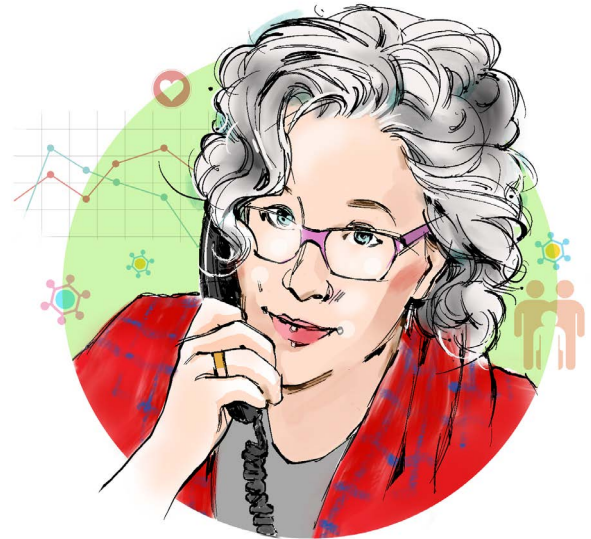


# THE NO-NC STAND

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.S. GOVERNMENT & GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION

SPRING 2021



## Nova Scotia's Forgotten Frontline: Public Health



## CONNECT WITH US!

We want to hear from our members. If you have thoughts on this issue of The Stand, or ongoing union issues, send us your feedback! You can email us at [inquiry@nsgeu.ca](mailto:inquiry@nsgeu.ca) or connect with us:



Dear members,

In some ways, it is hard to believe that we have been living with COVID for an entire year now. In other ways, this past year has felt like an eternity — even though we are fortunate to live here in Nova Scotia, where cases have remained low and we have been able to enjoy a relatively “normal” life, for the most part.

I want to take a moment to express my deepest appreciation to all of our members: each and every one of you have played such an important role in our COVID response and recovery. Whether you are on the “front line” of the hospitals or testing centres; working in the labs; stationed at the border; working in home care or long-term care facilities; or just doing your normal duties, but under very different circumstances: this has been an extremely stressful period of time. You have handled yourselves with kindness and professionalism, and done your best to protect the public, yourself and your loved ones. Thank you.

In this issue of The Stand, we are featuring the crucial work being done by our members working in Public Health (see page 4 for this feature). Despite the important work they are charged with in creating healthy communities, supporting families and responding to communicable diseases, Public Health only receives just over one per cent of our overall health budget: NSGEU members who work in this area have been stretched thin for a very long time, and it has taken a pandemic to shine a spotlight on the ways in which critical public services have been starved of support for a very long time.

COVID has also shone a very stark spotlight on the crisis in long-term care and home care. I made a presentation on this issue to the legislature’s standing committee on health back in January, making it very clear that the blame for what happened at Northwood lay squarely

at the feet of our government. I don’t say this to be political, I am simply stating a fact (see page 14 for a copy of my remarks, and a link to the video of my presentation).

The uncertainty and chaos that have reigned over this past year have certainly taken a toll on us all, particularly on our mental health. While mental health is certainly another area of our public health care system that is in dire need of attention, there are resources available to members: if you have access to an Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) through your employer, please don’t hesitate to use it. Additionally, there are a few new initiatives that have been recently launched (see page 9 for more information on these programs).

One of the positive aspects of this pandemic has actually been, for me, the way it has exposed our collective weaknesses. Unions have been beating this drum for decades, but COVID has very clearly illustrated why public services, such as health care, truly matter. While neoliberal governments have been chipping away at the strength of these services, eroding and contracting them out as time ticked on, COVID has presented an opportunity for us all to reflect on what really matters to us, collectively, and reprioritize.

But change calls for leadership and bold action. Fortunately, we have a new Premier at the helm here in Nova Scotia. I am cautiously optimistic that Premier Rankin will be open to working with unions and the workers we represent to make positive changes to strengthen and improve our public services. ■

Jason MacLean,

President, NSGEU

## FEATURES

- 4-9 NS Forgotten Frontline: Public Health
- 10-11 Union Campaign Saves 91 Jobs
- 12 Health Care Members Bargaining Update
- 14-15 Presentation to Health Committee LTC
- 16-18 Interview with NUPGE President Larry Brown
- 20-21 A Visit to the Black Loyalists Heritage Centre
- 22-23 Education Calendar 2021
- 25 Work from Home Tax Credit
- 26 Sister of the Year: Robin MacLean
- 29 Mental Health Resources for Members

## NSGEU TWEETS

Quenta Adams-Coward (@QuentaAC)

Passed by @NSGEU in Burnside during lunch today. Pleased to see they've raised the Pan-African flag for African Heritage Month @JMACL3AN #BlackHistoryMonth

Lara Fawthrop for Sackville-Cobequid (NDP) (@lara\_fawthrop)

Just now on @infomorning @larochecbc provides a his analysis of Rankin's accept/speech. This province does need to listen to provincial union leadership but how far will the Liberal olive branch reach? @DannyNSFL @withwozney @cupenovascotia @NSGEU @NanMcFadgen @JMACL3AN

The Benny Hill Gong-Show (@TheGongShow76)

The students are saying thank you to front line medical and long-term care workers today! Lots of connections to parents, grandparents, and great grandparents!

Thank you for all you do everyday!

@IWKHealth @nshealth @NS\_nurses @NSGEU @robertstrang @giles\_school

Danny Cavanagh (@DannyNSFL)

Updated: Nova Scotia Health Authority scraps plan to contract U.S.-owned company for health-record keeping | SaltWire #NSFL #nslab #canlab #unions #solidarity #novascotia #workers #1

@NSGEU @CUPE

santina kerslake (@coachsantina)

Replying to @NS\_Labour @NSGEU and @cupe

This is good news because there is NO WAY they should be having this off. We need good jobs here.

## THE STAND

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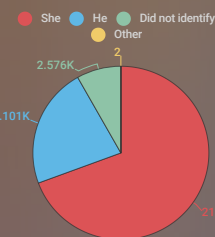
NSGEU

# Meet your union!

The membership of the Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union is incredibly diverse

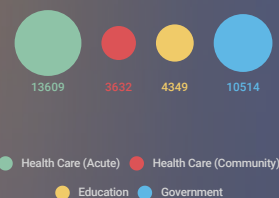
## Gender

Almost 70 per cent of NSGEU's membership identify as female. Our union has a very strong & active Women's Issues Committee to represent these members' issues.



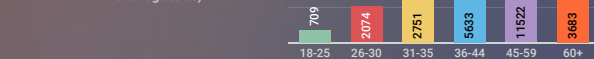
## Sectors

Our members work in a wide range of occupations, which fall under four main categories: Health Care (Acute), Health Care (Community), Government & Education.



## Ages

Our data shows that NSGEU members range in age from 18 to 60+ (some people did not disclose their age to us).

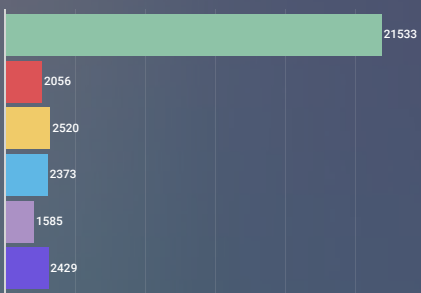


## Contracts

More than 60 full-time staff at the NSGEU help negotiate and service 87 separate collective agreements on behalf of our members.

## Where can you find us?

NSGEU members live & work in communities throughout the province: Metro HRM, Cumberland-Colchester, Cape Breton, Pictou Antigonish Guysborough, the Valley and South Shore.



Made with infogram

# Nova Scotia's Forgotten

**W**hen people think about health care, what most often springs to mind is a visit to the emergency department; a hospital stay; or even an appointment with their family doctor (if they're lucky enough to have one). But there's an entire area of the health care system that is always busily toiling behind the scenes, supporting and protecting Nova Scotians – Public Health.

The NSGEU proudly represents members working in this area, delivering programs under Public Health Units like Healthy Communities; Early Years Support, Healthy Beginnings; Environmental Health; Population Health Assessment and Surveillance; and Communicable Disease Prevention and Control (Health Protection).

There are a variety of occupations in this area, as well. Members include community home visitors, community outreach workers, dental hygienists, public health nutritionists, health promoters, administrative professionals, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs), just to name a few.

In addition to their regular duties, public health members are often the first people tapped to help in a time of crisis. And during COVID, they've stepped up a big way.

## ROLLING WITH THE WAVES

Holly Kennedy is a Communicable Disease Nurse working for Public Health in the Eastern Zone. She and

the members of her team manage reportable diseases, such as suspected tuberculosis, animal bites (for rabies investigations), Group A Strep, HIV/Hepatitis, all sexually transmitted infections, bloodborne pathogens, salmonella and giardia.

