

Facilities Bargaining Association

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Contact: Mike Old
HEU communications director
(604) 828-6771 (cell)

Health care workers send clear message with 96 per cent strike mandate

B.C. health care workers have delivered an overwhelming strike mandate to back their negotiating team's bid to secure a fair and respectful collective agreement with health employers.

Members of the 11 unions that form the Facilities Bargaining Association voted 96 per cent in favour of strike action after a month of balloting wrapped up Wednesday.

The key issues at the bargaining table are employment security, protection of benefits and improved health and safety provisions. The FBA is also seeking changes to the ambulance service that would improve and enhance paramedics' abilities to provide patient care.

FBA spokesperson Bonnie Pearson is hopeful that the strong strike mandate will refocus health employers on reaching a negotiated settlement.

"Health care workers have shown their determination to protect jobs and improve working and caring conditions," says Pearson, who is the secretary-business manager of the Hospital Employees' Union.

"We believe that a fair and reasonable agreement is within reach if health employers abandon their demands for contract rollbacks."

The negotiations cover the largest bargaining unit in B.C.'s public sector, with 47,000 workers in hospitals, residential care facilities, emergency health services and logistics and supply operations.

A wide range of occupations in the bargaining unit includes care aides, ambulance paramedics, health records staff, lab and other diagnostic specialists, sterile supply techs, emergency dispatchers, nursing unit clerks, trades and maintenance workers, activity aides and rehab assistants, IT specialists, pharmacy techs, admitting and booking clerks, administrative staff, cleaning and dietary staff, and many others.

The current collective agreement with the Health Employers Association of B.C. expired on March 31, 2014. The current round of bargaining began on January 14 and broke off in late March.

The Hospital Employees' Union represents about 85 per cent of health care workers covered by these talks. A further 14 per cent are represented by CUPE Local 873, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 882/882H.

Another seven unions represent less than one per cent of workers in the FBA, and are represented at the bargaining table by the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers Local 5.

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