

SGEU Health Providers COVID-19 Pandemic Update December 4, 2020



SGEU Health Provider Members:

We are writing to update you on a number of issues:

1. Raising your concerns and questions with the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and Ministry of Health

Your Health Providers Bargaining Committee continues to participate in daily conference calls with representatives from CUPE, SEIU-West, HSAS, SUN, the SHA and the Ministry of Health. At these meetings, we frequently voice concerns and ask questions to seek answers to your questions. We also hold weekly huddles with our local Human Resource representatives.

2. Recognition Pay for Health Providers during the COVID-19 pandemic

We continue to field questions from you about why the Saskatchewan government is not providing all health care providers with an increase in pay during the pandemic, much like other provinces across the country have done. We have been lobbying the government for months to include all health care workers in any recognition pay programs. Along with our Health Provider Association Partners, CUPE and SEIU-West, we wrote to the Saskatchewan government on May 4, 2020 to request recognition pay for **all** Health care workers that are working tirelessly to flatten the curve. We continue to address the inequities of the government's Temporary Wage Supplement Program.

The government has recently resumed their provincial Temporary Wage Supplement Program, but it still excludes too many who work in the health care system. Details of this program (taken from information provided by the provincial government) are included below:

Saskatchewan Temporary Wage Supplement Program

Phase Two of the Saskatchewan Temporary Wage Supplement Program (STWSP) provides a temporary wage supplement to eligible workers (specified below) helping Saskatchewan's most vulnerable citizens through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program is administered by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Finance.

A. Benefits

The amount of financial assistance provided in Phase Two of the temporary supplement is \$400 for each four-week period, for two periods from November 19 to December 16, 2020, and from December 17, 2020, to January 13, 2021.

B. Eligibility

Note: There is no income criteria for eligibility.

An eligible worker under **Phase Two** of the wage supplement program, is a worker who is:

1. Employed by a:

Personal care home licensed pursuant to *The Personal Care Homes Act*; **or**

Special-care home designated pursuant to *The Provincial Health Authority Act*; **or**

Integrated health care facility (facility that includes a designated Special-care home along with acute care and/or health centre services within the same facility).

2. A home care worker providing care to seniors in their homes.

These facilities are impacted by the suspension on visitation effective November 20, 2020, for long-term care facilities and personal care homes, and are therefore included in Phase Two. Other facility types, while providing valuable assistance to citizens through the COVID-19 pandemic, are not included in this phase.

Acute care facilities such as hospitals which provide access to acute short-term care services such as emergency, ambulatory care, diagnostic services, inpatient and outpatient care, critical care, and surgical care operated by the Provincial Health Authority or its affiliates as defined in *The Provincial Health Authority Act*, are not eligible facilities.

Eligible essential care facilities are listed alphabetically in the online [application form](#) (see drop-down menus under each eligible facility type).

The benefit will be provided to full-time, part-time and casual workers, and includes anyone employed by the facility, such as care workers, cooks, housekeepers, janitors, administrative staff, etc., but does not include third-party contract service providers working in the facilities.

Residents of Alberta or Manitoba who meet the criteria and are employed by an eligible essential care facility in Saskatchewan, or Lloydminster, AB, or Flin Flon, MB, are eligible to apply.

C. How to Apply

Individuals should review all eligibility criteria and review the [Program Overview and Application Instructions](#).

The applicant may apply for both four-week periods on one application form (November 19 to December 16, 2020, and December 17, 2020, to January 13, 2021).

If there is more than one eligible worker in your family, each worker must submit his or her own application.

***** Applications will be accepted until February 15, 2021 *****

D. Further Information

For additional information on the program, email stwsp@gov.sk.ca or call 1-800-667-6102 or 306-787-6645 in Regina

3. Saskatchewan Health Care Survey

Thank you to those of you who participated in the recent three-minute online survey for Saskatchewan health care workers. The survey focussed on PPE and mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was designed and initiated by Dr. Sean Tucker, an OH&S researcher at the University of Regina, and in collaboration with SGEU and the other provincial health care unions. The goal is to work towards improvements in health care workers' health and safety during pandemics. The survey is open only to health care workers and your input remained anonymous. The first survey was done in late May and the second was done in November. Some of the results include:

- 11% of SGEU members responded to the recent survey, up from just 3% in the last round of the survey. 71% of the respondents were from the SGEU Health Providers response. Responses by work site were also similar to the last round of the survey, with the largest share coming from long-term care, closely followed by staff in hospitals.
- Most responses to the survey questions closely followed those given in the last round of the survey. SGEU members averaged a slightly more negative response across the board in regards to overall feeling of safety at work, quality of safety information, and sufficiency of safety training. That pattern is consistent with what other unions' members reported.
- Our members were slightly more inclined to say they have the PPE needed to do their jobs properly – 82% said so this time, compared to 79% last time. Again, that follows the general trend of other unions' responses.
- Perhaps most significantly, members' psychological distress scores increased. The higher these scores, the greater the risk of anxiety and depression. The average score increased to 12.43 this time, up from 12.19 in May. More worryingly, the proportion of members considered to be at high risk of anxiety and depression (those with scores of 18 or higher) increased significantly. In the last round, 14% of our members were at high risk; this time, 20% are. Note that in the last round, our members were significantly less likely than other unions' members to be considered high-risk; that gap has now closed almost completely.
- Lastly, members' rating of the helpfulness of mental health supports from their employer did not change significantly since the first round of the survey.

