

# Provincial

## HOW BCGEU'S PUBLIC SERVICE MEMBERS BECAME THE MOST UNITED VOICE IN B.C.

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# 2022: Looking forward to what we can achieve together



The BCGEU is one of the largest and most diverse unions in British Columbia. With over 85,000 members and 550 bargaining units we represent workers in every community across the province and every sector of the economy. And that means that, on any given day, there is bargaining going on.

But 2022 is a special year for bargaining.

Since February this year our union has been engaged in bargaining agreements that collectively cover more than 64,000 BCGEU members—almost 80% of our total membership—in the community social services, community health, health science professionals, health facilities, post-secondary, and public service sectors.

And whether you are a member of one of these agreements or not, this round of bargaining impacts you. This round is about leveraging the lessons of the last two and a half years to make sure public sector workers get the recognition and respect they deserve for keeping our province functioning through the pandemic. And it's about more than that: it's about ensuring that workers can catch up and keep up with the cost of living; it's about ensuring that the robust public services we all rely on will be there for us in the future. Regardless of sector or job classification or community, the priorities for BCGEU members covered by all these agreements are the same: working conditions that protect the physical, psychological, and mental health of workers; innovative solutions for persistent recruitment and retention issues; and, most importantly, compensation packages that protect workers' wages from skyrocketing costs. And the gains we make at these tables will impact every member of our union.

I had hoped that by the time this edition of The Provincial was reaching mailboxes there would be a tentative deal or even a ratification vote going on in at least one sector. Instead, as I write this, progress at all tables has been slow and at our largest table—the public service table, which

covers more than 33,000 members—we have reached impasse, secured an incredible 95% strike vote from the bargaining unit, and are moving forward with plans for British Columbia's first public service strike in more than 10 years.

When bargaining started in February, this not where I wanted to be by late summer. That said, I want to be clear that I believe this round of public sector bargaining has been an unequivocal success. From day one the cooperation and coordination between the BCGEU's bargaining committees at the various sectoral tables and between the various unions representing members at those tables has been unprecedented. The strength and commitment of bargaining unit members has been unwavering. And the planning and execution of a province-wide strike vote for the 33,000-member public service built a level of member engagement and solidarity that has strengthened our union in ways that will ultimately benefit all members.

I know we will prevail and negotiate agreements that meet our members needs now and into the future. And by the time you read this edition, I hope your inboxes are full of good news about public sector bargaining. Until then, I want to express my deep gratitude and admiration to every bargaining committee member, worksite activist, and staffer who has devoted their time, talent, and dedication to this effort over the past six months. And I want to thank all of you for everything you do every day to support each other and to build the power of our union and our movement.

In solidarity,

**Stephanie Smith**  
BCGEU president

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**A massive strike vote requires mass mobilizing: how BCGEU's public service members became the most united voice in B.C.**

Pulling off a province-wide vote for a whopping 33,000 members is no easy feat - unless you've got a ton of passion and killer logistics on your side. There's no shortage of either among public service BCGEU members, who just organized one of our most sprawling and streamlined strike votes.

The battle is largely over cost-of-living (COLA) protections for wages, which will allow these workers to afford life in B.C., as inflation and prices climb. This strike vote was also taken in solidarity with tens of thousands of other hardworking people in myriad industries across B.C., whose wage provisions will likely mirror the public service agreement.

Just as BCGEU has always been the people's union, making rent and putting food on the table has always been a people's cause, so it's no surprise that our members are leading the COLA fight. An overwhelming 94.6 per cent of voters said they are prepared to strike for a fair collective agreement.

"When a rumble becomes a roar, employers must listen," said BCGEU president Stephanie Smith, who chalks up the impressive result to the solidarity and leadership of the members.

"Networking is our superpower. Stewards and activists didn't stop until they had paper ballots in the hands and mailboxes of as many coworkers as possible," she said. "In addition, over 500 members committed to being worksite contacts while hundreds more booked time to make calls, send reminders and run the community-based pop-up polls, which were a runaway success. Regardless of our next steps, this level of engagement, this early in a solidarity action, means we're on track to winning."

Votes matter, but it's the conversations and connections members made during outreach that will fuel us. Solidarity is evergreen; it can only grow. Since about one third of voters were new to bargaining when they cast their ballots between May 6 and June 21, that's thousands more members who are now engaged with their union. In this spread, we feature just some of the amazing members who helped grow our collective power at the polls.

STRIKE VOTE INTERVIEWS

"For myself personally - and I know a lot of my coworkers, colleagues have done the same - I voted yes. If it came down to it, and the needs are not being met by the employer - or at least a reasonable compromise - then I believe the action needs to be taken. I think it's very important - especially living here Victoria obviously, where cost of living is quite high, and with the way inflation is going."

**Henry Wong,**  
Local 1201



"I voted yes for a strike. You know, government doesn't run without the employees, you know, without us there. And so it's, it'd be nice to see that reflected in our in our worth and in our pay going forward. You look at inflation and where it's gone and where we live, obviously in Victoria, it's one of the most expensive places in North America. And so the our wages haven't met the demand to live here."