"Every day is different!" Holly says, laughing, "You never really know which diseases are going to be coming in, and you do keep a caseload, because some of the case management is ongoing."

Some of these cases require intense, prolonged follow-up, ensuring patients are well cared for. On top of this, Holly and her colleagues also coordinate routine immunizations for high-risk patients – those who are immunocompromised, have a chronic health condition such as liver disease, or diabetes, experience homelessness, use illicit drugs, or are 65 years or older.

This means that no two days at work are ever the same.

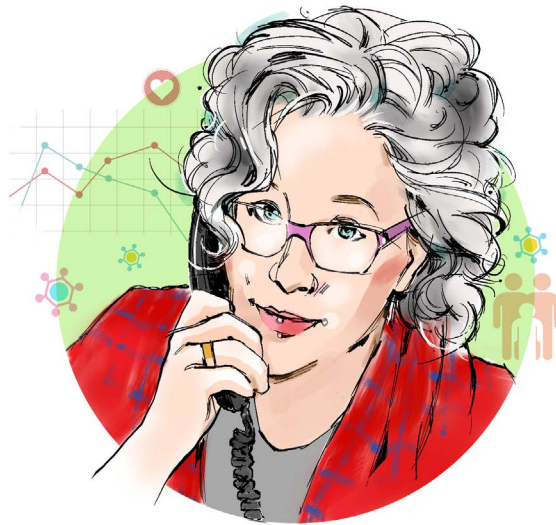
"It's busy, it's unpredictable, and it's always challenging me," Holly said.

She certainly didn't predict a global pandemic would turn everyone's lives upside down in 2020.

When COVID finally arrived in Nova Scotia in March last year, Public Health created a COVID Response Team.

If you're on that team, your only focus is on COVID: cases, follow-up, any types of requests, like exemptions, general information, and school follow-up.

Holly was one of the many Public Health members moved out of her normal duties and onto this COVID Response Team, where she acted as a Team



**NSGEU Communicable Disease Nurse Holly Kennedy**

# Frontline: Public Health

Lead and assisted with reporting comprehensive data, ensuring accurate information was getting to Chief Medical Officer Dr. Robert Strang for those regular updates we tune in for on a regular basis.

“When COVID started, we still only had the Communicable Disease Nurses working,” Holly recalled, “It was super challenging, because once those cases started coming in, we were like hen’s teeth trying to keep up with them, and there was no way that we could be the only ones doing the case management, especially considering the amount of detail that the Medical Officers of Health would look at.”

Other non-nursing members of Public Health, like Shannon O’Neill, were quickly brought in to help.

Shannon is a Public Health Dental Hygienist who has worked with the NSHA for 15 years now. She and her colleagues normally take the lead on oral health initiatives, such as the fluoride mouth rinse programs in elementary schools (fluoride is critical in preventing tooth decay and cavities). They also work with nutritionists and health promoters to develop oral health messages for the public, connect with Early Years team members to develop oral health messaging for young children and assist with content for school newsletters.

“***I had this conversation before with a couple of my coworkers: ... the ‘frontline’ designation kind of gets lost of us, because we don’t have patient contact – like direct, hands-on contact – but yet we’re the ones that are protecting the hospitals. We’re the ones that are protecting the people. And I find that kind of gets lost sometimes.***”

***-Shannon O’Neil***



***NSGEU Public Health Dental Hygienist Shannon O’Neil***

All that work has been put on hold as these members have been redeployed to the COVID Response Team.

Shannon was initially assigned to the negative labs component, which means she was calling clients to advise them of their negative COVID-19 results: “That was incredibly meaningful work because you have to remember that at that time, there were so many people that were isolated,” Shannon noted, “And even though a negative lab result is a quick conversation, you have the opportunity to connect with the public and give them some really good news.”

“I think we kept the public trust. Informing clients in a timely way about their negative COVID status built the public trust for Nova Scotians to continue to get tested – is one piece of it. I think that, to me, that was very meaningful.”

Shannon was made one of the Team Leads for negative labs. In that role, it was to support staff who were calling clients to inform them

of their negative test results and they would defer more unique situations that needed a bit of extra support. They also give input for improving processes and help edit scripts to ensure clients received consistent messaging.

Shannon is no stranger to leadership roles. She is the

Past Chair of the College of Dental Hygienists of Nova Scotia, and in 2017, she represented the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association as one of four hygienists selected to attend International Dental Hygiene Federation Strategy Session. She also helped establish an oral health assessment clinic for Syrian newcomers on behalf of the College of Dental Hygienists of Nova Scotia, and spent a year working as a health promoter in Public Health, after taking her graduate certificate in Public Health.

But being on the COVID Response Team is the first time she's had an opportunity to take on a Team Lead role with her employer.

"So dental hygienists in NSHA showed up in leadership roles that they hadn't had very much opportunity (to take on these roles before). It just never came up for those types of opportunities in the past, so that was really important to the profession, I think, just to demonstrate those core competencies."

Both Holly and Shannon say the experience has been rewarding in many ways.

"It feels good, on one level. It feels interesting to know that you're kind of making history, almost. You were on the frontlines – well, second lines, I'd say! We don't

work directly (with patients), but we're the ones that are calling the cases, we're the ones that are listening to them cry, we're the ones that are completing their contact tracing and trying to make sure it doesn't spread throughout the province," Holly paused.

**“ If there was one message that I could give to people is that this is not fake. This is not the government trying to control you, this is real, and your health is important. It's not about the percentages of people that are going to pass away ... there are people who have long-standing illnesses because of COVID ... that never fully recover.**

**-Holly Kennedy**



**NSGEU LPN Angie Chase-Naugler**

"I had this conversation before with a couple of my coworkers: ... the 'frontline' designation kind of gets lost of us, because we don't have patient contact – like direct, hands-on contact – but yet we're the ones that are protecting the hospitals. We're the ones that are protecting the people. And I find that kind of gets lost sometimes."

Being part of the provincial COVID team has also allowed members of Public Health to work with other professionals outside of their team and geographic area.

"If there was one thing that I could say was a really positive thing that I loved from this experience would be getting to know everybody in health protection across the province ... I really enjoyed my team and I really enjoyed the people that I met," Holly said.

The work hasn't been without its challenges, though.

"The work was severely frustrating and the public response and the tooth-and-claw that you had to fight with in order to get some people to isolate or to contact trace, that stuff was hard," she added.

Another frustrating aspect of their work has been seeing misinformation posted online about COVID cases in their community, and general information about the pandemic. Health care workers have to be very careful about what they post online - even if it is just to correct inaccuracies. In most cases, they just have to ignore posts by anti-maskers, science

deniers and people who unwittingly share articles from disreputable sources.

“If there was one message that I could give to people is that this is not fake,” Holly said, “This is not the government trying to control you, this is real, and your health is important. It’s not about the percentages of people that are going to pass away ... there are people who have long-standing illnesses because of COVID ... that never fully recover. Every single person who passes away from COVID is somebody’s mom or dad or relative of some sort: people look at it from a very individualistic view when, in reality, we should be looking at it from a community lens.”

## SHIFTING FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

Angie Chasse-Naugler has been a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) for around 20 years, and has spent 12 years of her nursing career with Public Health, where she helps run the school immunization program and the enhanced vision screening program for the Western Region (Lunenburg and Queens County). Her team oversees the planning and implementation of the grade seven immunization program, immunizing young Nova Scotians against meningitis (meningococcal quadrivalent vaccine), hepatitis B, HPV, and tetanus.

Of course, that was pre-COVID.

Since the pandemic began, Angie has had her work duties and hours changed more than a few times. Like Shannon and Holly, she was initially helping with doing negative lab calls, phoning hundreds of Nova Scotians each day.

“When a client went and had a swab done and they came back negative, we would call them and provide advisement on what to do for self-monitoring, and things like that,” Angie explained, “That quickly moved into daily monitoring calls: so it could be a client that

was a close contact to a positive case and we would give them a call to see if they had had any symptoms develop, and if they did, we’d be booking them in for another COVID assessment to see if now they’d become positive.”

Her most recent job, however, is the most hopeful one: she is helping set up COVID immunization clinics, eagerly awaiting the delivery of vaccines each week.

“Our role now is trying to get these (COVID) clinics up and running with management, so the LPNs and some of the RNs are clinic leads at the COVID-19 clinics, so that is going on-site and working with the engineer to have clinic flow set up, working with the site lead with infection control, occupational health to make sure these clinics meet all of the standards and then we

get those up and going by getting the appointments for phase zero clients,” Angie explained.

Shannon and other Dental Hygienists have also been shifted into the immunization clinics, working in the recovery area to monitor clients once they have received their dose to ensure they don’t have an adverse reaction (this is standard practice after receiving any vaccine, including the annual flu shot). Dental Hygienists

were a natural fit for this role because they are required to renew their health care provider CPR certification annually.

