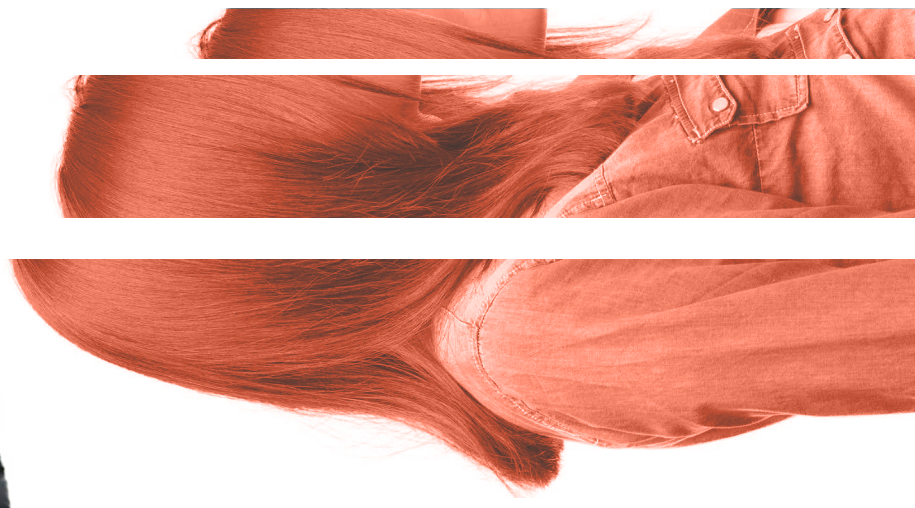




THE COLOUR OF PRIVATIZATION:

A CUPE REPORT ON THE IMPACTS OF PRIVATIZED AND FOR-PROFIT SERVICES ON INDIGENOUS, BLACK AND RACIALIZED WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES

*By Alia Karim and Julia Sánchez
Senior Research Officers – CUPE*





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ABOUT CUPE

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is Canada's largest union, with 750,000 members. CUPE workers take great pride in delivering quality public services in communities across Canada through their work in health care, emergency services, education, early learning and child care, municipalities, social services, libraries, utilities, transportation, airlines and more. CUPE represents close to 200,000 health care workers in hospitals and long-term care homes and more than 60,000 members in post-secondary institutions, both sectors covered in the case studies of this report.

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KEY FINDINGS

Driven by the desire to make massive profits, the private sector has pushed for privatization of public services in Canada. In this report, CUPE reveals the negative consequences of privatizing public services and basic living needs for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities—a population who already faces economic disparities due to historical and ongoing injustices against them.

This report uses five case studies featuring qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, surveys, and a focus group to document the impacts of privatization on Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members and their communities. Participants were asked to share their stories of experiencing privatization first-hand in their workplaces and communities. The report exposes how privatization drives down wages and creates exploitative working conditions for these workers. It also reduces the quality of services for their communities while enriching the pockets of for-profit corporations and their shareholders.

PAY AND BENEFITS

Privatization results in significantly lower wages and reductions to health benefits, pensions, and paid time off. When Black, Indigenous and racialized CUPE members' jobs were contracted out, they took a hit to their wages and benefits. They received higher pay and enhanced benefits when working in house for a public sector employer.

WORKING CONDITIONS

CUPE members reported harsh working conditions and heavy workloads while employed by private contractors due to chronic understaffing and increasing work demands from management. However, some members found that when their work was brought back in house, their working conditions stayed the same or they experienced minor positive changes.

JOB SECURITY

Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members expressed concern about their lack of job security when working for private contractors. The private contractors do not guarantee long-term job stability, and when they flip contracts, workers experience uncertainty about whether they will be rehired. In contrast, members said they feel more secure when they work for a public sector employer.

HARASSMENT

Most CUPE members revealed unsettling experiences of gender-based harassment, racial discrimination and favouritism when they were employed by private contractors. Yet, some argue that public sector employers need to improve their managerial practices as well since members also experience racism and sexism in public workplaces.

IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

Members reported that their working conditions impact the communities they serve. When public services are delivered in the interest of profit, it negatively impacts the quality of services for the community. Indigenous, Black and racialized communities are also struggling to access basic living needs such as housing. The financialization of housing has resulted in an affordability crisis for these communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT MUST DO WHAT THEY CAN TO STOP PRIVATIZATION AND IMPROVE PUBLIC SERVICES

1. Governments and public sector employers must stop the privatization of public services. Halting the privatization of public services, especially the contracting out of work, would reduce the inequities experienced by Indigenous, Black and racialized workers.
2. Governments should protect the rights of workers and put a stop to the race to the bottom in wages and working conditions that privatization provokes, by expanding successorship rules (which keep the union and their collective agreement in place) to cover contracting out and contract flipping in public services.
3. The federal government must update the National Housing Strategy to be compliant with the right to adequate housing. In addition, the federal government should: establish national standards for tenant protections; create acquisition funds for non-profit and co-operative housing; and end the tax loophole for Real Estate Investment Trusts.
4. Statistics Canada, public sector employers, and government contractors should collect and provide disaggregated data on Black, Indigenous and racialized workers and their compensation, benefits and working conditions.



CUPE SHOULD CONTINUE ITS COMMITMENT TO ANTI-PRIVATIZATION, EQUITY, AND ANTI-RACISM

1. CUPE should strengthen its anti-privatization strategy to better challenge the privatization of public services and ensure our anti-privatization campaigns, communications and bargaining priorities are informed by the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized members.
2. CUPE should prioritize collecting data on Black, Indigenous and racialized members working for public and private employers including their compensation, benefits, and working and living conditions.
3. CUPE should continue to bargain collective agreement language related to anti-privatization, equity, and anti-racism, aim for wage parity between members in public and private sectors, and develop bargaining language related to the housing needs and rights of its members.

Other goals related to equity and anti-racism are outlined in CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy¹.

¹ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). (2021). *CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy*. <https://cupe.ca/cupes-anti-racism-strategy>



INTRODUCTION

At the 30th Biennial National Convention of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), delegates passed a resolution which called on CUPE to develop resources that show the discriminatory impacts of privatization on Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities. The resolution further called on CUPE to highlight the stories of these equity-deserving groups who have experienced the consequences of privatization first-hand and to ensure our anti-privatization campaigns and communications are informed by them.

Delegates observed that the privatization of public sector jobs comes at a higher cost for Black, Indigenous and racialized workers because they are more likely to experience wage discrimination. They also noted that privatization exacerbates racial inequity by busting unions and eroding workers' benefits and working conditions. In response to this resolution, CUPE developed this report to document the experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities in the face of privatization of public services.

This report seeks to bring much-needed attention to the experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities in privatized and for-profit public services. It exposes how different forms of privatization impact wages and working conditions for these workers and reduce the quality of services for their communities.

The premise for this report is that privatization comes at a high cost to Black, Indigenous and racialized communities who are forced to take on the burden of low-wage, private sector employment with few workplace benefits and rights, along with high levels of precarity in their communities. The precarious situation of these communities places additional pressure on already overstretched and underfunded social services (such as Employment Insurance, social housing, child care subsidies, and food banks).

Unionized public sector jobs reduce racial discrimination through the collective bargaining of wages, benefits, and critical employment equity measures which push back against racial inequities in the workplace. Public sector jobs and services are more likely to pay a living wage and provide benefits that help equity-deserving groups secure decent employment and livelihoods, which in turn rectify racial inequities in the labour market and broader society.

Through a combination of case studies and data analysis, this report identifies the key impacts of privatization on equity-deserving groups and illustrates these impacts with stories from workers on the frontlines. After explaining the methodology of how it was generated, the report provides an overview of privatization—definitions, history, consequences—and how it worsens inequity. The report then reviews available data for the Canadian context before illustrating the impacts of privatization through case studies in four sectors: post-secondary education, long-term care, health care and housing. Finally, it presents a fifth case study with special considerations for Indigenous workers in Quebec before concluding with recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This report explores five case studies to document the impacts of privatization on Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members and their communities. The first case study analyzes the trend towards contracting out of food services in post-secondary institutions. The second case study reveals the experiences of personal support workers and continuing care assistants in for-profit long-term care homes. The third case study is the experiences of Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) members in B.C. whose work was contracted out in 2002 and brought back in house in 2018. The fourth case study looks at the impacts of the government's reliance on private sector solutions to housing. Finally, it includes a case study focused on circumstances faced by Indigenous workers in diverse sectors.

To produce this report, secondary sources were consulted as background material on the working conditions of Indigenous, Black or racialized workers in privatized settings, as well as data on the general working conditions of equity-deserving groups in Canada. These sources include past CUPE reports, research by other organizations, academic papers, websites, collective agreements, and data reports from Statistics Canada.

This report also makes use of a custom dataset derived from the results of the Labour Force Survey for 2012 and 2022. Data on the average weekly earnings for workers with full-time, full year employment was requested. This data was classified by sex, racial status, region, class (public or private), and union status to better understand the differential impact of privatization on Black, Indigenous and racialized workers across the economy.

Surveys, interviews, and a focus group were conducted as primary data collection tools. These qualitative methods were chosen to explore in depth members' experiences, feelings, and perspectives about working for private and for-profit organizations contracted to provide public services. We gained the consent of participants by informing them

of the purpose and objectives of the research and asking for their verbal or written consent to participate.

A total of 14 interviews were conducted with Black, Indigenous or racialized workers for this report. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with CUPE members about their experiences working in for-profit long-term care homes or for contractors at post-secondary institutions, and to inquire about members' experiences accessing affordable and secure housing. Two additional interviews focused on the experience of Indigenous workers in Quebec, working in diverse sectors (social services and energy). In cases where members worked for a contractor, and then their jobs were brought in house, we asked additional questions to compare members' experiences in both contexts. All interviews were conducted between May and July 2023.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, a focus group was organized in June 2023, in collaboration with HEU, to hear from five HEU

members about their first-hand experiences working for a contractor and then having their jobs brought back in house. The focus group participants completed a follow-up survey to complement and elaborate on the information and stories shared during the focus group discussion and help us better understand their experiences with privatized public services.

Interviews were conducted in person, online and by phone depending on the participant's preference, and the focus group was conducted online. Participation in the interviews and focus group was voluntary for members. All participants provided consent for the recording of the interviews and participants in the focus group signed a specific consent form. Identifiable information about individuals collected during the interview process is not disclosed in this report, and the identity of participants is protected using pseudonyms and other processes designed to anonymize them. The interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed for research purposes only.

The following table summarizes some basic information about the 14 participants:

SUMMARY TABLE OF INTERVIEWS

Sector	Employer/Job title	Identity	Province
PSE	University/Food services	Black	ON
PSE	University/Food services	Black	ON
PSE	University/Food services	Racialized	NB
LTC	Private nursing home/Personal support worker (PSW)	Indigenous	NB
LTC	Public nursing home/Continuing care assistant (CCA)	Black	NB
LTC	Private nursing home/PSW	Indigenous	ON
Social Services	Social work/Aide	Indigenous	QC
Health care	Hospital/Housekeeping	Black	BC
Health care	Hospital/Housekeeping	Racialized	BC
Health care	Hospital/Housekeeping	Racialized	BC
Health care	Hospital/Housekeeping	Racialized	BC
Health care	Hospital/Housekeeping	Racialized	BC
Energy	Public corporation/Trades worker	Indigenous	QC
Housing	Not for profit community services/Housing officer	Indigenous	SK

Most participants (13) in the interviews and focus group identified as women and one as Two-Spirit. Most participants, eight in total, are Canadian citizens who were born in another country and immigrated to Canada in the last 20 years. Five participants were born in Canada, and one is a permanent resident/landed immigrant. The age of participants ranged from early 30s to mid 60s. The graph below captures the age distribution of the 14 participants:

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS



CUPE'S COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND DEFENDING PUBLIC SERVICES

CUPE has a proud history of defending public services and advancing the equitable treatment of all workers, and in particular the equitable treatment of members of equity-deserving groups. CUPE's commitment to equity and defending public services informs this report.

Promoting equity and anti-racism

CUPE knows that we cannot achieve economic justice for all workers without eliminating racism in our workplaces and communities.

CUPE has a long and proud history of fighting racism, and we are committed to making sure that Indigenous, Black and racialized workers have the same opportunities as non-racialized workers. In 2021, CUPE adopted a new Anti-Racism Strategy which builds on a policy from our 1999 National Convention. Consultations were held with Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members inviting them to share stories about their lived experiences of racism. The result of those consultations is the Anti-Racism Strategy, which guides the work of achieving racial justice in our union, workplaces, and communities.

