

# MEMBER UPDATE

## CONTINUING CARE'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE IS A BIG PROBLEM – TIME FOR A BIG SOLUTION

STANDARDIZING BARGAINING AND PAY NEEDED TO STABILIZE THE SYSTEM

One of the major drivers in Alberta of the spread of infections of COVID-19 has been continuing care sites.

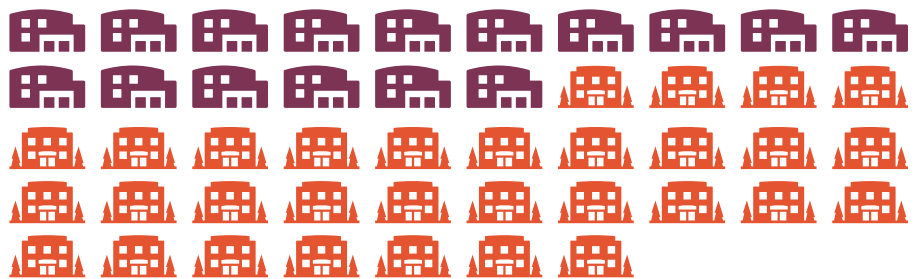
As of May 3, 2020 Alberta lists 47 workplace outbreaks in the province. 31 of those are in continuing care facilities, or 66% of the locations.

The numbers tell another story still when we look at the delivery model.

Only 6 public centres were experiencing an outbreak, while the private sector is responsible for the remaining 25 locations including 18 at for-profit centres such as Millrise Place.

Alberta is home to a confusing maze of multiple providers – with fewer and fewer homes operating on a not-for-profit basis. Just finding out if a home you are considering moving to is for-profit or not is hard enough to find out.

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## **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR QUALITY CARE?**

The fractured system has produced a highly unequal working environment for care givers and support workers. Some facilities barely pay above minimum wage. Starting wages in private care include housekeepers at Millrise Place \$15.46 an hour, a laundry worker at AgeCare Walden Heights only \$15, kitchen staff at Points West Living Stettler making \$15.78.

This means more staff turnover as workers who support their families move on to higher paying jobs. Instead of lasting relationships between residents and staff, a precarious workforce means residents have to adjust to new staff – and the cycle repeats once a better paying job opens for those staff.

## **ONE SOLUTION: STANDARDIZE BARGAINING AND PAY**

In British Columbia, a 1991 Royal Commission on Health Care noted that having multiple employer bargaining associations would not encourage “uniformity of working conditions”, and they recommended the establishment of a stable labour and care regime.

This brought all publicly funded long-term care employers under one bargaining associations – and their unions went to the table together too.

Through this they fixed the problem of inequality between facilities as all workers were paid the same rates, and they were provided consistent benefit and pension coverage as well.

This also meant more leverage for workers at the bargaining table who were able to win language protecting them against contracting out of care and services – a big win for longer lasting resident and staff relationships.

## **WE CAN DO THIS HERE**

It’s true that AUPE members have also offered a simpler solution – bring all continuing care homes under public operation. That’s the urgent goal – although one that this government might not agree with in time to save lives.

While the private continuing care sector still exists we shouldn’t punish workers with unequal treatment based on which publicly funded operator cuts their paycheque, and we shouldn’t punish residents with a revolving door of precarious workers.

Standardized bargaining and pay can ensure equal treatment while improving the resident experience.

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### **Improving Continuing Care – A Gift for Mother’s Day**

Join AUPE members who are calling Health Minister Shandro all week leading up to Mother’s Day. Ask what they’re doing to fix the problems of inequality and understaffing in continuing care. If you agree we should standardize bargaining and pay you can let him know as well!

Call Minister Shandro’s office at 780-427-3665. You can politely but firmly request a call with your Health Minister to discuss these issues. Be persistent but fair with the staff you talk to.

You can also send him an email at [health.minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:health.minister@gov.ab.ca) to let him know he has options to improve the system for residents and staff.