

COUNTERPOINT

FALL 2025

CUPE'S NATIONAL PUBLICATION



FOCUS

Wild at heart



Economy

Rebuilding our safety net: Let's make Employment Insurance work for workers



Profile

ANGELA HODGSON
CUPE 1974 President



Global Justice

International Workers' Day in Cuba: A powerful display of resistance and solidarity



Tabletalk

The story behind anti-scab legislation: A hard-fought union victory



Reconciliation

Opening doors to Indigenous representation in our unions



CANADA STANDS STRONG

Thanks to us

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AIR CANADA FLIGHT ATTENDANTS SLAYED GOLIATH NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE

By **Mark Hancock** – CUPE's National President

We've all heard the story of David and Goliath. In August, flight attendants represented by CUPE took on Goliath not once, but twice.

After their last 10-year contract expired, over 10,500 flight attendants at Air Canada were looking to do two things in this round of bargaining: get a wage increase to catch up with inflation, and end unpaid work.

Air Canada refused to do either.

Instead of telling Air Canada to smarten up and bargain fairly, Mark Carney's Liberal government backed the company against their workers – 70% of whom are women, and many of whom earn less than \$30,000 a year.

But our members did not back down. They delivered a 99.7% strike mandate, and they went on strike to stand up for themselves and for each other.

Within hours, the Carney government came to Air Canada's rescue, using Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to end the strike and refer the negotiations to binding arbitration.

But still, our members did not back down.

Air Canada tried to have our strike declared illegal, and the government backed them again – but the labour movement and Canadians as a whole came out in droves to support us and our fight for what's right.

The next day, our members showed up on picket lines across Canada in even stronger numbers.

When it was abundantly clear to both Air Canada and the Carney government that our members were not going to fall for their intimidation tactics, and that the dispute was only going to end through negotiation, the company came back to the table.

Our members earned a much stronger deal than the one on offer before we went on strike, proving that meaningful progress is truly made at the bargaining table.

But they also proved something else: that repeated government interference in negotiations to tip the scales on behalf of employers and major corporations has made labour peace impossible in this country – and it has to end.

This was the eighth time in two years the Liberal government has used Section 107 to trample workers' rights and bail out the executive boardroom. Employers have become pretty comfortable with sabotaging negotiations, and ragging the puck until the federal government bails them out. Air Canada's CEO even admitted on live television that the company had always planned on federal intervention to solve negotiations in their favour.

Not anymore. We aren't Canada's largest and strongest union for nothing, and we sent a clear message to this government and every employer in this country. The days of governments playing favourites and doing the dirty work of corporate monopolies for them are over.

There is more work to be done to end unpaid work in the airline sector and to finally repeal Section 107 from the Code.

But for now, let's celebrate how Air Canada flight attendants took on Goliath on two fronts – and won on both. They responded to threats and intimidation from one of the biggest companies in the country and from our own government the best way we know how: with courage and resolve.



STANDING TOGETHER FOR A STRONG CANADA

By **Candace Rennick** – CUPE's National Secretary-Treasurer

Canada is facing an uncertain future. Donald Trump's return as president of the United States is spreading chaos around the world and threatening Canadian sovereignty.

Many in Canada are rightfully asking: what defines us as a nation? National sovereignty is more than borders and trade agreements. It is also building a just society by making collective choices that reflect our values. And one of the clearest expressions of those values is the way that we deliver and protect our public services.

Our public health care system, our schools, child care centres and universities, our public libraries and community centres, the social services that support the most vulnerable, and the public infrastructure that gives us roads and clean water — these and so many more, are the services that knit our country together. They define the kind of country we want to live in, a country where no one is left behind.

CUPE members are the glue that holds these public services together. Our members show up, every day, in every corner of Canada, with dedication and professionalism. In many ways, we are the glue that holds this country together.

But in spite of our hard work, the reality is many people are being left behind. Sometimes it feels like our dream of a country where we support one another, where everyone has access to quality public services when they need them, is being destroyed. We see cuts and closures that hurt both workers and the people they serve.

That is why our union's role has never been more important. At the bargaining table, in the workplace, and in the public arena, we fight to protect public services and workers' rights.

We saw our union in action and at its best in the recent strike at Air Canada. When flight attendants stood together and continued the strike despite government interference, CUPE members across the country jumped into action. The courage of flight attendants and the solidarity of our members made it very clear that laws designed to silence workers will not stand in the way of our fight for justice.

At our National Convention, we will chart the course for the coming years. I see CUPE continuing our role as a powerful voice shaping Canada's future. Together, we have the strength to influence public policy decisions. When governments see CUPE members standing together on an issue, they know they have to listen. When we speak with one voice about the importance of public services, that voice is too strong to ignore.

As Canadians look for a way to stand strong in challenging times, we should look no further than our public services and the passionate workers who deliver them. Every time a CUPE member provides care to an elder, teaches a child, answers an emergency call, or repairs a pothole, they are serving their community and building the Canada we want to live in.

When we defend our members, we defend these values. When we fight for well-funded public services, we are fighting for Canada itself. That is real sovereignty — not just independence from outside pressure, but the ability to build the society we want, together.



WILD AT HEART

For Edmonton Valley Zoo staff, this isn't just a job. It's a calling.



At the crack of dawn, while most of Edmonton is still asleep, a quiet buzz begins behind the gates of the Edmonton Valley Zoo. Before the first visitor walks through the turnstiles, and before the first excited sloth sighting, zoo staff are already feeding, cleaning, and caring.

For animal care workers here, this isn't just work. It's devotion. It's a lifestyle. It's a calling.

More than just a job

From the smallest burrowing owl to the majestic Amur tiger, every animal has individual needs, preferences, and its own personality. Zookeepers pour their hearts into their work every day. They aren't just animal experts, they are behaviourists, nutritionists, and often emotional caregivers. When an animal is stressed, ill or grieving the loss of a companion, the keepers are the first to notice. They are also the first to act.

“We develop such deep relationships with the animals in our care,” says long-time zookeeper Karyn MacDonald. “You don't just leave the job when you get home. You worry, you think about them all the time. Emergencies with animals don't happen only from 9 to 5.”

These strong bonds come with a sense of responsibility that doesn't switch off at the end of a shift. On holidays and weekends, during snowstorms or heatwaves, animals still need to be fed, medications administered, and habitats maintained.

“We have all raced back for animal care needs, whether it's treating a sick animal or bottle-feeding a baby at all hours of the night,” MacDonald continues. “We are extremely dedicated to their needs.”

Most visitors see the zoo during its polished, boisterous public hours. But behind the scenes is a carefully choreographed routine that begins early and often runs late into the evening.

Keepers start their day with both physical and mental health checks: Are the animals behaving normally? Are they eating? Are they alert? The slightest changes in behaviour can be the first sign of illness or distress and missing it can spell disaster.

Feeding is a massive operation. Each animal follows a specialized diet, carefully prepared according to nutritional requirements and the highest standards. Some eat every few hours, others eat only once or twice a day.

“Scarp, the three-banded armadillo, will not eat his vegetables if they are touching or if they are not minced thoroughly,” says Heather Fedyna-Carter, another zookeeper. “I love when animals have preferences for their food and 'tell us' what they want.”

Next up is enrichment, a crucial part of the daily routine and key to each animal's well-being. Keepers stash treats in puzzle feeders, build toys and activities, or create seasonal themes with scents and props to keep animals mentally stimulated and physically active.

And, of course, there is cleaning. Lots and lots of cleaning.

Fedyna-Carter laughs, “Twenty-first-century animal care is so much more than scooping poop! We advocate for



the complete well-being of each individual, whatever the species. That means we consider their social, mental, and physical needs in every decision we make.”

The emotional work

Zookeepers celebrate births, mourn deaths, and witness the full lifespans of the animals in their care. Many can recount stories of sick animals they have nursed back to health, babies they have hand-reared, or companions they have said heartbreaking goodbyes to after years of friendship.

“We had to save a baby pronghorn by performing an emergency C-section,” recalls zookeeper Amanda Sanders. “We had to bottle feed him every three hours, even throughout the night. He bonded quite closely with us. Once he was introduced to the herd, we’d call him, and he’d come running across the pasture to see us.”

Visitors are aware of some of the obvious challenges zookeepers face, like hauling bales of hay in extreme heat or lifting heavy creatures. But other difficulties run much deeper.

“The toughest part of the job is the emotional toll it takes on you,” MacDonald says. “We spend more time with our work critters than we do with our own at home. So, when an animal passes, it feels over time as though your body is cut by thousands of tiny paper cuts. It’s so hard to say goodbye to beloved friends.”



“Some animals can kill you,” Sanders adds. “Some can make you very sick. Most people can see the physical aspect of the job but will never grasp the mental and emotional load that comes with it.”

CUPE 30 President Eric Lewis notes that supporting members through those moments is a union priority. “Union members are more than co-workers. We spend so much of our days with one another working on the front lines, sharing stories, laughing together, and watching out for each other. We are like a second family.”

Behind every keeper, a union

Animals rely on their keepers, and keepers can always rely on their union. And for many of the staff at Edmonton Valley Zoo, that union is CUPE 30.



"I believe strongly in the power of unions," MacDonald says proudly. "The balance of power between rich and poor only grows further and unions are our way to fight back. We all deserve a living wage, and unions have historically combated those inequities. They are at the forefront of the fight for all people who don't have a voice."