So, Shannon found herself working at the very first vaccination clinic for health care workers back in December.

“It was a real honour to be there at that first vaccine clinic, to see the health care providers receive their vaccine,” Shannon recalled, “They’ve been working so hard to take care of the public during this time, that it just felt like an honour to be there to help.”

It’s also given some optimism to health care workers, who are exhausted from working through a pandemic for the past year.

“At our first clinic that we stood up at Valley Regional

“ ***At our first clinic that we stood up at Valley Regional Hospital, when we had that first huddle and we realized what we were about to do, there was a lot of camaraderie there. There was a lot of emotion, because we thought, ‘could we be actually now seeing the light at the end of this tunnel?’***

***We’re all tired, but we’re all very excited that we’re actually finally getting needles into arms.***

***-Angie Chasse-Naugler***

Hospital, when we had that first huddle and we realized what we were about to do, there was a lot of camaraderie there. There was a lot of emotion, because we thought, ‘could we be actually now seeing the light at the end of this tunnel?’” Angie said.

“We’re all tired, but we’re all very excited that we’re actually finally getting needles into arms.”

## A TEAM EFFORT

Regardless of these struggles, Public Health members are quick to credit others for the important role they have played in helping keep Nova Scotians safe during this time.

“The community has really come together and we’ve all understood the importance of how we need to protect one another,” Angie said.

Because of that, Angie and her colleagues have been able to continue some of the important “normal” work that they normally do. In fact, Angie points out that Nova Scotia was one of the only provinces in the country that was able to hold our school immunization clinics, because our case numbers were so low.

“I’m just proud that we’re all taking this seriously and we’re all looking out for one another ... when you’re hearing those ‘travel-related’ (cases), they are self-isolating and trying to keep everyone safe. I’m just proud to be a Nova Scotian right now – I think a lot of us are.”

Angie attributes much of our success to the leadership of Dr. Strang and the work of her colleagues in Public Health, who ran with the processes developed by the Chief Medical Officer, doing daily check-ins and close monitoring of people.

“I think just as Nova Scotians, we’ve been through so much in the past year. I mean, we had a lot of tragedy and loss. In that, I just feel like Nova Scotia has been brought closer together, so now we’re more protective and more supportive of one another, now more than ever.”

Despite the chaos of the past year, Shannon is proud to have been a part of Nova Scotia’s pandemic response and recovery: “It’s all meaningful to me because I know I’m doing my part to combat COVID-19 and protect the health of the public. This is my job, to brighten up the future again.”

## CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS

This certainly isn’t the first time we’ve called on our Public Health members to step into the void during a health emergency: they have also been on the front lines during H1N1, SARS, mumps and other outbreaks.

“You do the work that’s focused around your profession, as it relates to Public Health, but then there’s always an expectation that if there’s an outbreak or different work, then you move into supporting that. So you have to be flexible ... that’s part of the way we work,” Shannon explained.

But the severity and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in an all-hands-on-deck response that has lasted for more than 12 months now, and it is taking its toll on these workers.

Holly worked in acute care, mental health & addictions, and even did a stint in Continuing Care before coming to working for Public Health about two years ago. While she enjoys the unpredictable and independent nature of her role as a Communication Disease Nurse, she isn’t sure how much longer she will be able to stay in this role.

She was shifted back to her pre-COVID role back in November. Since then, the workload has become unbearable, and even though the employer added another person to her team, four coworkers are off, either on leaves or redeployed to another area.

The situation on Holly’s team is not uncommon within Public Health right now. All over the province, NSGEU members who work in Public Health are reporting astronomical amounts of overtime, frequent changes to their schedules and shifts, cancelled vacations and more. It all has added up to mounting stress and burnout for these workers.

There are simply not enough people to do the work.

As a result, sick leave and STI rates have risen drastically.

All of these factors clearly demonstrate the need for an increased capacity in the sector.

While Public Health has hired 100 new nurses, plus more administrative professionals, to help with our COVID response, these are temporary positions, and many of the successful applicants are internal hires from acute care within NSHA. In many cases, these members

aren't being released from their current assignments for months, because their area in acute care is already so short-staffed.

Still, members like Angie are hopeful that now that Public Health has been pushed into the spotlight because of COVID, government may finally start funding this area of the health care system appropriately.

Despite the broad scope and significance of the work they do to keep the public safe, Public Health receives less than one per cent of the overall budget from the Department of Health and Wellness.

In fact, a [paper](#) was recently published in the Canadian Journal of Public Health, pointing out that the one per cent of funding Public Health receives here in Nova Scotia is well below the five to six per cent of health care funding that is recommended. Furthermore, the report found the last time our Public Health budget met the recommended funding levels was in 1975.

"More money and resources need to be put into Public Health so we can continue to manage things like this, because unfortunately – we hope this never happens again – but we can't say for certain that it won't, so we need to be more prepared, absolutely," Angie said.

"I am so thankful that NSGEU has taken on this government and taken them to task, because this government needs to be taken to task. We have suffered in health care under this government, that's how I feel."

The NSGEU has already filed grievances on behalf

of the members in Public Health over the past year, hoping to alleviate some of the stresses they've been experiencing.

One thing is certain: heading into bargaining, COVID has helped the union identify a variety of issues that need to be addressed urgently. And we will be bringing these issues to the bargaining table. ■



***Danielle Sheaves, a registered nurse with the COVID-19 unit at the QEII is the first person in Nova Scotia to receive the Pfizer-BioNtech COVID-19 vaccine on December 16th, 2020. LPN Jennifer Turcot provided the first vaccine. (Photo credit: Communications Nova Scotia)***

# Making HIStory: Union Campaign Saves 91 Jobs

**U**nions fight for many things for our members: better wages, benefits, and working conditions. All are undeniably important aspects of a contract. But at the end of the day, the most vital provision is job security language.

Job security language effectively makes it difficult for an employer to eliminate jobs by making it an expensive and onerous task.

The NSGEU has fought for the best possible job security language at the bargaining table over the years, always with the hope that we won't need to put it into use. Recently, however, that language was instrumental in saving jobs within our health care system.

In late 2020, the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA), advised the union that 91 members working in Health Information Services (HIS), scanning and archiving medical records at 24 hospitals throughout the province, were facing potential layoffs. Members working in Central and Western zones were NSGEU members, and members working in Northern and Eastern zones were CUPE members. The majority of the members affected work in rural parts of the province, and 84 are women.

## NSHA to contract U.S.-owned company, eliminating 91 health-record keeping jobs

Nebal Snan/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

**Published:** Jan 06 at 9:33 p.m.

**Updated:** Jan 07 at 9:54 a.m.



The changes are meant to improve patient record keeping and management across Nova Scotia. - 123RF Stock Photo

The NSHA was planning to eliminate these jobs and hand the work over to an American-owned private company, Iron Mountain, as an untendered contract.

The NSGEU immediately informed the provincial government of the NSHA's plan to contract out this work, who were unaware of the health authority's plan, but ultimately, government was prepared to allow the employer to proceed.

"It was an insult to these health care workers who have been helping to keep our health care system secure and operational throughout this pandemic," said NSGEU President Jason MacLean.

It's also worth noting that these layoffs were announced against the backdrop of a global pandemic, when everyone was also faced with an enormous amount of stress and uncertainty.

"This employer and government should be focused on supporting workers and our communities, especially at this uncertain time," MacLean pointed out.

Aside from the unions' obvious concerns about their members' job security, there were also scores of other concerns: by failing to fairly tender a contract, the employer could not guarantee the contract would

be competitive or that it will adequately protect citizens' private health information. As we know, this government has repeatedly failed to protect personal, private information (see repeated [FOIPOP database failures](#)).

On December 11<sup>th</sup>, the NSHA sent a memo to the affected members, formally advising them that: "Following a thorough review of our current situation and alternatives, a decision has been made to shift our scanning and archiving service to an external vendor", and that "As a member of our Health Records team, you will be directly affected by this change." A copy of the memo can be accessed [here](#).

Then, for weeks, they gave these members no further information on the layoffs, and left them to wait in limbo to find out their fate.

Meanwhile, the NSGEU and CUPE were working together to submit a response to the government's plan, taking the opportunity to point out its many flaws, and raising a number of questions the employer had failed to consider or answer. A copy of the report we produced can be found here: A Matter of Trust – [A Review of NSHA's Quiet Plan to Hand Control of Nova Scotians' Health Information to an American Company](#)

In response to our report and the negative media attention it garnered, the NSHA issued a public statement saying, "[the decision to outsource these jobs has not yet been made, we're merely "exploring it...."](#)". This statement clearly contradicted the memo sent to

staff on December 11<sup>th</sup>- ten days earlier.