**Suneil Karod,**  
Local 601

“

From social work to liquor store and warehouse jobs, all the way to correctional and administrative services, these dedicated employees fill myriad roles within the provincial government. They work in the backwoods, in cities, towns and in homes. They serve vulnerable populations and provide critical services to all the people who call British Columbia home. They're community members, and like all their neighbours, deserve to afford a living in B.C."

**Stephanie Smith**  
BCGEU President

"I voted in favour of a strike. Victoria is a very difficult place to rent and I'm kind of at a point where that I think a lot of people are at where I'm, I've been in the same place for a while, but I can't afford to move anywhere else in the city because I'll be paying more for less than I have. So my living expenses just like everybody else's are starting to get tighter. And I think that it doesn't seem like a crazy ask that our employer try and help us live."

**Shawn O'Hara,**  
Local 1201



"A government job back in the '80s was the job to get. And now a government job barely gets you living. So wages are huge, that's my number one issue. I voted - a very easy yes. Being a shop steward, there was no question. I'm advocating people in my office to get out there and vote."

**Debra Craig,**  
Local 1201

# FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN OUR INVESTMENTS

Since 2018, the BCGEU has been using our power as investors to protect our investments and push for progressive change within the companies we invest. Better managed companies that protect workers, human rights, and the environment make for better investments. This type of work is often referred to as “capital stewardship”.

Now, several years in, our union has built one of Canada’s leading capital stewardship programs and one of the only labour-led programs in the country. We are showing the labour movement and responsible investment community what is possible when we organize workers’ capital and fight for working people.

Each year, our team researches the companies in our Canadian equity fund - which is fully divested from the oil and gas industry - and engages with some of Canada’s biggest companies on a variety of important issues. This year, we filed nine shareholder proposals including topics such as racial equity, climate policy, freedom of association and collective bargaining, and forced labour.

We achieved some incredible things this season - here are just a few:

- Thanks to our shareholder proposal, TD Bank becomes the first bank and one of the first companies in Canada to conduct a racial equity audit.
- The Bank of Montreal acknowledged the potential for the financialization of housing in the single-family residential sector in Canada and committed to evaluating and enhancing its due diligence processes and training that will address human rights due diligence considerations. This would not have happened without our union’s proposal.
- When we learned Loblaw was using forced Uyghur labour to source textiles and tomatoes, we filed a proposal on forced labour, earning an overwhelming 87% of independent shareholders’ backing and our proposal sent shockwaves through the company. We’ll keep fighting this issue until we win.

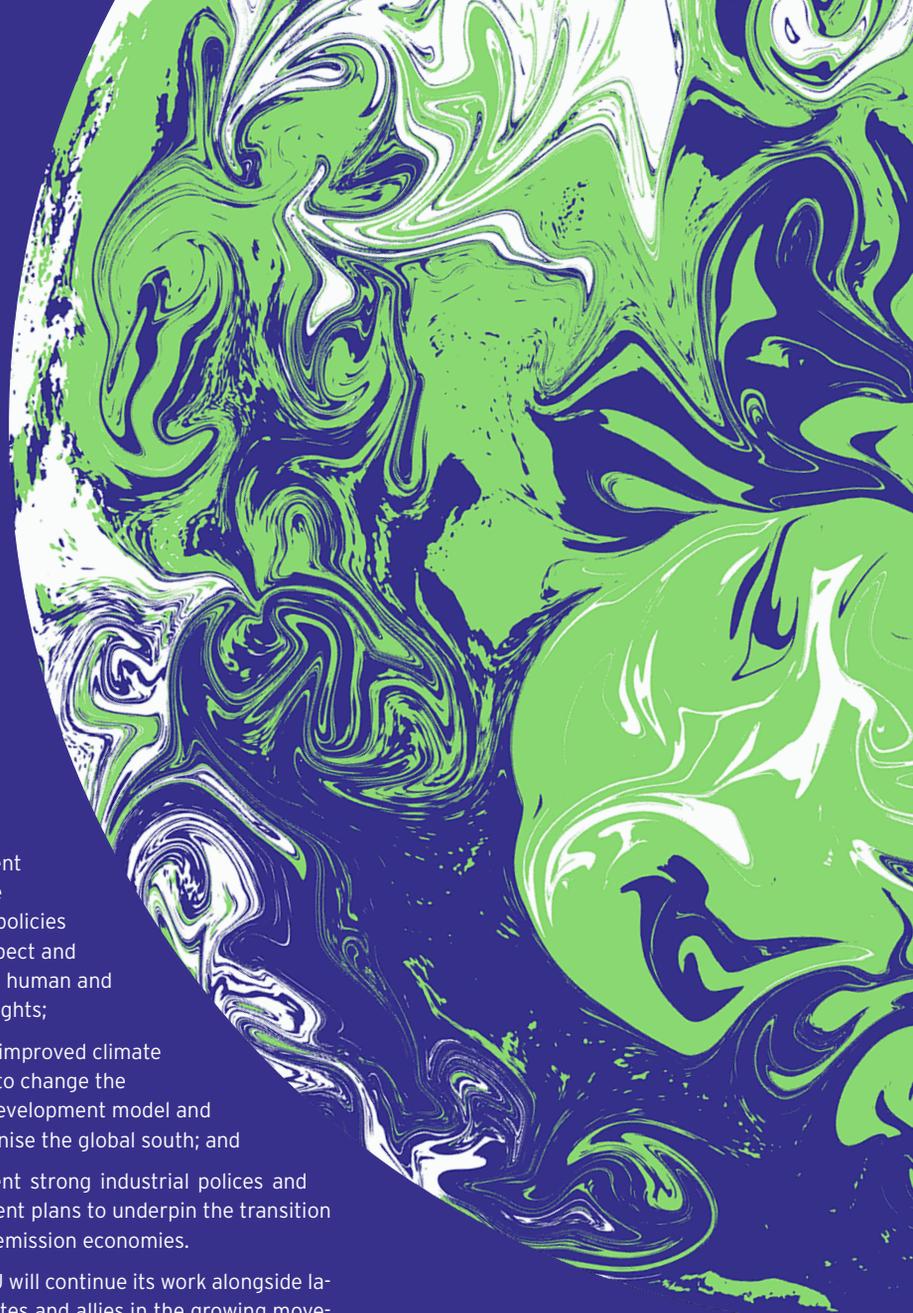
We also had our biggest win yet. After a three-year investor battle at Thomson Reuters, we finally won! Thomson Reuters agreed to align with the UN on human rights and is conducting a human rights risk assessment on its products including contracts with U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement or ICE, which it would not have done without us. With strong proposals, extensive investor outreach and working with front-line communities, we were able to help make the facilitation of tracking, detention and deportation of migrants and asylum seekers an issue that Thomson Reuters could no longer sweep under the rug.

