

Healthcare Privatization Not a Good Deal for Taxpayers

Health PEI and some members of the current government are saying that as long as the taxpayer funds healthcare privatization it is ok. However, I argue that healthcare privatization is too expensive and is not a good deal for taxpayers.

UPSE recently obtained a report from Health PEI on the number of private travel *Licensed Practical Nurses* (LPNs) hired. The report from the Employer reflected 52 travel LPN contracts. Respecting that private contracts are protected from FOIPP, the high benchmark for travel LPNs is approximately \$100/hour which can include travel, accommodations and daily per diems. Public healthcare LPNs who are members of UPSE make \$31.59/hr. Travel LPNs are being paid three times more than public/UPSE LPNs. That is an approximate discrepancy of \$60/hour. Based on a week's work, the travel LPN will make \$2,250 more per week, \$9,000 more per month, and \$117,000 more per year. As President of UPSE, it is hard for me to justify the use of private travel LPNs making these exorbitant wages while completing the same duties as my members. This is not affordable nor is it sustainable. Further, using private nurses is a clear violation of our collective agreement with Health PEI.

I met with some of UPSE's Allied members, specifically social workers, on December 19, 2024. The concern was regarding remuneration. Social workers can make \$130 per hour in the private sector by billing the province, which is approximately \$80 more per hour than social workers receive working in the public sector. As a result, many social workers are leaving the public sector. The province needs to increase the public sector pay to reasonable levels to maintain its staffing complement.

Another significant area of privatization is home care services. In 2022, UPSE was approached by the Employer regarding a pilot project for providing self-managed care. The pilot was one service in each county. The Employer did not advise the union of the pilot's success, concerns, expansion, or elimination. It was reported to the Union that the program has had expedited growth, ballooning to approximately 150 families, spending over \$5 million and all monies provided to private entities. UPSE is not opposed to enhancing home care services, but the union is opposed to the privatization of this service. In a review of the reported spending (over \$5,000,000) for this program, the Employer could have created 100 permanent or temporary full-time public positions to enhance homecare services for island residents.

Health PEI should focus on improving public healthcare for Islanders where there is more accountability, transparency, and a qualified documented level of care. The public deserves access to clear information regarding the quality, costs, and treatment outcomes of healthcare services. Privatization undermines these principles and leaves taxpayers in the dark. Rather than relying on

privatization to fill gaps in our healthcare system, we believe that investing in public sector staff and addressing wage disparities would create a more stable and sustainable workforce. This approach is ultimately more cost-effective and accountable to the taxpayers.

Karen Jackson,

UPSE President