

Bargaining Update



FACILITIES

Unions focus on safety and workload as collective bargaining resumes

Talks for a new facilities collective agreement resumed this week with the union bargaining committee tabling proposals to address crushing workloads and a worsening health and safety crisis on the frontlines.

Nearly two out of every three HEU members, covered by the collective agreement, report that their workloads have increased over the last two years, according to a poll released by the union last week. Three out of four say they've experienced pandemic-related burnout.

"We have heard loud and clear from frontline workers that workloads are taking a huge toll on them physically, mentally and emotionally, and that the pandemic has only deepened this crisis," says HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard, also the lead negotiator and spokesperson for the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association.

The unions tabled bargaining proposals this week to address short-staffing and provide Joint OH&S committees with more tools to address workload complaints. The nine-union FBA is also proposing improved access to Personal Protective Equipment, better-ventilated workplaces, and other measures to protect workers in a future major pandemic.

The union bargaining committee is also proposing an expansion to the Enhanced Disability Management Program, which supports ill and injured workers to safely return to work.

"Safer workloads and better support for injured members is a key to retaining skilled workers and attracting the health care workers we need going forward," says Brisard. "But we also need to significantly improve wages, and provide our members with more opportunities for career mobility through education and training."

The unions are proposing continued and expanded funding for the union-managed FBA Education Fund, which has successfully supported thousands of members in skills-upgrading and career mobility since its inception in 2006.

The parties plan to exchange wage proposals next week.

In a week where the provincial government introduced legislation to bring provincial laws into compliance with the *UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the unions and health employers also exchanged proposals on how to promote the recruitment and promotion of Indigenous health care workers, and combat Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination.

Contract talks between the Facilities Bargaining Association and the Health Employers Association of BC began on February 11. The 2019-2022 facilities collective agreement expired on March 31, but the terms and conditions of the current contract continue while the parties negotiate a new agreement.

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