



The Report: HSPBA reaches tentative agreement

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HEALTH SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS BARGAINING ASSOCIATION REACHES TENTATIVE AGREEMENT

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After two and a half months of bargaining, the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSBA), under the leadership of the Health Sciences Association, has reached a tentative agreement with the Health Employers Association of B.C. (HEABC).

“Through two and a half months of bargaining, both the union and employer bargaining committees focused on negotiating collective agreement solutions that address years of erosion in the system,” said HSA President Val Avery at a December tentative agreement briefing for HSA stewards.

Previous rounds of negotiations for health science professionals were routinely characterized by government neglect for public services and disregard for those who deliver them. When the B.C. NDP took power in 2017, they faced a significant social deficit to address over the course of their mandate.

“As the new government has demonstrated, it is committed to a reset,” she said.

The bargaining committee entered negotiations with the aim to stop the deterioration of the health sciences professionals’ contract and chart a new course in which the work and expertise of health science professionals are valued.

“It will take us a while to rebuild, but we have a very good start,” said Chief Negotiator Jeanne Meyers in an address to HSA stewards.

In a report drafted for members by the HSA bargaining committee, committee co-chairs Janice Morrison and Mandi Ayers state that the tentative agreement meets the bargaining priorities set out by member delegates at the 2017 HSA Bargaining Proposal Conference, which include competitive wages, a modernized classification system, recognition on multidisciplinary teams, and strategies to address workload.

According to Meyers, bargaining committee members “undertook a major task, negotiated long and hard, and have finally brought in some significant changes and improvements to the classifications system.”

The agreement also delivers gains in areas such as occupational health and safety, disability management, leave, paid steward work, and recruitment and retention.

The tentative agreement was signed by both parties on Nov. 8, 2018, and requires ratification from HSPBA members in order to take effect.

Voting on the tentative agreement will be conducted throughout January 2019 in communities across the province. In addition, members will have opportunities to attend telephone town halls and in-person information meetings in January. For members in communities where no in-person voting is available, members will receive information and voting packages by mail.

The HSA Board of Directors voted in favour of supporting the recommendation of the HSPBA bargaining committee to vote in favour of the agreement.

Agreement highlights

A General Wage Increase

The agreement achieves a six per cent wage increase over three years at a rate of two per cent annually. This aligns with a mandate from the Minister of Finance and is consistent with the base general wage increase set out in three public sector collective agreements ratified earlier this year. In addition to this wage increase, significant funding has been provided to address wage inequities in the classification system.

In addition to a general wage increase, health science professionals would see call-back pay increase to double time from time-and-a-half.

Modernization of the classification system

The tentative agreement secures \$10 million to fund the first step of a wholesale restructuring of the classification system to address decades-old inequities in job categories.

“Not only will there be immediate improvements for many of our members, but we will eliminate some of the situation that’s been created by having quite a few industry-wide miscellaneous rates and separate memos,” said Meyers.

In the current collective agreement, not all job classifications are treated equally. For example, there exists a lack of cohesion surrounding the recognition of education credentials and advanced practice. The tentative agreement would address these inequities, and apply a cohesive rationale across job categories to the recognition of leadership and supervision.

The tentative agreement has laid the groundwork to put all HSPBA members on a level playing field, and gives a lift to many members who have been treated unfairly. The redesign would continue beyond the term of the collective agreement.

A joint working group would be established to make changes to that classification system, which would address existing inequities, and most adjustments would be seen in year one of the collective agreement. The working group would lay the groundwork for further modernization of the classification system beyond the term of the collective agreement.

When the classification system redesign is fully implemented, all grade one and working level staff in non-graded professions would be elevated to grade two pay rates. Staff level professions receiving miscellaneous rates would receive a one grid increase.

New measures to address workload

The tentative agreement creates a working group designed to address workload issues proactively, with a mandate to develop, produce, and support the implementation of guidelines, which would include tools and strategies for employers and employees to identify, assess, and address workload issues affecting health science professionals.

Article 38.5 of the collective agreement has been amended to include a Workload Dialogue process for employees to raise excessive workload concerns. The process obliges the employer to perform an assessment of the issue raised. The new language negotiated also strengthens the requirement of the employer to meaningfully address workload issues in a timely manner.

A new provision was created to allow for the creation of regular relief positions to cover work during such instances as leaves of absence, temporary workload, and vacation.

The creation of domestic and sexual violence leave

The new tentative agreement provides up to 17 weeks of unpaid leave for employees who have experienced domestic or sexual violence, and for employees whose dependent child has experienced domestic or sexual violence.

“It is not necessary for employees to do a big song and dance with respect for the need for the leave,” said Meyers. “They have to be able to confirm that they need it for that purpose but they do not have to provide any

exhaustive particulars of any kind.”

Under the new provision, casual employees would not need to be available for shifts for up to 17 weeks.

The leave entitlement is in addition to other leave entitlements in the collective agreement.

Improvements to occupational health and safety

The agreement mandates the establishment of a working group to make recommendations surrounding the creation and implementation of a provincial framework on occupational health and safety in health care, including the implementation of the Canadian Standards Association’s (CSA) standards on psychological health and safety in the workplace.

The agreement requires the employer to contribute \$250,000 annually to HSPBA for the Joint Provincial Health and Safety Violence Prevention Committee.

An end to contracting out

The government has introduced legislation to repeal Bill 29, marking a significant victory for public health care and union rights. The bill allowed for the contracting out of non-clinical health services, even if layoffs were generated. The bill overrode protections negotiated in collective agreements.

Appendix 18 of the HSPBA collective agreement was drafted to align with Bill 29. The new tentative agreement strikes Appendix 18.

“And there was no attempt by the employer to get cute about it and try to give a new definition for what was a non-critical service. They just agreed to delete it,” said Meyers. “It’s a new day.”

Implementing Gender Neutral Language

Off the heels of a 2016 amendment to the *B.C. Human Rights Code*, the tentative agreement includes a provision to modernize the contract’s language and replace all gender-specific pronouns with gender-neutral language. The collective agreement’s definition of spouse is deleted in the new agreement.

To view the tentative agreement’s changes in full and to access an HSA report detailing the proposed changes, visit hsabc.org. Details surrounding the voting process are also available at hsabc.org.

To read the December 2018 issue of *The Report*, [click here](#).

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