



United Nurses  
of Alberta

An introduction to

**United Nurses of Alberta**

## **UNA: The union for Alberta's nurses**

Working for improvements  
for nurses, our profession, our  
patients, our residents and  
clients, and all Albertans

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# United Nurses of Alberta

## your workplace representative

United Nurses of Alberta is the union for more than 25,000 Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses and allied workers in Alberta.

Since 1977, UNA has been an effective advocate for nurses, the nursing profession and Canada’s fair and efficient public health care system.

UNA represents nurses in bargaining, in their profession, and in disputes with employers and professional licensing bodies.

UNA is deeply committed to member democracy. It is affiliated with the Canadian labour movement through membership in the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, and through CFNU with the Canadian Labour Congress and the Alberta Federation of Labour. Membership in these organizations helps UNA work more effectively on your behalf.



## What UNA does for nurses

UNA provides a wide range of services to its members. A key role is negotiating the excellent Collective Agreements that regulate salaries, benefits, schedules and working conditions of members.

UNA also administers its agreements to resolve disputes, improve working conditions and protect nurses' workplace rights. The union's professional staff represent members before Labour Relations Board hearings, professional bodies' disciplinary meetings and other quasi-judicial groups.

## How UNA is financed

UNA is financed by all of us – members who benefit from UNA's collective agreements. Each of us pays 1.3 per cent of our gross monthly income in tax-deductible union dues. Budgets are subject to approval by democratically elected delegates to the Annual General Meeting.

When they start to work at a UNA worksite, most nurses sign a membership card as soon as possible. This gives them power to vote on important matters and influence the direction of their union.

Those who choose not to join still have to pay dues, because the courts in Canada have determined all employees in a unionized workforce benefit from their union's collective agreements, services and achievements. In return, the union is legally responsible for providing fair representation for everyone in the workforce, members and non-members alike.

# UNA's approach to collective bargaining

Bargaining collective agreements is UNA's most important job. This is because the agreements we negotiate with employers govern the pay, benefits and working conditions of all UNA members.

A collective agreement is a legally binding contract between a union, negotiating on behalf of a group of employees, and an employer. Typically, collective agreements set out such things as wages, scheduling rules, overtime pay, sick leave, job security, benefits and other employee rights.

Since it was founded, UNA has negotiated collective agreements that have greatly improved salaries, benefits and workplace conditions for all members. UNA has more than quintupled the wages of Alberta nurses since it was founded. In 1977, a new nurse earned only \$6.28 an hour!

## Members set UNA's bargaining priorities

Before the expiry date of any UNA collective agreement, affected members can attend "demand setting meetings" at which the locals determine their bargaining proposals.

This is the process through which UNA's members democratically decide their priorities in bargaining. UNA's negotiating committees, the people who actually meet with the employer's representatives at the bargaining table, are made up of working members of the union, elected by their co-workers to represent them.

## UNA members vote on their agreements

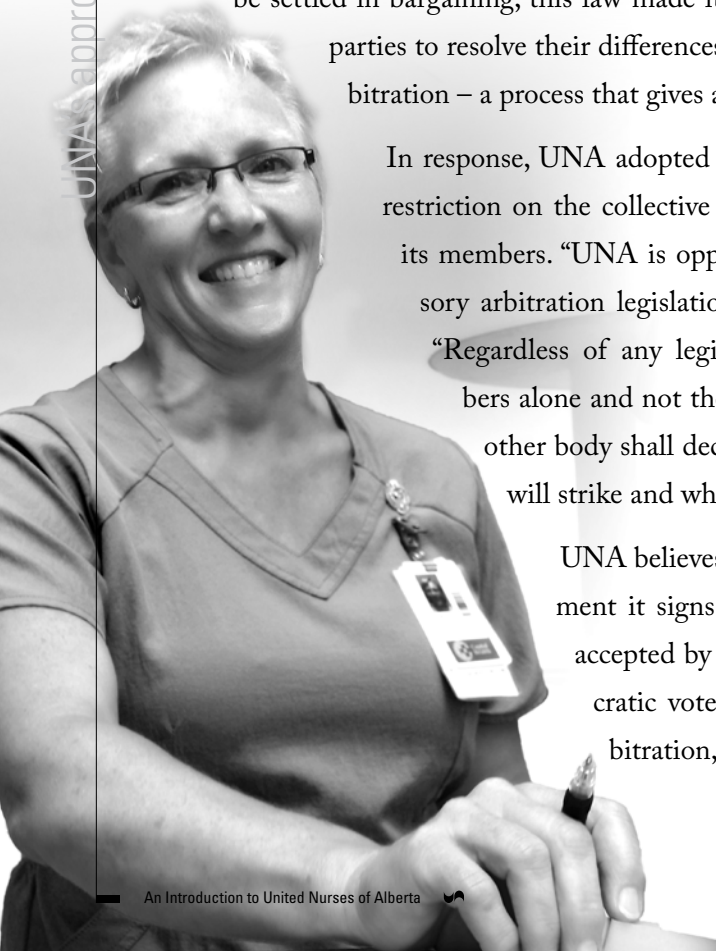
No UNA agreement takes effect before the members whose working lives it governs have the opportunity to discuss and ratify it in a democratic vote. Province-wide agreements like the contract with Alberta Health Services must be subject to a vote of all affected members, and must be passed by a majority of both members and locals.