“This is exactly why our union chooses to do capital stewardship the way we do – to force corporations to make progressive changes on the issues that matter to working people,” said Stephanie Smith, BCGEU president. “Tackling human rights risk isn’t just important for protecting shareholder value, real human beings will be impacted by the results of these human rights audits. This win is for them as much as it is for our union.”

To learn more about our shareholder program and the proposals we field this year, check out our shareholder website for more information about all the proposals we filed: <https://investments.bcgeu.ca/> You can also drop us a line at [investor@bcgeu.ca](mailto:investor@bcgeu.ca).



# BCGEU AT COP26



During the last year, unprecedented flooding and wildfires in B.C. have demonstrated that catastrophic impacts of climate change are all around us. The time to act is running out.

Trade unionists from across the globe are a vital part of a multilateral climate policy process, and they're wielding an ever-stronger voice in negotiations. Unions like ours are working to establish an inclusive approach that protects the rights and needs of workers across affected industries.

Last fall, BCGEU executive vice-president and environment committee chair James Coccola met with unionists at the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly referred to as COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland.

There, scientists, policy experts, environmentalists, social justice advocates, government negotiators, labour unions and diplomats reaffirmed their commitment to ambitious action to address the climate emergency.

"The parties know action can't happen at the expense of workers," said Coccola. "They also understand the scale of the change that's required can't occur without workers."

The action agenda is focused on 'just transition', which demands that climate action policies secure the future economic livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy, and that these stakeholders be included in all discussions affecting their livelihoods. The labour delegation at COP26 took direct action to advance four key demands on this issue:

1. Raise climate ambition with strong just transition policies and measures across enhanced nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for emissions reductions;

2. Implement inclusive climate policies that respect and promote human and labour rights;
3. Provide improved climate finance to change the global development model and decarbonise the global south; and
4. Implement strong industrial policies and investment plans to underpin the transition to zero-emission economies.

The BCGEU will continue its work alongside labour affiliates and allies in the growing movement. We're also committed to championing the voices of B.C. workers.

Nationally, we're working with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), which adopted a detailed, multi-component labour climate action agenda in June 2021. The agenda contributes to a practical working definition of 'just transition', along with a far-reaching strategy for unions. The strategy will integrate national-level advocacy with sectoral, workplace-centred approaches focused on putting workers, communities, and public services at the heart of climate action.

The CLC is also working with affiliates and allies to demand federal, territorial, and provincial governments develop broadly-based 'just transition' programs for workers, communities, and equity-seeking groups, and that these programs are strongly supported by coherent, appropriately aligned economic and labour-market policies.

We're also encouraged by the work of La Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec.

The federation is in the early stages of establishing a provincial working group for 'just transition', a multi-stakeholder body with appointed representatives from government, labour, and employers.

"It's up to the BCGEU and other Canadian labour unions to drive this movement domestically, putting pressure on policymakers, voters, and other workers needed to translate that vision into a concrete framework for our national economy," said Coccola.