The goals of the strategy range from increasing the representation of Black, Indigenous and racialized CUPE members in union leadership positions to ensuring that their lived experiences guide the union's bargaining priorities.

This report contributes to Goal #4 of the Anti-Racism Strategy, which seeks to learn from the lived experiences of Indigenous,

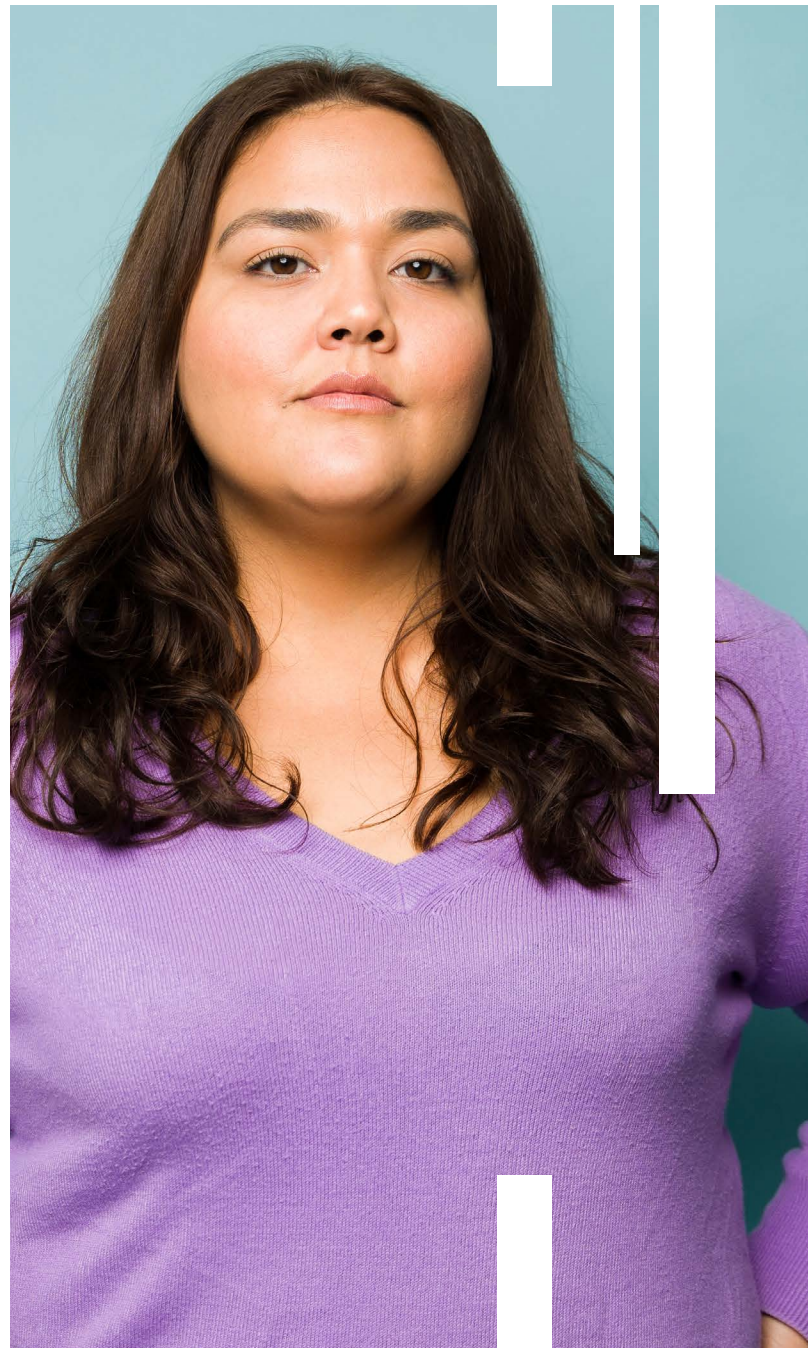
Black and racialized CUPE members. The case studies in this report amplify the voices of members impacted the most by racism and discrimination in the context of privatization. Indigenous, Black and racialized CUPE members shared their first-hand experiences with privatization and for-profit services. The stories contained in this report will help shape an anti-racist lens for future anti-privatization work and contribute to fostering an anti-racist labour movement.

Defending public services and fighting privatization

CUPE is committed to fighting all attempts by employers and governments to privatize our members' work. Throughout the years, CUPE has adopted numerous resolutions and implemented multiple campaigns on defending public services and fighting privatization.² When a public service is privatized, the for-profit employer will drive down wages and oppose unions, which harms the livelihoods of CUPE members. In addition, it is well documented that privatization impacts communities because it worsens the quality of public service delivery.³ This is because private corporations prioritize profits over caring for people. In a privatized service, profits must be paid out to shareholders, not reinvested in public services. These are the reasons why CUPE members and the labour movement mobilize to resist privatization and defend public services.

CUPE represents tens of thousands of Black, Indigenous and racialized workers across Canada. These members often face systemic racism by employers who aim to generate profits through the perpetuation of differential wage levels and working conditions.

Privatization hurts workers, including equity-deserving groups, and particularly Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities. These equity-deserving groups are the hardest hit by privatization because they are among the most recent entrants in the labour market and tend to occupy the most precarious jobs.



² CUPE Research has identified more than 100 resolutions, going back to 1963, which denounce privatization and contracting out and commit to defending public services and unionized jobs in the public sector. Similarly, Strategic Directions going back to the early 2000s prioritize anti-privatization work and campaigns.

³ The 2016 CUPE and Columbia Institute study, *Back in house: Why local governments are bringing services home*, details cases where municipal governments have brought public services back in house in large part due to poor service delivery by private contractors.

As public sector jobs disappear through privatization, the impacts are devastating for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities. They are overrepresented in lower paying, non-unionized and insecure jobs in the private sector, and are more likely to experience high poverty rates than the non-racialized population. CUPE is committed to defending public sector jobs against privatization because they are better for workers and their communities, and because it is a matter of racial justice for Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

HISTORY AND CONSEQUENCES OF PRIVATIZING PUBLIC SERVICES

In order to situate the case studies, findings, and recommendations contained in this report, it is important to first unpack the different definitions of privatization, to discuss the history and consequences of privatization in Canada and internationally, and to share some success stories of labour movements pushing back.

Defining privatization

Privatization, in the context of this report, refers to a range of practices involving the sale or transfer of public services to the private sector. It means shifting the ownership, management and/or delivery of public services from public hands to the control of for-profit corporations, non-profit organizations, or a consortium of private and public actors. The privatization of public services and infrastructure comes in many forms that are constantly evolving depending on the nature of the service or asset being privatized.

Privatization of public services and infrastructure comes in many forms that are constantly evolving.

CUPE members in public services often face privatization in the form of contracting out. This occurs when governments and public sector employers hire third-party contractors to perform specific tasks and functions, or deliver services that were previously provided by public sector workers. This form of privatization is harmful to workers because contracts are typically awarded to the corporation offering the lowest price for the work. Contractors exploit a cheaper, non-unionized labour force with fewer benefits and workplace rights. In doing so, they undermine the wages, benefits, seniority provisions and other rights entrenched in public sector collective agreements, which poses dire consequences for CUPE members' livelihoods.

For-profit corporations cause even more harm to workers when they engage in contract flipping. Contract flipping refers to an employer's practice of switching service providers every few years to suppress costs, and, some will argue, to weaken organized labour. Often, when a contract flips to a new corporation, unionized workers lose their union certification, along with jobs, wages, benefits, and seniority.

Privatization has taken on more complex forms as public sector employers expand the role of the private sector beyond designing and building public facilities to managing public services. For instance, private investors have pursued a more active role in advocating for public-private partnerships (P3s). In a P3 model, the government or another public entity and a group of corporations arrange a long-term contract where the private consortium is contracted to design, build, finance, operate, maintain and/or own a public facility. Compared to publicly financed and managed projects, P3s typically allow the private sector to have extensive involvement in the control of public services and assets. For-profit corporations are guaranteed long-term profits from government payments for financing, operating, and maintaining infrastructure.

The privatization of public services is becoming more prevalent as governments are increasingly abdicating responsibility for service delivery and leaving the field wide open for the private sector to manage, deliver, and operate public services and facilities. For instance, social impact bonds (SIBs) outsource the financing, planning and evaluation of social programs to corporations while providing profits to private investors. In 2022, the Manitoba government announced a new SIB to help Indigenous youth as they transition out of the justice system. The SIB will be managed by Marymound, a social service organization, with the financing of nine investors from the private sector who stand to profit from it.⁴

Corporations like Google have designed massive privatization schemes to try to seize control of public services and assets. Their Sidewalk Labs Toronto project, proposed in 2017, planned to develop a high-tech waterfront ‘smart city’ featuring autonomous trash collection robots, self-driving electric shuttles, and heated and illuminated sidewalks, in addition to providing public Wi-Fi.⁵ This plan raised questions about how artificial intelligence would impact workers, potentially threatening public sector jobs. The plan also sparked public concerns about personal data privacy. Google planned to install cameras and a network of sensors to survey people’s movements in public areas without the ability to consent to the collection of their personal data.⁶ Though the project was called off in 2020, it was a sign of the private sector’s desire to monetize public spaces and take over public services in the interest of profiting off them.

Public perceptions about privatization

Recent public opinion research provides insights into the Canadian public’s perceptions on privatization, including what they consider to be privatization in the health care sector.⁷ A 2023 Angus Reid study categorizes Canadians into three groups based on their views on privatization: 39% are public health proponents who see little to no place for privatization and believe any movement in this direction only exacerbates current challenges within the system, while 28% are private care proponents who believe increasing privatization is a necessary evolution. In the middle are what Angus Reid calls the ‘curious but hesitant’ (33%) who are sympathetic to elements of both sides of the debate. Even though this third group finds potential value in contracting for-profit doctors to work in public facilities and paying for operations to be done in the private network, they express concerns about access for low-income Canadians and the potential worsening of staffing shortages.

The study finds that these groups diverge in their understanding of what constitutes privatization. On the practice adopted by Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario of publicly funding surgeries at private clinics to help eliminate the lengthy wait lists caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 51% of Canadians see this as privatization, while 33% do not. And on the question of individuals paying out of pocket for treatment, 71% view this as privatization while 18% do not. Not surprisingly most public health proponents view both these practices as privatization: 71% for publicly funding surgeries at private clinics and 89% for patients paying out of pocket

⁴ Shebahkeget, O. (2022, October 3). *Manitoba to commit \$2.25M to program that aims to reduce number of Indigenous youth in justice system*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/indigenous-youth-recidivism-program-social-impact-bonds-1.6604419>

⁵ Bozиковic, A. (2022, March 22). *The end of Sidewalk Labs*. Architectural Record. <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/15573-the-end-of-sidewalk-labs>; Doctoroff, D.L. (2017, October 17). *Vision Sections of RFP Submission*. Sidewalk Labs Toronto. https://storage.googleapis.com/sidewalk-labs-com-assets/Sidewalk_Labs_Vision_Sections_of_RFP_Submission_7ad06759b5/Sidewalk_Labs_Vision_Sections_of_RFP_Submission_7ad06759b5.pdf

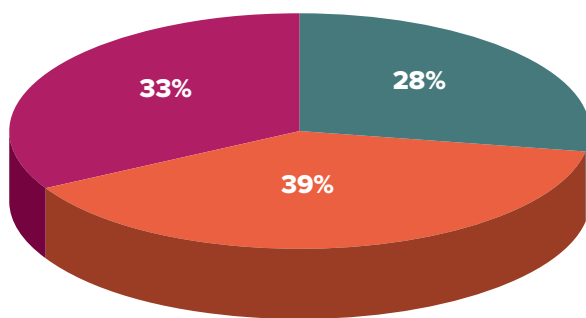
⁶ The project was cancelled in 2020 by Sidewalk Labs amidst public opposition and the economic uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁷ Angus Reid Institute (2023, February 27). *Public Purists, Privatization Proponents and the Curious: Canada’s three health-care mindsets*. <https://angusreid.org/health-care-privatization-perspectives/>

for treatments. In the case of private care proponents, only 38% agree that surgeries at private clinics constitute privatization and 55% think the same for paying out of pocket for treatments.

Other interesting findings of this study include high proportions of people believing that provinces are intentionally ruining public health care to make private care look better (43% in Alberta, 42% in Saskatchewan, 49% in Manitoba and 54% in Ontario). Seventy-five per cent of those living in households earning less than \$100,000 annually, and 66% of those in the highest income households, believe lower income Canadians will suffer more if privatization increases.

THREE CANADIAN HEALTH CARE MINDSETS



- Curious but hesitant
- Private care proponents
- Public health purists

Source: Angus Reid Institute, 2023.

