

# CANADIAN FEDERATION



FALL 2020



CANADA'S NURSES

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# OF NURSES UNIONS



CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF NURSES UNIONS  
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE  
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES  
ET INFIRMIERS

## WE ARE CANADA'S NURSES.

We represent close to 200,000 frontline care providers and nursing students working in hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health care and our homes. We speak to all levels of government, other health care stakeholders and the public about evidence-based policy options to improve patient care, working conditions and our public health care system.

## MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



## AFFILIATIONS



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@CFNU



/NursesUnions

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Sick, tired and mad as hell!

### Dear member,

In the 17 years I have been president of the CFNU, this year stands out as one of the most challenging, not only for me, but for all health care workers across Canada – and around the world.

None of us could have predicted how dramatically our lives and communities would be uprooted this year. Nothing has been left untouched by the COVID-19 pandemic that has swept the globe, claiming lives and livelihoods.

Canada's health care workers have reported to work every day, facing down a life-threatening virus, public fear, and governments that have too often failed to keep us safe. These challenges only compounded the chronic issues we faced long before COVID-19, including widespread short-staffing.

Adding insult to injury, governments and employers have applauded nurses as heroes while at the same time disregarding our concerns and undervaluing our work. Canada's failure to keep nurses safe is a disgrace – it's no wonder nurses are sick, tired and mad as hell!

Throughout, the CFNU has been working double time to raise our concerns nationally. We have brought our fight to decision makers at every level, demanding they act to protect frontline workers and the public we serve.

Our anger is powerful fuel for this fight. It's clear that if we want to have an impact, we have to be louder and bolder than ever before.

We must demand accountability for Canada's failure to keep health care workers safe. We must demand respect and fairness for all frontline and essential workers. We must demand a recovery from this pandemic – with a strategy that puts the health and safety of workers and our communities first.

Let us be bold, let us be loud, and together we will build safer and better health care and a future we can be proud of.

In unwavering solidarity,



Linda Silas  
President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

 @Linda4Workers

 /Linda4Workers

 President@NursesUnions.ca

# PANDEMIC RESPONSE

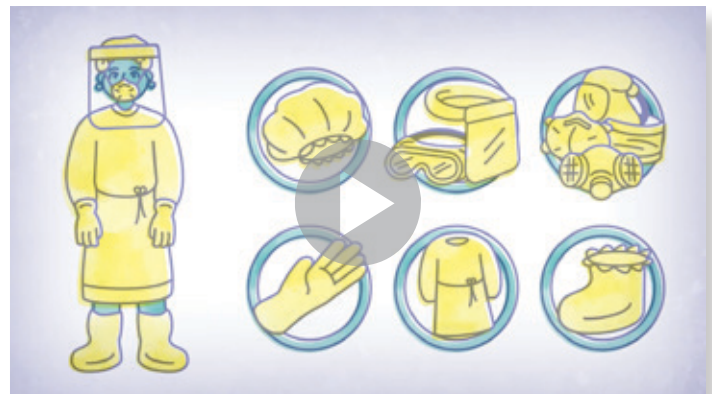
There has never been a more crucial moment to fight for workplaces with strong occupational health and safety.

Since January, the CFNU has been demanding that our governments, employers and public health agencies follow the precautionary principle recommended by the Ontario SARS Commission. With uncertain evidence about how a novel virus is spread, workers at risk of exposure should be protected from possible transmission through the air. It is unacceptable to put nurses' lives at risk while we wait for scientific debate to be settled. The CFNU called on authorities to be transparent about PPE stock and to work with unions to address any potential shortages.

This is the message the CFNU brought to decision makers and voiced publicly countless times. We met regularly with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), federal Minister of Health Patty Hajdu and others, and testified before the parliamentary health committee. We were among the first and loudest voices in national news calling out our decision makers for moving too slowly and failing to listen to workers.

We successfully pressured the PHAC to consult with labour unions representing health care workers regarding PHAC's national public health guidance. To ensure a united voice for workers, we convened a group of health care unions, including SEIU Healthcare, Unifor, Canadian Union of Public Employees and National Union of Public and General Employees, to jointly call for our governments to follow the precautionary principle.

