Over 100 Unifor delegates took part in the Hospital Bargaining Leadership Meetings held this past February in Toronto. “As this is a major year for Hospital bargaining with many Hospital agreements open this spring and into the fall we gathered to prepare ourselves and ensure we are putting forward the agenda of workers in this sector” said Andy Savela Unifor Director of Health Care. Presentations from Unifor economist Jordan Brennan and researcher Mike Yam informed members on the economic environment and what has and is happening with respect to hospital settlements. Delegates also developed language to address current concerns around numerous issues including violence in the workplace and protection of bargaining unit work.

Since this meeting, union representatives have met with the Ontario Hospital Association who speak on behalf of many Hospitals. “They are well aware of the issues and the agenda of our members and the need to address them in our upcoming negotiations” said Katha Fortier Assistant to the President. “The entire group will influence the overall settlement”.

Honouring our Paramedics

Three paramedics from Unifor Local 1359 were honoured recently by 3 survivors in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Mary Casola, Mark Jagt, and Robert Larkin were thanked for their quick response and actions that helped save lives and bring them back to their families.

Everyday paramedics are first respondents to serious incidents and perform heroic measures to ensure the safety and well-being for residents in their community.

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Rockwood Terrace in Grey County, where our members are represented by Unifor Local 302, were met with the challenge of a 2014 provincial long-term care renewal strategy requiring all long-term care facilities be upgraded to meet Class A standards by 2025. Currently, about half the beds in the province meet that level. Rockwood Terrace, built in 1984, is a Class C facility and meets standards set out in 1972.

A consultant group, which generated recommendations, seemed to be leaning to close Rockwood Terrace and move the facility’s 100 beds to a new wing of the Grey Gables home in Markdale, 50 kilometres from Durham.

The decision to potentially close the home precipitated significant reaction from residents and the community. A committee to save Rockwood Terrace was formed, including community and family groups, Unifor Local 302 members and staff. Organized demonstrations against the closing and regularly attended council meetings in great numbers meant these issues were heard. “We supported a fight back campaign by submitting a full page ad to the West Grey Community Spotlight magazine, which held councillors feet to the fire” said Unifor Area Director Bill Gibson.

Positive news was recently uncovered with a recommendation for the amalgamation of beds from Grey Gables and Rockwood into a single Long Term Care home in Durham. Unifor members in attendance held signs and wore t-shirts reading “Save Rockwood”. “We anticipate a positive outcome” said Local 302 co-chairpersons Renee Bourque and Jeff Wells, whose advocacy on behalf of the community, residents, families and members of the Rockwood facility deserves acknowledgement. These efforts continue with the anticipation of the meeting May 11, 2017.

CHC Pharmacare Lobby on the Hill

50 Unifor members engaged in a lobby organized by the Canadian Health Coalition to urge parliamentarians to bring in a national pharmacare program.

“Despite universal medicare, we need a national pharmacare program to not only increase access to health care, but to lower overall drug costs,” said Katha Fortier, Assistant to the National President, who took part in the CHC lobby.

Unifor members participated in over 100 lobby sessions with MPs. “Our Union has been a strong advocate for improving medicare, including establishing a pharmacare program” said Andy Savela, Director of Healthcare.

Extendicare and Revera Long-Term Care Homes Secure New Agreements

Bargaining in Ontario’s long-term care sector is never simple. With the pressures faced by workers on the job, it’s been important to seek appropriate gains that respect the hard work being done by members in this sector. There were serious challenges when facing for-profit employers who demanded concessions, particularly to sick leave plans and benefits.

The bargaining committees of Extendicare and Revera remained determined to resist concessions and to achieve a fair settlement on their member’s behalf.

January 2017, the master bargaining committee for 10 Extendicare Homes and 9 Revera Homes in Ontario reached a tentative agreement. The new agreement includes improvements to wages, benefits, premiums and part-time in lieu. There was also an agreement with the employer to review the recent Tribunal precedents as they relate to maintaining the Proxy Pay Equity Plans, including a process to re-evaluate jobs.

Ratification votes took place in all Extendicare and Revera homes involved at the master Bargaining table and the new collective agreements were ratified by the respective members.
On March 10, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta signed agreements for health care transfers with the federal government, leaving Manitoba as the only province yet to sign.