Unions, like the teams at the zoo, operate on care, trust, and solidarity. There is a deep understanding among CUPE 30 members that everyone's work matters. Whether they're hosing down barns, designing enrichment activities, or handling logistics, every person's contribution is important. "When we stand together, we win together," Lewis exclaims. And victories at the bargaining table ripple outward, closing wage gaps and strengthening the middle class far beyond the zoo gates.

Lewis sees that solidarity daily: "As president, it's my privilege to support every member, making sure their voice is heard! A union is more than an organization for its members, it is a voice for all workers. When we win for our members, we raise the bar for all workers. When we unite, we remind the world that every job has dignity, and that every worker deserves respect, a fair wage, benefits, and safe working conditions."

The heart of it all

There is a reason the word **heart** keeps coming up again and again when talking to zookeepers. It's not just about the animals they care for. It's about their colleagues, the visitors, and the community they've built, and it's about the solidarity they feel as union members, the solidarity that binds them.

Heart means staying late when a calf is sick, coming in early to make sure Cactus the porcupine gets his favourite fruits, and pushing, through CUPE 30, for better safety gear, more staff support, and proper training, because safe workers mean safe animals, too.

It also means recognizing that love and labour are deeply intertwined: caring for animals requires heart, and standing together as workers, as union members, and as human beings requires courage.

The job can be messy, hard, and occasionally heartbreaking, but for CUPE 30 members at the Edmonton Valley Zoo, it is also rich with meaning, connection, and joy.

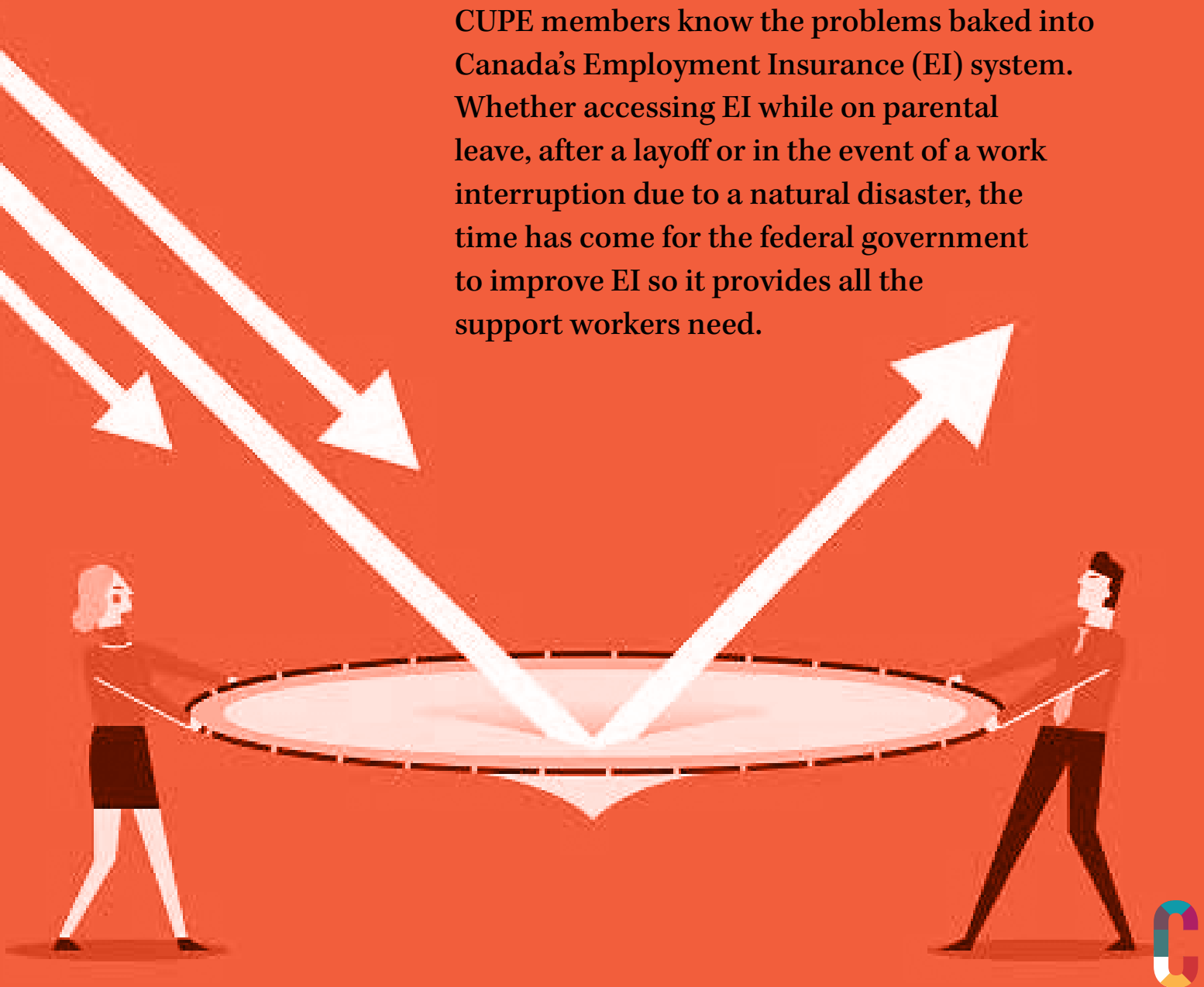
In the quiet early hours before the gates open, and in the tired moments after they close, zoo staff know what drives them: a deep, wild love for the creatures they serve, and for one another.



REBUILDING OUR SAFETY NET:

Let's make Employment Insurance work for workers

CUPE members know the problems baked into Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) system. Whether accessing EI while on parental leave, after a layoff or in the event of a work interruption due to a natural disaster, the time has come for the federal government to improve EI so it provides all the support workers need.



In school boards across the country, many early childhood educators (ECEs), educational assistants (EAs) and school secretaries are 10-month employees who are laid off every summer. And every summer, they rely on EI to get by.

“I’m a single mom and it’s rough,” says Marcy Hall, an ECE and Unit D vice-president at CUPE 4222. “You have to try and save money for the summer, but you’ve got your bills to pay the rest of the year.”

Hall highlights that the EI application process can be onerous, some part-time or supply workers don’t have enough hours to qualify, and the wage replacement level is extremely low. Moreover, workers struggle to afford food, rent and transportation during the one-week wait period that is built into the EI system. “As we all know, the bills don’t stop,” Hall says.

School board workers also need to prove that they are actively applying for jobs even though few employers will hire someone who will leave to return to work at their school in September.



NEW PARENTS NEED BETTER EI SUPPORTS

Chloe Martin-Cabanne, president of CUPE 2950, started receiving EI benefits after having her son Oren nine months ago. “I really liked the maternity leave portion because it was 15 weeks and I got 95% of my salary with our top-up,” she says.

Almost 60% of CUPE collective agreements include top-ups for pregnancy or parental EI benefits that make life more affordable for new parents on leave.

However, under the extended parental leave option, which does not qualify for the top-up, Martin-Cabanne has only been receiving 33% of her regular earnings. Her family has been making it work with savings, but it's not easy. “A lot of our members just go back to work early,” she notes. “It's impossible otherwise for them to afford life.”

Paid pregnancy and parental leave have many benefits for workers and their children. It gives workers time to recover after giving birth, promotes parent-child bonding, and supports infant development. It also lowers the risk of mental health issues, promotes gender equity, and reduces and prevents poverty.

“If we're able to get that threshold up to something people can reasonably live on, then there will be less stress,” Martin-Cabanne explains. “Parents will be able to be with their children and care for them and then go back to the workforce feeling like their kids are in a secure place.”



What is EI?

EI is a social insurance system where workers and employers contribute money to create a vital layer of income protection. EI regular benefits provide income support to workers who are unemployed, while EI special benefits provide income support to workers who are sick, on pregnancy or parental leave, or providing care to a loved one.

EI is the base of Canada's social safety net, but right now it is not providing the support workers need. EI excludes many workers who fail to meet the 420 to 700 hours of insurable employment needed to qualify. And at a 55% wage replacement level, the financial support is too low for most workers to survive on.

EI is also an economic stabilizer: by keeping money in workers' pockets during periods of economic uncertainty, it reduces the severity of recessions and keeps local economies afloat. EI doesn't just benefit those receiving income support, it benefits all of us!

WORKERS NEED EI NOW

In April 2025, the number of EI beneficiaries was up by 58,000, a 12.7% increase from April 2024. In May 2025, the unemployment rate hit 7%, the highest rate since 2016 (excluding the pandemic). The situation is hitting young people particularly hard with unemployment at 20.1% for those aged 15 to 24, the highest since May 2009. These numbers may worsen with the U.S. tariff war, job loss linked to artificial intelligence, and worsening natural disasters driven by climate change.

In periods of economic instability, workers in Canada need a social safety net they can rely on. The federal government must make urgent improvements to EI to give workers the security they deserve.

CUPE is working with other unions and organizations on the Interprovincial EI Working Group to advocate for EI improvements. We are currently pushing the federal government to:

- Set a universal threshold for access to EI benefits at 360 hours for all workers;
- Increase the EI benefit rate to 75% of weekly earnings with a minimum weekly benefit of at least \$600;
- Extend the duration of EI to at least 50 weeks;
- Increase the maximum insurable earnings so higher-income workers can count on a livable benefit; and
- End harsh disqualification rules so workers who are illegally misclassified as self-employed, or are migrant workers, also qualify.