As this was happening, we knew that workers' requests for PPE were being denied and that stress and fear were running high. To address the urgent on-the-ground need for action, we worked with our member organizations to lobby provincial governments and employers. We demanded that they respect and adhere to health care workers' requests for the personal protective equipment they required based on their professional judgment.



From top: promotion for the CFNU's PPE campaign (March); Linda Silas on CBC's Power and Politics (April 7); CFNU's video on appropriate PPE (April 29); an example of Linda's Facebook Live chats on COVID-19 with guest Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress (April 27)



On April 7, CFNU president Linda Silas testified before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. She spoke passionately about the realities facing frontline nurses and called on parliamentarians to act swiftly to ensure that all health care workers exposed to suspected and confirmed COVID-19-positive patients have access to proper protective equipment.

To educate workers and dispel confusion, we created a video, “Safety is not negotiable”, which highlighted proper PPE and the rights and obligations of workers and employers.

We created a resource hub on our website with up-to-date research and information pages. We launched a series of live Q&A sessions, hosted by CFNU President Linda Silas and streamed to Facebook, to answer nurses’ questions and discuss important topics. During the spring, tens of thousands of viewers tuned in to hear Linda provide national updates, and to learn from experts on occupational health and safety, long-term care, mental health, child care and more.

The fight is far from over. The reluctance of decision makers across the board to heed the concerns and warnings of nurses has resulted in disgrace. Canada’s health care workers have an infection rate that is higher than the global average, and much higher than countries like China, that followed the precautionary principle. This prompted the CFNU to retain Mario Possamai, former senior advisor to the SARS commission, to conduct an independent investigation into why and how Canada has failed to protect health workers. The final report, *A Time of Fear*, is a rallying cry for accountability and a road map for doing better. The CFNU will use this landmark report to continue our fight.



On June 22, the CFNU launched an independent investigation into Canada’s failure to properly protect health care workers from COVID-19, conducted by Mario Possamai, former senior advisor to the SARS Commission.

# LONG-TERM CARE

The pandemic has made the chronic issues in our long-term care sector impossible to ignore. About 80% of deaths in Canada due to COVID-19 have taken place in long-term care facilities. Many health care worker fatalities due to COVID-19 have also happened in this sector.

While for-profit, non-profit and municipal long-term care facilities are all equally likely to experience disease outbreaks, non-profit and municipally-run homes have been more effective at containing such outbreaks and preventing deaths than for-profit facilities.

For years, unions representing health care workers and seniors' advocacy groups have amplified the voices of frontline workers, expressing many of the same concerns. Governments have been briefed again and again on the significant problems regarding standards of care, funding, security, wages and hours of work in long-term care homes – particularly in for-profit facilities.

The CFNU publicly urged Prime Minister Trudeau to fix the crisis in long-term care by implementing the following measures:

- Regulating long-term care according to the principles of the *Canada Health Act*;
- Eliminating for-profit business from the long-term care sector;
- Requiring appropriate staffing and health and safety protections for workers;
- Matching wages and benefits of workers to the value of the work they perform; and
- Targeting and increasing federal funding for long-term care.

The CFNU brought these demands directly to decision makers on May 13. We hosted our first virtual event for parliamentarians in May. We focused on Canada's preparedness and response to COVID-19, particularly in long-term care. The event, *Canada Beyond COVID-19: Looking Back to Move Forward*, was hosted by CFNU President Linda Silas and featured expert panelists, including Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Sinai Health System and Director of Health Policy Research at the National Institute on Ageing; Sharleen Stewart, president of SEIU Healthcare; and Vicki McKenna, president of the Ontario Nurses' Association.

In April and May, the CFNU worked with the Canadian Labour Congress and unions from across the country to develop a report on long-term care. With its release, Canada's labour movement united in the call for the overhaul of the sector, with demands that echoed those the CFNU put forward.