"Which is it? It can't be both," asked MacLean. "Members are told a decision has been made on December 11<sup>th</sup> and read on December 23<sup>rd</sup> that no decision has been made. There is a lot of confusion and fear and, frankly, Nova Scotia Health has really dropped the ball. It's up to them to clarify what is going on because these people deserve to know what is really going on with their jobs."

Finally, after an agonizing wait for the members, the unions received word on January 22<sup>nd</sup> that NSHA had decided to halt their plan to contract out the members' work.

The unions had always maintained the position that the work of HIS members is invaluable, and it appears that the NSHA finally came to understand the important role they play in our health care system. This was an exercise in the strength of solidarity -- and the importance of maintaining strong job security language in our collective agreements! ■

## Nova Scotia Health Authority scraps plan to contract U.S.-owned company for health-record keeping

Nebal Snan/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Published: Jan 27 at 11:30 a.m.

Updated: Jan 28 at 10:16 a.m.



A plan to transfer health records from across Nova Scotia to the Dickson Building at the QEII Health Sciences Centre, before being moved to the Iron Mountain facilities in Burnside has been scrapped. - Ryan Taplin / File

# Health Care Bargaining Update

The collective agreement for members of our Health Care bargaining unit (which includes members of Locals 100, 122, 195, 193 & 104) expired on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. NSGEU started preparations for bargaining shortly after the expiration of this agreement, sending out our membership surveys in December and reviewing the results early in the new year.

The NSGEU Health Care bargaining committee members then began drafting NSGEU's bargaining proposals and brought these proposals to the larger Health Care bargaining council, which includes representatives from CUPE and Unifor, on February 10<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting, the unions shared their proposals and began deciding which proposals we would bring forward to the employers (IWK and NSHA). The Council has scheduled two additional meetings to finalize its proposals and strategy.

The Council, which is led by NSGEU, began asking the employers for bargaining dates in December 2020. After several further attempts to secure bargaining dates, the employer recently confirmed bargaining dates. The parties have agreed to exchange proposals on Thursday, April 15<sup>th</sup>. We have eight additional dates scheduled for bargaining, with the final date scheduled for Thursday, May 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Executive Council of Health Care Unions, which is made of the leadership of all four unions representing health care workers across the province, and the NSGEU Board of Directors both agreed to select Health Care as lead table in bargaining for this round. The Council

of Health Care Unions does not expect this round of bargaining will be as prolonged as the previous round, as the councils now have merged collective agreements in place.

As a result of the new Health Authorities Act passed by the provincial government in 2014, which merged the nine district health authorities into one, all four unions (NSGEU, CUPE, Unifor & NSNU) now must bargain in four Councils: Health Care, Administrative Professionals, Support Services, and Nursing. NSGEU appoints the Chief Negotiator for the Health Care Council and has the majority of bargaining committee members (NSGEU 6, CUPE 3, Unifor 1).

NSGEU's representatives are:

- Chief Negotiator is NSGEU Director of

Servicing and Negotiations, Shawn Fuller;

- Co-Chair is Allan LaPierre;
- Chris Weaver;
- Cindy Smith;
- Peter Perry;
- Uta Berthold-Brush;
- Sara Jane Arason.

The Health Care Council has also begun work on negotiating essential services agreements with employer representatives from the IWK and NSHA. These agreements determine the number of employees who must remain at work in the event of a strike. The IWK essential service agreement is complete, and the negotiations for the NSHA agreement are ongoing. ■



**A few of the NSGEU Health Care bargaining unit representatives: Cindy Smith, Chris Weaver & Sara Jane Arason**

# Update on Bill 148 Legal Challenge

**O**n January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the Court of Appeal released a decision in which it denied the Unions' request to file evidence in the constitutional reference, including affidavits from the union negotiators about the impact of Bill 148 on collective bargaining, expert evidence on the effect that taking wages and important monetary benefits off the table has on a union's bargaining power, expert evidence on the protection of collective bargaining in international law, expert evidence on the Province's finances during the relevant time, and the Cabinet documents that show that the Province had a legislative plan in place before bargaining began.

This is obviously very disappointing, as the Court will go on to decide the constitutionality of Bill 148 based only on the evidence filed by the Province.

However, the Unions will be asking the Supreme Court of Canada for permission to appeal the decision of the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal. The "application for leave" will be filed with the Supreme Court of Canada by March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

In the meantime, the Court of Appeal has set dates for the hearing of the constitutional reference: September 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.

If the Supreme Court of Canada grants the Unions permission to appeal the evidentiary decision of the Court of Appeal, the Unions will ask that the September hearing dates before the Court of Appeal be adjourned pending the hearing before the Supreme Court of Canada.

It is important to note that the Supreme Court of Canada only grants permission to appeal in a small number of cases involving matters of national and public importance. The Unions believe that the decision of the Court of Appeal is a matter of national and public importance, given that it means that the constitutionality of legislation that interferes with collective bargaining can be determined in a reference without receiving any evidence from the affected unions or their members. ■

## BACKGROUND ON BILL 148

Stephen McNeil's Liberal government proclaimed [Bill 148 – the Public Service Sustainability Act](#) in 2017.

This piece of legislation did three things that interfere with your right to full, free, collective bargaining:

1. It imposed a non-negotiated wage pattern on the entire public sector (0%, 0%, 1.0%, 1.5% & an additional 0.5% on the last day of the agreement);
2. It removed long-standing articles from the Civil Service master agreement (ending the retirement allowance/public service award as of April 1, 2015);
3. Prohibiting an arbitrator from awarding anything above the above-noted wage pattern.

Even before government proclaimed the Bill into force, the threat of legislation hobbled the unions' bargaining power and prevented us from being able to freely conclude the collective bargaining process, because it took away the leverage of wages and monetary items like the service award off the table completely. After a significant amount of time with very little progress in bargaining at any major tables, the NSGEU announced in late summer 2017 that it would apply to the Labour Board to appoint an Interest Arbitration Board to settle the Civil Service Master Agreement, as is our right under the legislation that applied. Government proclaimed the legislation to prevent the interest arbitrator from awarding any monetary increases that were higher than was set out in the legislation.

Since the legislation was passed, the NSGEU has been working hard alongside seven other unions who represent unionized workers to try and have this unjust legislation overturned by the courts.

The unions' argument is that Bill 148 breaches Section 2(d) of the Charter, which guarantees Canadians Freedom of Association and protects the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

The unions knew pursuing legal action would be a slow process, and that has proven to be true, especially since the government is delaying every step of the way.

# Presentation to Health Committee on LTC

***In mid-January, members of the Legislature's Standing Committee on Health heard from five union leaders, as well as the managing director of the Nursing Homes of Nova Scotia Association, about what happened in long-term care facilities during COVID. NSGEU's President, Jason MacLean, made the following presentation to the committee:***

Good afternoon.

As President of the NSGEU and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the Nova Scotia Federation Labour, I proudly represent thousands of people working in the continuing care sector.

Many work in long-term care facilities throughout this province. Interestingly, we actually represent none of the workers

at the Northwood Halifax campus. But many of our members were forced to go work there during the first wave of COVID, when the virus was ravaging the facility.

What happened at Northwood was a

tragedy, no doubt, but it was a preventable tragedy.

To be clear, the staff at Northwood are not to blame for what happened there.

Government is.

For years, they have ignored the cries of workers and the unions who represent them, trying to call attention to crisis in the sector, all while cutting the long-term care budgets.

At the outset of this pandemic, when we tried to raise critical concerns from frontline workers, not only did government ignore us, they accused us of fear-mongering and hyperbole.

Then, 53 people died.

Systemic underfunding is the root cause of all that is wrong with our long-term care sector.

We have a government that has been fixated for eight years on balancing their budget at any cost.

Now, we can clearly see what the true cost of that balanced budget was.

In our report, Neglecting Northwood, we clearly outline the

systemic problems that came to light during COVID, including the fact that management from Northwood approached this government for three consecutive years, asking for funding to modernize their facility to make it safer for residents and staff.

Those requests were denied.

Make no mistake: what happened at Northwood could have happened at just about any long-term care facility in our province. It still could.



***President MacLean gave a presentation to the legislature's standing committee on Health.***

Because we still face the same systemic issues that have been raised by workers in this sector for a very long time.

Band-aid solutions, like providing bursaries and creating a new, lower-paid position in the sector, are not going to solve the problem.

In short, we need more trained and qualified staff to work in this sector. They need to want to work in this sector. The work they do is hard work: it is physical; it is incredibly stressful; and it is certainly not glamorous. They make approximately \$18 an hour for their efforts.

In some communities, they need to work in multiple facilities to cobble together enough to make a living and support their families.

In other areas, they are so understaffed that they cannot get vacation time approved.

The sector needs to be completely reformed so we can actually keep people in this occupation.

In many ways, government's reaction to long-term care during the pandemic was simply indicative of how it views the sector in normal times: it is an afterthought.

Our seniors and our workers deserve much better.

