

CUPE Cross-Canada Tour on Residential Long-Term Care: Report

CUPE Research

Between November 2009 and April 2010, the Canadian Union of Public Employees hosted union and public events on residential long-term care across the country. Participants included union members, seniors, health coalition activists, elected officials and others concerned about the state of residential long-term care in Canada. We talked about the serious quality and access problems in this sector, their origins, and solutions. Participants went away with a greater awareness of facility-based long-term care issues and of CUPE and health coalition campaigns in this sector. In some locations, strategy workshops allowed participants to delve deeper into the issues and plan follow-up actions.

From the panels, participants learned about [CUPE's Vision for Better Seniors Care](#) and heard from long-term care advocates [Pat Armstrong](#) and [Toby Edelman](#). CUPE members and coalition partners from the host province described the situation on-the-ground and outlined local and provincial campaigns. Following the presentations, participants joined in the conversation, sharing stories from personal experience or describing their organization's campaign. People signed petitions and postcards and pledged themselves to join or continue the struggle for better long-term care programs at the provincial and federal levels.

Print, radio and television media covered most of the events, with particularly good coverage of the events in Peterborough, Regina, Calgary, Montreal, and St. John's events.

CUPE thanks our provincial coalition partners for helping us promote the events and make them a success.

Overview of the tour events

Each event included the screening of CUPE National's filmed [interviews with residential long-term care workers](#). In the five-minute video, seven workers talk about why they love their job, what they find difficult about it, and changes they would like to see for residents.

Prince Edward Island: 34 participants braved an ice storm to come to the forum in Charlottetown on January 25, 2010. Participants included CUPE members and staff, activists from other health care unions, and allies from other pro-Medicare organizations, including the provincial NDP and the Council of Canadians. Discussion moved quickly to strategy.

New Brunswick: 25 labour and health coalition activists and allies attended the January 26, 2010 event in Fredericton. The discussion touched on provincial developments around bargaining, staffing levels, and the recently-signed contract with Shannex corporation to build and operate the first for-profit LTC facilities in NB.

Newfoundland: 73 people attended the forum in St. John's on November 12, 2010. Over half of the participants came from ally groups: other health care unions, seniors' groups, the Alzheimer Society, the provincial NDP, and the provincial health coalition. In addition to the quality and access problems echoed in other forums, we heard about the particular challenges faced by residents in the area of oral health.

Nova Scotia: 50 CUPE members and staff participated in the November 10, 2010 meeting in Sydney. Concerns about work overload and other working/caring conditions were voiced, and participants learned about the union's campaigns at the provincial and national levels.

Quebec: 175 people attended the April 13 day-long [conference](#) of the Conseil provincial des affaires sociales. Presenters and participants spoke about chronic underfunding, staffing shortages, and mismanagement that, along with new privatization schemes, put seniors at ever-greater risk in Quebec long-term care facilities. Delegates heard from Louis Plamondon, president of the international seniors' advocacy network [Vieillir en liberté](#), from Human Rights Commission Chair Gaétan Cousineau, and from two commissioners from public oversight agencies, Ghislaine Tremblay and Sophie Marchildon. CUPE National shared its research findings and campaign proposals.

Ontario: 100 people came out to the public forum in Peterborough on February 1, 2010. Participants included CUPE members and staff, the local Member of Provincial Parliament, health coalition activists, and a hospital physician. People were urged to get active in the CUPE and Ontario Health Coalition campaigns.

Manitoba: 70 CUPE members gathered on November 24 for a day-long conference on residential long-term care. A number of employer and Federation of Labour representatives attended the plenary session in the morning. In addition to our guest speaker Pat Armstrong, participants heard from Theresa Oswald, Minister of Health, about the province's plans for improving care for seniors. In the afternoon, CUPE long-term care locals developed a strategy for bargaining and policy goals in the sector.

Saskatchewan: 120 CUPE members and 20 seniors and advocates attended the November 19 forum in Regina. Members and allies shared stories about declining quality and access in LTC facilities across the province, and talked about the role of privatization and deregulation. The government's decision to stall infrastructure investments in this sector drew the full range of media to our news conference the next morning, and excellent coverage.

Alberta: 110 people from a broad spectrum of groups attended the January 25 event in Calgary. CUPE activists were joined by Alberta Friends of Medicare and Parkland Institute supporters and concerned citizens. Participants had a lively discussion, signed the CUPE long-term care lobby postcards, and committed to strengthening CUPE and ally campaigns.

British Columbia: Four events in three cities - Burnaby, Kamloops, and Victoria – between January 21st and 26th, 2010. 164 participants from unions, seniors' groups and health coalitions. One of the events was a more in-depth strategy session though all of the forums touched on campaigns.