“It is a positive sign that Ottawa has made mental health and home care priorities in its agreements with the provinces,” said Jerry Dias, Unifor National President. “But we want to ensure there are benchmarks for each province to deliver the kind of mental health and continuing care services that Canadians need.”

Given the length of time between the federal government’s initial proposal in December and when the provinces agreed to the deals, there is concern the funding is not enough to address the needs foreseen by the provinces and firsthand by health care workers, especially with regards to hospitals and long-term care.

“The public hasn’t been given all the details yet about how the new funding formula will work, but we do know that the base funding per year will not increase at the same pace it has over the previous decade,” said Andy Savela, Unifor Health Care Director. “Unifor members working in hospitals and long-term care facilities are witnessing a greater need for far more complex care than they’ve seen before, so any scaling back in funding is going to mean a decrease in service and added stress for health care workers.”

People of all ages struggling with mental health issues increasingly reside in long-term care facilities. Funding across the country has not kept pace to adequately address the needs that arise in caring for these residents who may have psychiatric disorders, as well as dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease in addition to other complex conditions.

“There is an urgent need to ensure that the targeted funding for mental health care includes long-term care homes,” said Katha Fortier, Assistant to the President. “We’ve already seen an increase in resident-to-resident and resident-worker violence. Health care workers and residents have the right to be safe from violence and adequate staffing levels and training are key elements in prevention.”

Unifor fully supports funding directed to mental health, but cautions that we don’t make the assumption that needs are being met adequately within the current tiers of care.

“Targeted mental health funding should follow the patient regardless of where they are receiving care and treatment,” added Fortier. “That could be in a hospital, in the community, or in a group facility or long-term care home.”

Fighting For our Workers at Extendicare Maple View in Sault Ste. Marie, ON

In February, on the stormiest day of the year, Unifor along with Sault Ste. Marie and Area Health Coalition and other union’s came to support front line workers who are getting laid off at Extendicare Maple View. The question asked was “when will Extendicare put residents before profits?”

Unifor Health Care workers in the Long Term Care Sector are fighting critical staffing levels while trying to maintain excellent resident care. The rally effectively put pressure on the government to re-establish the Health Accord and a Minimum Care Standard that would provide each resident with at least 4 hours a day of hands-on care. Bill 188 a Private Members Bill, known as the “Time to Care Act” was introduced during the spring session of the Ontario Legislature by France Gelinas, MPP (NDP) and has passed the first reading. “We need the government to hear our voices to ensure that there is enough front line workers providing the kind of quality and dignity of care of daily living that our seniors deserve and have earned” said Unifor Local 1359 President Laurie Lessard-Brown.

Honouring our Paramedics

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“We’re here to help people, and it’s not too often we get to see the survivor because we’re often not able to talk to them again after we do our job”, said Mary Casola, Unit Chair EMS who has been a paramedic for 27 years.

Thank you EMS for doing what you do.
You are everyday heroes.

Save the Date

Health Care Conference June 9th to 11th, Port Elgin
A planning committee with members from this sector have been working on the agenda and logistics of the conference. The call letter to locals is on its way.
Unifor local leaders working in long-term care in Nova Scotia made sure the province’s health minister knew the impact two years of funding cuts have had on the quality of care for seniors.

They were bold and heartfelt when they met with Minister Leo Glavine and they did not shy away from explaining how devastating the cuts to funding have been on staffing levels, patient care, and food budgets.

“This is so unfair to our seniors, and for the government to have said the cuts don’t have an impact on care is ridiculous,” said Linda MacLeod, President of Local 4620. “Greater care is required, yet we’re consistently understaffed and asked to do 12 hours of work in eight.”

Atlantic Regional Director Lana Payne told the minister including the deputy minister and the heads of continuing care and labour relations, “to address the crisis, we want the cuts reversed and we want an investment in long-term care that delivers dignity to residents and seniors and respects long-term care providers.”

Unifor has launched advertisements across the province and on social media to demand the government reverse the cuts. The union is encouraging Nova Scotians to sign the online petition directed at Premier Stephen McNeil, and to call their MLA. The petition and updates on the campaign can be found at unifor.org/LTC.