A short history of privatization

The global upsurge toward privatization began with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher who argued in the late 1970s that the sale of public assets to

for-profit corporations would supposedly revive Britain's 'stagnant' economy.⁸ She advocated for privatization based on the assumption that corporations, galvanized by the profit motive, would be more efficient, 'innovative,' and responsive compared to government-owned enterprises.

As a proponent of capitalist 'free market' principles, Thatcher believed that opening new private markets would encourage competition and entrepreneurship to drive economic growth. She argued that the state's management of industries and public services was inefficient and stifled entrepreneurship, so she sold off British airlines, telecommunications, water services, gas utilities, social housing, and coal and steel companies to the private sector.⁹

Influenced by the 'free market' advocate Friedrich August von Hayek, Thatcher told her conservative allies that privatization returned power from government back to the people.¹⁰ At the same time, she did everything in her power to defeat strikes by trade unions and the public who defended government-owned enterprises, and public services from privatization or closure.¹¹ Successive governments in Latin America, Europe and North America embraced the neoliberal assumption that privatization leads to economic efficiency and delivers public services at a lower cost. These governments theorized that privatization and deregulation, coupled with capitalist 'free market' competition, would lead to better quality public services, increase productivity, and showcase the 'innovative' expertise and technology of the private sector. From the 1980s to 2010s more than 100 countries privatized an estimated USD\$3.3 trillion in government-owned enterprises.¹²

⁸ Edwards, C. (2017). *Margaret Thatcher's Privatization Legacy*. *Cato Journal*, 37(1), 89-102. <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/cato-journal/2017/2/cj-v37n1-7.pdf>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Adebayo, O. (2022, March 30). *Has Privatisation Failed the UK?* Rolling Stone UK. <https://www.rollingstone.co.uk/politics/features/has-privatisation-failed-uk-politics-thatcher-rollingstone-13151/>

¹¹ Faculty of History. (2023). *The Miners' Strike of 1984-5: an oral history*. University of Oxford. <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/miners-strike-1984-5-oral-history>

¹² Megginson, W. L. (2005). *The Financial Economics of Privatization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yet, the ideological assumption that the private sector can manage public services more efficiently and produce cost savings remains unproven. Proponents of privatization argue that the private sector will always deliver public services at a lower cost than government; however, privatization through P3s has cost governments more than they anticipated, more than public projects. P3s have also resulted in problems for the public. For example, the cost of Brampton, Ontario's P3 hospital escalated to over \$2 billion for a facility that was supposed to cost \$350 million, and the size of the planned hospital shrank, providing fewer rooms than the hospital it replaced.¹³ In another example, the NKS Hospital in Sweden was €1 billion over budget, it took four years longer to build than the private consortium had planned, and when the hospital finally opened it faced IT breakdowns, rooms that were too hot (which risked destroying medicines), and a lack of space for health care workers to complete administrative tasks.¹⁴

The ideological assumption that the private sector can manage public services more efficiently and produce cost savings remains unproven.

While corporations love to boast that privatization stimulates economic growth through market competition, they neglect to mention the social inequalities that have arisen due to privatization schemes. These problems include increases in user fees, high rates of unemployment which have plunged

families into poverty, and the increasing income gap between the rich and poor.

The consequences of privatization

During Thatcher's tenure in Britain, national unemployment more than doubled from around 1.5 million in 1979 to over 3 million in 1984. This was in large part attributed to major job cuts in electricity, gas, and steel when these public industries were sold off to for-profit corporations.¹⁵ After she left public office, the gap between the rich and poor hit a record high. Today we know that water bills have increased by an average of 360% since water utilities were privatized in 1989.¹⁶ Thatcher promised that water privatization would result in more efficiency and much-needed investments in water infrastructure and yet today, British people see infrastructure falling apart, raw sewage gushing into rivers, bills rising, and the potential collapse of water corporations because they took on too much debt to distribute cash to their shareholders.

Privatization drives by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have imposed conditions on developing countries in the Global South to privatize key public services in exchange for accepting loans. While corporations rake in massive profits from these privatization schemes, low-income residents have suffered from high user fees.

In a review of recent studies on the impacts of privatization, Saul Estrin and Adeline Pelletier of the World Bank concluded that the private sector's push for profitability has had negative social impacts on low-income populations in the Global South, including: higher levels of unemployment, lower wages, worse employment conditions, higher user

¹³ Ontario Health Coalition. (2020, January 24). *Ontario Health Coalition Backgrounder Brampton Hospital Crisis Warnings and Broken Promises*. <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/Backgrounder-on-Brampton-hospital.pdf>

¹⁴ Romero M.J. (2018). *History rePPeated – How public-private partnerships are failing*. European network on debt and development. <https://www.eurodad.org/historyrepppeated>

¹⁵ Adebayo, O. (2022).

¹⁶ Lawrence, M. (2023, July 10). *Mathew Lawrence on why privatisation has been a costly failure in Britain*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2023/07/10/mathew-lawrence-on-why-privatisation-has-been-a-costly-failure-in-britain>



fees (which disproportionately impact poorer households), reduced public service provision and the concentration of political power and economic wealth in fewer hands.¹⁷

In the health care sector, it is abundantly clear that private clinics deliver worse health outcomes and risk lives. The high costs and low quality of privately delivered health care in countries like the United States illustrate that public health services are far more efficient than private ones at ensuring universal, quality health care and better health outcomes. The American health care system costs twice as much as publicly managed health care in many European countries.¹⁸ An estimated 530,000 American families file personal bankruptcy every year because of medical bills and many decide to forego essential surgeries and procedures.¹⁹ Life expectancy in the U.S. is lower and infant mortality rates are higher compared to these same measures in the Canadian and European public health care systems.²⁰ Private, for-profit hospitals have been linked with an increased risk of death.²¹

¹⁷ Estrin, S., and Pelletier, A. (2018, October 3). *Privatization in Developing Countries: What Are the Lessons of Recent Experience*. World Bank Research Observer, 33(1): 65-102. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1093/wbro/lkx007>

¹⁸ Papanicolas, I., Woskie, L. R., and Jha, A. K. (2018, March 13). *Health Care Spending in the United States and Other High-Income Countries*. Journal of the American Medical Association, 319(10):1024-1039. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29536101/>

¹⁹ Himmelstein, D. U., Lawless, R. M., Thorne, D., Foohey, P., Woolhandler, S. (2018, November 27). *Medical Bankruptcy: Still Common Despite the Affordable Care Act*. American Public Health Association. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304901?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=a5697b7e-8ffc-4373-b9d2-3eb745d9debb&>

²⁰ Hall, D. (2015, February 1). *Why Public-Private Partnerships don't work: The many advantages of the public alternative*. Public Services International. <https://www.world-psi.org/en/publication-why-public-private-partnerships-dont-work>

²¹ Devereaux, J. P., Choi, P. T. L., Lachetti, C., Weaver, C., Schunemann, H. J., Haines, T., Lavis, J. N., Grant, B. J. B., Haslam, D. R. S., Bhandari, M., Sullivan, T., Cook, D. J., Walter, S. D., Meade, M., Khan, H., Bhatnager, N., and Guyatt, G. H. (2002, May 28). *A systematic review and meta-analysis of studies comparing mortality rates of private for-profit and private not-for-profit hospitals*. CMAJ: 166(11): 1399-406 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12054406/>

During the COVID-19 crisis in the U.S., testing kits were contracted to private corporations who could not manufacture enough kits, and private clinical laboratories had difficulty increasing their capacity which led to delays in test results.²²

These studies and examples provide evidence that the private sector is not necessarily more efficient than publicly operated and delivered services, and privatization has disastrous social consequences—in the most extreme cases, for example in the U.S., it has meant that not all citizens have access to health care services, and they have a shorter average life expectancy.

How privatization worsens inequity

The privatization of public services has transformed who has access to high quality public services and jobs, and it exacerbates social inequity in several ways.

Governments increase social inequity even before a privatization scheme is agreed upon. They follow a pattern which is commonly known as the ‘privatization playbook.’²³ Right-wing governments starve public services of funding and often place the blame for poor-quality public services on public sector management. In tandem with austerity cuts to public funding, they cut taxes for the wealthy and use the resulting deficit to justify the privatization of public services. These actions widen the gap between the wealthiest and poorest because the poor suffer from cuts while the rich receive tax breaks. When the public is frustrated with the poor quality of services and asks where their tax money is going, right-wing governments and their allies in the private sector step in to say that corporations can provide these services more effectively and save governments money.

When a service is privatized, it fractures access to public services. High-income earners pay for high quality services delivered by private interests, while lower-income communities struggle to pay for services, especially when corporations implement new and increased user fees which these communities cannot afford.

Privatizing services diverts funding away from the public system meant to provide equitable services for everyone, regardless of income level.

When corporations introduce the profit motive in the public sector, they have an incentive to keep their costs down by cutting corners on service quality, reducing services, or eliminating them entirely. Their focus becomes maximizing fee charges and hitting contract metrics, rather than serving the most people, addressing social issues, and providing high-quality public services. Low-income earners, equity-deserving groups and remote communities are the first to lose access to essential services they need the most.

The privatization of public services worsens social inequalities in the labour market. A private contractor’s success in winning a bid depends on submitting the lowest-cost proposal where they deliberately underestimate what they will spend. When contractors are hired, they put downward pressure on employment conditions as they find ways to recruit a cheap workforce. They maximize profit by driving out unions and

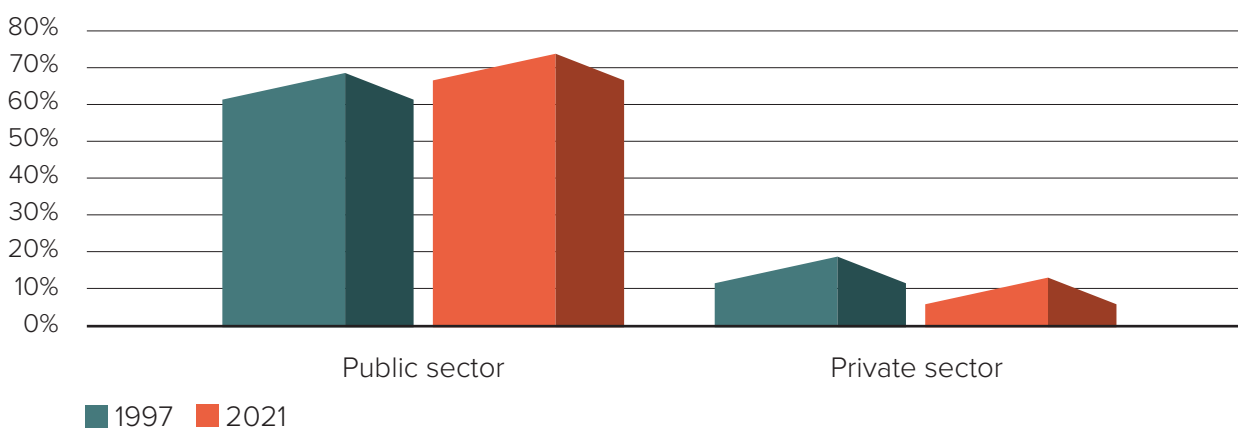
²² Strickler, L., and Kaplan, A. (2020, April 8). *Private labs do 85 percent of U.S. COVID-19 tests but still struggle with backlogs, shortages*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/private-labs-do-85-percent-u-s-covid-19-tests-n1177866>

²³ National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). (2016). *New Forms of Privatization*. https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/documents/research/nupge_new_forms_of_privatization_2016.pdf

hiring workers with less job experience. For-profit corporations in the private sector tend to offer short-term employment that is poorly paid, insecure, and dangerous, where workers have little to no control over their work schedules.

Forms of privatization such as contracting out erode decent working conditions in the public sector by diminishing the number of unionized, full-time and secure employment opportunities. This trend is seen in the Canadian labour market. Statistics Canada data shows that the private sector fueled a decrease in the unionization rate from 1997 to 2021. The unionization rate for private sector employees fell from 19% in 1997 to 13.8% in 2021.²⁴ In comparison, public sector employees drove up the unionization rate from 69.8% in 1997 to 74.1% in 2021.²⁵

UNIONIZATION RATE IN CANADA BY SECTOR, 1997 TO 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2022.

There is also a gendered aspect to privatization. As Jane Stinson's research has found, governments tend to privatize public sector jobs in social services, education, and health care services which are dominated by women.²⁶ Privatization undermines decent employment opportunities for women and increases the amount of unpaid labour they are responsible for at home, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for children. When public services are transferred to the private sector, it eliminates the welfare state women rely on to help with child care, health care, education, and a broad range of social

services. Privatization therefore threatens gender equity by putting working women in more precarious, non-unionized and low wage jobs, and increasing the amount of unpaid labour they do at home.

