

Bargaining Update



FACILITIES

Health employers miss the mark on wages as unions seek to protect workers' earnings against rising costs

The Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) has tabled a wage proposal that falls short of what's needed to protect wages against rising costs, and fails to address a serious recruitment and retention crisis in the facilities subsector.

“Our members are falling behind with many looking to leave health care altogether,” says Meena Brisard, HEU secretary-business manager and spokesperson for the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association (FBA).

“Employers needed to make a bold move to protect our health care system going forward, and to support those working on the frontlines of this pandemic.

“We've told HEABC that workers' wages must be protected against rising costs, and in this sector, we need a plan to address historic wage cuts that have undermined pay equity for our members.

“But the employers' response fails to recognize the crisis we're facing on the frontlines.”

HEABC has tabled a wage offer of 1.75 per cent, two per cent and two per cent over three years with an additional 25 cents on wages in year 1, and a signing bonus of \$1,000.

Similar wage offers have been tabled at other public sector tables, and the major unions involved are united with HEU and the FBA in their position that the proposed increases are inadequate and do not meet the needs of those who deliver health care and other public services.

The BC General Employees' Union (BCGEU) announced Thursday that it had reached an impasse with the Public Services Agency (PSA) in talks for a new contract. Negotiations at the FBA and at other public sector tables are at earlier stages than at the BCGEU-PSA table.

“We've got a long way to go to resolve the outstanding wage issues,” says Brisard. “In the meantime, we will continue to seek agreement with health employers on more than 100 proposals on the bargaining priorities identified by our members.”

Earlier this week, the FBA bargaining committee tabled proposals to expand job opportunities, improve equity in the workplace, and support workers impacted by natural disasters and pandemic outbreaks.

In the face of more frequent climate emergencies and disease outbreaks, the bargaining committee is proposing standard premium pay for workers who are redeployed – and for workers who are receiving patients and residents from other locations.

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“Our members have uprooted themselves from their families and communities in frightening circumstances to safeguard their patients and residents – even as their own homes were threatened by fires and floods,” says Brisard.

“Sadly, we can expect these climate emergencies to continue, and we need to ensure that our members are properly consulted and compensated in these circumstances.”

The bargaining committee has also proposed comprehensive language to promote trans-inclusion by taking steps to combat transphobia, affirm gender identity, and implement other measures to support members.

The committee also tabled language to accelerate the reversal of B.C. Liberal-era privatization in health care to include security and other services.

This week, more than 150 housekeepers were brought back in-house in Fraser Health, with a total of more than 4,000 housekeeping and dietary staff to be returned by year’s end as a result of language negotiated in the 2019-2022 collective agreement.

Bargaining continues with dates scheduled until the end of May to renew the facilities collective agreement covering more than 58,000 health care workers. HEU represents more than 90 per cent of the workers covered by the collective agreement between the nine-union FBA and HEABC.

Brisard will be hosting a telephone town hall with facilities subsector local executive members in the coming weeks to provide an update on bargaining.

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