Read the full version of our report on COP26 at [www.bcgau.ca/COP26](http://www.bcgau.ca/COP26)

# No year-round wildfire service without wildfire fighters

Another wildfire season is upon British Columbia and our wildfire fighters are hard at work keeping communities safe in an increasingly complex and volatile environment.

But, despite the B.C. government's announcement in February 2022 that it would evolve the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) from a seasonal to year-round service - a change that the BCGEU has been calling for years - cracks in the system exposed by recent fire seasons have yet to be fixed.

"Wildland firefighters work in hazardous conditions throughout the summer and are relied upon to provide extensive expertise in many emergency environments," said Dimitri Vaisius, BCWS wildfire officer and BCGEU Wildfire Committee (Article 29 Sub-Committee) co-chair.

"Recent government announcements sound like good news for firefighters but, until there is a major commitment to changing their compensation model, our province will continually struggle to recruit and retain the experience levels required to deal with the increasingly complex fire environment," he said.

In a poll commissioned by the BCGEU in October 2021, 90 per cent of British Columbians said they support a wage increase for wildland firefighters. But there are issues beyond wages that need to be resolved.

"The BCGEU welcomes the government's acknowledgement that wildfire fighters are the foundation of our province's planned year-round emergency service," said BCGEU Vice-President for Component 20, Rob Davis. "But more full-time jobs aren't enough - government needs to pay competitive wages (including improvements to wildfire fighters' pensionable service and early retirement options) and recognize the full breadth of the duties expected of such a service."

Announcing and funding a year-round wildfire service model is a much-needed step towards ensuring our communities have the emergency support they need. But, to make the service truly effective, our wildfire fighters need to be treated as the professionals they are.



Wildland firefighters work in hazardous conditions throughout the summer and are relied upon to provide extensive expertise in many emergency environments,"

Dimitri Vaisius

## The insecurity of professional fire-fighting in B.C.



BCGEU member Chad Haugen - a 12-year seasonal BCWS employee and crew supervisor of the Lytton Rattlers unit crew - loves his work and the people he works with. But he struggles with the insecurity of a seasonal job.

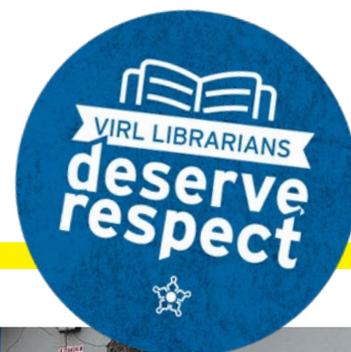
"We do a lot that I don't think people realize," he said. "We put out fires, call in helicopters, conduct controlled burns, help with other emergencies. But I'm also a certified tree faller - one of the most dangerous and needed tasks. But, compensated with a fraction of what private contractors are paid to do for the same job. Having to find winter work on top of that isn't sustainable for me."

Seasonal insecurity is also challenging because of what Haugen has lost, including his extended family's homes in the Lytton fire of June 30, 2021.

"It seems like it was just yesterday. I'm still working and living in Lytton, still the unit crew supervisor here, still paying a mortgage for a house that no longer exists - a mortgage I fought hard with the bank because I'm not considered full time," he said. "Year-round employment would give my family stability while I continue in the work I love and that the province needs."

# THE POWER OF 48 LIBRARIANS:

## WINNING THROUGH SOLIDARITY



It's no surprise that librarians have become society's social safety net.

Providing communities with critical literacy and social service supports on minimal budgets and carrying out this work amidst a pandemic and crises in affordable housing, toxic drug supply, and climate change is a recipe for burnout.

For BCGEU librarians at Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL), years of disrespect and demoralization from a toxic employer, and no signs of change, had caused apathy and fear within the workforce. When bargaining for their next collective agreement hit impasse in February 2022 - 16 months after their former contract had expired - the 48 librarians working at VIRL's 39 branches voted 95 per cent in favour of striking and conducted seven weeks of escalated job action. They eventually ratified a new collective agreement that included strong wage improvements and opened the door to better occupational health and safety.

In her blog post, *How to fight and win: five things I've learned*, bargaining committee chair Laura

Kaminker emphasized "success was the result of intentional and sustained internal organizing, over the course of several years. Before I joined VIRL, a group of activist librarians had rolled up their sleeves and got to work. They modelled stepping up, speaking up, demonstrating to members that it could be done."

Kaminker's predecessors built trust and solidarity by demanding labour-management meetings, filing policy grievances, and listening to members' concerns and supporting them through the grievance process. In 2019, a group of union-minded librarians attended the BCGEU's Organizing Academy, a week-long course based on the work of American union organizer, Jane McAlevey, and later, McAlevey's Skills to Win virtual course.

"These experiences gave us a shared vocabulary, a clear understanding of what needed to be done, and a framework in which to see our work," she said.

Over the next two years, the team elevated their internal organizing, leveraging COVID-19

protocols by meeting regularly online. They were also spurred on by continued disrespect from their employer.