## Are strikes by nurses legal?

In 1983, the Alberta Legislature passed a law making it illegal for hospital employees, including nurses, to strike. If a dispute couldn't be settled in bargaining, this law made it compulsory for the parties to resolve their differences through binding arbitration – a process that gives an edge to employers.

In response, UNA adopted a policy against this restriction on the collective bargaining rights of its members. “UNA is opposed to any compulsory arbitration legislation,” the policy states. “Regardless of any legislation, UNA members alone and not the government or any other body shall decide when this union will strike and when it will not.”

UNA believes any collective agreement it signs must be voluntarily accepted by members in a democratic vote, not imposed by arbitration, or any law or ruling.



# Professional Responsibility Committees

## Protecting both nurses and patients

Patient advocacy is a key responsibility of all nurses. UNA achieves this crucial goal through joint employer-union Professional Responsibility Committees (PRCs).



This process, included in UNA's collective agreements, gives nurses the opportunity to raise concerns such as safe staffing levels and the assurance patient care is delivered by skilled practitioners and to demand that employers respond to them.

## Filing a Professional Responsibility Concern

Sometimes, the only way to effectively advocate for our patients is to file a Professional Responsibility form. Every time an unsafe or unprofessional practice or setting is created or permitted by the employer, a PRC should be filed.

If you need to file a PRC form, your Local Executive has a copy of the necessary paperwork.

If the issue cannot be resolved, UNA has the contractual right to present PRC concerns to your employer's CEO, or to a designate. Finally, if it still remains unresolved, UNA has the right to make a formal presentation to the employer's Governing Board.

More information about Professional Responsibility and PRC forms can be found in your Collective Agreement and on the UNA website – [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca) .

# Occupational Health & Safety for UNA members

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Nursing is not only a demanding profession, it is a hazardous one.

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Because of the unpredictable nature of our work, nurses face among the highest rates of work-related injury and illness. Alberta Workers Compensation Board statistics show working in health care is more dangerous than working in such industries as mining and petroleum extraction!

UNA takes workplace safety extremely seriously and has formed Occupational Health and Safety Committees to ensure employers provide healthy and safe working environments. We view this as not only an essential protection of the wellbeing of our members, but as a vital protection of the quality of care received by our patients. We recognize safe and competent care cannot be provided in an unhealthy or unsafe workplace.

## The Role of a UNA OH&S Committee

UNA Locals' OH&S Committees strive to represent nurses in matters related to health and safety in their workplaces, monitor working conditions and practices to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, provide a formal process for recommendations to eliminate hazards and ensure compliance with legislation, plus provide a systematic way to solve problems and eliminate safety concerns of nurses.



Most UNA Collective Agreements include provisions that allow health and safety concerns not resolved by the OH&S Committee to be taken to a higher level of management.

## Filing an Occupational Health & Safety complaint

The most effective way to deal with any concern about workplace health or safety hazards is to file a formal Occupational Health & Safety complaint. Any instance of an occupational hazard, abuse or illness should be dealt with through a complaint to your Local OH&S Committee.

If the committee cannot resolve the issue, it can be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

If UNA is not satisfied with the result of the meeting with the CEO, the agreement gives us the right to present the issue and union recommendations to the Governing Board.

More information about OH&S can be found in your Collective Agreement and on the UNA website – [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca).



## **Grievances: The most effective way to right a workplace wrong**

All UNA collective agreements are designed to protect your rights in the workplace.

Our agreements contain provisions clearly stating that if employees believe they are being disciplined, they are entitled to the representation of a workplace Local representative. If you think you are being disciplined by a supervisor or manager, you have the right to insist that a union representative be present.

