



## Government of Ontario COVID 19 – Pandemic Pay

### *Questions & Answers*

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On Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup> the Ontario Government announced its intention to issue Pandemic Pay in the period from April 24<sup>th</sup> to August 12<sup>th</sup> for some workers in some workplaces. The program is to be financed through a combination of provincial and federal monies.

Literally from the time of the announcement there have been many questions about Pandemic Pay. This brief Q&A addresses these issues based on what we know as of May 7, 2020.

CUPE Ontario continues to lobby government on Pandemic Pay through daily direct calls to government and in writing. We also have an e-action so that members can be part of that important lobby to apply pressure to government – [follow this link to take part](#).

#### **What is the pandemic pay?**

Government Information says “eligible workers” in “eligible workplaces” will receive \$4 per hour worked on top of existing hourly wages.

The government’s eligibility requirements appear to include that the worker is “front line,” “at risk,” and working “full time, part time, or casual” in a “publicly funded” “congregate care setting.”

If an “eligible worker” works at least 100 hours or more in a designated 4-week period (which are spelled out in four, 4 week periods starting April 24 until August 13), they are also eligible to receive an additional lump sum payment of \$250 for each period, meaning its possible to receive a total of an additional \$1000.00 should a you work 100 or more hours in each of the 4 week periods.

#### **How do workers get paid?**

Those the government deems eligible will receive pandemic pay directly from their employer. When exactly this will happen is unclear, but government information says all hours worked from April 24<sup>th</sup> will be covered retroactively. To date, the government says it will contact eligible employers on May 15<sup>th</sup> regarding pandemic pay.



CUPE Ontario continues to push the government to transfer money to employers TODAY so that pandemic pay can flow immediately.

It remains unclear how workers will get the lump sum payments. We have had some communication suggesting a government portal would be established that workers would apply online. Government information today says they are still “working out how lump sum payments will be made” and suggest people check back to their web page for updates [here](#).

### **Am I covered? Who gets pandemic pay?**

We continue to lobby to expand who will receive pandemic pay. It is, however, the provincial government who has decided who is eligible. They list criteria of both “eligible workplaces” and “eligible workers” in their information, and to receive pandemic pay you have to meet both criteria. A current list is found [here](#). Management is not eligible for pandemic pay.

CUPE members have many different job titles in the current list of “eligible workplaces”. Regardless of your specific *job title*, we believe the *job function* should be a guiding principle for who is included.

For long-term care and *licensed* Retirement homes, all non-management employees, full-time, part-time, and casual are included.

All hospitals, including small and rural hospitals, post-acute hospitals, children’s hospitals, and psychiatric hospitals are eligible workplaces, as are “home and community care”. What exactly “home and community care” includes remains unclear, we are pushing for all workers who deliver home care services to be included. A current list of “eligible workers” in these settings can be accessed by clicking [here](#). We continue to lobby for expansion to this list and refer members to our e-action to help lobby efforts to government – please share the this action, [available by clicking here](#), with members.

In Social Services there is a list of services including developmental services, women and homeless shelters including emergency shelters, youth justice residential facilities and Indigenous healing and wellness facilities and shelters. The full list of workplaces and eligible workers to date is [here](#).

There are CUPE members in workplaces that are not listed – like transit workers or emergency childcare workers or garbage and solid waste workers as just a few examples. There are others. CUPE Ontario is actively lobbying for the expansion of pandemic pay to all front-line workers providing vital services during the pandemic and we need our members



to be involved in that work to expand pandemic pay. An e-action directed to the Premier can be found [here](#). Please widely distribute this action and encourage as many people as possible to use it to help us apply pressure.

### **Is pay during leaves, like sick leave, covered?**

Current government information says only *hours worked* are applicable. Vacation, sick leave or any authorized leave that is pay, or any time you were not in the workplace for any reason does not apply.

We disagree with this and have been applying pressure to reverse this decision, particularly in relation to sick leave.

### **How does pandemic pay impact things like my pension?**

The Ontario government has decided that pandemic pay including any lump sum payments are not part of a base salary, are non-pensionable earnings, and have no impact on benefits paid by an employer.

CUPE Ontario believes pandemic pay should form part of a worker's base salary and we continue to lobby for this change.

### **What about Bill 124 – the wage restraint legislation the Ford Conservatives passed?**

The government of Ontario passed a regulation to say that Bill 124, the legislation passed to limit wage increases to public sector workers to 1% per year, is not impacted or changed by pandemic pay.

CUPE will take a different position. We have launched a court challenge against this wage restraint bill. Pandemic pay allows us to add to our existing arguments about the violation of the rights to free collective bargaining by pointing out how wage restraint makes no sense for public sector workers.

### **Next Steps?**

CUPE Ontario is formally approaching the government this week with formal, detailed proposals to expand the list of eligible workplaces and eligible workers, to widen the applicability of pandemic pay to pensions, overtime and sick time and, most important, to make pandemic pay permanent and ongoing.

We will do our best to keep CUPE Locals and members updated about these important issues.