The failures of privatization in Canada

In Canada, the push for privatization can be traced back to the 1980s when former prime minister Brian Mulroney embarked on an extensive program of privatization. Mulroney followed in the footsteps of Thatcher by selling off more than 20 government-owned enterprises including the Canadian National

²⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022, May 30). *Quality of employment in Canada: Trade union density rate, 1997 to 2021*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2020001/article/00016-eng.htm>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Stinson, J. (2004). *Why privatization is a women's issue*. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 23 (3-4): 18-23.

Railway, Air Canada, and crown corporations in telecommunications, fisheries, marine shipping, and transportation.²⁷ Like Thatcher, he believed government-owned enterprises were inefficient and stifled the potential of the private sector to stimulate economic growth and improve efficiency.

But today there is mounting evidence that privatization results in ballooning costs and widening social inequalities and does not save the public money. There are countless examples of failed privatization ventures across the country to illustrate this point.

There is mounting evidence that privatization results in ballooning costs and widening social inequalities and does not save the public money.

Ontario's Auditor General revealed in 2014 that the provincial government could have saved \$8 billion on 74 P3 infrastructure projects if they were financed and built through public sector procurement.²⁸ A 2018 Columbia Institute study estimated that the cost of 17 P3 projects was \$3.7 billion higher than if the projects had been carried out through traditional procurement.²⁹ And in 2019, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that Nova Scotia's Cobequid Pass toll highway cost the provincial government \$232 million more as a P3 as compared

to a publicly delivered project.³⁰ These projects have not only resulted in massive cost overruns, delays, and legal battles over poor contractor performance, they have also led to the loss of public accountability and democratic decision-making over the design and operation of key public assets.

Studies show that privatization has resulted in lower quality public services, and in the health care sector it has impacted the quality of patient care. A 2005 study of contracted-out housekeeping and food services jobs in B.C. hospitals and care homes concluded that this form of privatization threatens the health and well-being of workers and patients.³¹ Contracted-out workers, the majority of whom were female and racialized immigrants, worked in hectic, exhausting, and unsafe working conditions. Privatization worsened the relationships between workers and patients, as workers had less time with patients due to their excessive workloads.

In 2023, Alberta Health Services (AHS) contracted out the work of approximately 300 employees in hospital food services.³² Their decision came despite warnings that privatization results in lower-quality services. AHS estimated that private contractors would save \$3 million a year that could be used toward clinical services. Lorne Fundytus, CAO of Rimoka Housing Foundation, cautioned against the move to privatize food services due to his experience of the contracting out of housekeeping services at Red Deer Hospital and subsequently bringing them back in house. He argued that privatizing

²⁷ Whittington, L. (1985, August 30). *Despite Mulroney's Pledge, Canada's Business Ownership Thrives*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1985/08/30/despite-mulroneys-pledge-canadas-business-ownership-thrives/73b4bbf4-4577-4429-b466-f16babc9beef/>

²⁸ Auditor General of Ontario. (2014). *Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario*. Infrastructure Ontario—Alternative financing and procurement. <https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en14/305en14.pdf>

²⁹ Reynolds, K. (2018). *Public-Private Partnerships in British Columbia: Update 2018*. The Columbia Institute. <https://columbiainstitute.eco/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Columbia-Institute-P3s-in-BC-2018-June-7-WEB.pdf>

³⁰ Majka, C. (2019, June 4). *Highway Robbery: Public Private Partnerships and Nova Scotia Highways*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/highway-robbery>

³¹ Stinson, J., Pollak, N., and Cohen, M. (2005, April 26). *The Pains of Privatization: How Contracting Out Hurts Health Support Workers, Their Families, and Health Care*. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/pains-privatization>

³² Alberta Public Union of Employees (AUPE). (2023, February 9). *Important information for AUPE members in AHS Retail Food Services*. <https://www.aupe.org/news/news-and-updates/important-information-aupe-members-ahs-retail-food-services/>; Jaycox, E. (2022, January 14). *Rimoka CAO says privatizing health care services 'doesn't work'*. Ponoka News. <https://www.ponokanews.com/news/rimoka-cao-says-privatizing-health-care-services-doesnt-work/>

housekeeping resulted in a lower quality of service because for-profit contractors tried to cut their costs. Indeed, after AHS contracted out food services in Edmonton and Calgary hospitals, their workers complained about the dreadful quality of food services.³³ They claimed the food tasted awful, was too expensive, there were no longer any healthy options, and there were empty shelves where healthy food used to be sold.

A 2022 CUPE report about contracting out at post-secondary institutions found that workers and communities pay a heavy price when university administrators decide to privatize CUPE members' work.³⁴ The study found that contracted-out workers providing food and custodial services on campus receive lower wages (with many below the level of a living wage) and they are less likely than in-house workers to receive sick days, a pension, and other benefits. Contracting out puts pressure on these workers to speed up service levels with fewer staff, which compromises service quality and the health and well-being of workers and the campus community. These are some of the consequences when private interests are put ahead of the public good.

Despite these failures, and a complete lack of evidence supporting the claims that privatization is beneficial for workers and communities, the push for privatization continues full steam ahead. At present, we are seeing privatization drives across a range of sectors where public services have previously been delivered by publicly employed workers: transportation, health care and education sectors are seeing a renewed push for P3 infrastructure projects; social impact bonds are increasingly being

proposed by governments to take over publicly delivered social services; and public sector employers are continuing to contract out work across the country.

CUPE and other unions are rallying against the harms of privatization to workers and communities, and we are succeeding.

Critical wins against privatization

There has, however, been a counter movement to privatization. Across the country, CUPE and other unions are rallying against the harms of privatization to workers and communities, and we are succeeding in reversing privatization and bringing jobs and services back in house. In 2020, CUPE members mobilized community members to stop the City of Peterborough from closing a child care centre, which would have created space for private operators to fulfill demand for child care.³⁵ In the same year, CUPE 2541 brought snow removal jobs back in house after they had been privatized for years in Alma, Quebec.³⁶ The 2016 report, *Back in house: Why local governments are bringing services home*, details 15 cases where municipal governments decided to cancel or not renew contracts with private contractors and instead bring services in house.³⁷ Several of these cases were won by CUPE members who argued that municipalities are bringing services back in house because governments have better control over services, they can

³³ Lee, J. (2023, May 19). *Health workers slam newly privatized Alberta hospital cafeterias over empty shelves, quality*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/ahs-food-hospitals-quality-alberta-1.6847905>

³⁴ Pasma, C. (2022). *Who pays? The cost of contracting out at Canadian post-secondary institutions*. Canadian Union of Public Employees. https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/pse_contracting_out_eng_low_res.pdf

³⁵ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). (2020, January 17). *CUPE Child Care Workers Celebrate Victory in Peterborough*. <https://cupe.ca/cupe-child-care-workers-celebrate-victory-peterborough>

³⁶ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). (2020, June 10). *Chalk up another win for Alma municipal workers*. <https://cupe.ca/chalk-another-win-alma-municipal-workers>

³⁷ Reynolds, K., Royer, G., and Beresford, C. (2016). *Back in house: Why local governments are bringing services home*. Columbia Institute. https://columbiainstitute.eco/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Columbia_Back_in_House_2016_English_web.pdf

increase staff capacity if needed, and they can better respond to issues concerning quality control and community needs.

HEU won a monumental victory against privatization in 2021, when the B.C. government announced that they would repatriate over 4,000 HEU members whose jobs were contracted out for 18 years.^{38,39} The government argued that bringing the work in house and offering the workers higher wages, job security, and improved working conditions would result in higher quality care for hospital patients, and public sector employers would be better able to attract and retain future health care workers.⁴⁰ HEU's win has boosted wages and improved working conditions for racialized women since 80% of the jobs that were contracted out were held by women, many of whom were South Asian.⁴¹ The impacts of bringing these workers' jobs back in house are analyzed in this report.

Around the world, social movements have successfully pushed back against privatization too. In the early 2000s, residents of Cochabamba, Bolivia, waged a series of protests (known as the 'Cochabamba Water War') six months after the city privatized their public water supply company.⁴² Angered by skyrocketing user fees for water, residents

demanded that they have the right to clean water, which they consider a gift from Mother Earth, or as they call her, the *Pachamama*.^{43,44} The IMF's plan to stimulate Bolivia's economy failed miserably and in 2005, in response to mass protests, the government reversed the privatization of the water supply.⁴⁵

These victories demonstrate that reversing privatization is possible, and that it has positive impacts for workers and communities. Yet today, corporate players continue to lobby governments to approve new P3s and other privatization schemes because corporations stand to profit off them. We need to clearly

³⁸ HEU estimates that as many as 8,500 members were bumped from their jobs by private contractors.

³⁹ Garden, B. (2021, September 9). "Make It Public!": *The History of HEU's Fight Against Privatization*. B.C. Labour Heritage Centre. <https://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/make-it-public-heu-history/>

⁴⁰ B.C. government. (2021, August 30). *Cleaning, dietary workers coming back in-house at B.C. hospitals*. BC Gov News. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0157-001703>

⁴¹ Garden, B. (2021).

⁴² Spronk, S. (2009). *Water privatization and the prospects for trade union revitalization in the public sector: Case studies from Bolivia and Peru*. *Just Labour*, 14: 164-176.

⁴³ Finnegan, W. (2002, March 31). *Leasing the rain*. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/04/08/leasing-the-rain>

⁴⁴ Pachamama is an ancient female deity worshipped by Andean and Amazonian peoples.

⁴⁵ Anandakuga, N. (2020, July 2). *Hopes For A Rainy Day: A History of Bolivia's Water Crisis*. *Harvard International Review*. <https://hir.harvard.edu/hopes-for-a-rainy-day-a-history-of/>



demonstrate to public sector employers why privatization has failed and build an even greater movement to counter this negative trend for workers and communities.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

The effects of privatization on Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities require careful consideration due to historical systemic injustices. As private interests continue to siphon funding away from universal public services, the dismantling of public goods not only perpetuates pervasive economic inequity, it also contributes to growing racial inequity. This race to the bottom has serious consequences for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers who are overrepresented in lower paying, non-unionized and insecure jobs, and whose communities are likely to experience higher poverty rates than non-racialized communities.

Racialized workers are more likely to be employed in public sectors such as transportation, education, and health care. When these services are privatized, there is a higher risk of layoffs and wage reductions that exacerbate economic disparities within these communities.

The experiences of racialized communities are marked by high levels of precarious employment, leaving them consigned to low paying, non-unionized, and temporary jobs with poor working conditions.

Racialized refugees and immigrants who are newly arrived in Canada are forced to fill areas of chronic shortage in the lowest tiers of the labour market, such as housekeeping, food services, custodial services, child care

and warehousing. They have little choice but to take on low-wage jobs when their international education, credentials, skills, and experience are not recognized by Canadian employers, and they have fewer resources and social networks to navigate better job opportunities.