Long-term care and home care must be thought of as part of our overall public health care system.

Our government needs to take full responsibility for what happened at Northwood, and invest in reforming this system, if they truly want to ensure Nova Scotians are protected.

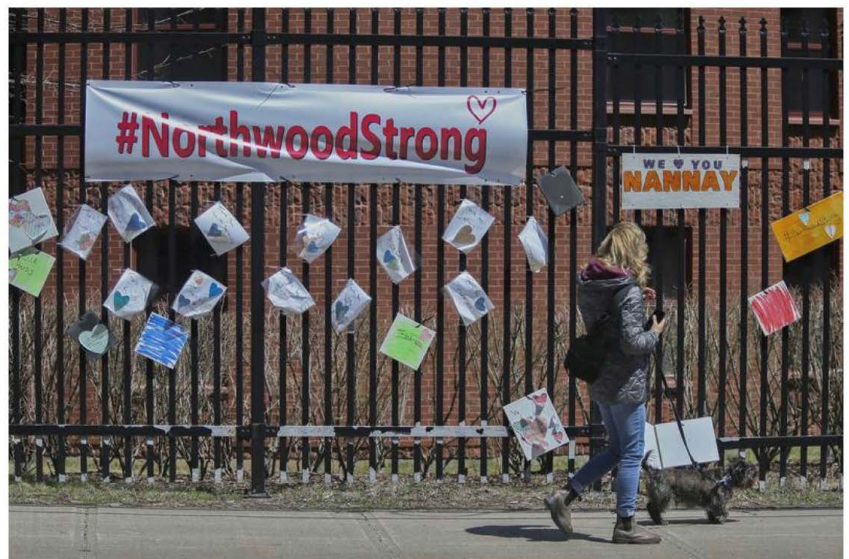
## Northwood Halifax had 53 deaths when pandemic started. Here's how they've changed

 Premium content

John McPhee (jmcphree@herald.ca)

**Published:** Jan 29 at 1 p.m.

**Updated:** Feb 04 at 10:17 a.m.



A woman walks past messages of support for residents and staff at Northwood placed across the street of the retirement and care facility in Halifax Wednesday May 6, 2020. - Tim Krochak

# An Interview with NUPGE President Larry Brown: Covid 19's Impact on Canada

Our National Union (NUPGE) is a union of provincial unions - from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, PEI, Newfoundland, and us in Nova Scotia. Among other things, it is where our union

goes to find out what is happening to members like ours across the country. NUPGE has been a source of information and strength for its 11 component and three affiliate unions since it was formed in 1976.

NUPGE's role facilitating communication, connection and support between workers across the country has only grown stronger and more pressing through the Pandemic. Larry Brown, President of NUPGE

explains, "we have always known that there is a great similarity between what a long-term care worker does, as an example, in Sydney, Nova Scotia and in Victoria, British Columbia. What we did was to bring members together more often so they could share information about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); health & safety pandemic protocols; work-from-home conditions; and more. Prior to the pandemic, we were holding meetings with the leadership three or four times a year. This moved to monthly meetings or even more frequently when required."

"If you think back to when the pandemic began, we had a great number of people who were suddenly sent home and told they have to work from home without a whole bunch of rules. The same thing was happening in every province. I mean, at that time, we didn't

have a whole lot of guidance for people who were abruptly transitioned to work from home. At the same time, we had a whole lot of workers who were told they had to go to work. These are people like our health care workers, correctional workers, liquor store workers, long-term care, and home care workers. For them, it was a whole set of different questions about how do we do our jobs well and safely in the midst



**NUPGE President Larry Brown at the NSGEU 2019 Convention.**

of a pandemic?" Larry recalls.

Connecting people is one important piece of what NUPGE does, but NUPGE is also looking to help raise awareness and develop solutions to issues that are identified in these calls. Larry says, "Our job is to come in behind and say, "Okay, given what you have shared, here is the role that NUPGE can play moving the issues you have identified forward."

One initiative was the creation of an Anti-Racism Special Committee following the murder of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in the United States. Fanned

by an overtly racist US President, demonstrations in solidarity with people of colour and against police violence sprung up in cities across the US and Canada. This sparked people and organizations to renew their anti-racism work alongside the Black Lives Matter movement to continue to work towards an equitable and just world. Our own NSGEU President, Jason MacLean, is the Chair of NUPGE's new Anti-Racism Special Committee which provides an opportunity for all components to learn from one another and share knowledge.

"The pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in our existing federal political/economic system here in Canada," Larry continues. It has become clear to most Canadians now that we need the federal government to play a stronger role developing and tracking national standards for care and public services in a number of areas.

"Take support for victims of domestic violence," Larry explains. "It was clear to us [NUPGE] that domestic violence was going to increase as a result of being forced to work from home. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to reason that if you have increased stress, combined with people working in confined spaces and an increasing use of alcohol – it is a recipe that will increase domestic violence. Once we identified this as an issue, we found out there was no agency we could turn to, to address it. There was too much of a vacuum. We had some protections for women in some provinces but no systemic way to really address this looming threat across the country."

**“These are opportunities because we no longer have to spend time trying to convince people of the problems. Now, our task is to convince them of the solutions. So that is a move forward.”**



**NUPGE President Larry Brown speaks at a Bill 1 protest in Halifax.**

The pandemic has exposed many holes in our public system and Larry sees these as potential opportunities for us as Canadians. For example, it exposed:

- The need for the expansion of public health care and the Canada Health Act to include long-term care and home care;
- The need to address income inequality as we saw people on the lower end of the income scale suffering more job loss, more income loss, and more illness during this period of time;
- The need to have a robust national childcare program. When the pandemic hit, there wasn't a business who didn't notice how crucially important childcare was to their being able to function.

"These are opportunities because we no longer have to spend time trying to convince people of the problems," he says. "Now, our task is to convince them of the solutions. So that is a move forward."

In this spirit, NUPGE is lobbying for a "new normal" to emerge out of this pandemic – where people and corporations pay their fair share of taxes and where our provincial governments are given enough targeted federal dollars to maintain strong public services. The new normal would see public services being made a priority.

NUPGE is one of the ten largest Canadian unions in the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and as such, Larry, as President, has a seat on the Executive Council. In February 2021, members of the Executive met in a pre-budget consultation with Deputy Prime Minister/ Minister of Finance, Christia Freeland. During this

meeting, Larry spoke to Freeland about the need for strong federal standards of care and federal regulations. He points out how important it is that Freeland heard from provincial unions who represent actual working people because she will be hearing the exact opposite from Premiers who want to hold the purse-strings. "Jason Kenny, Brian Pallister, Scott Moe.. all those guys. They would love to maintain control of the money and allocate it as they see fit. But we want national standards so that people get the same level of care across the country."

Larry wants members to watch out for the term "provincial jurisdiction" and says provincial leaders throw that word up when the federal government proposes national standards, programs or strategies – like childcare and pharmacare. He argues, "why anyone would not accept a national standard on childcare? Why would you not accept a national standard on health care or pharmacare? Canadians don't care about these jurisdictional arguments. We all want programs and support."

Labour rights, strong taxation and public programs are three quarters of the battle on income inequality. During the meeting with Freeland in February, Larry was also able to talk about fair taxation as a part of a conversation about reducing income inequality coming



**NUPGE President Larry Brown speaks at a 2019 Board of Directors meeting at NSGEU.**

**“ Jason Kenny, Brian Pallister, Scott Moe.. all those guys. They would love to maintain control of the money and allocate it as they see fit. But we want national standards so that people get the same level of care across the country. ”**

that complicated.”

Although there are challenges everyday, Larry sees this time optimistically. “It’s a seize the moment time for us, isn’t it? All of the issues we have been talking about are so self-evident now. We will make progress coming out of this – I’ll tell you that.”

out of the pandemic.

“The conversation can’t be about what we are going to cut, but needs to be how are we going to pay for what we spent and are spending. In order to do this, we have to have a discussion about taxes,” he recalls saying to Freeland.

Larry was pleased that although Minister Freeland didn’t openly agree with him, she didn’t disagree either and came back at the end of the meeting to say, “Larry, I agree with you that income inequality is really not

We are stronger together – 400,000 strong from coast-to-coast. Thank you NUPGE, for being there to connect and support us through this pandemic.

If you are interested in more information about the issue of income inequality among other campaigns, please visit: <https://unionsyeah.ca/factsheets> ■

# New Liberal Premier Iain Rankin

The Nova Scotia legislature has reconvened on Tuesday March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, one day shy of the one year anniversary since Nova Scotia's MLAs last gathered.

A lot has happened over the last year. The world has faced sudden changes in dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic. While Nova Scotia has fared well during the pandemic, it is safe to say everyone is feeling the impact it has had on everyone's life. Over the last year everything has changed: the way we live, the way we work and the way we relate to each other. As well, families across Nova Scotia have had to deal with the loss of loved ones taken by COVID-19.