WORKERS NEED SUPPORT DURING CLIMATE DISASTERS

Wildfires and other climate emergencies are becoming a common reality across the country. Yet some workers who are forced to evacuate from their homes fail to qualify for EI benefits, leaving them without income.

CUPE 8600 member Rheanne Ellingson had to evacuate Flin Flon, Manitoba, due to wildfires, which meant she would be away from work and without a paycheque for at least a month. Ellingson faced the prospect of applying for EI while away from her home community.

“I wasn’t in a position to get the access code I needed, and this took seven to ten days,” Rheanne Ellingson recounts. “At first I thought I’d take vacation days, but then decided not to waste them on a stressful emergency.”

Ellingson recalls that once she was able to access the EI application system, the money came relatively quickly: “When I took maternity leave a few years ago, I waited over a month for EI. This time it came faster, in about four days.” She found the amount of money she received to be good for a time-limited emergency, but it would not have been sustainable long-term.

An increased minimum benefit and increased benefit rate – two reforms CUPE and the Interprovincial EI Working Group have called for – “would have really helped,” Ellingson says, “especially with increased prices.”

An EI pilot project was introduced in early 2025, months after workers were affected by the major wildfires in the summer of 2024 in Jasper, Alberta, and in Bunibonibee Cree Nation, Manitoba. This pilot provided a one-time credit of 300 hours of insurable employment, making it easier for affected workers to qualify for EI benefits and have some income security during the disaster and recovery.

This pilot project provided an important lifeline for affected workers, but the EI system needs to ensure these supports are available to all workers affected by natural disasters. The federal government should make it easier for workers to access EI benefits permanently.

EI is meant to be there for all of us in times of need, whether we are unemployed, welcoming a new child, recovering from illness or caring for a family member. “If everyone’s paying into it, we should definitely have more say in how that money is allocated,” Martin-Cabanne adds.

Because workers contribute to EI, the system funded by them must put their voices at the centre of every decision – from benefit levels and eligibility rules to funding mechanisms and claims adjudication – so it can keep families stable and local economies afloat.

Strengthening EI is about more than income support. It is about ensuring accessibility for all workers and providing the financial security they need to live with dignity.







PROFILE ANGELA HODGSON

WHY ONTARIO NEEDS SAFE NURSE STAFFING LEVELS

Angela Hodgson is the president of CUPE 1974 and chair of the RPN Committee of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU-CUPE).

Over the past two decades, she has been intimately familiar with the long-festering staffing crisis in Ontario's hospitals. As a registered practical nurse (RPN), Angela has witnessed first-hand the decline in working conditions, characterized by high rates of injuries and workplace violence, poorer patient outcomes, and worsening morale.

Ontario's low level of nurse staffing – the lowest in Canada – comes with a heavy price tag: every additional patient added to a nurse's workload is linked to a 7% increase in patient deaths. Conversely, appropriate ratios save lives.

As Angela notes, safe staffing also protects workers. In a 2023 CUPE survey, 75% of nurses said they had high stress levels, 61% reported trouble sleeping, and 55% dreaded going to work. Good nurse-to-patient ratios are associated with reasonable workloads, lower injury rates, higher job satisfaction and better retention.

But is that enough to convince governments across Canada, wedded to austerity, to invest in higher staffing levels?

There have been encouraging signs in recent years. The British Columbia government has already begun implementing nurse-to-patient ratios. Nurses in Nova Scotia have successfully negotiated a staffing standard with the health authority. In Manitoba, employers, unions and the government have signed a letter of intent to establish ratios.

In Ontario, nurses are bound to face an uphill battle with a Conservative government in charge. Furthermore, in the last round of central bargaining, the employer – the Ontario Hospital Association – refused to discuss the issue with the common front composed of CUPE's hospital division, the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU), representing nearly 50,000 staff; SEIU, representing 20,000; and Unifor, representing 15,000.

As chair of OCHU-CUPE's RPN Committee, Angela plays a key role in the union's campaign for safe nurse staffing levels. The campaign began with a media tour in August 2025, releasing findings of a major new academic study endorsing nursing ratios.



Question 1

What motivated you to become a nurse?

From a young age, I had a strong desire to help people, especially those who were unwell. I found comfort in caring for sick family members and always felt a deep sense of purpose in being there for them. Visiting loved ones in hospital sparked something in me. I was fascinated by the environment, the compassion of the caregivers, and the resilience of the patients.

I believe that being present for someone during their most vulnerable moments is a privilege. No one should feel alone or afraid when they're sick, and sometimes, simply offering comfort and companionship can make all the difference. Nursing gives me the opportunity to do just that, to provide care, support, and a sense of humanity when it's needed most.

Question 2

You have been working as a hospital nurse for over 20 years. How have your working conditions evolved during that period and what drew you to union activism?

Working conditions for nurses have declined considerably over the past 20 years. I wouldn't say they were ideal before, but 10 to 15 years ago, our workloads were far more manageable. You might have been assigned five or six patients in an acute care unit, which allowed for timely and effective care. Those ratios weren't perfect, and you might have had to stay late, skip lunch, or forgo a break, but you felt like you could do your job to a reasonable level of satisfaction. You didn't leave your shift questioning if the care provided was compromised.

Today, it's so much more challenging. The number of patients per nurse has increased. It's far more common to be assigned six to eight patients during your shift. It becomes virtually impossible to provide the kind of care that we were trained to deliver. It's not fair to patients.

Over the years, I became increasingly aware of the ongoing challenges in our profession, particularly around workload, lack of support for RPNs, and the absence of strong advocacy for our role in health care. I knew I needed to better understand the root causes of these issues and find a way to make a difference.

The combination of rising patient acuity, reduced staffing, and limited resources pushed me to act. I realized that the same compassion and commitment I bring to caring for patients could be used to advocate for colleagues. My goal became clear: to help improve working conditions, secure proper support for health care workers, and create a healthier, more respectful workplace for all.

Question 3

We hear a lot about nurses and other health care workers facing moral distress as a result of not being able to deliver the care that patients need. Can you explain what that feels like for you?

We go into nursing because of our compassion and desire to help people and improve their well-being.

But when you're unable to provide the level of care your patients truly need, when call bells go unanswered, medications are delayed, and there's no time to sit with someone, understand their condition, or simply offer comfort, you start to question yourself. You doubt the quality of care you've delivered and carry the weight of feeling like it wasn't enough. These moments stay with you. It's very demoralizing.

Question 4

Our 2023 survey revealed that working conditions keep many nurses up at night, which helps explain why so many are leaving the job they love. OCHU-CUPE is campaigning for nurse-to-patient ratios. How would that help?

The constant sense of letting your patients down doesn't just fade. It settles deep in your mind and begins to weigh on your emotional well-being. Over time, that emotional toll becomes physical, too. It's the reason so many nurses lie awake at night, burdened by the "what ifs" and "what could have been." There's only so much you can endure before you reach a breaking point and decide to quit, so it's no surprise that so many nurses have left the profession.

Mandating nurse-to-patient ratios is extremely important. Evidence from the U.S. and Australia shows that nursing ratios are linked to lower death rates, improvement in patient satisfaction and decline in workplace injuries.

Ratios will guarantee that staffing levels never dip below an established threshold. We will have the time to properly assess our patients, provide treatments, and teach patients how to better care for themselves. It will mean less rushed care which decreases the potential for error. It will allow for the therapeutic relationships that nurses should be building with their patients to reduce their anxiety. Overall, it will mean better working conditions for us as nurses so we can fully take care of our patients.

Question 5

Would it be possible to implement nursing ratios in a province like Ontario where there is a significant shortage of nurses and employers are struggling to fill vacancies?

Mandating ratios isn't a magic bullet solution, but evidence shows they boost recruitment and retention. I think it sends a clear signal to staff that the system cares about their well-being and is taking concrete steps to improve working conditions.

We have proof that ratios have been greatly beneficial elsewhere. In 2015, after ratios came into effect in the Australian state of Victoria, the number of nurses increased by 24%, with more than 7,000 inactive nurses rejoining the workforce. Imagine if we tried that in Ontario, where 15,000 nurses are registered but not currently practicing, it could be an incredible success story.

Question 6

Nurses in other jurisdictions like British Columbia and Nova Scotia have already won ratios or equivalent staffing standards. What campaign has OCHU-CUPE launched in Ontario, and how do you expect the employer to respond in central bargaining?

OCHU-CUPE released an academic study in August, which explores nurse-to-patient ratios and concludes we absolutely need them. We will be touring the province, holding media conferences as part of an awareness and education campaign in an effort to win the public over. We'll also organize rallies, run educationals for CUPE members, and lobby members of the provincial parliament. We'll host virtual briefings for all the nurses we represent and a nursing conference on December 1 to approve an action plan to achieve ratios.

The demand for nurse-to-patient ratios is also going to be tabled as a bargaining proposal in central bargaining. Unfortunately, in the last round of bargaining, the Ontario Hospital Association was unwilling to even have a conversation about it. There is no reason to expect a different attitude this time around, but that makes it even more important to have a strong campaign and compel them to seriously engage with us on this issue.

Nursing ratios save lives. If the employer truly cares about improving patient care, we need to be talking about how best to implement them here in Ontario. People's lives depend on it. This issue won't go away. We will achieve these ratios in Ontario and, eventually, in every province.



INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY IN CUBA: A POWERFUL DISPLAY OF RESISTANCE AND SOLIDARITY



On May 1, 2025, more than 600,000 people filled the streets of Havana, and over 5 million marched throughout Cuba, in a powerful display of resistance and solidarity. The international community, including CUPE members, joined the rally as part of a week-long delegation to renew and deepen ties with Cuba's workers, students, women's groups, trade unionists and other supporters of the Cuban Revolution.

"To gather in the Plaza de la Revolución, in a rally led by the trade union movement with hundreds of thousands of workers was an extraordinary experience," says Ashley Clark, delegation member and CUPE regional vice-president for Prince Edward Island.

For more than 20 years, CUPE – through CUPE BC's leadership and in partnership with CoDevelopment Canada – has worked closely with the National Union of Public

Administration Workers in Havana (SNTAP Havana). Inspired by the revolution's spirit of international cooperation and solidarity, the two unions have forged a long-lasting partnership.

Over the years, there have been many worker-to-worker exchanges and opportunities to share expertise. Moreover, CUPE BC sponsors a Global Justice Fund project that helps SNTAP members share strategies and improve health and safety practices, while also delivering much-needed supplies made scarce by the U.S. embargo.

The past year has been one of the most difficult in Cuba's history. Cubans face daily hardship and scarcity because of the illegal U.S. embargo that has lasted more than 60 years. It blocks access to the basics of daily life – everything from medicines and medical equipment to school and office supplies like paper and computers, vehicles and



automotive parts, and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities and seniors.

The Cuban people rose up to overthrow a military dictatorship in 1959. When the new government nationalized U.S.-owned oil refineries, Washington responded with sweeping economic sanctions that remain in force today. The embargo's goal is to break the Cuban people's spirit and undermine their socialist society.

In this context, international solidarity matters more than ever.

"They are trying to achieve the complete siege of Cuba, making it too difficult to maintain the achievements of the revolution and undermining the morale of Cubans," affirms CUPE National Global Justice Committee member Nadia Revelo. Revelo is a CUPE 1004 member and the labour and human rights program director at CoDevelopment Canada.

The embargo is the world's longest-running economic sanctions regime in recent history. Restrictions deepened in 2021, after outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump listed Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, imposing 240 additional sanctions that both Republicans and Democrats have upheld.

When Arisleydis Hidalgo Leyva, secretary-general of SNTAP Havana, addressed CUPE's 2023 National Convention, she called it "perhaps the cruellest blockade that has been imposed on any country in history – one that has had not only an economic impact on Cuba, but that has also become a social blockade because the economic limitations impose a very difficult social and political dynamic."

Today, Cubans are living with daily power outages, wages that lag far behind soaring prices, chronic food and fuel shortages, difficulty accessing clean water, and shortages

of critical medicine. The inflation rate is over 30%, and emigration continues to climb.

Despite the challenges, the people persist. SNTAP is committed to strengthening labour's foundations through member education, workplace health and safety and a better understanding of the equity issues its members face.

The delegation met with several leaders from the labour movement and attended an International Gathering of Solidarity, hosted by the secretary-general of the Workers Central Union of Cuba (*Central de Trabajadores de Cuba*, CTC) and Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel. During the event, CUPE received the *Corazón Abierto* ("Open Heart") award from the CTC in recognition of our union's deep and longstanding solidarity with Cuban workers.

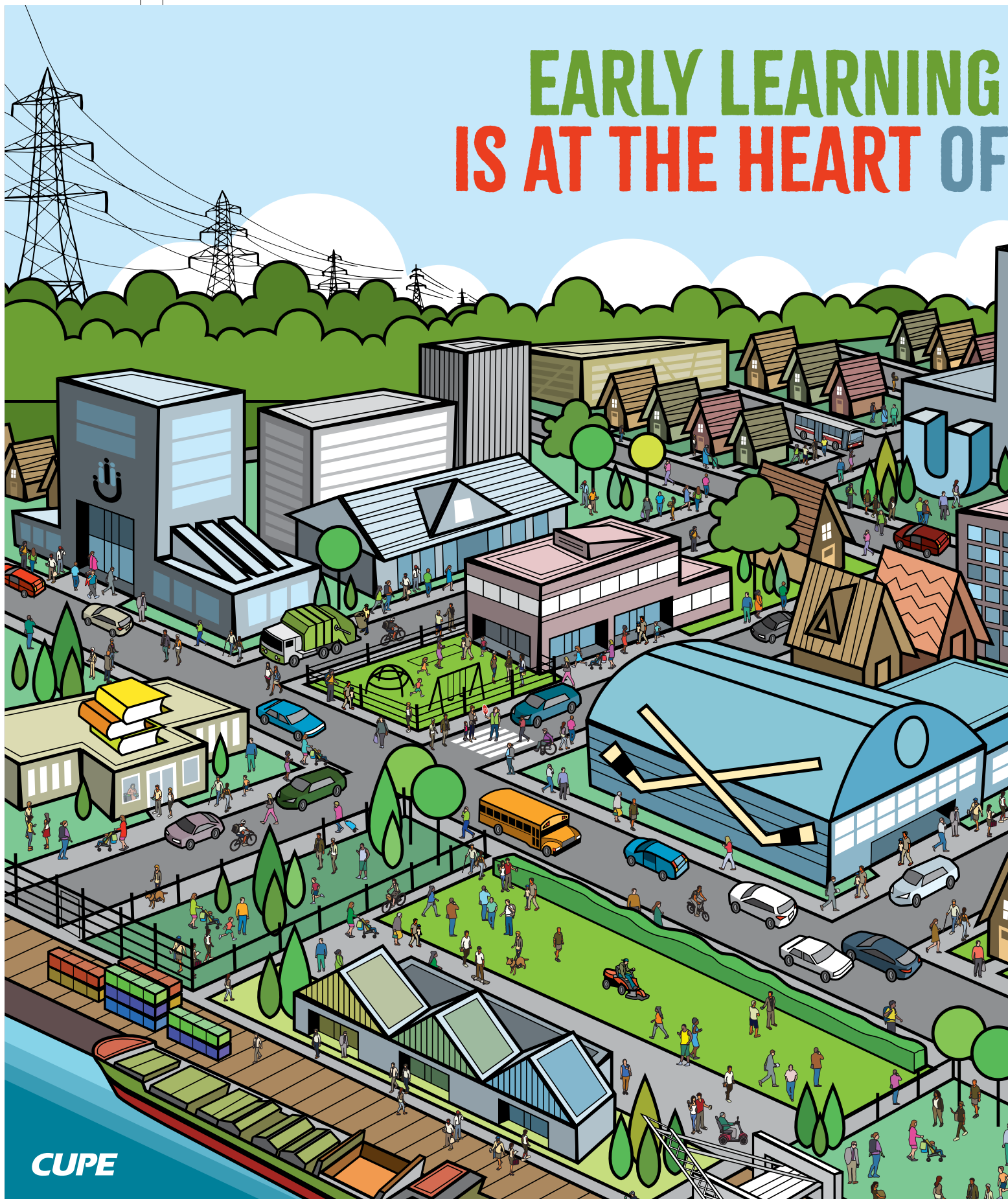
"Meeting with the CTC, SNTAP and other union leaders was amazing, we have so much to learn from them," says CUPE National Global Justice Committee member Clay Gordon. Gordon is the president of CUPE 40, representing the Calgary Board of Education workers.

Canadian unions, churches, and civil society organizations are pushing the Canadian government to increase humanitarian aid to Cuba and demand the United States lift punitive sanctions. Until that day comes, CUPE and its partner unions will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Cuban workers to build a stronger, more inclusive labour movement for the challenges ahead and to prove that solidarity knows no borders.

"Despite their difficult conditions, the Cuban people continue to offer support and solidarity to others around the world. Expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people and calls for Israel to end the genocide were everywhere. It was truly inspiring," underscores Ashley Clark.