The grievance procedure is the main way UNA resolves the concerns of employees it represents. If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or have any concern about your workplace, you should immediately contact your Local Representative or a UNA Labour Relations Officer.

When in doubt, call your union!

More information about the grievance process can be found in your Collective Agreement and on the UNA website – [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca)

# How UNA Works

Democracy is the foundation of the United Nurses of Alberta. UNA members make the decisions, setting their union's priorities and actions. They chart the direction in collective bargaining, and approve the results.

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As a large organization with more than 25,000 members spread across Alberta, UNA also requires effective administrative structures to do its job.

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## Locals & Districts

For administrative purposes, UNA is divided into Locals, each with its own executive and bylaws. UNA's Locals represent members in their own workplaces. As of 2012, there were more than 165 Locals throughout Alberta, one in virtually every hospital and health centre. Locals range in size from well over 2,000 members to fewer than a dozen.

## Districts

Locals are grouped into five geographically based districts – North, North Central, Central, South Central and South. Presidents of UNA Locals attend regular District Meetings where they share information, compare challenges and develop strategies.



## Executive Board

District Representatives from each of the five Districts sit on UNA's Provincial Executive Board. They are elected at UNA's Annual General Meeting. Districts are allocated one representative on the Provincial Executive Board for every 1,500 dues-paying members with a minimum of two representatives for each District. The Board is the union's decision-making body between Annual General Meetings.

## Provincial Executive Officers

UNA has four Provincial Executive Officers, the President, the 1st and 2nd Vice-Presidents and the Secretary-Treasurer. The Executive Officers and the District Representatives make up the Provincial Executive Board. The Executive Officers direct the union between Board meetings.