In its September Speech from the Throne, the federal government pledged to work with the provinces and territories to establish new national standards for long-term care. The dire reality in long-term care remains a pressing priority for the CFNU and Canada's unions moving forward.



Above: the CFNU's long-term care campaign calls for better staffing and conditions (May)

Left: the CFNU hosted an event for Members of Parliament, Senators and stakeholders, which highlighted lessons for fixing long-term care across Canada (May 13)

# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK



The virtual launch featured lead researcher Dr. Nick Carleton, Scientific Director for the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. Download the report at [nursesunions.ca/osi](https://nursesunions.ca/osi)

On June 15, the CFNU released a groundbreaking study on mental health among nurses, revealing troubling levels of mental disorder symptoms.



Long before the pandemic, nurses and health care workers have been experiencing a silent mental health crisis. The everyday realities of working in our overburdened health care system are contributing to high levels of stress and trauma for workers.

Aiming to give voice to this crisis, the CFNU conducted a first-of-its-kind national study, *Mental Disorder Symptoms Among Nurses in Canada*, with researchers Dr. Nicholas Carleton and Dr. Andrea Stelnicki of the University of Regina. The disturbing rates of mental illness revealed by this study were recorded among thousands of nurses before the pandemic hit – we can only imagine how much more severe they would be now as nurses shoulder the stress of fighting COVID-19.

The study, released in June, found nurses reported levels of mental disorders at rates higher than the general population:

- One in three (36.4%) screened positive for major depressive disorder.
- More than one in four screened positive for generalized anxiety disorder (26.1%) and clinical burnout (29.3%).
- One in three nurses reported having suicidal thoughts (ideation) (33%), 17% reported planning suicide, and 8% reported attempting suicide during their lifetime.

The CFNU hosted a virtual launch event with the study's researchers to share this information with media and the public. In the summer, the CFNU met with Minister of Health Patty Hajdu to highlight the study's findings and call for better mental health supports. We continue to meet and discuss how nurses and health care workers can be better supported during the pandemic and beyond.

In recognition of the extreme stress caused by the pandemic, the CFNU launched an online mental wellness resource page for nurses, *Supporting your mental health during COVID-19*. The page included tips for managing anxiety, getting support, and other resources.

Despite these worthwhile measures, addressing the root causes of this mental health crisis will require fixing the long-standing issues that make our health care system unsafe for everyone, including chronic short-staffing and pervasive violence.



# PHARMACARE

COVID-19 has exposed many weaknesses in our health care system, including a lack of universal prescription drug coverage. With one in five Canadian households unable to afford their medications before the pandemic, millions more lost their jobs and the private drug plans that accompanied them. No one should be forced to choose between filling their prescriptions and feeding their family – especially under the vulnerable circumstances of a global pandemic.

For decades, nurses have been talking about the benefits of universal single-payer pharmacare. It will save lives every day, reduce suffering, improve health outcomes, and save the system billions of dollars every year – money that is sorely needed elsewhere.

In a minority parliament where three major parties – including the governing party – support universal public pharmacare, we are closer than ever to getting drug coverage for all. In the government’s September Speech from the Throne, they reiterated their commitment to building national universal pharmacare but did not provide a clear timeline.

As the government moves forward on recovery measures, the CFNU will be pushing hard along with the Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Health Coalition and other key allies in this fight. It is past time to implement pharmacare, and the need has never been greater.



Above and right: the CFNU continues our long fight for pharmacare, made even more urgent by widespread job and benefits loss.

# RECENT VICTORIES

## MEDICARE WINS IN COURT

In a landmark ruling, the BC Supreme Court rejected a charter challenge to the province’s public medicare legislation in the long-standing Cambie Case this September.

## NURSE ATTACKER FOUND GUILTY

The perpetrator of a brutal physical attack on two New Brunswick nurses was found guilty of two counts of aggravated assault in September.

## GOVERNMENT PROMISES HEALTHY RECOVERY MEASURES

In September, the federal government committed to putting Canada’s health first by investing in measures supported by the CFNU, including pharmacare, child care, long-term care, EI reform and housing, among other things.