EARLY LEARNING IS AT THE HEART OF



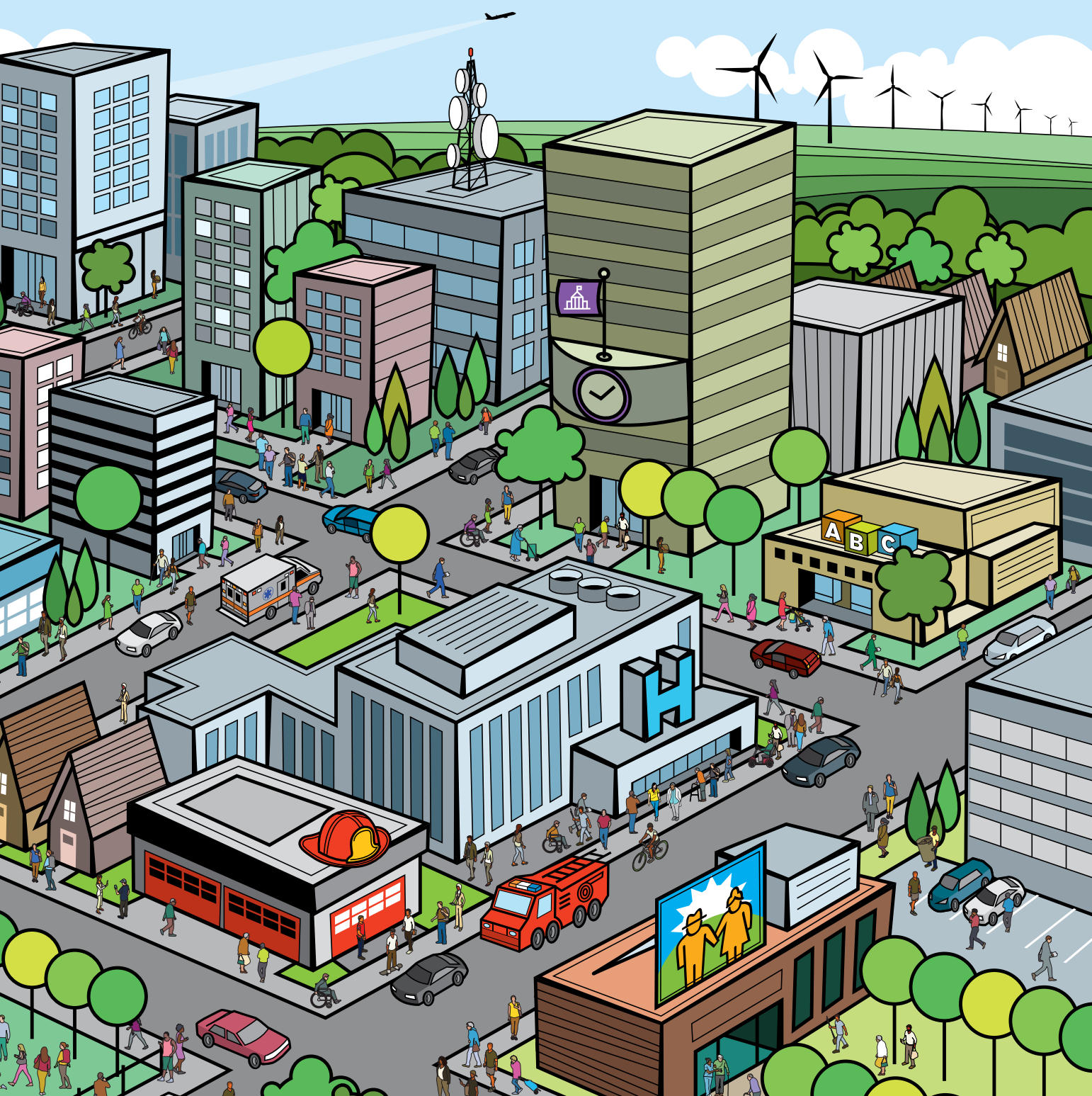
CUPE

Can you spot the parents at work in our community?

Thanks to child care, they are everywhere!

**FIND THE PUBLIC
SERVICES THEY
DELIVER**

AND CHILD CARE OUR COMMUNITIES



COMMUNICATIONS



CHILD CARE

LONG-TERM
CARE

EMERGENCY SERVICES



ENERGY

HEALTH
CARE
WORKERLIBRARY
WORKER

TRANSPORTATION



MUNICIPAL SERVICES

SOCIAL
SERVICES
WORKERUNIVERSITY
WORKER

EDUCATION



TIME TO TALK ABOUT MENSTRUATION, MENOPAUSE, AND THE WORKPLACE

MENSTRUATION AND MENOPAUSE ARE NATURAL PARTS OF LIFE. BUT IN MANY WORKPLACES, THE SYMPTOMS AND HEALTH NEEDS THAT COME WITH THEM ARE STILL TREATED AS TABOO, OR IGNORED ENTIRELY. THAT SILENCE HAS REAL CONSEQUENCES.

Research conducted with women shows that 80% experience symptoms during menopause, nearly 60% report these symptoms have had a negative impact on their work, and 30% say they have considered reducing their hours or leaving their job. For workers who menstruate, the monthly cycle can bring cramps, mood changes, fatigue, migraines, and more, often with no accommodations or understanding at work, leaving them to manage symptoms on their own.

CUPE's new fact sheet on menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace offers practical steps locals can take to talk about it, support members, and push for change.

Symptoms that impact work, changes that make a difference

Every person who menstruates experiences their cycle differently, but symptoms like cramps, fatigue, headaches or digestive issues are common, and they can make the workday a lot more difficult. For those living with chronic conditions like endometriosis, fibroids, or premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), the impact is even greater.

Perimenopause and menopause also bring a wide range of symptoms: from heavy or irregular bleeding and hot flashes, to sleep disturbances, anxiety and joint pain. And while some experience only mild changes, others face challenges that affect their job performance, attendance, and overall well-being. About 25% of them say those symptoms interfere with daily life.

When symptoms affect a worker's ability to do their job, it's not just personal. It's a workplace issue that deserves real support.

Working conditions matter

The work environment can make symptoms worse. Poor temperature control, limited access to restrooms, strict break schedules, stressful workloads, and uncomfortable uniforms all add pressure on workers.

And while more employers are paying attention to equity and wellness, the stigma around menstruation and menopause persists. Too often, managers lack basic awareness of how these realities affect workers, or what kinds of support and accommodations are possible. Many workers feel uncomfortable raising these issues for fear of being dismissed, misunderstood, or even penalized. That's where the union comes in.

Your union can help

CUPE members should never have to navigate these experiences alone. Locals can help start conversations

with employers, support members in asking for what they need, and push for lasting change at the bargaining table.

CUPE's fact sheet outlines practical, member-informed solutions that can make a real difference. CUPE locals can negotiate improvements through collective agreements that recognize menstruation and menopause as legitimate workplace health concerns. Your local can work with your CUPE servicing representative or health and safety specialist to develop bargaining language that includes:

- Free menstrual products and clean, accessible restrooms;
- Flexible work arrangements to help manage symptoms;
- Paid leave options and other accommodations;
- Manager training and workplace education;
- Health benefit coverage for related treatments.

These are not one-size-fits-all fixes. Every workplace is different. But what matters is that we start the conversation, break down stigma, and create inclusive conditions where a natural part of life isn't a barrier to workplace participation and success.





Want to know where your workplace stands?

Use this checklist to assess your workplace, and bring it to your next union meeting to talk about what else could be improved.

DOES YOUR WORKPLACE SUPPORT MENSTRUAL AND MENOPAUSAL HEALTH?

Facilities and physical environment

- Clean, well-stocked washrooms providing adequate free menstrual products
- Gender-neutral restrooms available
- Temperature control such as adjustable thermostats, fans, openable windows
- Access to cold drinking water and cool-down spaces
- Breathable uniforms with flexible sizing
- Private rest areas for managing symptoms

Flexible work arrangements

- Options for remote work or adjusted hours
- Flexibility in start and finish times
- Split lunch breaks or flexible breaks throughout the day
- Temporary reduced hours to manage severe symptoms
- Shift planning that supports symptom management
- Job-sharing options
- Support for medical appointments
- Paid menstrual and menopausal leave options, or flexible sick leave

Workplace culture and policy

- Clear health and safety policies that acknowledge menstruation and menopause
- Non-discrimination clauses in collective agreements that include menstruation and menopause
- Training for managers on impacts and accommodations
- Designated advocates or points of contact in leadership
- Access to support resources and employee support networks
- Workplace culture that supports open, stigma-free conversations
- Accessible information on available accommodations
- Health benefits that cover symptom treatments, including alternative therapies
- Workplace wellness programs that address menstrual and menopausal health



Learn more

Is your local ready to take action on this issue? Check out CUPE's full fact sheet for concrete, realistic steps to support members, bargain for improvements, and help remove barriers that too many workers still face at cupe.ca/menstruation-menstrual-health-and-menopause-workplace



THE STORY BEHIND ANTI-SCAB LEGISLATION: A HARD- FOUGHT UNION VICTORY

In April 2024, the Canadian Parliament finally passed legislation banning the use of replacement workers during strikes or lockouts in federally regulated sectors. For unionized workers, this is a historic victory after a long, hard-fought struggle — proof that the labour movement can truly change the rules of the game.

The struggle to ban the use of replacement workers was crucial, as scabs continued harming striking workers on picket lines across the country. For CUPE, Canada's largest union, this fight was a top priority.

Indeed, employers in federally regulated sectors — telecommunications, ports, rail and air transport — never hesitated to bring in scabs during a strike or a lockout, inevitably tipping the balance of power in their favour.

For 20 years, unions had been calling for federal legislation to ban the use of scabs. Conservative and Liberal governments repeatedly refused to act, under pressure from employers who strongly opposed such a law. In 2016, the two political parties even joined forces to defeat a bill introduced by the New Democratic Party. Yet anti-scab legislation had been in place in Quebec since 1977 and in British Columbia since 1993.



Things shifted after the 2021 election: the Liberal minority government needed NDP support to stay in power. In March 2022, the NDP and the Liberal Party negotiated a confidence and supply agreement that allowed the NDP to push forward its priorities — and this time, the adoption of anti-scab legislation was one of the conditions.

On September 15, 2022, 81 longshore workers at the Port of Quebec were locked out by their employer, who quickly brought in external contractors and managers to resume activities. A month later, workplace accidents among replacement workers underscored the risks of using unqualified staff to operate heavy machinery. The impact on CUPE 2614's bargaining was devastating, kicking off a conflict that dragged on for over two and a half years.

A year later, in October 2023, 214 Vidéotron employees in Gatineau were locked out. Once again, the employer brought in scabs to keep operations running. For CUPE 2815 members, the dispute dragged on for an entire year, much like at the Port of Quebec.

These conflicts became stark examples of why anti-scab legislation was needed. They also shaped a powerful political narrative: there was an imbalance of power, where employers could undermine workers' right to strike, as if it were no longer relevant.

