



Facilities talks: Employers slow to disclose data essential to making progress on key issues

After a scheduled two-week break, negotiations for a new Facilities Collective Agreement have entered their fourth month.

The multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association says that talks are proceeding slowly, in part because health employers have limited authority to engage in bargaining under a strictly-controlled government negotiating mandate. Most other bargaining tables in the broader public sector are also reporting slow progress.

The main proposal from the Health Employers' Association of B.C. last week was their position on merging collective agreements covering employees of the BC Ambulance Service into the Facilities Agreement. The BCAS was transferred into the health sector in 2010.

One significant stumbling block in talks is the lack of disclosure by health employers of information and other data related to issues such as the casual addendum, part-time employment, benefit costs and how employers intend to operationally integrate the ambulance service into the health sector.

“Collective bargaining does not take place in a vacuum. This information is fundamental to making progress at the bargaining table,” says secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson and spokesperson for the FBA negotiating team.

At this point, all major non-monetary issues have been tabled by the FBA.

The two sides have yet to discuss monetary issues. Negotiations resume Wednesday.

The collective agreement covers a diverse health care team that includes workers in hospitals, nursing homes and diagnostic treatment centres as well as emergency health services and shared services such as logistics and supply operations.

More than 270 occupations are represented in the talks including care aides, licensed practical nurses, lab assistants, pharmacy technicians, admitting clerks, medical transcriptionists, trades and maintenance workers, sterile supply technicians, dietary staff and many others.

HEU represents about 85 per cent of health care workers in the FBA. Another 14 per cent are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 873, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union and International Union of Operating Engineers Local 882/882H. Eight other unions in the association represent one per cent of workers covered by the talks.

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