As Grace-Edward Galabuzi explains, racialized workers are overrepresented in sectors of the economy where precarious work has become most prevalent in accordance with free market principles of ‘flexibility’ that employers use to justify cheapening the labour of racialized workers. He writes,

“The neoliberal restructuring of Canada’s economy and labour market towards flexible labour markets has increasingly stratified labour markets along racial lines, with the disproportionate representation of racialized group members in low-income sectors and low-end occupations, and under-representation in high-income sectors and occupations. It is these broader labour market processes that are responsible for the emergence of the phenomenon of the racialization of poverty in the late 20th century.”⁴⁶

‘Flexible’ labour markets mean weakening employment standards and regulations so employers can set wages, fire employees, and change employee work hours at will. Racialized workers, particularly immigrants, are the most recent entrants to the labour market, so the weakening of employment standards affects them the most. Workers in these precarious jobs are not only poorly compensated, the jobs are rife with unsafe working conditions which puts workers’

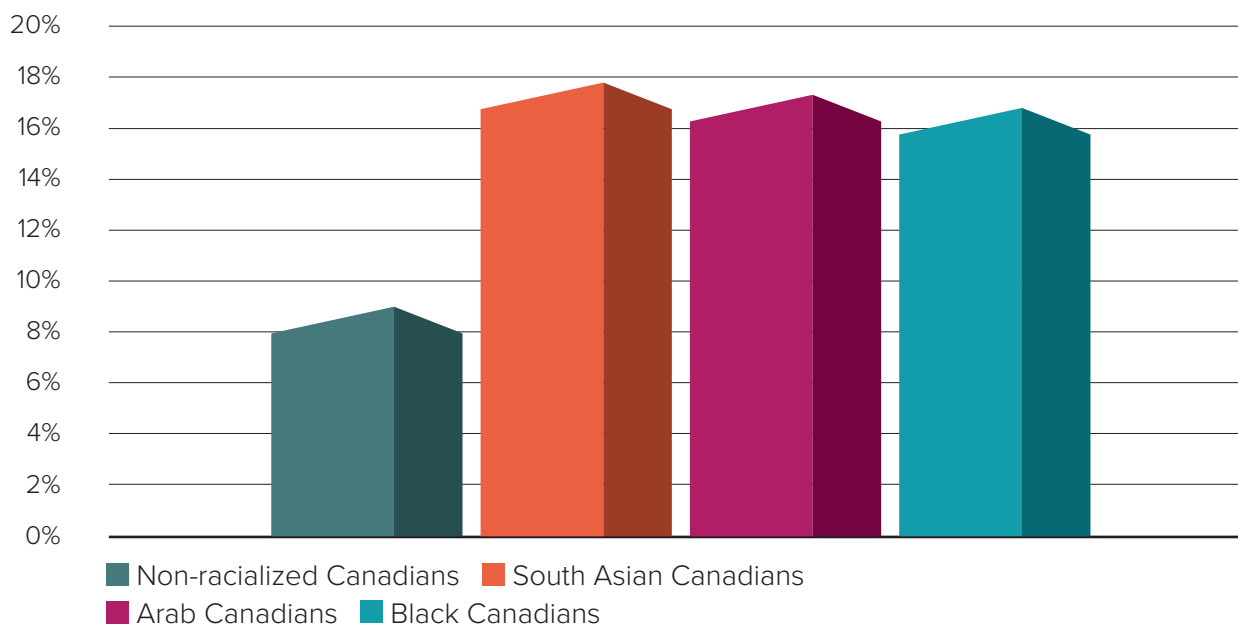
⁴⁶ Galabuzi, G-E. (2006). *Canada’s creeping economic apartheid: The economic segregation and social marginalization of racialized groups*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press. P. 87.

lives at risk. For instance, private temporary agencies are known to hire recently arrived, racialized refugees and immigrants into jobs where they receive virtually no workplace safety training. In a shocking case in 2016, a 23-year-old racialized refugee from Guinea, Amina Diaby, died at work at a Fiera Foods bakery when her hijab got caught in a machine and strangled her. A *Toronto Star* investigation revealed that Diaby's co-worker did not understand how to use the machine's emergency system because they were not adequately trained to use it.⁴⁷

Census reveals disturbing picture of inequity and discrimination

Racialized workers had a higher unemployment rate than their non-racialized counterparts at 9.2% compared to 7.3% in 2016.⁴⁸ Racialized women were the hardest hit with a 9.6% unemployment rate. These groups also experience worse employment outcomes during major economic shocks, such as when governments decided to shut down public spaces and workplaces during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. A few months after the pandemic began, in July 2020, non-racialized Canadians had a 9.0% unemployment rate, whereas racialized groups nearly doubled that, including South Asian Canadians (17.8%), Arab Canadians (17.3%), and Black Canadians (16.8%).⁴⁹

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN CANADA, JULY 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, 2020.

⁴⁷ Mojtehdzadeh, S., and Kennedy, B. (2018, April 6). *This temp worker was being strangled by a machine. Her co-worker didn't know how to help.* Toronto Star. https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/this-temp-worker-was-being-strangled-by-a-machine-her-co-worker-didn-t-know/article_ae1db357-941a-5c7d-b955-a408eb87b012.html

⁴⁸ Block, S., Galabuzi, G-E., and Tranjan, R. (2019, December 9). *Canada's colour coded income inequality.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/canadas-colour-coded-income-inequality>

⁴⁹ Statistics Canada. (2020, August 7). *Labour Force Survey, July 2020.* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200807/dq200807a-eng.htm>

Racialized workers struggle to gain decent employment and job promotions due to systemic discrimination against their race, language and accent, religion, and country of origin. Systemic racism by employers has intensified with the rise of Islamophobic, anti-Black, anti-Asian and xenophobic sentiment in recent decades, as well as increasing instances of harassment and hate speech against racialized people at work. The concurrence of discrimination in workplaces, schools and other institutions means that racialized communities are at greater risk of experiencing poverty. Sixty per cent of racialized Canadians were in the bottom half of the distribution of family incomes in 2016.⁵⁰

According to the 2021 Census, the poverty rate among visible minorities was 12.1% compared to 6.6% for the rest of the population.^{51,52}

Anti-Black racism is historically rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, segregation policies, and restrictive immigration practices in Canada. This continues to create conditions which contribute to higher rates of poverty, precarious employment, unemployment, and worse health outcomes among Black people. Data from the 2016 Canadian census shows that Black adults (aged 25 to 59) were twice as likely to live in a low-income situation compared to the rest of the population, and 23.9% of the Black working population lived below the Statistics Canada

low-income measure.⁵³ Black workers also had unemployment rates approximately twice as high as the rest of the population. The latest Census data (2021) reveals that Black workers' hourly wages were on average \$28.07 compared to \$33.44 for non-Indigenous and non-racialized workers, amounting to a 16.1% pay gap.⁵⁴ This means that Black people in Canada continue to experience systemic discrimination in the workplace and in their communities compared to the non-Black population.

Discrimination against Indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples in Canada have endured through intense racism, poverty, and economic marginalization due to ongoing attempts to dispossess their communities from their traditional territories and the effects of paternalistic, colonial policies to control almost all aspects of their lives. Indigenous children taken from their families to attend residential schools suffered horrific abuses, which established a painful chain of intergenerational trauma for many Indigenous families. The effects of residential schools are evident today in the high rates of depression, mistrust, fatigue and health problems Indigenous peoples face.⁵⁵

Chronic government underfunding of services for Indigenous peoples and lack of investment in their health care, education, social services, infrastructure, and transportation systems perpetuate impoverished living conditions, both on and off reserves. Based on 2016 data, nearly 45% of households on reserves were low

⁵⁰ Block *et al.* (2019).

⁵¹ Statistics Canada uses "visible minority," which has been criticized by the United Nations as racist terminology. They are in the process of updating their language. In this text, we will use the terminology from Statistics Canada when speaking about the information we received from them.

⁵² Statistics Canada (2022, November 9). *Disaggregated trends in poverty from the 2021 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021009/98-200-X2021009-eng.cfm>

⁵³ Do, D. (2020, February 25). *Canada's Black population: Education, labour and resilience. Ethnicity, language, immigration thematic series*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2020002-eng.htm>

⁵⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022, May 30). *Quality of employment in Canada: Pay gap, 1998 to 2021*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2020001/article/00003-eng.htm>

⁵⁵ Bombay, A., Matheson, K., and Anisman, H. (2014). *The intergenerational effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the concept of historical trauma*. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 51(3): 320-338. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4232330/>

income and as many as 60% of on-reserve status First Nations children lived in poverty.⁵⁶ State-directed employment programs and job opportunities in urban areas have meant that many Indigenous peoples have moved off reserves, yet they also face racism and high poverty rates in cities. In Winnipeg, for instance, 16% of the Indigenous population lived in poverty in 2020 and nearly one-quarter of Indigenous peoples in other cities were living in poverty.⁵⁷ More recent data indicates that the poverty rate for Indigenous peoples living off reserve has fallen.⁵⁸ This decrease was mostly attributed to increased government transfers and temporary pandemic-related benefits, meaning they remain trapped in poverty.

Indigenous peoples continue to experience worse outcomes in overall workforce participation rates, employment rates and unemployment rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

⁵⁶ Macdonald, D., and Wilson, D. (2016, May). *Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2016/05/Indigenous_Child%20_Poverty.pdf

⁵⁷ Statistics Canada. (2020, May 26). *Indigenous people in urban areas: Vulnerabilities to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00023-eng.htm>; Statistics Canada. (2021, September 21). *Low-income statistics for the population living on reserve and in the North using the 2016 Census*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210921/dq210921d-eng.htm>

⁵⁸ Statistics Canada. (2022, November 9). *Disaggregated trends in poverty from the 2021 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021009/98-200-X2021009-eng.cfm>



In the labour market, Indigenous peoples continue to experience worse outcomes in overall workforce participation rates, employment rates and unemployment rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.⁵⁹ For instance, from June to August 2021, the unemployment rate of Indigenous peoples was 11.6% compared to 7.6% for non-Indigenous people.⁶⁰ Factors that explain Indigenous peoples' unemployment include past traumatic events (e.g. the abuse in residential schools), racism, poverty and poor housing, economic marginalization and environmental racism.⁶¹ The lack of government funding and access to financial aid in post-secondary institutions, which would help Indigenous peoples gain access to decent employment opportunities, is also an important factor.⁶² When Indigenous

post-secondary students do not receive adequate financial aid for housing, child care, food, transportation, and tuition, many drop out of school to work for minimum wage or in other low-wage jobs, if they are even hired.⁶³

Public versus private sector employment

Past studies show us that Black, Indigenous and racialized workers are treated more equitably in the public sector compared to the private sector. This is evident when we compare their wages in both sectors. In 2014, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a study of public and private sector wages for women, Indigenous peoples and visible minorities which revealed that the private sector engages in greater wage

CANADA'S PAY GAP FOR UNIVERSITY-EDUCATED RACIALIZED AND INDIGENOUS WORKERS



Source: CCPA, 2014.

⁵⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018, September 24). *Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Canada*. <https://www.oecd.org/publications/indigenous-employment-and-skills-strategies-in-canada-9789264300477-en.htm>

⁶⁰ Bleakney, A., Masoud, H., and Robertson, H. (2021, November 16). *Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people living off reserve in the provinces: March 2020 to August 2021*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00037-eng.htm>

⁶¹ Durand-Moreau, Q., Lafontaine, J., and Ward, J. (2022). *Work and health challenges of Indigenous people in Canada*. *Lancet*, 10(8): E1189-E1197. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(22\)00203-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(22)00203-0/fulltext); Indspire. (2018). *Post-Secondary Experience of Indigenous Students Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Summary of survey findings*. <https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PSE-Experience-Indigenous-Students-Survey-Summary-Sept2018.pdf>; Skudra, M., Avgerinos, A., and McCallum, K. E. (2020). *Mapping the Landscape: Indigenous Skills Training and Jobs in Canada*. Public Policy Forum. <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IndigenousSkillsTraining-PPF-JUNE2020-EN.pdf>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

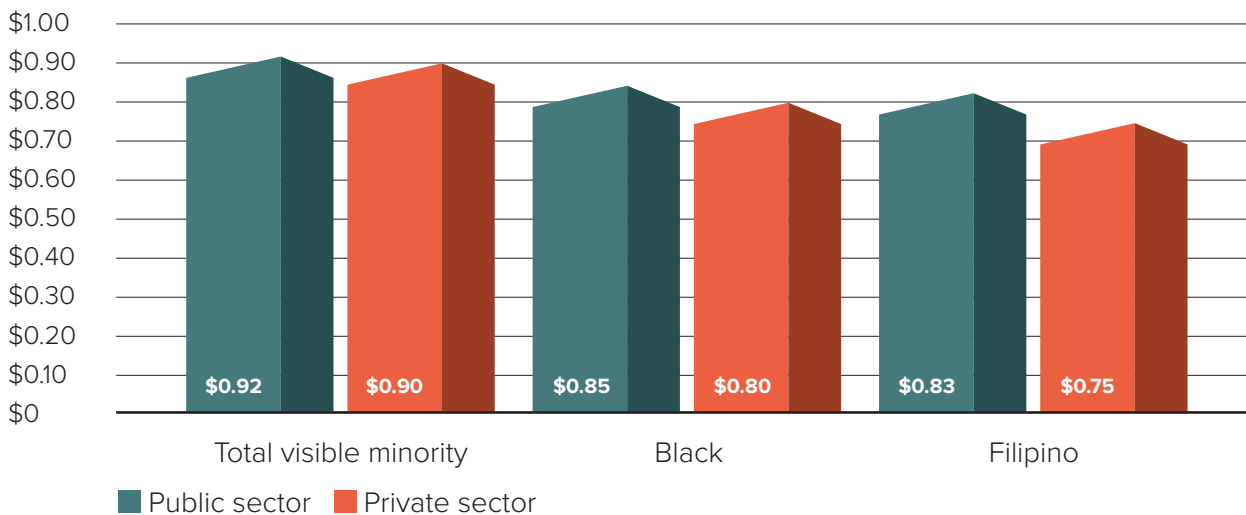
discrimination against Indigenous, Black and racialized workers than the public sector.^{64,65} For instance, university-educated visible minority workers earned 20% less than their non-visible minority counterparts, whereas in the public sector, their wage gap was reduced to 12%. Additionally, university-educated Indigenous women earned 44% less than their non-Indigenous counterparts in the private sector. In the public sector, the wage gap shrank to only 14%.