CUPE mobilized its members and allies to put pressure on the federal government and lobby the Labour Minister directly. Rallies and press conferences took place on Parliament Hill, and the NDP — with the active leadership of MP Alexandre Boulerice — kept up political pressure to ensure the government finally tackled the issue.

It was not until November 9, 2023, that the Liberal government introduced an anti-scab bill.

During parliamentary committee hearings, the bill came under fierce attack from employer groups but locked-out CUPE members kept up the fight. Members of CUPE 2815 at Vidéotron in Gatineau attended every hearing to show, day after day, the human impact of a system clearly built in favour of employers. Meanwhile, longshore workers from CUPE 2614 protested repeatedly on Parliament Hill, joined by many CUPE leaders and allies.

In April 2024, it became official — the law was adopted. Still, it did not take effect immediately. Only in June 2025 did the use of replacement workers become illegal in federally regulated sectors.

"The adoption of this law is a historic victory. After decades of struggle, we've finally put an end to an injustice that undermined the right to strike. It proves that when unions stand together, we can win real gains and build a fairer future," says CUPE's National President Mark Hancock.

CUPE and the NDP — with support from the Bloc Québécois — played key roles. But above all, it was workers on the ground who gave this law its legitimacy and urgency. From the beginning, CUPE pursued a two-pronged strategy: grassroots mobilization, with members stepping up, plus constant political pressure.

This was also a lesson in solidarity: through campaigns, symbolic actions, testimony, viral videos, and media outreach, CUPE members held the line. They refused to accept a practice that violates the fundamental rights of all workers.

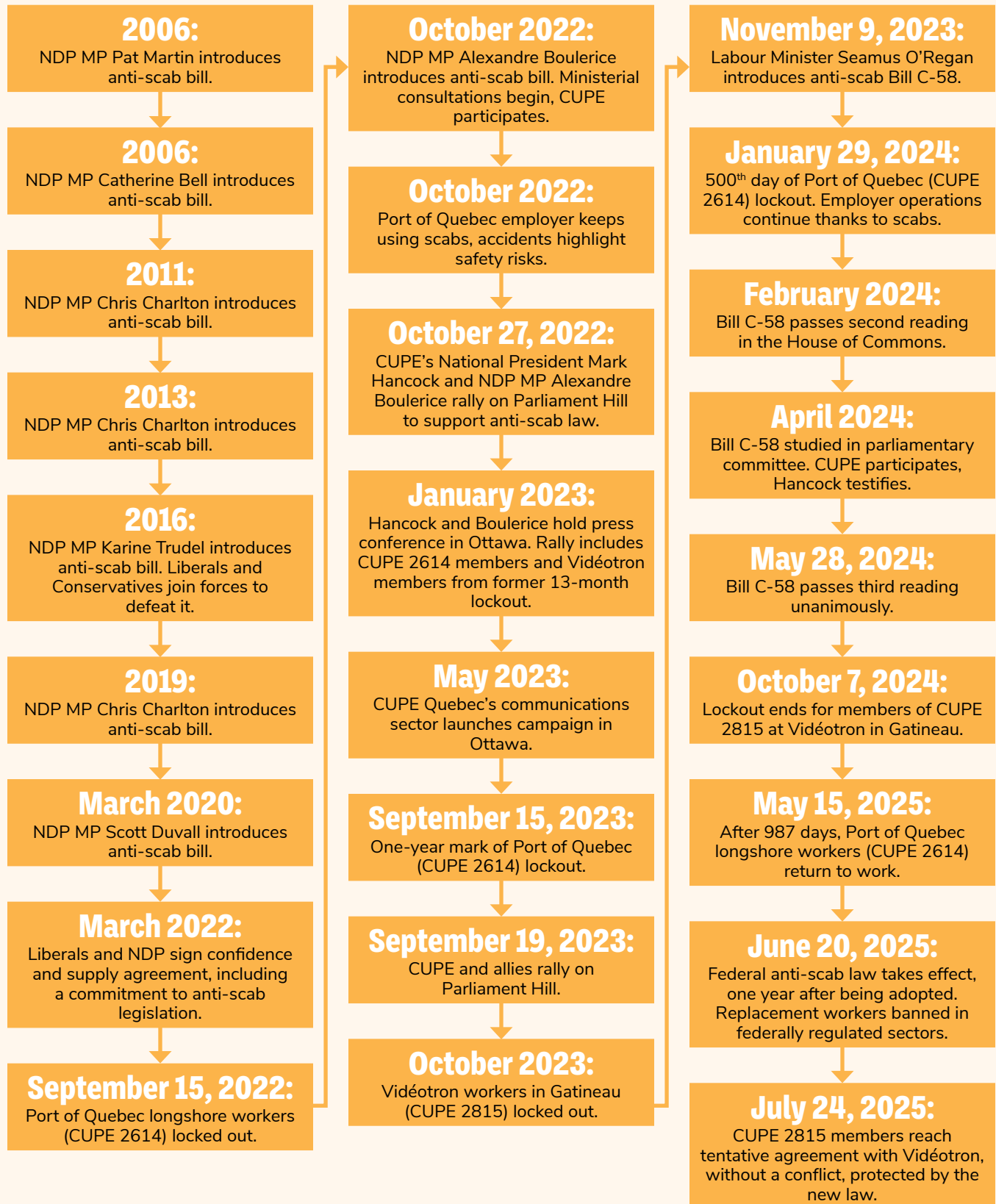
A telling example of the impact of the new legislation came on July 24, 2025, when CUPE 2815 reached a tentative agreement with Vidéotron, without job action. Protected by the provisions of the anti-scab legislation, the local was able to bargain on equal footing for its largest bargaining unit, restoring balance to the relationship between the parties.

In a political climate dominated by right-wing governments, this victory sends a clear message: the NDP's steadfast support throughout the parliamentary process is indispensable. And when the labour movement and its progressive allies organize and persevere, they can truly bring meaningful change.

TODAY, A WHOLE GENERATION OF UNION ACTIVISTS CAN LOOK BACK WITH PRIDE AND SAY: THIS VICTORY IS OURS.



TIMELINE



LANGUAGE TRAINING CUTS, SHIFT TO AI HURT SMU WORKERS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A short-sighted decision to close the Saint Mary's University language centre is inflicting long-term harm on members of CUPE 3912 and the international students they supported. Management at the Halifax-area university waged a campaign of cuts and neglect before abruptly shutting down the centre in 2024.

The centre provided a language bridging program where international students could study English in order to start academic programs at Saint Mary's University (SMU). Instructors provided English language training as well as courses on academic communication, critical thinking, and research methods and standards.

Highly trained language instructors with decades of experience helped international students adapt to a different culture as they adjusted to campus life.

Replacing workers with an app

Management laid off the centre's 22 instructors in the middle of a teaching day, while the local was in bargaining. CUPE 3912 president and language instructor Lauren McKenzie later learned that SMU would use Duolingo, an artificial intelligence (AI) language training app, for crucial language training and testing.



McKenzie is clear that Duolingo may have a role in education, but it is no substitute for a highly trained educator who understands the connections between language and culture, and can respond to a learner's needs.

“AI is amazing, but it does not bring that exchange,” says McKenzie. “That is human-powered.”

Closure a major blow to students and workers

The language school closure is a major blow to international students and CUPE members. “We are all cast out now,” says McKenzie. “We don't have CUPE work anymore. Our section has been dissolved.”

McKenzie says the laid off instructors are either out of work or working in private language schools for half the pay and no benefits. CUPE 3912 filed a grievance and was able to negotiate a package for affected members.

The local represents more than 5,000 workers in five bargaining units at four Halifax universities. Language instruction has also been cut back or eliminated at Dalhousie University and Mount Saint Vincent University. “We're all precarious workers,” says McKenzie.

Exploiting international students

Over the years, McKenzie has seen SMU cut other services for international students like visa support, while exploiting them by charging high tuition fees.

Sarom Rho, coordinator of the international student section of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, agrees. “What we're seeing is that these educational institutions are using these kinds of language programs as ways to recruit international students, charge a lot of money, which then goes to subsidizing public education,” Rho says.

“When they operate with the objective of supporting international students with language, which is such an essential tool that we use to feel a sense of belonging, a sense of

homemaking, a sense of connection, then I think these programs are very good,” Rho adds.

Unfortunately, in recent years, contradictions have emerged with universities attempting to extract the maximum profit from international students while deteriorating programming.

International students have always been marginalized on university campuses, according to McKenzie. She has seen students denied university services like a gym membership or a bus pass, despite being full-time language centre students.

“It's the ultimate corporatized university: treating workers as disposable and the students as the income unit,” she says.

The latest cut leaves McKenzie questioning how international students will access education at SMU. “They can get in, but how can they stay? It's just throwing them to the wolves,” she adds.

Rho also states that language is a key component of the current points-based immigration system.



International students need a very high score in order to qualify for the federally-managed immigration program. Language programs like SMU's supported students in meeting these requirements.

Cuts on university campuses

SMU is not the only post-secondary institution to lose language programming for international students. The University of Saskatchewan, Simon Fraser University and the University of Winnipeg have all closed English language programs. George Brown College also announced it was ending its *English for Academic Purposes* course in 2026, a program that had been in place since 1969.

These closures are in part a response to the federal government's decision to slash the number of study permits for international students after elected leaders and right-wing pundits unfairly blamed immigration and international students for the housing crisis. They were looking for a scapegoat rather than taking responsibility.