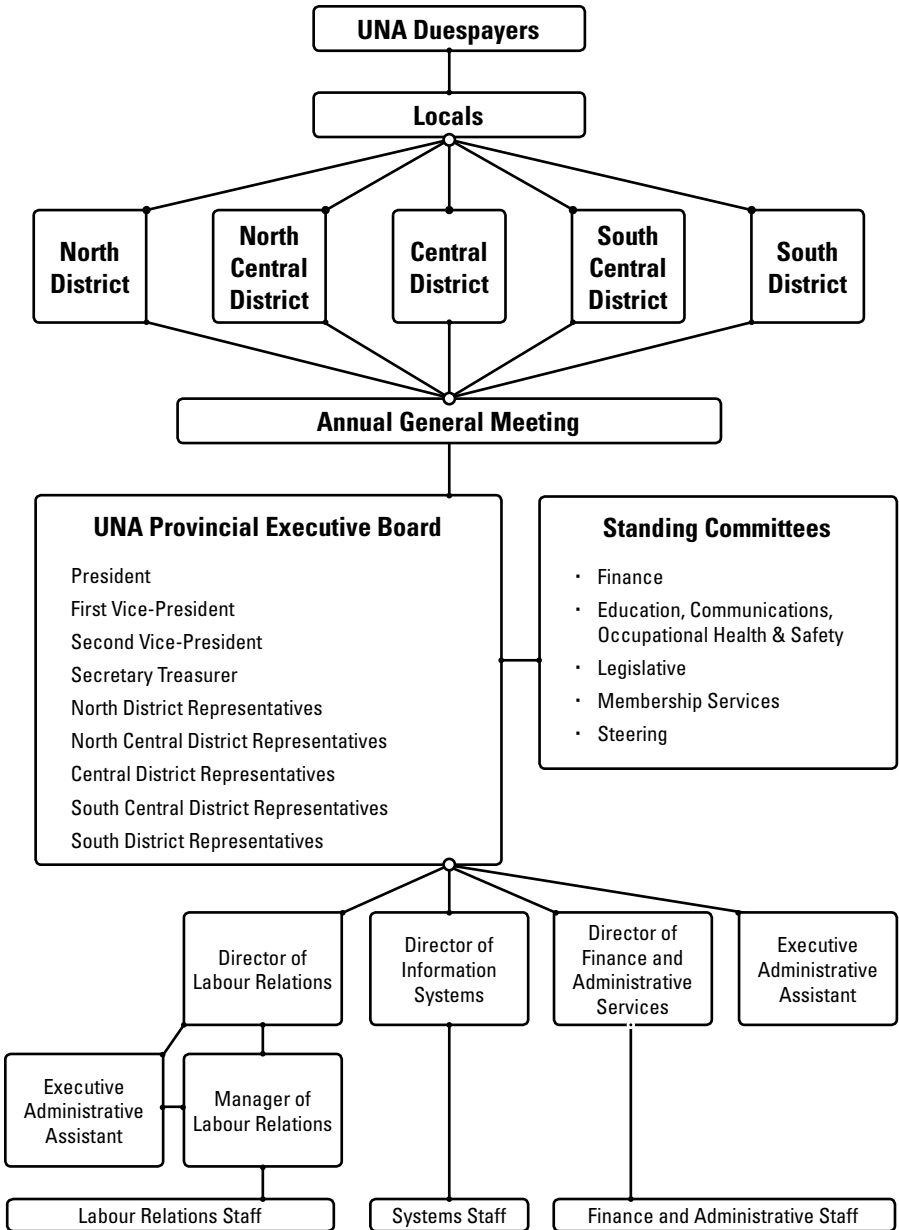
## Constitution

UNA's Constitution contains the rules by which our union is governed. The UNA Constitution may only be amended by a vote of two-thirds of the delegates present and voting at the union's Annual General Meeting.

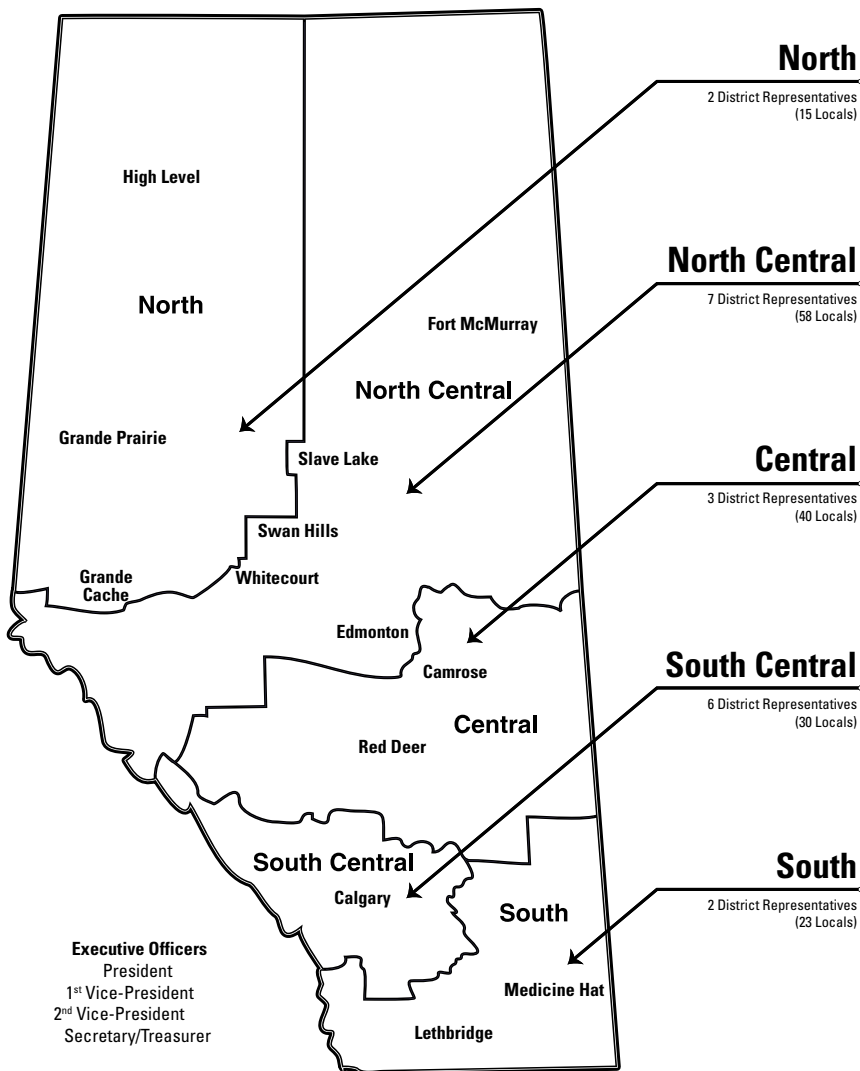
## Annual General Meeting

UNA's ultimate governing body is its Annual General Meeting. At the AGM, policies are established, the budget is determined and officers are elected by delegates.

# Organizational Structure



# District Map



# Communications and Education

## Communications

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UNA strives to keep its members connected through effective communication. We do so because informed and empowered members are the key to success and strength.