For the purposes of this report, recent data was commissioned from Statistics Canada⁶⁶ on wage differentials for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers. We were interested in seeing what the wage gap between these three groups of workers and white⁶⁷ workers is when comparing public and private sector employers, as well as unionized versus

non-unionized workplaces. The data confirms what we anticipated: workers are better off when employed in a public sector and unionized job. The 2022 Labour Force Survey data shows that:

- Canada's labour force is increasingly diverse. For example, 26% of all workers in 2022 were landed immigrants, as opposed to 20% in 2012.
- A large proportion of racialized workers were employed in private sector and non-unionized jobs. Only 20% of landed immigrants in 2022 were employed in the public sector, with a unionization rate of 75%. While 80% of landed immigrants were in private sector jobs with a unionization rate of only 14%.

FOR EVERY DOLLAR A WHITE WORKER EARNS IN EACH SECTOR, A RACIALIZED WORKER EARNS...



Source: Statistics Canada, 2023.

⁶⁴ McInturff, K., and Tulloch, P. (2014, October 29). *Narrowing the Gap: The Difference That Public Sector Wages Make*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/narrowing-gap>

⁶⁵ In the CCPA's report the term "Aboriginal" refers to people who reported in the 2011 Census being First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuit and/or those who reported Registered or Treaty Indian status, that is registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada, and/or those who reported membership in a First Nation or Indian band. In the 2021 Census the name has been changed to "Indigenous".

⁶⁶ Statistics Canada. (2023). *Custom dataset—Labour Force Survey 2022*.

⁶⁷ When providing data on racialized workers, Statistics Canada includes Indigenous workers in the category "Not a visible minority." Similarly, when providing data on Indigenous workers, Statistics Canada includes racialized workers in the "Not Indigenous" category.

- Similarly, 19% of visible minority workers, as defined by Statistics Canada, held public sector jobs in 2022, and 72% of those jobs were unionized. While 81% of visible minority workers were in private sector jobs with only 13% of those jobs being unionized.
- Wages in the private sector are generally lower than in the public sector, with visible minority workers earning 83 cents in the private sector for every dollar visible minority workers earn in the public sector.
- The difference is more significant for Black and Filipino workers. Black workers in the private sector earn 80 cents for every dollar that Black workers earn in the public sector, while Filipino workers earn 76 cents in the private sector for every dollar in the public sector. In comparison, workers defined as “not a visible minority” by Statistics Canada (which includes Indigenous workers) earn 85 cents in the private sector for every dollar they earn in the public sector.
- There is a union advantage for racialized workers in the public sector, with visible minority workers making an average of \$23.48 more a week in unionized jobs than in non-unionized jobs. For Black workers the difference is \$79.76 a week, while for Filipino workers it is \$81.22 a week. Non-visible minority workers, on the other hand, are making higher average wages in non-unionized jobs.
- For the private sector, the situation is reversed, with visible minority workers making higher wages on average in non-unionized jobs than in unionized jobs. This could be explained in part by the fact that for-profit employers will sometimes pay higher wages while providing very low or no benefits, no job security, and precarious working conditions. The exceptions are Filipino workers who earn \$74.11 a week more in unionized private sector jobs.

THE UNION ADVANTAGE FOR RACIALIZED WORKERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

(Average weekly wage by sector, 2022)

	Public Sector			Private Sector		
	Union	Non-union	Difference*	Union	Non-union	Difference*
Total population	\$1,332.59	\$1,367.30	-\$34.71**	\$1,145.84	\$1,115.86	\$29.98
Total, visible minority	\$1,258.41	\$1,234.93	\$23.48	\$969.72	\$1,051.88	-\$82.16
Black	\$1,173.87	\$1,094.11	\$79.76	\$922.73	\$923.84	-\$1.11
South Asian	\$1,308.30	\$1,274.15	\$34.15	\$979.78	\$1,105.27	-\$125.49
Chinese	\$1,414.73	\$1,414.61	\$0.12	\$1,027.99	\$1,201.71	-\$173.72
Filipino	\$1,141.88	\$1,060.66	\$81.22	\$921.84	\$847.73	\$74.11
Other visible minorities	\$1,256.37	\$1,218.58	\$37.79	\$998.17	\$1,054.32	-\$56.15
Not a visible minority	\$1,351.64	\$1,415.93	-\$64.29**	\$1,208.49	\$1,144.23	\$64.26

Source: Statistics Canada, 2023.


* Difference is Union minus Non-union, if this is negative, it means non-unionized workers make higher average wages.

** Note: the reason that there is no public sector union advantage for “Total population” and “Not a visible minority” is because management is non-unionized, overwhelmingly white, and makes much higher wages.

- Indigenous workers also fare better in unionized environments. They earn 98% of the average wages in unionized public sector jobs, and 89% of wages in non-unionized public sector jobs. They earn 7.0% above the average private sector unionized wages, and only 86% of the non-unionized average wages. However, Statistics Canada did not provide disaggregated data, and we know that wages can vary significantly for workers with different Indigenous identities.
- Finally, the situation of racialized women is particularly precarious. When compared to the average weekly wage of all men who are not a visible minority, visible minority women earn 23% less in unionized jobs and 33% less in non-unionized jobs than white males. Black women earn 38% less in non-unionized jobs than white males, and Filipino women earn 41% less.⁶⁸

The public sector has more equitable employment standards, and is more likely to have unionized jobs, pay a living wage, and provide access to benefits like parental leave won through collective bargaining. These

improvements in pay and working conditions help close the wage gaps between racialized and non-racialized workers and improve the overall well-being and long-term economic security of equity-deserving groups. It is clear from this research that we must work toward reversing privatization because public sector employment provides more equitable working conditions for Black, Indigenous and racialized people, and it positively benefits their communities, which will reduce social inequity over time.



Public sector employment provides more equitable working conditions for Black, Indigenous and racialized people, and it positively benefits their communities, which will reduce social inequity over time.

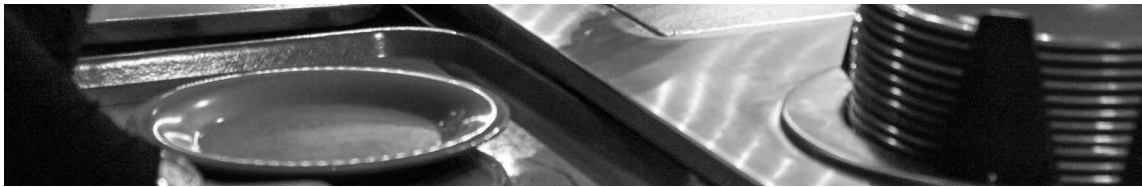
⁶⁸ Statistics Canada includes Indigenous men in the category of not visible minority men. For purposes of this comparison, all men who are not a visible minority includes male workers in unionized and non-unionized jobs.



**POST-SECONDARY
PRIVATIZATION—
EXPLOITED
FOOD SERVICE
WORKERS ENRICH
MULTINATIONALS**

CASE STUDY





CUPE reported in our 2022 publication, *Who pays? The cost of contracting out at Canadian post-secondary institutions*, that the trend towards contracting out in post-secondary institutions is the result of multiple pressures post-secondary administrators have faced in recent decades.

These pressures include the ever-increasing costs of post-secondary tuition fees as governments provide insufficient funding to support universities and colleges. Up until the 1990s, provincial governments were the highest contributors to post-secondary funding.⁶⁹ In the 1970s, provincial governments directly funded three-quarters of the cost of a university degree.⁷⁰ Yet, that changed drastically in the 1990s when the federal government, concerned about federal debt, began slashing transfers for post-secondary institutions and other provincial health and social programs.

In response, post-secondary administrators have embraced funding from private corporations. But many of these private donations have strings attached. In some

cases, donors are afforded nearly total control over decisions for staffing, curriculum and research agendas that their money is put toward. For instance, Peter Munk, the founder and chairman of mining giant Barrick Gold, made a \$35 million contribution to the University of Toronto to create a school of global affairs whose general design and programs were subject to Munk's approval.⁷¹ These same donors increasingly dominate top governance positions that make critical decisions about the institution's priorities for funding. Universities such as York University have accepted big private donations from rich families, such as the Sorbara family which owns a real estate company with billions of dollars in assets.⁷² After establishing scholarship awards Greg Sorbara was made chancellor of the university in 2014 and sat on the school's Board of Governors.⁷³

Universities and colleges now compete against each other in a race to have the best programs, facilities, and technology to recruit students. This propensity toward competition and a corporate mentality among post-secondary administrators has

⁶⁹ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). (2019, January 29). *Corporatization in post-secondary education*. <https://cupe.ca/corporatization-post-secondary-education>

⁷⁰ Walsh, G. (2018). *The Cost of Credentials: The shifting burden of post-secondary tuition in Canada*. Royal Bank of Canada. https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/wp-content/uploads/Tuition_-June2018.pdf

⁷¹ McQuaig, L., and Brooks, N. (2011). *The trouble with billionaires*. Toronto: Penguin Canada.

⁷² Contenta, S. (2018, October 5). *Greg Sorbara in the middle of ugly feud that threatens family's billion-dollar company*. Toronto Star. https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/greg-sorbara-in-the-middle-of-ugly-feud-that-threatens-family-s-billion-dollar-company/article_47ca4035-b538-5386-b4e0-6e176cf89a8f.html; York University. (2023). *Biography - Gregory Sorbara*. <https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/membership/biography-gregory-sorbara/>

⁷³ *Ibid.*; York University. (2023). *Creative Writing Awards*. <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/en/experience/awards-prizes/creative-writing-awards>

contributed to more contracting out of cleaning, maintenance, and food services. In some cases, the management and staffing of entire services will be outsourced to an employer who uses the opportunity to drive down wages and reduce benefits. As post-secondary institutions contract out these ‘secondary’ services, students feel the effects of poorer quality of food and cleaning and higher prices for services, as corporations try to make as much profit as possible. Corporations cut their costs by buying cheap food and cleaning equipment and giving contracted workers low wages, scant benefits, and little job security.⁷⁴

In 2022, CUPE found that the vast majority of post-secondary institutions, 83.7%, have contracted out some or all food services, while 61% have contracted out some or all custodial service.⁷⁵

Half have contracted out both food and custodial services. CUPE also found there is a significant gap in union representation between in-house and contracted-out workers. Nearly all in-house workers have union representation, compared to one-third of workers in contracted-out food services and 52.6% of workers in contracted-out custodial services.

CUPE compared the wages of contracted-out and in-house workers, concluding that contracted-out food and custodial workers are some of the lowest paid workers on post-secondary campuses. While most in-house workers are receiving a wage at or above the

living wage for their region, their contracted-out counterparts are earning wages far below the living wage.⁷⁶

CUPE’s report also concluded that workers in food and custodial services are more likely to be women, Black, racialized, and/or a newcomer to Canada. These workers are already earning low wages in the broader Canadian labour market. This means that post-secondary administrators are relieving themselves of any responsibility and respect for these workers and forcing an already marginalized group of workers to bear the costs of privatization.

For this report, we interviewed three CUPE members working for food services at post-secondary institutions to hear their stories about contracting out. In one case, a CUPE member had her contract flipped to a new corporation. Another member worked nearly her whole career as an in-house part-time baker and recently experienced the contracting out of her job. The last member previously worked for a private contractor, but fortunately the service was brought in house, and she became an employee of the university.

Pay and benefits

CUPE members received higher pay and better health care benefits when working in house for a public sector employer. When their jobs were contracted out, they took a hit to their wages and benefits.

One food services worker, Alice (not her real name), a recently arrived immigrant to Canada and worker for Chartwells Canada at a university in New Brunswick, saw a cut to her wage and benefits when the university decided to flip contracts from Sodexo to Chartwells, both highly profitable food services corporations. Chartwells immediately

⁷⁴ Contract Worker Justice @SFU. (2022). *Labour Conditions Among Contract Cleaning and Food Services Staff at Simon Fraser University*. <https://contractworkerjusticesfu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CWJ-Report-Jan-2022.pdf>

⁷⁵ Pasma, C. (2021).

⁷⁶ A living wage refers to the wage workers need to earn to cover the actual costs of living in their community.

decreased Alice's wage by six cents/hour. The corporation decided to compensate part-time staff with lower wages than full-time staff and laid off nearly all the staff in the summer, meaning they lost income and needed to rely on other jobs or Employment Insurance (if they qualified for it) to get by.