Politically, another big change that comes with the reopening of the Legislature is that Premier Stephen McNeil has stepped down as Liberal leader and premier. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, the Hon. Iain Rankin was elected as the new Leader of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and was sworn in as Premier on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union's and labour in general has faced countless attacks from the McNeil government since its coming to power in 2013. Countless pieces of anti labour legislation and what felt like a complete disdain for public sector workers. The new Premier was first elected in 2013, when the Stephen McNeil government was first elected. Premier Rankin was a backbencher and voted to support every anti-labour bill hammered through the Legislature by Stephen McNeil. However, Rankin's Campaign and early

days of his government give the impression that he wants to lead a more open, responsive and collaborative style of Government.

Its very early in Premier Rankin's tenure, but to date he has worked to change the tone in the way he deals with media and conducts his political discourse. Nova Scotians have yet to see what a Rankin budget will look like, however, his Finance Minister has stated clearly that no one should be expecting to see staff reductions, program cuts or a return to the fiscal austerity of the McNeil government.

As union members and progressives, we should give a new government a chance to show us and Nova Scotians how they will govern. At the same time, we all must remain vigilant and prepared to fight against any move that would bring us back to the McNeil days.

Premier Rankin has a choice. He can decide to simply continue as simply a subsidiary of "McNeil's Movers" or chart his own course as "Rankin's Renovators" for the benefit of

all Nova Scotians.

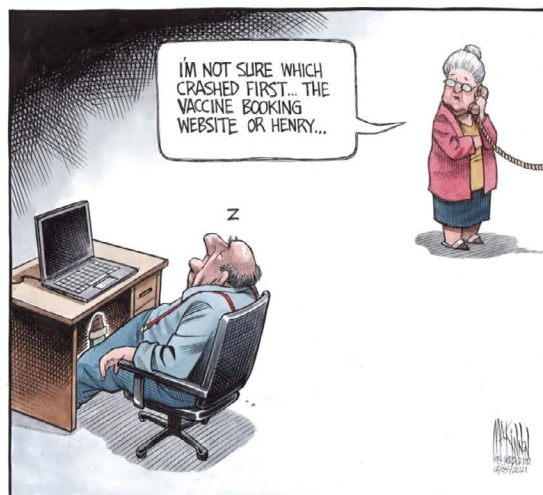
## GAIL LETHBRIDGE: Iain Rankin's COVID premiere off to bumpy start

Premium content

Gail Lethbridge

Published: Mar 05 at 7:57 a.m.

Updated: Mar 06 at 6 a.m.



Bruce MacKinnon's editorial cartoon for March 5, 2021.

# Nova Scotia history is alive at the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre

If you haven't been to the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, it is time you visited! It is a wonderful way to spend the day learning about what was for a time, the largest free Black settlement in the world.

The Centre was built to commemorate and honour women, men and families who settled in Loyalist communities in the late 1780's and who now live in many communities across the province, including Shelburne, Halifax Regional Municipality, New Glasgow, Sydney, and Parrsboro. There is a monument on the shore of Shelburne Harbour that honours the 1783 Black Loyalist landings.

The Heritage Centre itself was built in 2015 after an earlier museum at the same location burned down. This new Centre is a lovely modern structure that takes you on a journey in time to follow the path of people who were wrenched from their homes in Africa, enslaved, brought to the American colonies, then brought to Nova Scotia and finally back to Africa again. NSGEU members, historical interpreters, will give you a tour

at the Centre if you book ahead. You can call and visit between 10am and 4 pm, Monday to Friday. Currently, the Centre is not open on the weekend, but that could change - check before you visit.

The story of the lived experience of Black Loyalists is not for the faint of heart. Originally, they were violently removed from their communities in Africa and enslaved – forced to work as house servants, or in manual labour in a variety of ways and places throughout America. All of their work made profits for the owners and was foundational for the growing American economy. When the American Revolutionary War (aka American War of Independence) began, the British Crown promised any slaves who fought

with them freedom. When the British lost, freedom was negotiated with Americans (representatives from the 13 colonies) for between three and four thousand Black Loyalists. Their names were recorded in a British Naval registry which became the basis for Lawrence Hill's book: *The Book of Negroes*.

As part of the agreement, the newly freed Black Loyalists had to leave America and were told by the Crown they would be granted land in Nova Scotia.



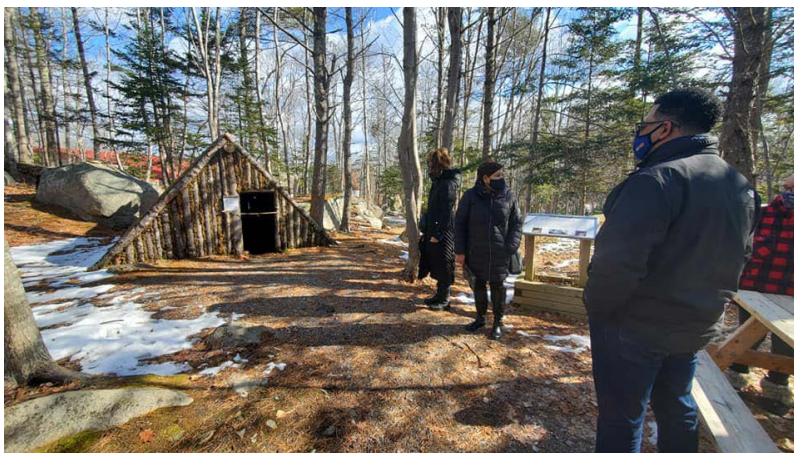
***NSGEU President Jason MacLean visits the Black Loyalists Heritage Centre in Birchtown, NS.***

They landed in 1783 in Birchtown, near Shelburne. For a time, it was the largest free Black colony in the world.

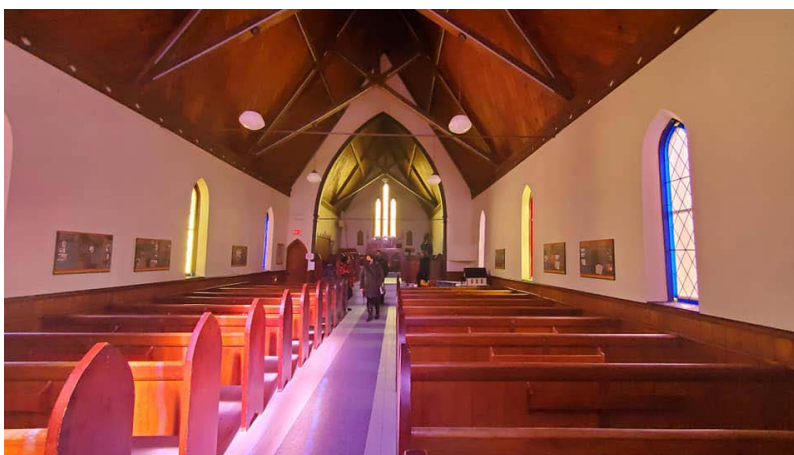
In reality, many Loyalists did not receive land grants as promised. Those who did receive them had to adhere to strict conditions in order to keep them. Many Loyalists could not meet these conditions as they could not work the land because they were too poor and were indentured and working in Shelburne. They were constantly taken advantage of, lied to, and discriminated against. One of the first recorded race riots was in Shelburne as Black Loyalists were violently forced out of town to live in poverty and isolation.

As a result of the hardship experienced in Nova Scotia, a leader in the Black Loyalist community organized a way back to Africa for any Black Loyalists who could make it to Halifax at a particular day and time. Over 1,100 people made it to the boats that day – some walking all the way from Birchtown. The freed Black Loyalists settled in Freeport in Sierra Leone.

You can find out more about these stories and more by visiting the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre. ■



**Photos at right - February 24, 2021: With President MacLean, 3<sup>rd</sup> VP Melissa Marsman and Human Rights Committee Chair Sherry Dennis, visit the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre (Local 1783) in Birchtown near Shelburne. During the visit they hears amazing stories told by NSGEU members Braden Chetwynd and Jessie Corrigan. Thank you for the wonderful tour today.**



# NSGEU Education 2021 Calendar

## New Courses

### NSGEU 101 (ONLINE) Coming Soon

- Any member in good standing can register

In this online workshop, members will learn the history of NSGEU, how the NSGEU is structured, and why NSGEU and other unions exist.

### Steward Orientation (ONLINE) Coming Soon

- Must be a local steward

In this two (2) day workshop, Stewards will better understand their role as Educators, Grievance Handlers, Communicators, Leaders, Organizers and Activists. Tools are provided to assist Stewards in supporting local members.

### Workers in Transition (.5 day) (Chief Stewards will receive invitations via email)

- Must be a Chief Steward

In this ½ day course, Chief Stewards will better understand the role we all play to better protect the rights of our trans members and ensure they have the support they need in our workplaces, in our unions and in our communities."