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### UNA-Net – instant communications

UNA was the first union in Canada to create an on-line computer network for Locals and members. Through FirstClass online conferences, UNA provides discussion forums on topics important to the union and to nurses at the Local, District and Provincial levels. Every member is eligible to participate in UNA-Net at no cost.

UNA-Net's FirstClass discussion forums are used by nurses to discuss everything from nursing practice issues to detailed questions about UNA's agreements.

### UNA on the Web – [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca)

UNA's website, [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca), is where members and non-members alike can access information about the union, the latest news and background materials. Members can access FirstClass through the website.



## UNA on social media – Facebook and Twitter

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have also proved to be effective communication tools for UNA members. With several thousand members, UNA's Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/UnitedNurses](http://www.facebook.com/UnitedNurses) offers an online platform where UNA can provide up-to-date information on health care and nursing in Alberta, as well as labour relations issues. Plus, anyone can follow UNA on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/UnitedNurses](http://www.twitter.com/UnitedNurses). For video updates, visit UNA's page on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/UnitedNursesAlberta](http://www.youtube.com/UnitedNursesAlberta).

Since social media sites are wide open to public scrutiny, UNA advises members who use social media to comment responsibly and remember they are still responsible for what they say.

## NewsBulletin

UNA's NewsBulletin is published several times a year and sent to all members. The publication contains news of members' activities, plenty of photos, information on union initiatives, occupational health and safety and our collective agreements.

## Education

UNA believes a strong union is built by informed and active members. Accordingly, UNA has an active union education program to provide materials and interactive workshops on labour relations and nursing issues.

UNA offers workshops on workplace rights, including professional responsibility, stopping nurse abuse, health and safety, running a local, dealing with media and many other topics.



## Liability: The Canadian Nurses Protective Society and UNA

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From time to time, nurses may face serious issues of nursing liability.

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If you are named in a patient complaint, civil lawsuit, fatality inquiry or complaint under the Protection of Persons in Care Act, or if you are involved in a serious issue at work and are contacted by your employer's lawyer, UNA is your first line of defence. You need to contact UNA as quickly as possible.

In addition to UNA, Registered Nurses may also contact the Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS), and Registered Psychiatric Nurses may contact the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses.

The CNPS<sup>®</sup> is a not-for-profit society that offers legal advice and assistance, risk-management services and professional liability protection to eligible RNs. Contact both UNA and CNPS when an unusual incident takes place that involves harm or serious consequences.

To contact the CNPS: call 1-800-267-3390 or email [info@cnps.ca](mailto:info@cnps.ca). For more information on the CNPS, visit the organization's website, [www.cnps.ca](http://www.cnps.ca).

## Checklist for new nurses and UNA members

In conclusion, when you start with a new employer, it's easy to forget some of the important things you need to do in a timely way. Here's a checklist for new UNA members of the important things you need to keep in mind when you start with a new employer:

- Sign a UNA membership application. Get a say in your union!
- Attend your UNA Local's meetings. It's the best way to learn about your union.
- Be aware of your UNA Local number and your seniority date.
- Give your new employer a copy of your degree or diploma, plus all nursing certificates, to ensure you receive applicable educational allowances.
- Maximize your income by getting an extra 2% pay through an RRSP paid by the employer. (For more information, review Article 29.05 of the Provincial Collective Agreement.)
- Remember when you are hired or transferred, your employer is required to provide you with a "letter of hire" that details your position.
- Check your pay slips to ensure you are receiving the correct pay, increment, vacation accrual, overtime, shift premiums and allowances. Keep these records for five years.

- Don't work for free! Ensure you are paid for all the hours you work and that your employer has the information it needs to budget properly. If your employer withholds pay or does not comply with the agreement, contact UNA.
- Get a copy of your Collective Agreement from your employer. The topical index at the back can help you find details you need.
- If you are called to any disciplinary meeting, you have the right to be accompanied by a UNA representative.
- If you encounter unsafe or unprofessional staffing or practices, contact your Local UNA representative. UNA's Professional Responsibility (PRC) process offers a way to raise concerns.
- Safety issues? Talk to your UNA Local and address issues through the Occupational Health and Safety Committee.
- Placed in charge? Each unit must have a "charge" document that outlines responsibilities of the nurse in charge, including required orientation.
- Has your shift schedule been changed unfairly? You have the right to a regular schedule. For help, contact your UNA local.

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Remember, no matter what you concern,  
UNA is there to help.

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