On April 18, hospital workers across Ontario held workplace rallies to demonstrate solidarity and strength for a joint union bargaining campaign with Unifor, CUPE and SEIU who have come ‘Together for Respect’.

Unifor members attended eight rallies held on Wednesday, April 18 as part of a joint mobilization to demand fairness and respect in the current round of negotiations with the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA).

“Union members and their colleagues are proudly conducting actions to show their support for a united bargaining demand,” said Nancy McMurphy, President of Local 302. “Beyond our members, it’s great to see allies, stakeholders and other healthcare unions also taking part in the workplace actions.”

The Together for Respect campaign, launched on March 27, is led by three of Ontario’s largest unions including Unifor, to demand respect from the employer and to negotiate a better deal for hospital staff at 160 hospitals across the province. Collectively the coalition is bargaining for 75,000 hospital workers, Unifor represents about 9,000 hospital workers in Ontario. The first workplace action was held on April 11 with a mass Sticker Day at hospitals across the province.

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Unifor, OCHU/CUPE and SEIU formed an alliance to apply political pressure and coordinate a united response in this round of bargaining with the OHA that represents many of the hospitals. In negotiations earlier this year the OHA had pushed for concessions which are unacceptable to the unions, especially given the excellent care offered by unionized employees in workplaces that are increasingly understaffed, over-crowded, and dangerous for workers. Depending on the response of the OHA the unions may also conduct job action workplace votes on May 2, if necessary.

For more information and photos of the actions, visit: Facebook.com/TogetherForRespect

We care for your mom. We care for you.
Stephen McNeil thinks it’s OK to ignore the crisis in nursing homes.

Start respecting workers
unifor.org
Getting ready for difficult negotiations in Nova Scotia

Unifor negotiating committees in long-term care and supportive living in Nova Scotia have been holding meetings in Halifax and Sydney to prepare for bargaining with their employers.

“These workers have been without a contract, without a pay increase for years because of the Stephen McNeil government’s attacks on collective bargaining and wage freezest,” said Lana Payne, Atlantic Regional Director. “We share their frustration and are inspired by their resolve to negotiate fair contracts for the members they represent.”

Most health care and community service workers in the province have been without a contract since October 31, 2014.

The Stephen McNeil liberals have legislated wage freezes and retirement concessions for tens of thousands of public sector workers, including nearly 4,500 Unifor members who work in a number of health and community-related sectors such as long-term care.

Unifor, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and Nova Scotia Nurses Union are all part of the Nova Scotia Council of Unions tasked with negotiating collective agreements for four groups of workers: acute care workers: nursing, health care, service and clerical.

Historically, acute care agreements would be reached first and long-term care would follow with similar wage patterns, but recent interference by the provincial government in collective bargaining, has resulted in slow progress in negotiations.

Employers are seeking more concessions and the unions are pushing back, in a province where several worker classifications are the lowest paid in the country.

“People assume that if you are in the public sector that you are well-paid but the truth is most hospitals and long-term care homes earn modest wages, many work part-time and most are women,” said Shauna Wilcox, health care sector representative on the National Executive Board, after a pre-bargaining meeting Sydney in February. “Let’s be clear, McNeil’s wage freezes have a gender lens.”

Local Unifor leaders are taking a pro-active approach and are preparing for bargaining for the more than 2,000 members in long-term care and the community sector, even though the acute care negotiations are moving at a snail’s pace.

“It just didn’t make sense to wait on a new agreement for acute care workers,” said Katha Fortier, Assistant to the National President. “Our bargaining committees have done a lot of work already and I know everyone is looking forward to rolling up their sleeves and getting to the table.”

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Nurses will start negotiating in June

Members who met in Halifax in February shared stories about their growing workloads, higher acuity of patients and how staff to patient ratios are pushing the health care system to the limit.

“There are set limits for workers in daycares for children yet when it comes to seniors there are no standards,” said one long-term care worker. Many expressed concerns about workload and how unfair this was to residents and seniors.

In the acute care round of negotiations, there are six days of conciliation scheduled in April and May, and significant progress has been made with the province’s children’s hospital, however, the parties are far apart on more contentious issues such as benefits, wages, job security and retirement benefits.

Unifor, as part of the Nova Scotia Council of Health Care Unions is also working to negotiate an essential services agreement, which is required before the unions can take job action.

Unifor bargaining committee members met in Halifax February 14, 2018.

SAVE THE DATE

Unifor’s Health Care Conference is set for September 28-30, 2018 in Halifax Nova Scotia. Unifor efforts with all levels of government, and all health care related groups has never been stronger as we bring to light the needs for a universal pharmacare program, better standards in long-term care, and illuminate the injustices with current hospital bargaining.

This years conference promises to be a good one. It will be held at the Delta Hotels Halifax. Watch for details coming soon.
More than 50 long term care members, retirees and staff took part in a lobby day at Queen’s Park on December 4 to advocate for four hours of direct care per resident, per day in the sector. Activists met with members of all three political parties. Unifor members took part in an afternoon training session the day before, where they told their stories about the challenges of working in long-term care.

Unifor and its predecessor unions have been pushing for a minimum standard of care for more than 15 years. Currently, there is no minimum standard of care across the sector. “The long term care sector is at a crisis point - short staffing, more complex cases and stagnant funding have created a situation that is deeply worrisome and unsustainable,” said Ontario Regional Director Naureen Rizvi. “Our members have first-hand experience in why we need four hours of direct, hands on care for every resident, every day.”

“The government’s new Action Plan for Seniors could be a good step, but it is still unclear that the plan will include four hours of direct care for residents. Without that, Ontario seniors are not getting the care that they need and we will be no further ahead,” said Health Care Director Andy Savela.

