

## PAY INCREASES FOR PSWs WORKING IN HOME AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES: MORE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Before the June provincial election, the Liberal government announced that it would increase wage rates for publicly funded home and community care Personal Support Workers (PSWs).

Specifically, they promised to increase wages for these PSWs by \$1.50 an hour effective April 1, 2014, with further increases of \$1.50 an hour effective April 1, 2015, and \$1.00 an hour, effective April 1, 2016. Since the June election, the government indicated that wage increases and retroactive pay would roll out in September.

As the increases roll out to workers (or in some cases, don't), CUPE is learning more about the anomalies, exceptions and problems that accompany the increases. Below are examples of questions that we have received, how members are affected and how CUPE is approaching the problems with the roll out.

### **Q.1 Why aren't all PSWs covered by the pay increases?**

- A.** The PSW pay increase was specifically designed for the 30,000 PSWs who provide publicly funded personal care in the "home and community care sectors."

These workers are often unorganized and have lower wages than PSWs in the highly unionized hospital and long-term care (LTC) sectors. Therefore, the wage increase does not cover PSWs working in the hospitals and LTC or developmental services sector.

Other PSWs not eligible for the increase are those on private contracts; PSWs working under government funded self-directed care; and those providing solely homemaking services.

### **Q.2 What about PSWs in the community agencies?**

- A.** They are eligible for the increase even though their job titles might not always be "personal support worker." In the Community Agencies sector these PSW-type workers are referred to with various titles including, but not limited to: Community Care Workers, Support Services Attendants, Support Coordinator, Support Workers, etc.

### **Q.3 What reasons have employers given for not providing the increases?**

- A.** Some home and community care PSWs have begun to receive these wage increases without incident. However, problems with the roll out remain.

Some employers are refusing to implement the increases, claiming that the amount the government has set aside to pay for the increased benefit costs is insufficient.

Some employers are not increasing wages for all hours of work, claiming only direct hours of care are covered.

Employers that provide PSW home and community care services as well as PSW services outside of the home and community care sector have claimed they are only being funded for the home and community care PSWs, creating wage inequities within a single workforce.

In another case, the employer has told us that the PSWs do not qualify for the wage increase, although no genuine explanation has been offered to us.

#### Q.4 What is CUPE's position?

- A. CUPE takes the position that publicly funded home and community care providers must implement the wage increases, that all hours of work should be covered, and that all PSWs and Community Care Workers within a single bargaining unit should benefit from this increase.

#### Q.5 What is CUPE doing to get these increases for eligible PSWs who have not yet received them yet?

- A. As a first step, we are asking that locals and National Representatives that are experiencing difficulties with the wage increase to follow up with their employer's funding agencies (be it LHIN, CCAC or Ministry of Community and Social Services) before **Friday, October 10.**

We are asking National Representatives to note the funding agencies' explanations and pass them on to the relevant CUPE sector coordinator (Sharon McKenna, Health Care Sector; and Barbara Wilker-Frey, Social Services Sector, Community Agencies).

#### Q.6 Can my local come to its own agreement with my employer about pay increases for PSWs?

- A. As agreements with employers on this matter will affect other locals, **we ask that you confer with your National Representative and Coordinator before reaching any understandings with your employer on this matter.**

#### Q.7 Has CUPE contacted the government about the PSWs who aren't getting what they deserve?

- A. We have written to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Eric Hoskins, copying the Premier and asking the Health Minister to work with us to resolve these problems (see accompanying document). So far, however, genuine dialogue has not begun.

The wage increase is a very positive initiative by the provincial government,

and we do not wish to be forced to encourage resolution of these matters through other means.

We were happy to see that Premier Kathleen Wynne has instructed the Health Minister Eric Hoskins on September 25 to build "on the 2014 Budget announcement to increase wages for Personal Support Workers (PSWs) in the home and community care sector," indicating that his goal should be "to develop a strategy to bring stability to this workforce and ensure we meet the need for PSWs in the long term."

We should also note that, in April, the government did commit to "develop measures to create more permanent and less casual employment for PSWs" in the home and community care sector.

CUPE will work to ensure these goals are achieved, in regard to the increased wages and the other PSW promises made by the government to increase regular hours of work in the home and community care sectors over the longer term.

#### Q.8 How are the increases meant to help secure more full-time jobs and stabilize the workforce for PSWs?

- A. Increasing wages in the home and community care sector will not only reduce precarity for many CUPE members and non-union workers, but will also reduce pressure on wages in the hospital and LTC sectors and allow work to be distributed between hospitals, LTC, and the community on a more rational basis, rather than on the basis of low pay.

If there are other problems with the increase that you are experiencing, please let your National Representative or Coordinator know as soon as possible. CUPE Ontario has two committees who count PSWs among their members: the Health Care Workers Coordinating Committee (HCWCC) and the Social Service Workers Coordinating Committees (SSWCC). Along with Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU), they will be watching and ensuring the monies are paid out in the way that benefits workers most.