Below: the CFNU celebrated the pro-medicare outcome of the decades-long Cambie court case (September).





# HEALTHY RECOVERY

During the summer, decision makers and stakeholders turned their attention towards the critical and transformative changes required to rebuild a stronger and more resilient country. While the pandemic is far from over, the CFNU recognizes our once-in-a-generation opportunity to address long-standing issues, not only in health care but in our social safety net, working conditions and economy.

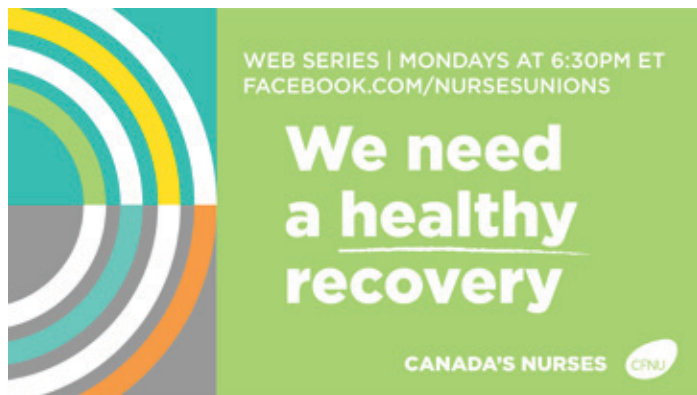
In August, the CFNU provided a submission to Canada's parliamentary finance committee. Our submission, *Toward a Healthy Recovery for Canada*, called on our government to invest in crisis-proof systems that will help us weather the ongoing uncertainties posed by current and future pandemics, along with the challenges of an aging population, worsening climate crisis and a shifting global economic landscape.

We recommended that the government invest in:

- The building blocks of a healthy society, with targeted funding for the social determinants of health, including a living wage, pharmacare, housing, child care and essential services
- Long-term care to allow our seniors to live in dignity
- Healthy workplaces – a priority for all workers and employers
- Climate health and just transition strategy for workers and communities, and accelerating the shift to a green economy

In September, we launched a web series of weekly live sessions, exploring our vision for a healthy recovery. Hosted by CFNU President Linda Silas, the live sessions streamed to Facebook on Mondays, and featured expert speakers and a live Q&A segment where members and the public engaged with the topics.

In its September Speech from the Throne, the government made some promising commitments that echoed the CFNU's recommendations. These included universal pharmacare, a national child care program, national standards for long-term care, enhancements to Employment Insurance, investing in affordable housing, and other measures.



Above: the CFNU's Healthy Recovery web series was launched in September and has featured a range of topics.

As governments move forward with plans to rebuild, the CFNU and our Member Organizations will be ramping up pressure to make sure they put Canada's health first. The pandemic has proven that a healthy society is the foundation of a healthy economy. As nurses know well, our foundation has been cracked for too long. It's time to build a sturdier base, and we will fight to ensure we do just that.

## HAPPENING NOW

### VIRTUAL MENTAL HEALTH TOOLS

The CFNU is working with federal officials and the Minister of Health to develop virtual tools tailored to specific mental health needs of health care workers.

### MADE-IN-CANADA PPE

The CFNU is working with allies to lobby for the expansion of domestic production of PPE, to ensure Canada has a self-sufficient supply of vital equipment.

### PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION

The CFNU and its provincial Member Organizations are lobbying premiers to enact legislation granting presumptive workers' compensation benefits to health care workers with COVID-19.

### EXPOSING FAILURE TO PROTECT HEALTH WORKERS

The CFNU's independent investigation into Canada's failure to follow the lessons of SARS makes sweeping recommendations for change.



Above: the CFNU has called on the federal government to ensure Canada makes enough PPE domestically to meet demand.

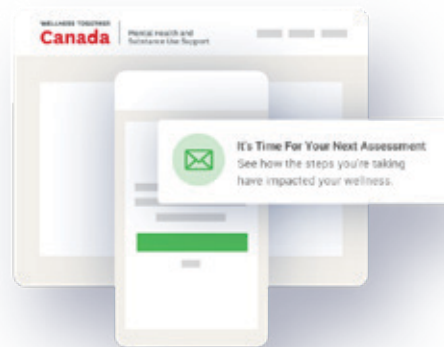
Right: the CFNU and MOs have called on premiers to ensure health care workers with COVID-19 are not denied compensation benefits.