What was most significant for Alice, however, was the cut to her sick benefits. Chartwells eliminated her sick days completely, so she has no paid time off when she falls ill. She must now choose between going to work and infecting her co-workers and campus community or staying at home and sacrificing her pay.

Tina (not her real name), who identifies as a Black woman, is a 19-year food services veteran at a university in Ontario. She has seen little change to her wage and benefits package after having her job contracted out. Her job has been precarious for a long time. Tina used to work directly for the university, but in January 2023 they decided to contract out food services to Sodexo. She is often called in to work more hours, including working full-time hours in the summer with the custodial department to clean dorms when students leave. And yet, neither the university nor Sodexo have given her full-time pay and benefits. Thankfully, however, due to her collective agreement, she will receive a salary increase in 2024.

Tina does not receive benefits as a part-time worker, but she currently pays into a benefits plan. She has been paying into a dental plan for over three years, and yet she cannot access the medical attention she needs. She said her dentist and insurance provider are going back and forth about how much she needs to pay out of pocket to have her teeth replaced. She finds this process arduous, and she feels like she is not receiving the dental coverage for which she pays.

The third worker interviewed, Gloria (not her real name), is a Black woman born in Jamaica. She has worked as a cook in food services at a university in Toronto for over 25 years. Gloria has had a unique work experience compared to Alice and Tina because she used to work for a private contractor, but her job was brought in house in 2016. Where CUPE members' work has been brought in house, they have benefited from improvements to their wages.

Gloria initially worked for Sodexo and then Aramark food services until 2016 when the service was brought in house. The most significant improvement is her increase in pay. When she worked for Aramark, she earned \$20/hour but now her wage is nearly \$22/hour due to the union's collective agreement with the university.

Working conditions

Members working in food services found that their workloads either increased or stayed relatively the same when working for private contractors.

Alice expressed concern over her heavier workload under a private food services contractor. She said there is a shortage of staff under the new contract with Chartwells. She claimed that there are not enough people being hired or called in. As a result, Alice often finds herself doing the work of three people on her own. To make matters worse, Chartwells has not provided critical on-the-job health and safety training at work, such as training in how to use equipment. They have provided online training, but Alice questioned whether it was effective, and she was unsure whether she and her colleagues would be compensated for it.

Tina said her workload has not increased, nor has her schedule or workload changed, since she has been employed by Sodexo. Her one complaint is that the university (and now Sodexo) hires young international students to do the work, and they often call in sick or do not come because of their schoolwork or for other reasons. Then the other workers, like her, must cover for them, which increases their workload in those circumstances.

Job security

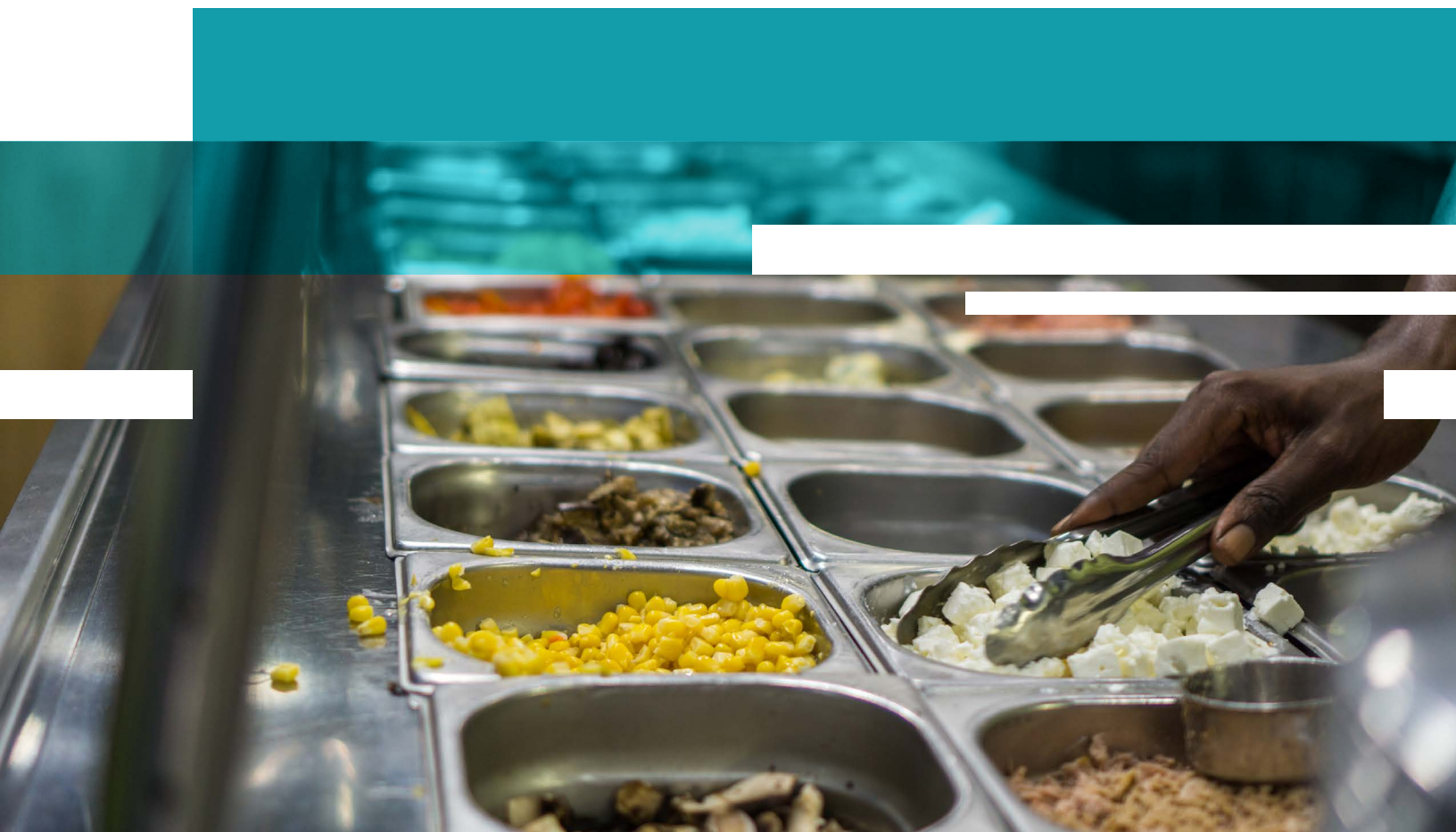
Members expressed concern with their lack of job security and job training when working for private contractors.

In the Maritimes, where Alice and her co-workers faced a switch in contracts to a new private contractor, food services workers feared they would lose their jobs when Sodexo issued layoff notices. The university's request for proposals for a new

food services contractor did not include any mention that the next provider would employ the current workers and keep their union representation.⁷⁷ When the university administrators were asked what would happen to food services workers, they shirked any responsibility for protecting the job security and well-being of these workers. Administrators argued there was nothing the university could do to ensure their employment through the contract change because they were not direct employees of the university. Workers were kept in the dark about contract negotiations with no guarantees that their jobs and collective agreement would be protected.

After the contract flipped in May 2023, Alice and her co-workers did not lose their union protection, but they were unjustly put on probation for 60 shifts. The probation period was about 12 weeks in Alice's case.

⁷⁷ Rudderham, H. (2023, March 8). *75 workers at UNB receive layoff notices from food services company*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/cupe-unb-food-service-contract-sodexo-1.6771217>



Most workers at the university experience job insecurity when they are laid off every summer. Alice was not sure if she would have continued employment with Chartwells after the summer of 2023.

When asked if she feels burnt out because of her long-term job insecurity and stressors at work, Alice said, “Yes, a few times.” Juggling 20 hours a week at another job in a medical facility, studying for a real estate agent license, and receiving unpredictable shifts at Chartwells, she feels exhausted, but she said she is determined to keep going. “I’m a soldier—you wake up and go,” she remarked about her daily hustle.

Tina has worked at a university in Ontario since 2004. She has always been employed in house until 2023, when administrators contracted out food services to Sodexo. Tina said she is a hard worker, and she loves her job, although she has endured job insecurity at the university for decades. She said she applies for full-time positions whenever they are vacant, but she has always lost out to co-workers with more seniority. Yet Sodexo expects her to be at their beck and call whenever they need it.

Harassment and discrimination

All CUPE members interviewed shared a multitude of experiences with discrimination and harassment from their managers.

Alice said that a culture of misinformation, lack of information, contradictions and lying is dominant among Chartwells’ management. Alice pointed out that management is not treating staff fairly or transparently. For example, at times, students who are part-time sometimes get more hours than regular staff. She explained that when employees point this out to management, they are usually met with the response that “there is nothing they can do.” Alice said she is always asked to do “favours” for management which adds to her workload. Their mistreatment has compounded her stress, and she believes they should step up to provide basic necessities for workers, like providing her with a proper work uniform.

Like Alice, Tina said she experiences mistreatment by managers and stress while working for a private contractor. Tina shared that she has been harassed by the new general manager from Sodexo. She claimed that the new manager treated her like a dog,



shooing her off and telling her to punch out and go home, when she had already punched out and was speaking with another co-worker while waiting for the next worker to arrive. Tina was offended by the way she was spoken to, and she believes that the manager treated her this way because she is Black. She observed that he does not speak to or treat other staff like this, and they are mostly white. She explained, “I feel that he is racist, and I feel he doesn’t talk to the white people like this [...] Never in my [many] years have I ever worked at the university and be treated and talked to like that.”

As Tina stated very clearly, this is the first time in her life, at the university or elsewhere, that she feels she has been discriminated against and harassed as a Black woman. She observed that there are very few Black employees at the university’s food services and she is the only one in her department. Tina’s story suggests that private contractors fail to stop harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

While working for a private contractor, Gloria said she was forced to work a heavier workload and she endured harassment by managers in the workplace. She said she had more job duties assigned to her, and her colleagues were often short staffed. She recalls that Aramark management harassed her when she came to the defence of a friend at work who was experiencing harassment from a co-worker. Feeling that management harassed her because she is a Black woman with a disability, she explained,

“Management attacked me. And because I was sickly. I have a disability [...] Anybody can have a disability, but they know their job. They tried to take away my position from me. So, I filed a grievance against them.”

Unfortunately, even since her job has been brought in house, she still experiences tension with management. She said she feels targeted because she fights for workers’ rights. She remarked, “[The university] found out that I was a part of the bargaining thing, so they began to harass me [...] Sometimes I’m not doing anything really, you know? And they nit-pick at any little thing that I’m doing.”

Gloria also continues to struggle to get more time off work and push back against unfair practices by management which affect her work-life balance. She only has three weeks off per year, but she would like a month off at a time. She explains that she used to have weekends off, but now she only receives half of the weekend off. She said,

“I used to be off Saturdays and Sundays. Ever since they [management] come, they take away and only give me Sundays and Mondays and they said I shouldn’t be enjoying the weekend. I’ve worked there for how many years [...] And then they change it around and give new workers time off.”

Gloria’s story demonstrates that while bringing jobs in house benefits workers, some problems remain, showing that public sector employers also need to improve working conditions for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers. While Gloria benefited from a pay increase, she still faces harassment by management. She struggles to access the time off she desires, and she experiences the negative consequences of favouritism which is pitting workers against each other.

