



DHA Restructuring: Unions working towards Health Care Union Bargaining Associations

Dear Health Care member,

Nova Scotia's health care system is undergoing radical change by the provincial government. These changes include the government's decision to move from nine District Health Authorities to one provincial board and one board representing the IWK. As a part of this restructuring, the government plans to reduce the number of collective agreements it negotiates with health care unions by requiring bargaining in just four province-wide bargaining units.

Where health care restructuring has occurred elsewhere in the country, conflict has resulted as members have been forced to choose between unions or be placed into another union via legislation.

Nova Scotia's health care unions – NSGEU, Unifor, CUPE, and NSNU – have been working together to discuss how restructuring will impact our members, and how our members' rights can be best protected.

As a result of this planned restructuring, the unions responded to government actions with a formal proposal to develop a new bargaining system in which the unions join together to negotiate at one table for each of the province-wide bargaining units. In each of these units, the unions would form a Bargaining Association to negotiate with the new employers together, thus avoiding disruptive run-off votes and allowing members to stay with their current union.

After many meetings and thoughtful consultation, the unions' presented their proposal to government on August 5th. We hope to receive their response to our proposal soon.

What is a Bargaining Association?

A Bargaining Association represents members of more than one union for the purpose of collective bargaining. In an association, each union continues to speak on behalf of and represent their own members as they do today. So, all members would remain members of their current union, but the unions would bargain collective agreements together.

Why a Bargaining Association?

A Bargaining Association is the best solution to the government's request for fewer collective agreements and meets the Minister's requirement for "streamlined" health negotiations.

A Bargaining Association is the only way to ensure that all workers are able to stay with their own union. It will also give workers a unified voice at the bargaining table.

These Associations would avoid disruptive run-off votes. Similar Bargaining Associations are working well in other Canadian provinces, such as British Columbia.

How would these Bargaining Associations work?

The unions would come together to negotiate collective agreements for the workers in each of the province-wide bargaining units but would otherwise continue to represent and speak on behalf of their own members.

For example, all unions who currently represent support services workers would create a Support Services Bargaining Association to bargain a provincial support services agreement together. The same structure would apply for nurses, clerical and health care workers.

The bottom line:

We want health care workers to be able to focus on patients and continue to deliver quality health care, and we believe Nova Scotians and the government want that, too. The best way to do that is to ensure unions and workers aren't forced into a position of dispute, but are allowed to work together cooperatively.

We recognize there are differences within the current collective agreements and developing new, common collective agreements will be challenging. The unions have worked together very effectively and feel this is the best way for us to move forward and bargain the strongest collective agreement for all members.

We will continue to advance the Health Care Union Bargaining Association concept. As soon as we receive a formal response from government, we will be in contact with you. Please watch for communications from your union!

In solidarity,

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The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL) is a provincial umbrella labour organization, committed to the principle of advancing the social and economic well-being of the workers of Nova Scotia. 23,500 unionized health care workers represented by NSGEU, NSNU, CUPE and Unifor are among their members.