

# PANDEMIC POLICY DEMANDS

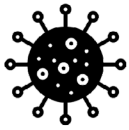
Unifor position on public policy needs, worker support measures

Revised: March 19, 2020

## FEDERAL JURISDICTION

Policy demands that have not been implemented or addressed by government:

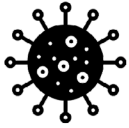
- Waive the one-week waiting period for regular Employment Insurance benefits and temporarily eliminate the qualifying hours needed to access benefits to ensure more workers – especially vulnerable workers in the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors – have access in the event of job displacement;
- Expand the EI regular and sick leave benefit payment to replace 80% of a workers earnings, and temporarily extend the time period for benefits beyond the 45 weeks limit, until such time as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Similar income replacement adjustment should be made with respect to the recently announced Emergency Support Benefit and Emergency Care Benefit;
- Waive the EI regular benefit requirement for seven consecutive days without work or wages in the previous 52 weeks to provide workers suffering from reduced work-hours access to EI benefits;
- Increase the duration of EI sick leave from 15 to 26 weeks;
- Institute a minimum of 14 days of paid sick leave, for all federally-regulated workers, whether a worker has been formally quarantined by a health official, or been asked to self-isolate;
- Introduce special “income relief” measures for full-time and part-time workers in the health care sector (as was done during the SARS outbreak), who are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19;
- Provide special assistance to workers returning from maternity and parental leave who have exhausted their EI benefits and do not have enough hours to cover lay off benefits;



- Implement enhanced EI or other wage replacement measures that accommodate those workers whose income is partially derived from gratuities, including those employed in hospitality, gaming, and the taxi industry;
- Service Canada must issue a directive to employers to code layoffs as “Layoff/Shortage of Work” instead of “other” to ensure no administrative bottlenecks prevent impacted workers from receiving money. Alternatively, Service Canada can establish a new special attestation for EI benefits, as related to “COVID-19” specifically;
- Expand the number of Service Canada staff in order to process claims in a timely manner. Staff should be hired and on-boarded immediately, given the extreme demands placed on the system;
- Suspend the requirement to repay EI Regular Benefits through the filing of an income tax return and based on the claimants net income (currently in excess of \$66,375) for the 2019 tax year;
- Suspend the requirement for EI claimants to conduct job searches and document their job search activities while collecting EI Regular benefits;
- Provide employees the option to accept a temporary layoff, and receive regular EI benefits, in order to offset the layoff of a co-worker. Such an option will be made available to employees throughout the COVID-19 crisis and shall be made available to union members covered by a collective agreement, upon agreement with the union; and
- Ensure that recently announced federal mortgage relief efforts (announced on March 18), including payment deferral, loan re-amortization and other special measures, is provided in equal measure to small business, non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations.

### Policy recommendations that government has made moves to address:

- Waive the one-week waiting period for EI sickness benefits;
  - **Federal Government announced this change on March 11.**
- Waive the hours requirement for EI sickness benefits and the requirement for a medical certificate;
  - **Federal Government announced on March 18.**
- Expand EI coverage to include workers who are caring for children affected by mandatory school, daycare and other child care facility closures;
  - **Federal Government announced expanded coverage as part of new Emergency Care Benefit, up to \$900 biweekly for up to 15 weeks regardless of if the worker qualifies for EI or not. Applications will be available in April 2020.**



## COVID-19 FLATTEN THE CURVE



- Implement emergency special income assistance payments to vulnerable workers (including precarious workers, and independent contractors), who otherwise would not receive EI benefits;
  - **Federal Government announced this on March 18, includes Emergency Child Care Benefit (up to \$900 biweekly for up to 15 weeks) and Emergency Support Benefit (benefits not yet defined). Applications for both will be available in April 2020. Both will be administered through the Canada Revenue Agency.**
- Ease federal Work-Sharing rules, to maximize eligibility, and enhance benefits to mitigate job losses especially within vulnerable sectors (like tourism). The federal government should actively promote work-sharing across workplaces, and commit to accelerating the approval process;
  - **The Federal Government announced enhanced Work-Sharing and extended eligible weeks from 38 to 76.**