"Without the internal organizing framework, we might have been merely another group of workers, complaining," Kaminker said. "Our understanding of the work to be done transformed those complaints into solidarity and collective purpose."

"VIRL members' job action was strategic and coordinated, and a true display of solidarity in action - not just amongst themselves but with the community they serve and the labour movement in which they are connected," said Component 7 Vice-President, Joanna Lord.

Ultimately, said Kaminker, the way to win isn't easy or quick, but it is simple "organize, organize, organize. This work takes patience, and persistence. It takes compassion. It takes commitment. This is what built our strike."

Read Kaminker's blog post in full at [www.bcgeu.ca/virlstory](http://www.bcgeu.ca/virlstory)

# PUBLIC SECTOR BARGAINING 2022 UPDATE

The BCGEU is the first of many public sector unions to bargain with the government in 2022. In total, almost 400,000 public sector workers have agreements that will, or already have, expire this year. Tens of thousands of BCGEU members are involved in the negotiating process, in addition to members who work directly for the B.C. public service. (This information was correct as of our publication date.)

## **B.C. Public Service**

We've not yet concluded a new collective agreement for our union's largest sector of members. The B.C. public service, with around 33,000 members, began bargaining in February. Surveys conducted last fall showed that members want a fair and equitable contract that addresses inflation and recognizes how critically important public service workers are.

In late June, public service members voted nearly 95 per cent in favour of giving their bargaining committee a strike mandate to stand strong behind members' demands. It was the largest strike vote in BCGEU history.

This resounding strike vote has buoyed members in other bargaining units. It has sent a message of solidarity to hundreds of thousands of other public sector workers who are, or soon will be, in bargaining including staff at addiction treatment centres, group homes, community health, seniors' care, homes for persons with developmental disabilities, and more. A win for the BCGEU's public service members would be a win for every public sector worker in B.C.

Negotiations resumed for a few days in late June, but broke off quickly, after the public service agency (PSA) - on behalf of the government - tabled an offer that amounts to a pay cut for members and refused to discuss any counter-proposals. This only leaves us with the option to bargain with ourselves - an option we won't take.

Cost of living adjustments (COLA) are key to ratifying an agreement. These protections allow wages in the agreement to adjust based on cost of living increases. They have become a key issue for all workers and their unions, with other unions engaged in the same fight with similar goals.

COLA is a reasonable demand and affordable under the province's fiscal framework. MLAs of all parties and minimum wage earners already have wage increases tied to inflation. Anything less than cost-of-living protections amounts to a wage cut. No worker should be expected to take a wage cut.

Your bargaining committees appreciate the hundreds of comments and feedback you have sent us about holding our ground in bargaining. It's time to stop playing games. We want government to roll up their sleeves and send their bargaining team back to the table with the mandate to negotiate a fair deal that meets your needs.

## **Health Sciences Bargaining**

The 2,200 BCGEU members who work in health sciences are among 19,000 workers in this sector who function as social program officers, environmental health officers, public health inspectors, recreation therapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists and more. At the bargaining table, they're part of a multi-union association of five unions led by the Health Sciences Association who bargain with the Health Employers Association of Brit-

ish Columbia (HEABC)

Bargaining began in February with the unions proposing a variety of issues, such as workload, understaffing, health and safety (including psychological safety), equality to job classifications comparable pay to other provinces, overtime pay and shift premiums, improved vacation and wages.

Bargaining will resume in the fall.

### Health Facilities Bargaining

Bargaining began in the spring and has continued through the summer. More than 200 proposals were tabled, and steady progress was made to address workload, health and safety and barriers that stand in the way of worker recruitment and career advancement. A sticking point, as with other public sector bargaining tables, has been a wage increase that addresses the rising cost of living.

### Community Health Bargaining

Our union is the lead member of the Community Bargaining Association (CBA) Negotiating Committee, which includes seven other unions. The committee is negotiating a new agreement for over 21,000 workers in the community health sector across the province. This table bargained from February until late June and made progress toward reaching an agreement on issues around mobility, overtime, modified work hours and other non-monetary items.

Bargaining will resume in September to discuss classifications, health and safety, wages, and benefit funding.

### Community Social Services

The Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA) represents unionized workers in the community social services sector, and bargains with the Community Social Services Employers Association (CSSEA). The negotiating committee represents nine unions, with BCGEU representing the majority of community social services workers with 11,000 members out of 17,000 across the province.

The collective agreements for all three sub-sectors expired March 31, 2022.

Bargaining began in February 2022 and additional dates are scheduled in August and September to discuss issues members identified as priorities, including: equitable wages, addressing recruitment and retention, health and safety, mental health supports, improved working conditions, and Indigenous recognition and reconciliation.

### Post-Secondary Bargaining

Post-secondary bargaining involves around 4,800 technical and trades instructors and administrative professionals at post-secondary institutions across B.C. They include Camosun College, Coast Mountain College, Douglas College, Justice Institute of BC, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Northern Lights College, Okanagan College, Selkirk College, and Vancouver Island University.