Unifor is pushing for the quick implementation of Aging with Confidence: Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors. Within this plan, the government must establish a swift timeline for the roll-out of four hours of direct care per resident per day, the minimum standard of care should be legislated and allow for prescribed changes within regulation and increasing the “provincial average to four hours of direct care per resident per day” must be specific to staff who directly care for residents.

Building on the success of the lobby day, long-term care members are encouraged to reach out to their local unions to set up meetings with their MPPs. Lobby materials are available online and can be shipped from the national office.

A downloadable workplace poster and lobby materials are available at: unifor.org/6minchallenge
National pharmacare wins at Thunder Bay City Council

A plan for national pharmacare has won over councilors and the mayor in the City of Thunder Bay, which showed vast support on April 9 at the Council meeting. All elected representatives in attendance voted unanimously to pass a resolution brought forward by Unifor members to support national pharmacare.

Early in March, presidents from three Unifor locals, Jamey Rosdobutko, Local 191, Kari Jefford, Local 229; and Dominic Pasqualino, Local 1075 were at City Hall, as part of a deputation to Thunder Bay City Council. The deputation lobbied municipal reps to put forward a Unifor resolution that was then sent to the City’s Intergovernmental Affairs Committee for review.

Four weeks later, the resolution was put on the agenda of the City Council and received an overwhelming majority of support. In a show of innovative leadership, Thunder Bay is one of the first cities to pass the resolution provided by Unifor. The three local presidents commended the City’s enthusiasm to be pioneers in the push for national pharmacare.

Applauding the success of the Unifor delegation to the Thunder Bay Council, Andy Savela, Director of Health Care said, “Thunder Bay’s welcome support in favour of national pharmacare is a big win. We hope that the City’s decision will see itself being repeated in communities across Canada, so we can come together in the drive for a universal prescription drug plan.”

This June Unifor will also be at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) conference held in Halifax where mayors and other municipal representatives from across the country will be on hand. Unifor will use the (FCM) conference to lobby municipal leaders to pass similar resolutions and support the union’s campaign for national pharmacare.

For more information or resources to have your own municipal council pass a similar resolution please visit unifor.org/pharmacare.

Unifor lobby’s for all Canadians

Lobbying the Federal Government to develop a national pharmacare program for all Canadians sparked a wave. Unifor activists from across the country and Members of Parliament invite you to a lobby on Parliament Hill in Ottawa commencing Wednesday May 23rd and conclude with a debrief session by 11 a.m. Friday May 25th. Other key issues such as childcare, just transition and anti-airport privatization will be the subject matter of these meetings.

Register soon and participate in this important initiative. Contact your local union office for approval and travel arrangements. The National Union will be responsible for the cost of the hotel rooms and all other associated costs will be made at the Local Union level.
Port Arthur Health Centre workers on strike

Workers at the Port Arthur Health Centre have been on strike since April 9 in protest of low wages and precarious employment.

“The frustrating thing about bargaining talks with this unreasonable employer is that the employer is not arguing that they do not have the ability to pay, but rather want to keep overhead low which means more profit for them”, said Kari Jefford, President of Local 229. “The situation is just shameful; as care providers, one would think the Port Arthur Health Centre would be more respectful and offer fairness to these hard working employees.”

Unifor Local 229 represents the 65 workers at the Centre, working as appointment secretaries, medical aides and in medical records. The collective agreement expired on December 31, 2017. Over 60 per cent of the 65 women who work at the Centre are casual workers, meaning that the workers have no guarantee of hours of work from week to week. Additionally, with the Ontario minimum wage hike in January the wages for many workers in the Centre were surpassed, reflecting the inadequate compensation currently received by the staff.

To bolster support for the striking workers Unifor organized a community rally on April 12. In a showing of support several community members attended the solidarity rally on the picket line in front of the Centre and expressed the need for a fair wage for all workers.

“There are more than enough hours to make scheduled rotations, but it hasn’t happened,” said Andy Savela, Director of Health Care. “The barrier to secure employment appears to be an unwillingness from the employer to give up profits, as this form of casual work helps keep operating costs low but at the expense of workers’ well-being.”

Unifor said the employer is acting aggressively towards the union and applied to the Ontario Labour Relations Board on the first day of the strike in an attempt to force a vote on their last offer. Currently, there are no dates scheduled for negotiations with the employer, however Unifor is willing to negotiate to seek a fair resolution.
Ontarians embrace Unifor’s #6minchallenge

On December 2, Unifor launched the #6minchallenge video, calling on members and Ontarians to do the impossible – get ready in the morning in only six minutes. This represents the approximate time that personal support workers have to help long-term care residents get ready in the morning, making the case for four hours of direct care for all long-term residents, every single day.

The video was first screened at the Ontario Regional Council in Toronto and has since taken off. The has been viewed more than 46,000 times on Facebook and YouTube and features clips from National President Jerry Dias, Assistant to the president Katha Fortier, Health Care Director Andy Savela, National Executive Board member and former PSW Ruth Pryce and PSW Dawn McChrystal. The video highlights the current crisis in long-term care.

The challenge has struck a chord on social media, with nearly 1,400 people sharing the video on Facebook alone and hundreds participating in the actual challenge via Facebook and Twitter, encouraging their family, friends and Members of Provincial Parliament to do the same. The challenge has also been reported on by CTV regionally and nationally.

If you haven’t taken the challenge yet, there is no time like the present. Set your alarm for six minutes in the morning and then go! After that, take a picture of your progress and share it on social media with the hashtag #6minchallenge and invite your Member of Provincial Parliament to take the challenge too!

For more information, please visit: unifor.org/6minchallenge