Language centre closures are just one part of a vast array of cuts to post-

secondary education programs and services. Academic programs have closed, as well as counselling services and programs addressing gender-based violence. All of this occurs in the context of decades of government underfunding of post-secondary education in Canada. In the 1980s, the provincial and federal governments contributed 80% of total funding for colleges and universities. Today, they contribute barely 50%.

Organizing for the fights to come

These program cuts are happening alongside the most significant rollback to migrant rights in Canadian history. Over 200,000 post-graduate work permits for international students are set to expire by the end of 2025, and this will leave countless graduated students stranded, many of whom have already applied for permanent residency. These measures come in addition to broader changes affecting migrant workers, international students and refugees.

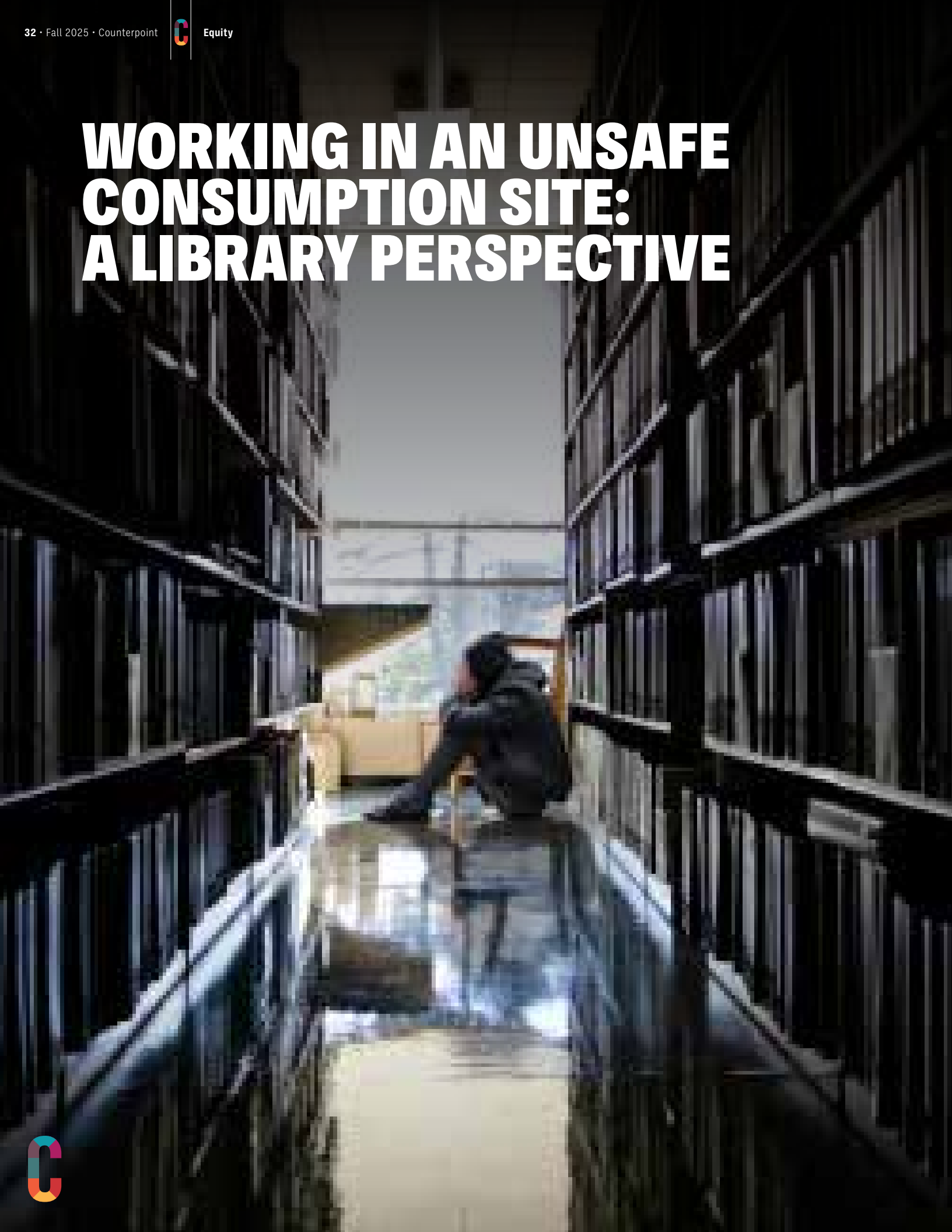
Workers are also affected by the rollbacks, and like other employers, post-secondary employers are using these immigration changes to fire

CUPE members who are migrant workers. CUPE has been working with allies to protect and defend our members. Last year, our union launched a guide to support members who are temporary foreign workers. CUPE has been working with the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change to get the federal government to renew post-graduate work permits.

Rho points to the interconnections between our struggles: "Migrants are exploited, migrants are also fighting back against these types of systems, and so are unions."

As for CUPE 3912, the local recently won a victory that will give workers a say in future decisions affecting members and students. Part-time faculty had fought for years for a seat on the Saint Mary's University Senate. In May 2025, senators amended their bylaws to let part-time faculty run for a Senate seat, and vote for their own representative. CUPE 3912 is mounting similar challenges to university governance at the other universities where its members work. This will give the union more power to protect workers and students in the fights ahead.

WORKING IN AN UNSAFE CONSUMPTION SITE: A LIBRARY PERSPECTIVE



It is impossible not to know there is an overdose crisis in Canada. You might think that no one is more aware of it than nurses, paramedics and social service workers – tens of thousands of whom are CUPE members.

But what fewer people realize is how deeply social and medical crises in Canada affect public libraries. With fewer public spaces that are truly open to the public, our libraries are becoming the only refuge left for many of our most vulnerable neighbours.

“I see libraries as a public good where we have a duty to provide services to those who are often abandoned by the state or kicked out of other public spaces,” says Kendra Cowley.

Cowley was a librarian at the Toronto Public Library in December 2024 when Ontario Premier Doug Ford brought in legislation forcing the closure of most supervised consumption sites in the province. These sites are closing despite an injunction, as the province withdrew funding for the services.

It was a move that put thousands of lives at risk, and pushed more drug use into dangerous, unsupervised spaces like libraries.

Cowley, who recently resigned from Toronto Public Library to take a job at a university library in Wyoming, sat on a library committee focused on providing services to vulnerable people when the provincial bill was announced. When the bill was raised in the committee, management said the issue was outside the committee’s mandate. Cowley and others disagreed and, together with library safety specialists who deal with drug poisonings daily, drafted an open letter.

That letter quickly gathered hundreds of signatures and sparked a new grassroots movement: Ontario Library Workers for Supervised Consumption Sites (OLW4SCS).

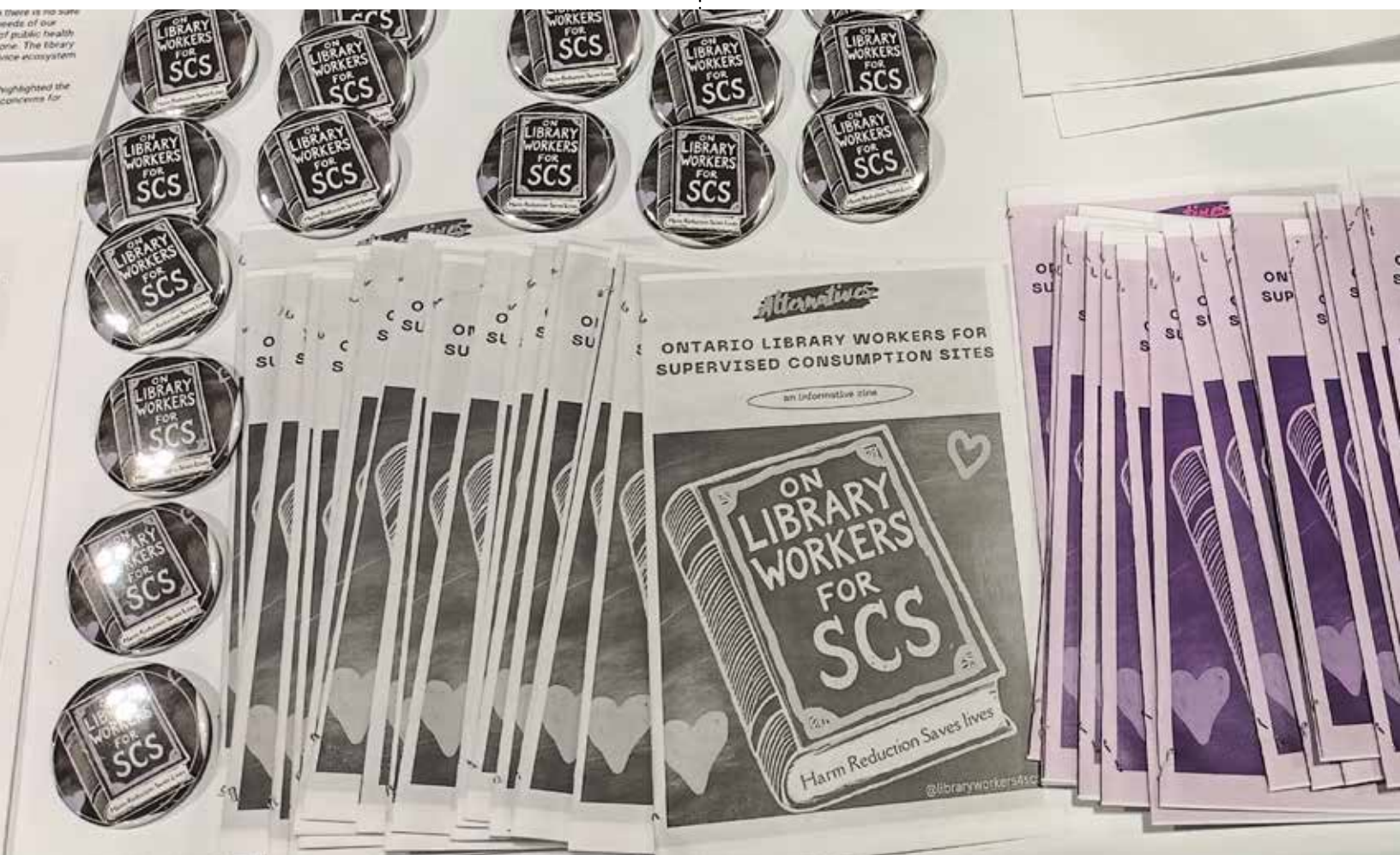
The group – mainly library workers from large urban systems such as Toronto, Hamilton and London – launched a survey and a public advocacy campaign in support of the consumption sites that keep people they care about safe and help keep their workplaces safer.