The instructors' bargaining committee tabled their monetary demands in February and March 2022 but, due to summer slowdowns and the employer association's lack of a mandate from government, the committee has not yet received a response from the employer.

The administrative staff's bargaining committee agreed with the employer in June to negotiate a common agreement for seven relevant units and is hoping to begin bargaining in August. Their common table will negotiate first, followed by local tables. The collective agreement expired June 30, which means all BCGEU members employed in the public sector now have expired agreements.

## DON'T BE A STRANGER: WHY UPDATING YOUR MEMBER CONTACT IS SO IMPORTANT

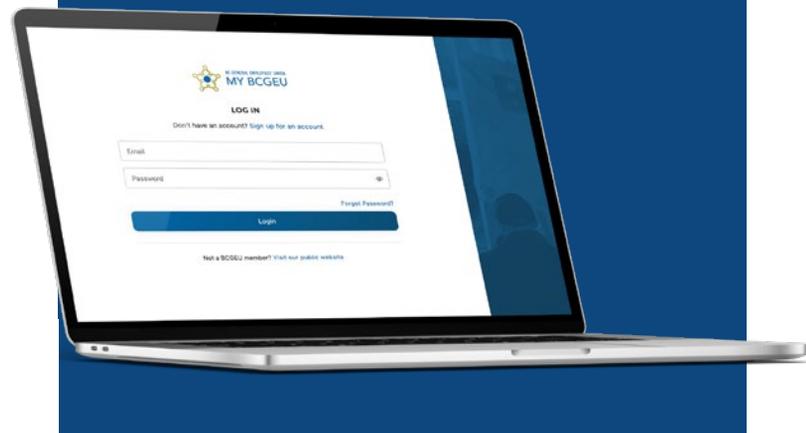
It's important that members are set up to receive important bargaining updates to their current contact info. Have you logged into the member portal and updated your contact information with BCGEU yet? If not, visit [portal.bcgcu.ca/login](https://portal.bcgcu.ca/login) today.

We know - filling out forms is a pain, but we promise that it will only take one minute of your time, which isn't much when you consider the lasting effect good member data has on our mobilizing efforts. Streamlining BCGEU's contact collection has been critical to a successful strike vote turnout with the public service, and it's going to serve us in all our bargaining and campaigning moving forward.

A union cannot organize effectively without up-to-date contact information for all members. At the BCGEU, our power is our numbers so being able to quickly contact as many members as possible is key. It's how we maintain democracy and build a more unified labour movement.

Centralized data is never a replacement for your own networks. Informal lines of communication at the workplace and in the lunchroom, plus over text and email, will always be the best way to grow solidarity because these conversations are forged from trust and shared experiences. But centralized data is a must for mass communications, for building momentum across worksites, industries, and cities, and for ensuring everyone has their say through surveys, petitions and more.

Job action - whether strikes, strike votes, information at pickets, button days, or neighbourhood leafletting - are the result of days, weeks, months, and sometimes years of preparation and education. For a union as big as ours, which boasts over 85,000 members, mobilizing takes highly strategic and consistent messaging. It also requires our Membership Records department having your personal contact information, rather than work contacts, because employers often block union emails sent to your work email address during bargaining disputes. So, get involved, get informed, and log-in to the member portal to update your information today.





# BREAKING NEWS: BC PUBLIC SERVICE JOB ACTION!

Just as this issue of The Provincial was going to press, BCGEU members in the public service bargaining unit issued 72-hour strike notice and begin picketing four BC Liquor Distribution Branch warehouse worksites in Delta, Richmond, Kamloops and Victoria on Monday, Aug. 15.

Our union had hoped to avoid a strike, but it became clear that job action was necessary to win what members have told our bargaining committee they needed in their collective agreement: protecting wages from the rising cost-of-living.

The government's most recent wage proposal failed to meaningfully protect wages. Asking members to accept wages far behind the rate of inflation amounts to a wage cut.

These members are leading the way for all public sector negotiations in B.C., and gains won in their agreement will set the standard for other sectoral agreements that are bargaining now.

Visit [www.bcgeu.ca](http://www.bcgeu.ca) to find out how you can support your fellow members who are on strike, and please keep an eye on your email for future updates.







**Nigel Keenan,**  
**Conversion Specialist at BC Place**  
Local 1703

Nigel Keenan is a shop steward, an OHS committee member and was also on the bargaining committee in the most recent round of bargaining with the BC Pavilion Corporation. Their bargaining unit represents most of the workers at BC Place and the Vancouver Convention Centre – excluding food services and talent.

As a conversion specialist, Keenan helps convert BC Place between events. This can be a big job, sometimes with less than 24 hours to transform the field from a setup for a sporting event to a trade show.

