



Contracting-out protections restored, health and safety protections strengthened in ‘no concessions’ agreement

Provincial Executive recommends ratification of tentative agreement

The HEU Provincial Executive has reviewed the tentative agreement for members in the facilities subsector and is recommending members vote “yes” in ratification votes that are being scheduled for mid-January.

The agreement includes new language and resources to tackle high injury rates in health care, and it provides workers with more job security protections in the face of health care restructuring. That includes elimination of the contracting-out cap and a restoration of pre-2002 contracting-out protections.

Wages and premium increases

The three-year agreement includes general wage increases of six per cent, in line with other settlements reached with government employees, community health workers, nurses and health science professionals, under the government’s negotiating mandate.

There are also significant improvements to shift premiums, on-call differentials and the isolation allowance. In addition, grids 7, 8 and 9 will be phased out by 2020 with all impacted members moved to grid 10.

HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside, the chief spokesperson for the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association (FBA), says the tentative agreement recognizes and respects the value members bring to health care delivery.

“This agreement begins the process of rebuilding a stronger health care system that is safer, less fragmented, and where members have more rights on everything from job postings to grievance procedures,” says Whiteside.

“Our bargaining plan was based on extensive feedback and direction from members – in province-wide consultations and from our bargaining conference,” says Whiteside.

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“And I am really proud of our bargaining committee and our FBA partners who showed a lot of wisdom and grit in making immediate and sustainable gains in a ‘no concessions’ agreement that will improve the working lives of our members.”

There are extensive improvements and additions proposed to the collective agreement, which will be detailed in a comprehensive report available in early January before members are asked to vote on the agreement.

Health and safety

The tentative agreement includes a number of language improvements to tackle the ongoing workload crisis in health care – a top issue identified by HEU members at the facilities bargaining conference earlier this year.

The OH&S language in Article 37 of the agreement has been bolstered to provide OH&S stewards with more tools to advocate for members.

And the agreement includes an \$8.5 million commitment from the Ministry of Health to re-establish a provincial organization focused on health and safety across the health care sector.

This is a major step forward in addressing the risks to members who work in some of B.C.’s most dangerous workplaces, and an initiative that the union has been advocating for at all levels.

“We need system-wide improvements to make real progress towards safer workplaces by driving down injury rates,” says Whiteside. “Focusing resources on OH&S best practices and ensuring that they are scaled up across the sector is the right approach.”

Job security

HEU and its union partners also negotiated a number of provisions to address the uncertainty and chaos that’s accompanied restructuring, consolidation and privatization in the health sector.

In addition to restoring pre-2002 contracting-out protections, employers and government have agreed to a process that will consider bringing contracted-out work back under the control of health authorities.

And there’s a renewed focus on recruitment and retention issues for facilities members with employers agreeing to work with the union to identify barriers and propose solutions.

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Expanded rights

The tentative agreement also gives expanded rights to displaced employees at multi-employer sites, and improves access to stewarding for all members at these sites.

“The BC Liberals had 16 years to mess up our health care system – and it’s going to take more than one round of bargaining to fix it,” says Whiteside.

“This tentative agreement puts us on the path to safer workplaces, where our members get more rights, more respect, and more security.”

The agreement, covering 44,000 health care workers, was reached between the multi-union FBA and the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) on December 1, after nine weeks of talks.

More than 90 per cent of the FBA membership is represented by the Hospital Employees’ Union.

The agreement must be ratified by both union members and health employers. It covers health care workers in publicly funded hospitals, long-term care facilities, health authority corporate offices and warehouses, and other settings.

FBA members work in direct patient and resident care, as well as in support services, technical, clerical and trades and maintenance areas.

In addition to HEU, the FBA includes workers in nine other unions, including the B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union and the International Union of Operating Engineers.

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