## Short Local Delivered Courses

(Participant and Facilitator booklets and more information will be found on the NSGEU website in Executive Portal)

Local Executives can provide these one hour quick courses independently.

Local Executive Officers can print the required documents or request copies from NSGEU Education by emailing [nsgeueducation@education.ca](mailto:nsgeueducation@education.ca) with a minimum of two weeks notice. The documents can be mailed or picked up at the NSGEU in Burnside.

### Time Management: Finding Time for the Important Things

Participants will: review some basic principles of time management, set goals and priorities and find time in their schedules for their goals and priorities

### Facing the Employer

Participants will build their confidence in facing management, identify common issues and management tactics when challenged and strategize for meetings with management

### Effective One on One Communications

Participants will choose the most effective mechanism for communicating each message to their members, use non-verbal communication skills effectively, recognize the non-verbal message when others are speaking, match how they are saying something with the message they are conveying and write and deliver an effective message.

### Public Speaking

Participants will build confidence in speaking publicly, practice body language and vocal delivery and practice giving an impromptu speech using the "5 Magic Phrases" technique.



## Ongoing Education

### Workplace Mapping

There will be ongoing training with Local Presidents on Building Local Steward Networks through Workplace Mapping.

Workplace Mapping is the process of obtaining accurate and relevant information about where, and who, the local members are. It can form the basis of most successful union activity, including recruiting, communications, developing activists and campaigning around issues. Developing strong local steward networks is the goal!

**Steward Orientation (2 days)** • Must be a Local Steward (Members will receive invitations via email)

In this two (2) day workshop, Stewards discuss their role as Educators, Grievance Handlers, Communicators, Leaders, Organizers and Activists. Tools are provided to assist Stewards in supporting local members.

**Dealing with Workplace Conflict (1.5 days)** (Members will receive invitations via email)

- Must be a Steward or Local Executive Officer

In this one-and-a-half (1.5) day workshop, we will define and analyse conflict and look at the range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict. We will also look at mediation and its role in conflict resolution. Any steward or local executive officer that has not previously attended this workshop is eligible to attend.

**Domestic Violence: Why is it a Workplace Issue?** (.5 day) (Locals who have not participated will be contacted via email)

This will be offered via Zoom to Chief Stewards (or an Executive Officer if Chief Steward is unavailable) who were unable to attend in 2020

- In this ½ day course, Chief Stewards will learn about the impact of intimate partner violence in the workplace. Chief Stewards will be provided tools to support members who experience Intimate Partner Violence in the Workplace.

President, Steward, Secretary and Treasurer Toolkits will be updated with Domestic Violence: Why is it a Workplace Issue? resources.



## Additional Resources

A new Bargaining Guide Supplement will be available along with Running Effective Local Meetings, Effective Local Elections, Rules of Order, Workplace Mapping. Toolkits for President, Secretary, Treasurer and Steward will be regularly updated.

All Toolkits and Supplements can be found in the executive portal on the NSGEU website and here; <https://nsgeu.ca/education-3-2/stewards-resources/>

Educational videos, including an introduction to the NSGEU and short introductions to Local Executive roles as well as one on Labour/ Management Committees, and Rules of Order available on the NSGEU website here; <https://nsgeu.ca/education-videos/>

Local Officer Training - Local Officers will be sent invitations via email. Next training session is scheduled for June 24th at 1:30pm

Domestic Violence-Why is it a Workplace Issue? Resources can be found in the executive portal and on the main web page here: <https://nsgeu.ca/education-3-2/stewards-resources/>

Pre-Retirement Seminars, Joint Occupational Health and Safety Training, Executive, Regional and Occupational Council and Board training are ongoing.

Please visit the new member library off of the Solarium in the member office area in the Main NSGEU office in Dartmouth. These books include children's books, so take some time to go discover what we have there.

## Labour School 2021

In the interest of everyone's Health and Safety Labour 2021 has been cancelled.

Please watch for an email in early 2022 for an invite to apply for a spot in Labour School 2022. Planned courses will be in Communications, Advanced Steward, Leadership, Mobilizing through the Generations and a new course, Political Action.

# Recent Organizing Efforts

## Internal Organizing - Workplace Mapping

In an effort to build strong Local Steward networks, local presidents, based on occupational grouping, will be meeting for short meetings to discuss Workplace Mapping.

Workplace Mapping is one of the most effective ways of examining the strengths and weaknesses of a Local and building a strong Steward network. Mapping is the process of obtaining accurate and relevant information about the workforce in a systematic way. It can form the basis of successful union activity, including recruiting, communications, developing activists and campaigning around issues.

## New Locals

113 Shady Oaks Residential Support LTD.

23 Cape Breton Island Housing Authority Supervisors.

Click [here](#) for the latest organizing booklet



## Unions make a difference in our lives.

Unions fought for many of the benefits workers enjoy today: Sick leave, maternity & paternity leave, vacation, minimum wage, paid breaks, overtime, workplace safety standards and regulations, collective bargaining rights, and much, much more.

Do you know of a group of non-unionized workers who might be interested in joining the NSGEU? Please contact:

Lori Smith, Education & Organizing Officer  
902-456-6531 or 1-877-556-7438 or [lsmith@nsgeu.ca](mailto:lsmith@nsgeu.ca)



# Work From Home Tax Credit

**\*\*Note:** many NSGEU members were forced to work from home during the first wave of the pandemic, and many continue to do so on a rotational basis. If you are one of these members, please review the following information from the Government of Canada's website when preparing your income tax return for the 2020 year.

**T**his year has been filled with unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Canadians unexpectedly had to work from home which resulted in millions of Canadians setting up their work space in their kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms.

In response, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has made the home office expenses deduction available to more Canadians, and simplified the way employees can claim these expenses on their personal income tax return for the 2020 tax year. Employees with larger claims for home office expenses can still choose to use the existing detailed method to calculate their home office expenses deduction.

Employees who worked from home more than 50% of the time over a period of at least four consecutive weeks in 2020 due to COVID-19 will now be eligible to claim the home office expenses deduction for 2020. The use of a shorter qualifying period will ensure that more employees can claim the deduction than would otherwise have been possible under longstanding practice.

A new temporary flat rate method will allow eligible employees to claim a deduction of \$2 for each day they worked at home in that period, plus any other days they worked from home in 2020 due to COVID-19 up to a maximum of \$400. Under this new method, employees will not have to get Form T2200 or Form T2200S completed and signed by their employer.

To simplify the process for employees choosing the detailed method, the CRA launched today simplified forms (Form [T2200S](#) and Form [T777S](#)) and a [calculator](#) designed specifically to assist with the calculation of eligible home office expenses.

For more information on working from home expenses go to [Canada.ca/cra-home-workspace-expenses](https://Canada.ca/cra-home-workspace-expenses).



# Sister of the Year: Robin MacLean



*The NSGEU's very own Executive Director, Robin MacLean, has been selected as the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour's 2021 Sister of the Year. Nominated by NSGEU President and NSFL First Vice-President Jason MacLean, he says, "Through her skillful and effective leadership, the NSGEU has been able to continue to improve working conditions for its women members. Her experience and guidance in negotiations, her intelligence in strategic planning, along with her open and kind management style makes her a perfect candidate for Sister of the Year."*

*Congratulation and thank you, Robin, for all that you do to support and improve the working lives of women!*



# COVID Restrictions Extended

**N**ova Scotia has continued to experience relatively low rates of COVID cases within our communities. However, in late January, the NSGEU Executive decided to err on the side of caution and extend our policy of not allowing in-person meetings of more than 10 people for the immediate future.

This means that all in-person educational events (including Labour School) have been cancelled, although training on Domestic Violence: Why is it a Workplace Issue?; Workers in Transition; and Local Officer Training will still be offered via Zoom.

Bargaining and arbitration sessions will go ahead as scheduled, and Local Executive meetings of 10 people or fewer may proceed, as well.

We will update the membership again if there are any changes to this policy as a result of ever-changing direction of Public Health.

We appreciate your understanding, and your continued efforts to deliver public services while keeping our fellow Nova Scotians safe and healthy! ■



## New Locals 113- Shady Oaks Residential Support LTD. & Local 23 Cape Breton Island Housing Authority Supervisors

**T**he staff and members of the NSGEU would like to extend a warm welcome to Local, Local 113, the Residential Support Workers at Shady Oaks Residential Support Ltd., who voted unanimously to join our union.

Shady Oaks Residential Support Ltd operates an eight-bed group home and a four-bed small option home in Westville.

Their first Local meeting and elections were held via Zoom on February 1<sup>st</sup>, and Jennifer Polley was elected their Local President. They will begin the work of bargaining their first collective agreement shortly.

Thank you to the members for choosing us to represent you.