Wages were a central issue at the bargaining table this round – particularly for event time staff who had fallen behind other event-based employers. Members were also hoping to put stronger limits on the employers’ ability to contract-out. Although the bargaining process took a long time, members held to their demands through mediation, and successfully ratified a new contract this spring.

“It’s about working together and strength in numbers,” Keenan said. “When we all pull together, we can improve things for everyone in the union.”

**Mabel Peter,**  
**Native Courtworker**  
Local 703

Mabel Peter has been a courtworker in Duncan for 13 years, where she works with Indigenous people to navigate the criminal justice system. She is a member of the Cowichan Tribes and is thankful to work on their lands. Her bargaining unit works in courts across the province and also includes some councillors and detox workers.

Peter was a member of her bargaining committee for the first-time last fall, where she and her committee were able to ratify a new agreement that included wage increases and paid wellness days. There is also improved language for resolving workplace conflicts, such as bullying and harassment, that is more specific to them, an Indigenous organization. This is something Peter said that she really wanted to see.

“I really believe that alternative resolutions and having other ways to deal with issues are typically better because it gives you more leeway,” she said.





## Donna Kluz, Child and Youth Mental Health Clinician

Local 604

Donna Kluz has worked for the Ministry of Children and Family Development for over 20 years, providing no-cost mental health treatment and assessment to children and youth aged zero to 18. Clinicians like her also work with families. It's a specialized service that is critical in many communities. However, one thing Kluz worries about is recruitment and retention in her ministry, as the cost-of-living skyrockets and wages in the public service stay flat.

"A lot of clinicians, especially the young ones that are just coming on, they're seeing opportunities with better pay, better benefits and other positions," Kluz said, noting that clinicians can also make substantially more by going into private practice. "So, we're finding it challenging not only to find experienced people, but to find people at all."

"The services that BCGEU members provide, in particular, child and youth mental health - are integral to the wellness of the community," she said. "So, it would be really nice to be acknowledged for that."



## Kate Banky, Residential Support Worker

Local 301

Kate Banky has been a shop steward at Victoria Cool Aid Society for a few years and was recently elected chair of her local. According to Banky, short staffing is a root cause of many workplace issues in the mental health and addictions sector. In one instance, Banky recalls that a colleague had to cover four different buildings that would normally be run by four separate staff, plus auxiliaries. Even in impossible situations like this, she and her coworkers feel the weight and responsibility of ensuring clients stay safe. That sense of responsibility makes it harder to take breaks, or even to turn down shifts - compounding issues of burnout and staff turnover.

Banky is thankful to have a great group of fellow stewards with her. Last summer they organized to update member contact lists across all their worksites - a critical task when staff turnover is high.

"I find in this field, all of us want to advocate for other people, but we sort of forget to advocate for ourselves," Banky said. "I hope like I can be that person for my coworkers sometimes - looking out for their needs, making sure they take their breaks, and are respected and protected."



# VICTORY! WORKERS AT OUR PLACE SOCIETY VOTE TO JOIN BCGEU

When someone in Victoria needs help, without fail, Hannah Komadina and her coworkers are there.

"Through the opioid epidemic – we've shown up. Through the housing crisis – we've shown up. Through COVID-19 – we've shown up," says Hannah, the team lead for Tiny Town, a transitional housing community made entirely of shipping containers and managed by Our Place Society (OPS).

The unrelenting compassion of the OPS team is undeniable, but it raises a question: Who shows up for the front lines when they need support? Thanks to the recent organizing effort at OPS, the answer is clearer. Like a wave that grows from its own internal thrust forward, these workers have committed to supporting one another, so they can keep showing up for clients, stronger than ever.

And that's saying a lot because staff already give themselves fully to the job. Working across 10 sites, they provide housing and support services, including hot meals, education, and more to the most vulnerable in their community – often under distressing and difficult circumstances.

Their story is common in the non-profit sector, where workers often provide endless community care while the employer often gives little back to staff, who assume all the front-line risk. For over a decade, OPS employees have been trying to disrupt this narrative by organizing their union.

"It's one thing to hear daily that another coworker has experienced an unsafe work environment, was unfairly overlooked for a promotion or raise, or was told that their issue was not important," says Komadina, "it's another to be able to tell them that their issues do matter and they have the right to do something about it, and we did!"

Health issues, safety concerns, and dangerously low staffing levels are just some of the rocky crags the new members have crashed up against for years. This ongoing battle became unbearable when an employee was assaulted at a drop-in centre. Staff appealed to the employer for better safety measures. Instead of responding with an effective plan to protect the staff, OPS resolved to close the centre without introducing any systemic changes.

Komadina and her coworkers realized they'd have to create the change themselves. After months of organizing, the staff voted to join BCGEU.

"This win means that the OPS will finally be held accountable to uphold a safer and healthier environment," she says. "It means that each and every employee is respected as more than just a body filling a shift."

Solution-oriented and aspirational, the organizing drive was worker-led. Stacked with dynamic leaders, the organizing committee empowered fellow workers to share ideas and concerns, reminding them that they have a voice.