4. Screening by OH&S or 811 leading to quarantine for health care providers

If you are sent home due to a screening by the OH&S Employee Line or 811, and are required to quarantine as determined by the Medical Health Officer, we continue to maintain the view that according to Article 17.12 of our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), this shall not result in loss of pay or reduction in your sick leave credits.

If you are sent home due to screening, and subsequently ordered to be tested for COVID-19 and must remain home to await results – and your employer tells you to use your sick leave/vacation or any other leave other than COVID Pay, we ask that you contact a workplace steward and file a grievance.

5. Who to contact if you have questions or need assistance with Union issues

Please contact your Facility Steward if you have questions or need assistance with union-related issues. Your Steward should be your first point of contact – they have a better understanding of the operations of your workplace and are trained to assist you. If necessary, your Steward may seek advice or assistance from the Chief Steward or the local Bargaining Committee Representative. The Bargaining Committee Representative may seek advice from the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Bargaining Committee.

Please do not go directly to the Labour Relations Officers (LRO). Initial inquiries and general questions should be dealt with by your elected representatives. Our Labour Relations Officers will become involved as required in some circumstances, but we recognize that they are already very busy with other duties. Your elected representatives, including Stewards and Bargaining Committee members, are well-equipped and willing to assist you with your questions and concerns.

6. Seniority When Re-Employed – Article 8.06 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

We have developed a form for members to complete when they have been re-employed for five years and are requesting their seniority hours back from previous employment, as per Article 8.06 of the SGEU Health Providers CBA.

This form and all applicable verification documents must be sent to the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Bargaining Committee.

For a copy of this form, please ask your local steward or contact Tracey Sauer or Diane Ralph.

7. Job Share Form – Letter of Understanding (LOU) #3

We have received many questions regarding how to apply for a job share, therefore we have developed a Job Share Request form, which is available from your workplace Steward or a member of the Bargaining Committee.

The member requesting the job share must complete the form and then send it to their manager for approval. The manager must forward the request, along with the schedule to be posted, to the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Bargaining Committee for approval.

Please note:

- You cannot request to share more than 50% of your shifts.
- The job share must be reviewed annually.
- The job share applicant cannot request a job share to seek work in another department/classification. The full time incumbent of the job share can pick up relief in their department and classification only.

8. Request for Vacation or Leave of Absence

COVID-19 has changed much of how things were once done, and this includes planning your holidays or leaves of absence. We understand the uncertainty of the times and realize that what you may have had envisioned for your vacation, may not be able to proceed as originally planned. Earlier this year, we discussed this situation and came to an agreement with the SHA to handle vacation and leave requests in a different manner, a process which you have been following for the last several months.

Recently, we agreed with the SHA to continue that process until March 1, 2021.

This allows SGEU Health Provider members to submit their vacation requests on a monthly basis. If you have submitted your "Annual Vacation request" it also gives you the opportunity to adjust that request on a monthly basis.

Given what we know at this point, the SHA and SGEU have mutually agreed to make the following adjustments to the annual vacation process in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

1. By December 1, 2020 SGEU employees need to submit their vacation requests for the month of January. Those requests will be filled in order of seniority by December 15. After December 1, 2020, any vacation requests received for the month of January will be filled on a first-come-first-serve basis.
2. By January 1, 2021 SGEU employees need to submit their vacation requests for the month of February. Those requests will be filled in order of seniority by January 15. After January 1, 2021, any vacation requests received for the month of February would be filled on a first-come-first-serve basis.
3. Vacation requests will continue to be handled in this manner until such time as the Pandemic is in the recovery phase and the parties identify some reasonable dates to complete an annual vacation process for the remainder of the 2021-2022 fiscal year.
4. SGEU employees may have chosen to submit an entire year's requests by April 1st (rather than the monthly process described above) and these requests will be reviewed on the 1st of each month, along with other requests.

Please remember to try and take some time for yourself and your family.

9. Health Providers Bargaining Committee Local Meetings

Your bargaining committee is planning to resume check-in calls with each of the Health Provider Locals. We previously held these meetings with each Local on a biweekly basis. We are currently looking at scheduling these meetings to begin again in January. Local Chairs and the Bargaining Council will notify members once the new schedule is in place.

10. Bargaining Committee membership changes

We would like to thank Jolean Brochu for her work with the Health Providers Bargaining Committee. We appreciate the work she did to assist all of our members. We are happy to have Jolean remain on Bargaining Council, so this is not a farewell!

We also want to welcome Tanya Schmidt to the Bargaining Committee as the new representative for Local 3354-2. We look forward to working with and getting to know Tanya better, and we're confident she will be a valuable member of the committee.

11. Thank you to our members

Again, we wish to express our most sincere gratitude and appreciation for all the care and selfless work that the SGEU Health Providers do on a daily basis. It is true that not all heroes wear capes.

May you all have a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy holiday season!

To keep informed about SGEU Health Provider information, please download our [SGEU Health Sector app](#), follow us on Facebook [@sgeuhealthproviders](#) or check out our website <https://www.sgeuhealthproviders.org>.

In Solidarity,

SGEU Health Providers Bargaining Committee:

Tracey Sauer, Co-Chair - tsauer@sgeu.org

Diane Ralph, Co-Chair - dralph@sgeu.org

Tanya Schmidt, member KTHR

Ryan Favel, member KYRHA

Wendy McPhail, member MCRRHA

Danny Hind and Kim Nordmarken, LROs