A warm welcome to Local 23, the Supervisors at the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority who voted unanimously to join NSGEU.

The positions are Property Managers, Maintenance Supervisors, Grounds Supervisors, and Applications/Community Relations Managers and Coordinator of Safety and Emergency Planning.

Thanks for putting your faith in us! ■

# Civil Service Bargaining- Bargaining Input Survey Time!

On Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the NSGEU Union Negotiating Committee (UNC) sent notice to the Public Service Commission (PSC) that they were prepared to start collective bargaining. UNC is made up of elected representatives from each of the units in the Bargaining Unit Negotiating Council (BUNC) – Professional (PR); Clerical (CL) and Technical and Services (TS). Service Coordinators, Odette MacLeod and Jim Gosse are the Chief Negotiators. The PSC has already determined their Chief Negotiators and Bargaining Committee. The Union will be negotiating a new Master Civil Service Collective Agreement with the Employer. Here is the current agreement which expires on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. ([Click here](#))

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, the Bargaining Unit Negotiation Council (BUNC) came together virtually using the Teams platform to prepare for bargaining. They discussed the political/economic context of bargaining and the bargaining process as well as any bargaining issues that could be included in the bargaining input survey.

An important part of bargaining preparations is creating the bargaining input survey, sending this out to the membership, and receiving and collating responses. Along with bargaining meetings and discussions, these responses help BUNC and UNC set the bargaining priorities.

The Civil Service Bargaining Survey was sent to the membership by email on March 18, 2021 with a deadline for submissions of March 30<sup>th</sup>. Please take a few minutes to fill yours out. If you did not receive an email with your survey, please get in touch with us. It may mean we don't have a correct email address, or that you have unsubscribed sometime in the past. Just call the NSGEU at 1-877-556-7438 or email us at [inquiry@nsgeu.ca](mailto:inquiry@nsgeu.ca).



If you are interested in the Civil Service bargaining process, the rules for Civil Service bargaining can be found in its own Act – the Civil Service Collective Bargaining Act ([Click here](#)) Unlike health care or other

locals that fall under the Trade Union Act, the Civil Service does not have the right to strike, but instead has the right to interest arbitration as the means through which disputes between the parties are resolved.

If you are interested in how the NSGEU forms its Civil Service bargaining committee, this is outlined in our NSGEU Constitution. It outlines the process for electing the members of the Bargaining Unit Negotiation Councils or (BUNC) and also who sits on the Union Negotiating Committee (UNC), which is the body that actually negotiates at the table with the employer. You can find our Constitution ([Click here](#)) on our website.



# Mental Health Support Resources for Members

Last March Nova Scotians, along with most other Canadians, went into lock-down to stop the spread of a potentially deadly virus – COVID-19. Fear and worry descended on many of us as we did our best to adhere to public health orders. Everyone was a potential pathway for the virus.

At first, it was unclear how we could protect our loved ones and ourselves. Is the virus transmitted on things? In the air?

When it became clearer – that health care workers needed N95 masks and face shields – the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was not readily available. Fears and worries escalated as many workers provided services with substandard protection. As a union, we lobbied employers for more PPE and asked our members to refuse

work if they were asked to work in unsafe conditions. It was a stressful time. Whether you worked in hospitals, in nursing homes, in home care, in schools, in group homes, in correctional facilities, in liquor stores, in social work, or providing other much needed public services – Nova Scotians relied on you and you showed up.

The stress of this past year has been great. If you are feeling like you need support in any way we wanted to share some resources with you. If you work for the Civil Service, Nova Scotia Pension Corporation, or Tourism Nova Scotia – you can access the Office of Workplace Mental Health. They are a valuable resource for helping you navigate the mental health system. You can reach the Office and a navigator by calling 902-424-CARE (2273) or 1-833-389-CARE (2273). You can visit the webpage at <https://novascotia.ca/office-of-workplace-mental-health/>. (We have recently partnered with the

Nova Scotia Community College who are working to develop a similar resource for their employees as well – Local 267 - Watch for this in the not-so-distant future!)

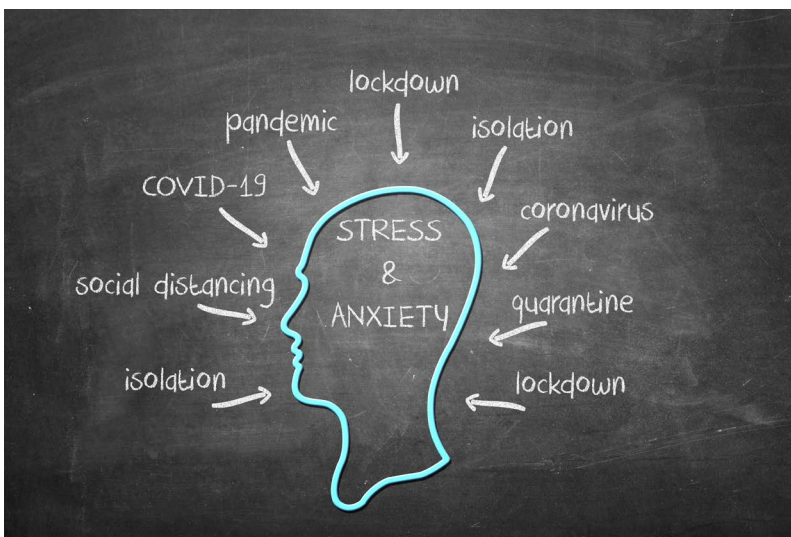
If you have any symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or think you would like to find out more about this condition, please visit: <https://firstrespondersmentalhealthns.com/>. The NSGEU partnered with other organizations with first responders

to develop this site. It was created with first-responders in mind but it is open to anyone. First responders include nurses, paramedics, employees of the Fire Department, Correctional Officers, acute health care workers, social workers, and others.

You may also be covered by an Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) which can be

accessed through your benefits provider. This program is confidential. If you work for the Civil Service, it is here: <https://beta.novascotia.ca/employee-and-family-assistance-program>. If you work for Nova Scotia Health Authority, it can be found here: <https://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/employee-health/employee-families-assistance-program-efap>. If you need any help finding out who your benefits provider is, you can also call the union and we can help you. You can reach us at [inquiry@nsgeu.ca](mailto:inquiry@nsgeu.ca) or toll free at 1-877-556-7438.

Another good source of information about occupational health & wellness, including mental health if you are a health or community health care worker can be found through Aware+NS here: <https://awarens.ca/> or under the Emerging Issues tab here: <https://awarens.ca/emerging-issues-2/>. ■



# Young Workers Spotlight



**M**y name is Kate Bessette and I'm 32 - I am an adjudicator at Workers Compensation Board. I have been there since 2019, and love working at the Board and learning something new everyday.

Prior to my time with WCB, I worked in various non-profits (provincially and nationally) supporting numerous community-driven initiatives.

My favourite things include my pup Reba, my little niece, and all the snacks!



**I**'m Samantha Dagenais. I am 31 years old & my husband and I will be married five years in June. I have been a CCA for over six years. After my maternity leave was over I joined Digby/Clare Home Support Agency in July of 2018 and haven't looked back since. I couldn't ask for a better employer, co-workers and especially my lovely clients. I knew I wanted to help people at a young age. I feel that being a home support worker gives me the opportunity to get to know my clients better, and more one-on-one time with them is very important. They love hearing about my three year old son Tyler and all the funny things he does. It would be an understatement to say Covid-19 has been hard for all of us. With the right information and tools our employer has made the process bearable for us to continue working in clients homes.

# NSGEU Wear

Our online order form is live:

<https://bit.ly/2Rf5Di5>

We now have two payment options available:

1. By cheque: make out a cheque to NSGEU and mail it to:

NSGEUwear

255 John Savage Avenue

Dartmouth, NS B3B 0J3

2. By e-transfer: send an e-transfer to [orders@nsgeu.ca](mailto:orders@nsgeu.ca)

Be sure to put your name and the date in the e-transfer notes section. Your order will be mailed as soon as the payment is received.

Please Note: After you fill in the shipping information, click on the Next button to review your order. Then click on the Pay by Cheque button, even if you are paying by e-transfer, in order to complete the order process.



Hoodie - \$20.00  
Ladies & Unisex sizes  
Royal Blue, Black, Navy, Red,  
White, Yellow, Grey



Long Sleeved T-Shirt with Pocket. Logo on sleeve and back.- \$15.00  
Unisex sizes  
Black & Charcoal



T-Shirt - \$15.00  
Unisex sizes  
Royal Blue, Red, Navy



Golf Shirt - \$15.00  
Ladies & Unisex sizes  
Royal Blue, Black, Navy



Fleece Jacket - \$20.00  
Ladies & Unisex sizes  
Grey & Navy



Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>

# Celebrating Administrative Professionals' Day

Administrative Professionals' Week April 25-30

Thank you for the work you do

# NSGEU

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