They join over 500 fellow BCGEU members in the industry around Victoria, including staff at the Victoria Cool Aid Society, Beacon Community Services, and the Salvation Army, who together, represent a burgeoning movement of workers seeking justice in workplaces that desperately need union representation.

The BCGEU is proud to lead the way in welcoming community social service workers to the labour movement because every worker deserves a safe, respectful work environment. That's the power and protection of a union and we're thrilled to welcome Our Place workers to the BCGEU family.

## NEW MEMBERS IN 2022

### Beacon Community Services

Community social services (CSS), (Victoria, Sidney, and Salt Spring Island)

### Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Vancouver (Men's Shelter)

CSS, Supports men in social service programs (Vancouver)

### Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society

CSS, supports immigrant, visible minority, refugee and women without immigration status (Lower Mainland)

### AgeCare - Cariboo Place

Retirement and nursing home services (Williams Lake)

### Elements Casino Victoria

Casino (Victoria)

# Audited financial statements



Every year, we publish the audited financial statements of the union in *The Provincial*, to ensure our finances are available and transparent. This year's statements confirm our strong fiscal health, and should give confidence in our ability to deliver the programs, services and bargaining necessary to meet the needs of our expanding membership.

As usual, we should remind ourselves that the real strength of our union is in our ability to take collective action, and to win and defend meaningful improvements for working people across the province. It is a great benefit to have strong finances, but more important are the many members who volunteer as shop stewards, occupational health and safety representatives, and who stand for elected office to serve the union.

The net effect of the pandemic has been a significant annual budget surplus as in-person meetings have fallen to record lows. Shop steward and other training has fallen considerably, and it will be imperative that savings realized during the pandemic are harnessed to provide additional options as in-person meetings become more common.

Bargaining has been a top priority, and I'm proud to confirm we were able to allocate \$4million of last year's surplus to advertisements and polling to support the broader public sector bargaining objectives across multiple tables. It remains important that our significant surpluses from the 2021 budget, visible in these statements, be recycled into accomplishing our objectives. To put it simply, these are not idle funds to accumulate in surplus, and these dollars will be put to work for the members throughout 2022 and beyond.

With our union responsible for such significant holdings, it's important to overview the controls we have established in recent years, including proper governance practice. In this regard, the amendment of our constitution to create a human resources and governance standing committee by our last convention is a dramatic

improvement. We have aligned our meeting schedules on a quarterly basis, and standardized reporting frameworks to ensure we have better reporting measurements to understand the quality and quantity of services being delivered to members.

Our finance committee has fully adapted to carrying out internal audit functions, and we have two internal audit positions as well as two procurement management roles. Collectively, these positions pay for themselves in the value they generate across the union, aiding internal accountability and maintaining efficient standards.

The executive committee has retained its delegated role as trustees of the union's finances, overseeing investment risk and participating in twice-yearly investment analysis training overseen and conducted by myself and staff. Our portfolio continues to provide superior returns, and remains divested from fossil fuels. We continue to operate a capital stewardship program from our Canadian equities, filing shareholder motions at annual general meetings and voting at meetings.

We have significantly reformed the ownership structure of our buildings. For years, members have seen our "Solidarity Holdings" statements, showing ownership in part of our buildings. These statements were confusing at best, and the ownership structure itself lent to confusion from members on its role and purpose. We have therefore abolished this model, and moved to a single holding entity as the shareholder of all our properties, which are contained in bare trusts. The union is the beneficial owner of those properties.

For our new building project, to fulfill some of the requirements for construction financing we have created a non-profit society beneficially owned by the union. Upon completion of our affordable housing, responsibility for assigning units will be removed from visibility or control by the union, to avoid the obvious and unacceptable conflicts of interest that would otherwise arise.

We have consciously chosen to keep substantial reserves in a cash position in anticipation of strike action, and to increase our available credit facilities in the event we need to deploy strike pay in advance of withdrawing from our investments. At the conclusion of major bargaining, we will ensure that cash is properly invested.

Our staffing has exceeded the pace of our membership growth, especially in front line and field servicing. Among provincial government unions, our staffing levels far exceed peers. This has enabled a good ratio of staff representatives to members, as well as leverage our size to create specialized departments such as expanding our occupational health and safety activities. The union now employs over 300 regular full time equivalent positions.

Finally, it is crucial to emphasize that the surpluses we have seen during the pandemic are not structural but temporary, and we will soon move back to spending close to our entire annual dues allotment on operations and servicing the membership. As treasurer, my commitment to all of you is to continue to implement governance reforms that best steward and safeguard our considerable assets, and ensuring that the temporary surpluses we have accrued during the pandemic are put to quick and good use in the service of our members.

In Solidarity,

**Paul Finch**  
Treasurer

OPEN SUNDAYS  
OPEN HOLIDAYS  
EXTENDED HOURS

# SHOP PUBLIC

WHERE YOU SHOP  
DOES MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE

**BC LIQUORSTORES**  
**BC CANNABIS STORES**

