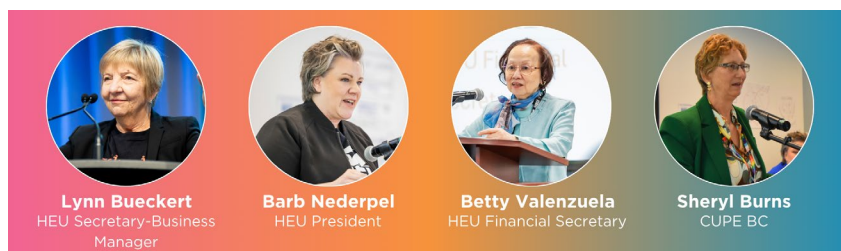


Community social services members prepare for next round of bargaining

HEU's community social services bargaining conference wrapped up on November 7 with delegates electing a new bargaining committee and sending them to the negotiating table with a clear mandate.

During the two-day conference, delegates heard from HEU secretary-business manager Lynn Bueckert, president Barb Nederpel and financial secretary Betty Valenzuela, as well as solidarity greetings from Sheryl Burns of CUPE BC.



In her bargaining address, Bueckert told delegates, “I want to recognize that the contributions you make are significant, even though your sector is an area of health care where the work has historically been undervalued and largely invisible.

“But without the work of community social services workers, the province’s social safety net would cease to function. You are key to helping make sure people don’t fall through the cracks when they have a special need or when they are facing critical life challenges.”

Building on improvements

Bueckert also spoke about the gains made in the last round of contract talks, and the work that remains to make workplaces safer and healthier, and to build on the recent wage and benefit improvements.

She also thanked delegates for taking on the responsibility of representing their peers and giving a voice to the issues that matter most to frontline workers in the subsector.

The first of three public sector bargaining conferences HEU has organized throughout November, community social services delegates debated and voted on numerous bargaining demands, covering themes that included wages, premiums and allowances;

health and welfare benefits; paid leaves; stability, recruitment and retention; safety at work including safe-staffing and respectful workplaces, and union rights.

HEU represents 1,500 members in the multi-union Community Social Services Bargaining Association – led by the BCGEU – and includes members of CUPE BC.

“I can promise you that HEU and CUPE will continue working together,” said Sheryl Burns, president of CUPE Local 1936, the largest community social services local in CUPE BC. “We will continue our bargaining alliance at the table, and we will continue to proudly fight on behalf of our members.

“Our relationship is really built on a shared value system... CUPE is proud to call HEU a friend in the struggle. Together, we really are strong, proud and united.”

Critical work in challenging times

President Barb Nederpel thanked delegates for the lifesaving work they do, especially in these challenging times.

“We are still feeling the ripple effect of the pandemic that turned our world upside down,” said Nederpel. “Not just economically with inflation, unaffordable housing, and the skyrocketing cost of groceries and most services, but on a social level with mounting mental health challenges, the poison drug crisis, the rise in domestic violence – and violence as a whole – and the growing reliance on alcohol and substances as people try to cope. I know you see it every day in your work.”



Delegates also elected a new bargaining committee: David Huespe and Brenda Orenca, with alternates Cheryl McLachlan and Taraneh Shamloo Farahmand.

In her closing remarks, Valenzuela said, “As a woman of colour, an immigrant, I was marginalized. I have experienced racism, discrimination, and harassment. The British Columbians you provide services to – are also marginalized. They experience discrimination. They are often invisible and forgotten. Ignored. Left behind. So, the crucial work that you do cannot continue to go unrecognized.”

Valenzuela echoed the commitment from Bueckert and Nederpel that the union stands united with its community social services members, and they will have the full support of HEU’s 60,000 members through the bargaining process.