## NEED SUPPORT?

Get connected to mental health and substance use support, resources, and counselling, through Wellness Together Canada. Start with a five-minute self-assessment.

- ✓ Accessible 24/7
- ✓ No fees, ever
- ✓ For everyone

VISIT THE WEBSITE: [CA.PORTAL.GS](https://ca.portal.gs) 

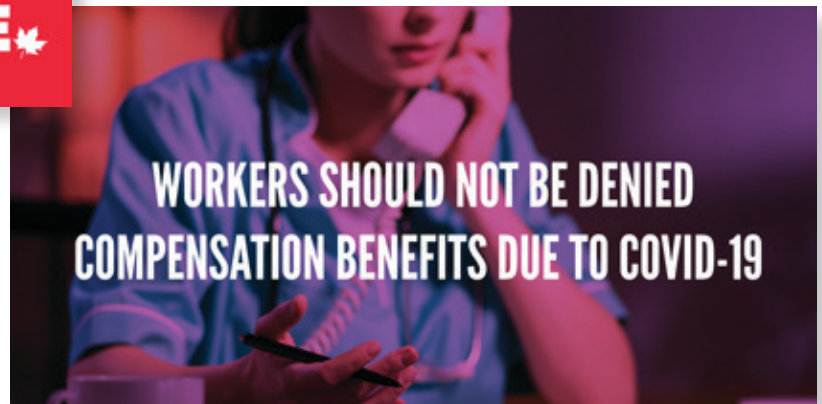


### FOR IMMEDIATE CRISIS SUPPORT:

Adults: text "WELLNESS" to 741741

Frontline workers: text "FRONTLINE" to 741741

Wellness Together Canada was funded by the Government of Canada in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



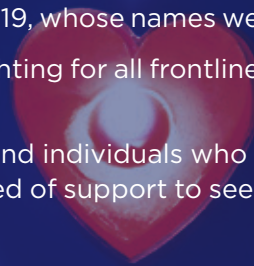
# IN MEMORIAM

Join the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions in remembering and honouring the lives of all Canada's health care workers who have died from COVID-19, whose names we have recorded here.

As we collectively mourn their loss, let us recommit to fighting for all frontline workers to have the protections they need to remain safe and healthy.

The CFNU extends heartfelt condolences to all families and individuals who have lost loved ones as a result of this pandemic. We encourage anyone in need of support to seek assistance.

We are in this together.



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**Agary Akaekpuchionwa**  
*Personal support worker  
Ottawa, ON*

**Sharon Roberts**  
*59, personal support worker  
Toronto, ON*

**Arlene Reid**  
*51, personal support worker  
Peel Region, ON*

**Stéphanie Tessier**  
*31, personal support worker  
Saint-Jérôme, QC*

**Brian Beattie**  
*57, registered nurse  
London, ON*

**Unknown name**  
*58, environmental services worker  
Brampton, ON*

**Christine Mandegarian**  
*54, personal support worker  
Scarborough, ON*

**Unknown name**  
*personal support worker  
Ottawa, ON*

**Laurence Ménard**  
*33, social worker  
Drummondville, QC*

**Unknown name**  
*personal support worker  
Ottawa, ON*

**Leonard Rodrigues**  
*61, personal support worker  
Toronto, ON*

**Unknown name**  
*residence administrative support  
Montreal, QC*

**Marcelin François**  
*40, personal support worker  
Montréal, QC*

**Victoria Salvan**  
*64, orderly  
Montreal, QC*


**Marina Thenor**  
*45, orderly  
Montreal, QC*

**Warlito Valdez**  
*47, residential support worker  
Richmond, BC*

# FIGHT BACK.


We can't do it without you.  
Sign up for updates and get involved  
in the CFNU's work:


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 @Linda4Workers

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