

## Conference Works to Grow, Unite Health Care Sector

The 2018 Health Care Conference opened with clear goals: to unify the diverse sector, build stronger locals, and expand bargaining power through organizing.

Nearly 200 union leaders and activists came to Lexington, Ky., this week, energized and ready to start tackling these challenges.

“Today we have approximately 50,000 health care members, about 6,000 in Canada, but we have to do better because we are a health care union,” said International Vice President Fred Redmond, who oversees bargaining in the health care sector. “We are a union that has never walked away from a fight.”

Members attended sessions teaching them about their workplace rights, how to do strategic research to build stronger contracts and how to engage elected officials to press for better workplace safety laws.

### Striking similarities

Attendees also discovered that despite the remarkable diversity of the sector, which includes all aspects of the industry from direct patient care to the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals, labs, billing, first response and more, they share a great deal in common.

Namely, they are almost all being asked to do more with less, leading to disruptions of work-life balance, high rates of burnout, and one of the highest rates of workplace violence of any industry.

“It’s important to see that no matter what district or country, everyone has the same issues with staffing and face the same things in negotiations we do,” said Renee Bacany, an RN and chief shop steward for Local 4-200 at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J.

“Across the board, staffing is the biggest problem,” said Misty Lafond, an LPN and unit chair in Local 1-207, who works in the Youville Home, a long-term care facility in St. Albert, Alberta, “and in the end it’s the employee that pays the price, not the employer.”

### Council revitalized

This was the first Health Care Conference since the formation of the health care council’s steering committee, whose members helped set the agenda for the conference.

The coordinator position was the result of a resolution at the 2017 Constitutional Convention, which charged each district director with appointing a staff and member coordinator to represent the district.

The group first met last December in Pittsburgh.

“It was good to meet our health care coordinator,” said Alex Castro, recording secretary of local 14459 and a non-management laboratory supervisor at Norton Community Hospital in Norton, Va. “It’s important that we’re linking our health care locals together.”

In addition to helping outline the top priorities for the conference, several member-coordinators, taught classes and served on panels so that the information was truly sector specific.

“We all have to work together to come up with a solution to problems like short staffing and safety,” said Deana Hughes, a radiologic technician at Essentia Health in Hayward Wis.. “If we don’t make a plan, nothing’s going to get done.”

*For more in-depth coverage of the 2018 Health Care Conference, check out next month’s issue of the union’s magazine, [USW@Work](#).*

## Protect Those Who Save Lives

Saturday, April 28, is Workers’ Memorial Day, a day to honor those workers who lost their lives on the job and reflect on how to make our workplaces safer.

Health care workers face some of the highest rates of workplace violence of any industry, and they regularly confront everything from verbal abuse to deadly injuries, largely from their patients.

To commemorate Workers’ Memorial Day, International President Leo W. Gerard this week devoted his blog to

demanding stricter national laws to protect health care workers.

“In the case of health care workers, who are more likely to suffer violence on that job than those in any other profession,” wrote Gerard, “we must fight like hell for a federal safety standard to ensure that more of them return home after a day’s work without broken bones, bruises, bite marks or gunshot wounds.”

To read the full blog, [click here](#).



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