The survey of 133 library workers in 16 cities found that more than 38% had responded to an overdose in the workplace, yet only half were trained well enough to feel confident in using naloxone – a medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids – and one-third did not know where to find it in their library branch.

Together, OLV4SCS played a significant advocacy role: providing important context for news stories, presenting to the CUPE Ontario Library Workers Caucus, and – at the Ontario Library Association’s invitation – staffing a booth at the OLA Super Conference. They also created a zine and resource site to help library workers have conversations in their workplaces and communities, something many had been craving.

“I saw what they posted on Instagram about starting this group and was really excited. I don’t have a lot of opportunities to share space and talk with people about this. We have so many shared experiences all across the province,” says Zoë Hayes, an information clerk at Hamilton Public Library and member of CUPE 932. **“It feels like a success to have this network that allows us to share experiences and**



similarities because it can be so isolating. The survey we did was really helpful for that - to be able to say it's not just happening here and there, but we're all experiencing it in different places."

Before becoming a library worker, Hayes was a counsellor and did harm reduction placements, including at South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) in the east end of Toronto. SRCHC has a team of peer support workers who established the concept of street nursing. It also operated a supervised consumption site that CUPE Ontario campaigned to open. Later, in 2018, SRCHC staff organized into CUPE 5399.



Talking about compassionate treatment isn't always easy for library workers. In recent years, as governments of all levels failed again and again to address the overlapping addiction, mental health and housing crises, library staff are left to contend with rising numbers of drug poisonings, disruptive patrons, and violent incidents.

While these problems are not new for libraries in major urban centres, they have become increasingly common in smaller cities, particularly in regional hubs like Peterborough, Kingston and Thunder Bay.

At the Thunder Bay library branch where a CUPE member was violently assaulted on the job in May, incidents rose by 183% over the past winter.

Most people living with addictions are neither violent nor disruptive – the spike in incidents reflects the multiple, overlapping social crises at play.

Unfortunately, the response of many libraries has been to hire security guards, or do nothing at all, to address the health and safety issues.

"One of the core conversations we needed to have as a group was, if we frame this as a health and safety issue, which it is, whose health are we talking about and whose safety are we talking about? To necessarily lump together a medical incident with violence doesn't solve the problem," says Cowley. "If we're talking about safety, we need to prioritize the safety of the person who is in imminent threat of brain damage or death."

Some library systems have been taking more innovative approaches. There are social workers in downtown branches of some urban library systems, for example.

Toronto Public Library has a pilot team of library safety specialists trained in de-escalation and drug poisoning response. But there are only 12 of them across the system's 100 branches.

Hamilton Public Library partners with CAMH to provide peer support workers in its downtown branch. Peer support workers typically have a common background to the people they are supporting and are known in the community, so there is a level of trust others may lack, as one support

worker explained at the CUPE Ontario Library Workers Caucus in April.

But again, it is a pilot project in one branch, not a system-wide strategy. Peer support workers don't exist at the Barton branch where Hayes works – a part of Hamilton that has a large unhoused population.

“I’m so grateful for that peer support worker pilot at the central branch and for the social workers. I hope we can get them here too,” Hayes says.

Even that won’t fix everything. Solving the crises will require a concerted effort by all levels of government to increase affordable and supportive housing, expand mental health supports, and adopt real solutions to the overdose epidemic that killed more than 50,000 Canadians between 2016 and 2024, according to Health Canada.

“I’ve seen things escalate so much over time,” Hayes adds. “This winter was definitely the hardest and that was before the supervised consumption sites closed. I’m anticipating fallout. Winter is when we see the most health crises and challenges in the branch.” CUPE Ontario – an early, outspoken advocate for safe consumption sites and their workers – continues to campaign against the closures.

In June, OLW4SCS made deputations to the library boards in Hamilton and Toronto. They urged the boards to outline their plans for addressing Bill 233 and the drug-toxicity crisis, to ask front-line staff what they actually need – not more training, but time to recover from attending an incident – and to defend the right to public services that keep people safe.

At the end of the day, library workers are deeply compassionate, but few choose the profession expecting to handle overdoses or mental health crises.

What stands out is their remarkable desire for compassionate approaches, their appetite for new ideas but also their incredible need for more help.

Adequate staffing levels are at the core of both addressing health and safety concerns and attending to medical emergencies appropriately. Yet, right now, library workers are often working alone or in understaffed environments,

expected to be at the desk, assist patrons, and run programs simultaneously.

“We can’t train ourselves out of a crisis,” Cowley says. “If I have to do all these other things, I can’t give my full attention to someone in medical distress.”

Connect with OLW4SCS at
[instagram.com/libraryworkers4scs](https://www.instagram.com/libraryworkers4scs)



ON
LIBRARY
WORKERS
FOR
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Harm Reduction Saves Lives



OPENING DOORS TO INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION IN OUR UNIONS



Ensuring that Indigenous members are included in union decision-making spaces is an important step on the path of reconciliation. One concrete way CUPE locals can do this is by creating an Indigenous workers' representative position on their executive board.

This position is not simply a symbolic gesture. It ensures Indigenous members have an equal voice in all aspects of the local's work — finances, bargaining, education, and beyond. It is not about assigning a single "Indigenous voice" to speak on certain issues, but about bringing a different lens to every decision. This also means the position must carry equal voting rights and responsibilities, just like any other member of the executive.

Each local's path to creating this position will look different. Some may add a new seat to the executive, while others may adapt an existing one. If bylaw amendments are not yet in place to support that position, planning ahead, preparing draft language, and engaging Indigenous members and the membership at large in discussion well ahead of a vote will help to ensure participation and approval from the membership.

Adding an Indigenous workers' representative is not about checking a box. It is one step along a longer path of reconciliation that also involves supporting Indigenous members' participation in the union, recognizing the power imbalances that exist in colonial systems, and

building relationships with Indigenous organizations and communities. It is about creating a culturally safe environment that is respectful and free from racism and discrimination — a space where Indigenous members can participate fully.

Ongoing education for all members is central to this work, and so are conversations. Indigenous members must be consulted throughout the process — on the duties of the position, the election process, and what meaningful participation looks like. At the same time, allies on the executive and in the broader membership need to take responsibility for explaining why the position matters and responding to concerns.

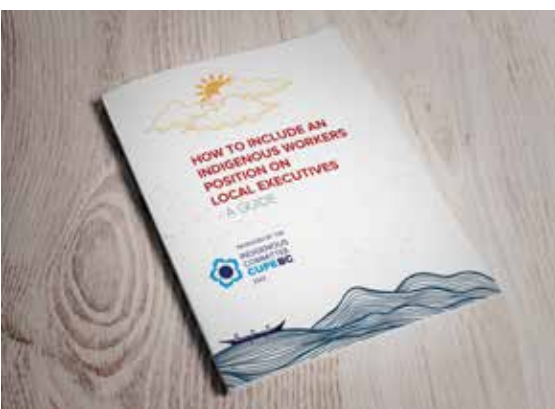




In that context, cultural humility is key. For non-Indigenous allies, that means recognizing their own biases, listening, approaching conversations as learners, and building respectful relationships based on trust. It means being realistic about where the local is at, and willing to start from a place of shared learning. While an Indigenous workers' representative brings a unique

perspective to the work of the union, the position should not be tokenized by only asking for input on issues related to reconciliation, by assigning them land acknowledgements or expecting them to act as teachers for others. Like all executive members, their contributions must be valued across the full scope of union leadership in shaping priorities that affect all members.

Creating an Indigenous workers' representative position is not the end of the work. It is one piece of a larger commitment to reconciliation, where locals must continue to create opportunities for Indigenous members to be more engaged. Done thoughtfully, this step strengthens our entire union by making it more inclusive, more representative, and better equipped to fight for justice for all workers.



At the 2021 CUPE BC Convention, delegates adopted a resolution to encourage locals to add an Indigenous workers' representative to their executive, recognizing the importance of representation of Indigenous members in our union. CUPE BC has since developed a guide to help locals through the process. Read their guide (in English only) here:

www.cupe.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/how-to-include-an-indigenous-workers-position-on-local-executives.pdf



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