



What the Coronavirus (COVID-19) means for gaming workers

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ABOUT CANADA'S GAMING SECTOR

Canada's gaming industry, comprised of lotteries, video lottery terminals (VLTs), casinos, bingo halls, and horse racing (pari-mutuel wagering), continues to play a strong economic role across the country, supporting jobs and raising critical revenue for provinces and municipalities.

The total GDP of gaming industries in Canada in 2018 reached approximately \$2.5 billion, representing 0.1% of Canada's total GDP. Unifor represents almost 9,000 gaming workers at casinos, racetracks, and lotteries across Canada, and we are the largest union for gaming workers in the country.

HOW THE GAMING SECTOR IS VULNERABLE TO COVID-19

Canada's gaming sector is extremely vulnerable to external risks such as pandemics, such as COVID-19. As the economy suffers and household incomes decline or are put in jeopardy, discretionary spending on recreational activities like tourism and gaming is immediately curtailed. Public gathering places like casinos, racetracks, and bingo halls create the conditions for community disease transmission, and public attendance will naturally decrease or end altogether, creating possible job loss and layoffs. Further, gaming facilities are very likely to be closed as governments enact emergency measures, as we have seen in places like British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba.

Workers in the gaming sector are vulnerable in a number of ways. Most of them come in direct contact with the public; a huge health and safety risk during a pandemic situation. Many gaming workers

WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM GAMING EMPLOYERS

How Local Unions in the gaming sector can support members

Proper safety training

Strict personal hygiene protocol

Social distancing measures

No doctor's notes to claim sick leave benefits

Full wage replacement or other income assistance

Full benefits coverage for the duration of the crisis

Waiving of minimum sick bank hours to qualify for benefits coverage

may not qualify for employment insurance (EI), and their benefits coverage may be contingent on a minimum number of hours worked in a given period. In addition, some workers earn gratuities as a part of their income, and EI may not compensate them fairly or adequately for this lost income.

HOW LOCAL UNIONS IN THE GAMING SECTOR CAN SUPPORT MEMBERS

We are increasingly seeing the full closure of many gaming outlets on a province-by-province basis, and these closures create special challenges for Unifor gaming members. Local unions can urge government officials to enact wage replacement policies, including the expansion of eligibility for Employment Insurance benefits (including sick benefits). Some gaming workers may not currently be eligible for EI, so lowering or eliminating qualification thresholds may be necessary. Gaming workers should receive full income assistance, including support from employers, during this time of crisis. In addition, where relevant, employers must be required to extend full benefits coverage for the duration of the crisis, regardless of sick bank hours.

Where gaming outlets are still open and operational, local unions must ensure members have access to adequate and appropriate health and safety gear, procedures, and policies from their employers, using a risk-based approach. This is especially important for those in closest contact with customers and public spaces. This includes proper training on a regular basis so staff have the best available knowledge for personal safety in what is a rapidly-changing and fluid situation.

Gaming workers must understand they are especially at risk due to the frontline, public-facing nature of their work. Therefore, employers must communicate strict protocols to workers for personal hygiene and facility hygiene as well as social distancing and safety measures with co-workers and customers.

Local unions must ensure employers and governments do not require gaming workers who fall ill or experience flu-like symptoms to provide doctor's notes in order to claim sick leave benefits. Any employee who is responsible enough to call in sick, self-isolate or undergo quarantine should face no financial penalty.

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

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