Impact on communities

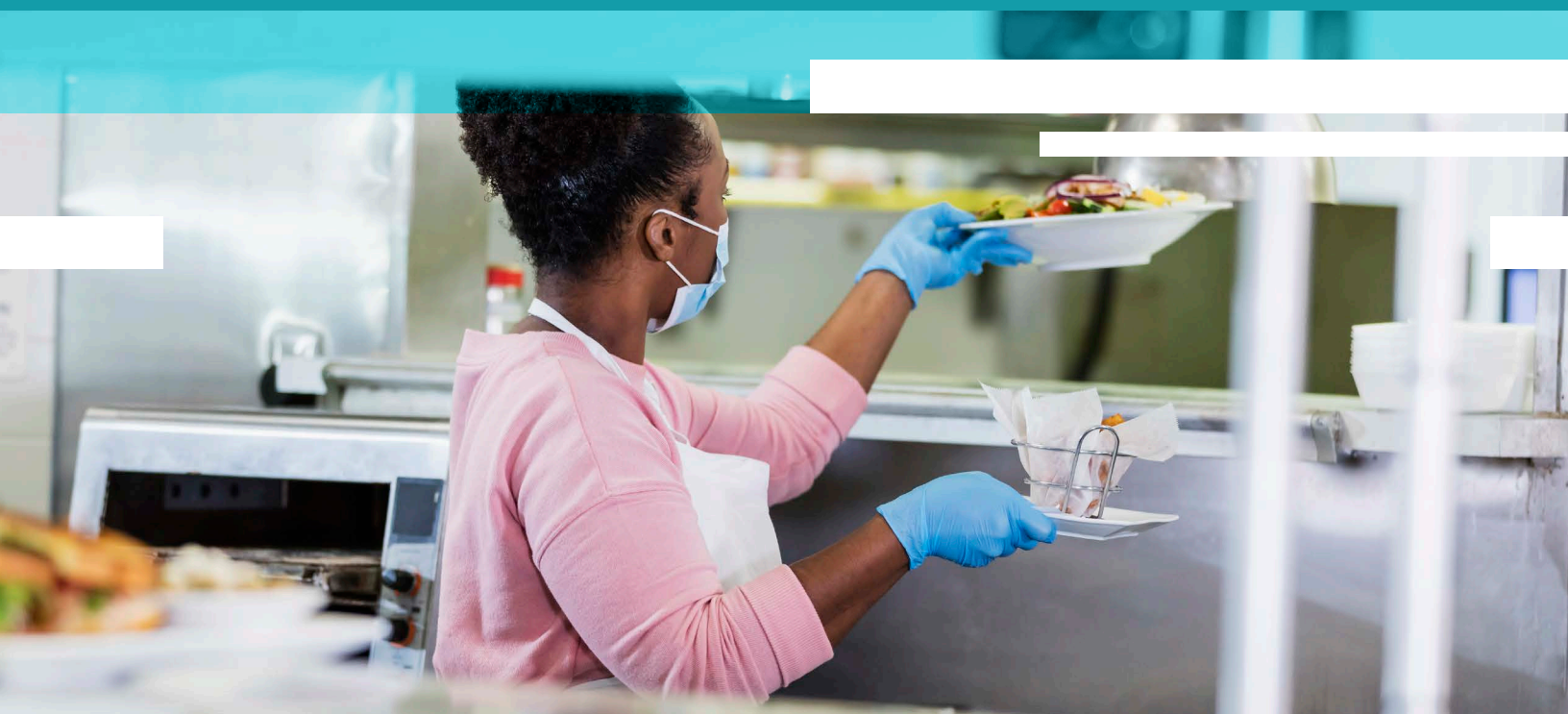
While most members said they have not seen a clear difference in the quality of contracted-out food services, Tina said she has seen a drastic increase in food prices since her university contracted out services, so she is concerned about the impacts of contracting out on the student community.

Tina observed that food prices for students have gone through the roof since January 2023, when Sodexo began their contract

at the university. She said the prices for house salads went up from \$8.99 to \$12.99, Jell-O from \$1.25 to \$2.99, and pudding from \$1.99 to \$3.99. Food quality is also poorer as they sell expiring food and Tina knows students are unhappy with these changes. Her story illustrates the fact that private corporations are interested in making as much profit as possible, so they will increase the prices of their products. This comes at the expense of students who are already facing high tuition and living costs.

CONCLUSION

Altogether these stories illustrate the consequences of contracting out on Black, Indigenous and racialized CUPE members who work in food services on post-secondary campuses. The most consequential impacts members identified are the cuts in pay and benefits, mistreatment and harassment of staff by management, and heavier workloads due to a lack of adequate staffing. These consequences arise when private contractors cut down on compensation for their workers and burden them with workloads so that they can make as much profit as possible. When workers were brought in house, in Gloria's case, they received some improvements to their pay and working conditions, but there are even more changes public sector employers can make to improve working conditions for these members.





**SHORT-TERM GAIN
FOR LONG-TERM
PAIN—THE PRIVATE
SECTOR TAKEOVER
IN LONG-TERM
CARE**

CASE STUDY

2



The growth of corporate long-term care

The provision of long-term care (LTC) across Canada has increasingly adopted a neoliberal market model which uses privatization to cut costs and services, while boosting profits for shareholders of private long-term care corporations. These private homes rely heavily on the labour of poorly paid care workers who are mostly Indigenous, Black and racialized women. This case study summarizes the situation in this sector and illustrates the working conditions of Indigenous, Black and racialized women who work as continuing care aides and personal support workers, through the stories of two Indigenous CUPE members in New Brunswick and Ontario.

The privatization of long-term care takes many forms. The main mechanisms of privatization are the private ownership of LTC homes and the contracting out of services such as housekeeping, laundry,

and food services. In 2021, the Canadian Institute for Health Information reported that the majority of LTC homes in Canada are in private hands—54% of LTC homes are privately owned and the remaining 46% are publicly owned.⁷⁸ However, public and private ownership varies greatly across the country. For instance, 88% of LTC homes in Quebec are publicly owned compared to 16% in Ontario.⁷⁹

As of 2020, financialized companies owned approximately one third of seniors' housing in Canada including 42% of retirement units and 22% of LTC beds.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2021). *Long-term care homes in Canada: How many and who owns them?* <https://www.cihi.ca/en/long-term-care-homes-in-canada-how-many-and-who-owns-them>

⁷⁹ Estabrooks, C. A, Ewa, V., Keefe, J., Straus, S. E. (2023, July 24). *The predictable crisis of covid-19 in Canada's long term care homes.* BMJ, 382. <https://www.bmj.com/content/382/bmj-2023-075148>

⁸⁰ Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2022). *The financialization of seniors' housing in Canada: A Report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate.* <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Brown-The-Financialization-of-Seniors-Housing-ofha-en.pdf>, p.4.

Financialization—a term that refers to the ownership and/or operation of properties by investment companies with a mandate to maximize returns for external shareholders—is prevalent in both seniors’ housing and long-term care. Financialized companies include publicly traded companies, real estate investment trusts (REITs), private equity firms, pension funds, and other entities that treat seniors’ housing as a commodity rather than a human right and a social good for people and communities. According to a report of the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, as of 2020, financialized companies owned approximately one third of seniors’ housing in Canada including 42% of retirement units and 22% of LTC beds.

Revera, Sienna, Extendicare, and Chartwell are the biggest corporate players in the LTC industry and have raked in massive profits. Extendicare, the largest private LTC provider in the country with 111 owned and managed homes, made \$1.2 billion in revenue at the end of the 2021 fiscal year.⁸¹ Revera, the second largest LTC home owner in Canada, is a subsidiary of the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, which oversees the investments of federal public service pension plans and holds approximately \$170 billion in assets.⁸²

Governments promoting privatization

The growth of private LTC homes goes back decades to decisions by Conservative and Liberal governments who set the stage for private ownership to expand. These governments cut public funding, tendered

beds to the private sector, gave corporations subsidies and licensed them to build new homes.

In Ontario, for example, the Harris Conservative government gave public funding to private corporations to build LTC homes that the corporations would then own and operate.⁸³ The government cut funding for thousands of hospital beds and cancelled capital grants for municipalities and non-profit organizations to build new LTC homes. They put out tenders for 20,000 LTC beds and the private developers who won and built the homes were reimbursed for the construction costs from public funds over a 20-year period. The subsequent Liberal government increased the construction subsidies to incentivize the redevelopment of older homes (the majority of which were privately owned). In 2021, the Ford Conservative government increased the subsidies once again and gave corporations licences for 16,000 more long-term care beds. Canadians for Tax Fairness estimates that for-profit LTC corporations in Ontario were given nearly \$4 billion in public funding from 2012-2022, which enriched corporate executives and shareholders rather than improving care for senior residents.⁸⁴

Other provincial governments have provided massive subsidies to LTC corporations and given the green light for P3s with giant corporations as well. The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) gave Extendicare \$40 million in the 2019-2020 fiscal year for expenses like office supplies.⁸⁵ Privately-operated homes that set their own fees

⁸¹ Extendicare. (2023). *Corporate Profile*. <https://www.extendicare.com/about-extendicare/corporate-profile/>; Roy, I. (2023, March 13). *The Private Deals Remaking Long-Term Care*. The Local. <https://thelocal.to/long-term-care-extendicare-revera-private-care/>

⁸² Anderson, J. (2021, October 11). *Reforming long-term care starts with Revera*. Toronto Star. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/10/11/reforming-long-term-care-starts-with-revera.html>

⁸³ Ontario Health Coalition. (2021, November 29). *Public Money, Private Profits: The Ford Government & the Privatization of the Next Generation of Ontario’s Long-Term Care*. <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/Final-Ford-government-LTC-bed-allocations-report.pdf>

⁸⁴ Cochrane, D., and Sanger, T. (2022). *Careless Profits: Diverting Public Money From Long-Term Care in Ontario*. Canadians for Tax Fairness. <https://www.taxfairness.ca/sites/default/files/2022-05/careless-profits-report-canadians-for-tax-fairness-may-2022.pdf>

⁸⁵ Birrell, A. (2021, May 3). *The slow crisis in Saskatchewan’s long-term care*. Briarpatch Magazine. <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/the-slow-crisis-in-saskatchewans-long-term-care>

and are overseen by the SHA, deemed as “personal care homes,” received \$9 million in the same year. The province of New Brunswick, which had a not-for-profit LTC system until 2008, has awarded Shannex corporation almost \$198 million since 2008 to provide care.⁸⁶ New facilities since then have been constructed and operated exclusively by Shannex. On the East Coast, LTC corporations are making a foray into P3s. In the last six years the government of Newfoundland and Labrador has awarded P3 contracts to build LTC homes in Corner Brook, Gander, and Grand Falls-Windsor (a total of 265 beds).⁸⁷ They agreed to the P3s despite compelling evidence that these P3s will likely cost more than public projects, and will add more debt, which the government was trying to shed in the first place.⁸⁸

Corporations maximize profit in LTC homes by raising accommodation fees; paying the lowest wages possible; hiring part-time, casual and ‘self-employed’ workers to avoid giving benefits; and shifting care work to private caregivers, unpaid volunteers, and family members.⁸⁹ Other measures to save costs include giving staff less time to adequately and safely care for residents. As Pat and Hugh Armstrong argue, these corporate managerial practices are designed to generate profit rather than provide quality care for seniors.⁹⁰ The cost savings from contracting out and private delivery are derived from reducing the level of service that residents receive.

The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, housed at the Canadian Human Rights Commission, states unambiguously that private LTC is detrimental for residents, workers, and the community. They explain, “there is a well-documented pattern of inferior care at for-profit long-term care homes compared to public and non-profit homes, including fewer hours of direct care, lower staffing levels, and higher mortality and hospitalization rates.”⁹¹

What COVID-19 revealed

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented attention to the horrific neglect and mistreatment of seniors in for-profit LTC homes. Compared to not-for-profit and publicly operated homes, private homes had lower levels of staffing, more infections and deaths, more verified complaints, more hospitalizations, poorer quality of care, and were more prone to closure as COVID-19 ravaged private LTC homes.⁹²

Across Canada, private LTC homes had the highest mortality rate during the pandemic.⁹³

In Ontario, for-profit homes had about twice as many COVID-19 infections and deaths as not-for-profit homes, and four times as

⁸⁶ McFarland, J. (2021, June 18). *The corporatization of funded long-term care in New Brunswick*. NB Media Co-op. <https://nbmediacoop.org/2021/06/18/the-corporatization-of-funded-long-term-care-in-new-brunswick/>

⁸⁷ Plenary. (2020, February 26). *Construction completed on first P3 project in Newfoundland and Labrador*. <https://plenary.com/news/construction-completed-on-first-p3-project-in-newfoundland-and-labrador/>; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2022, March 28). *Two Long-Term Care Homes to Open in Central Newfoundland*. <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2022/exec/0328n02/>

⁸⁸ CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador. (2017). *Stop P3 deals before you saddle us with more debt*. <https://nl.cupe.ca/campaigns/no-room-for-profit-in-health-care/>; Saulnier, C. (2020). *Many Dangers of Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Nova%20Scotia%20Office/2020/10/HiddendangersofP3s.pdf>

⁸⁹ Armstrong, P., and Armstrong, H. (2020). *Privatizing care: Setting the stage*. In P. Armstrong and H. Armstrong (Eds.) *The Privatization of Care: The Case of Nursing Homes*. Routledge.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2022).

⁹² Ontario’s Long-Term Care Commission. (2021, April 30). *Final Report*. <https://files.ontario.ca/mltc-ltcc-final-report-en-2021-04-30.pdf>

⁹³ August, M. (2021, November 25). *Securitising Seniors Housing: The Financialisation of Real Estate and Social Reproduction in Retirement and Long-Term Care Homes*. *Antipode*, 54(3): 635-680. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/anti.12795>

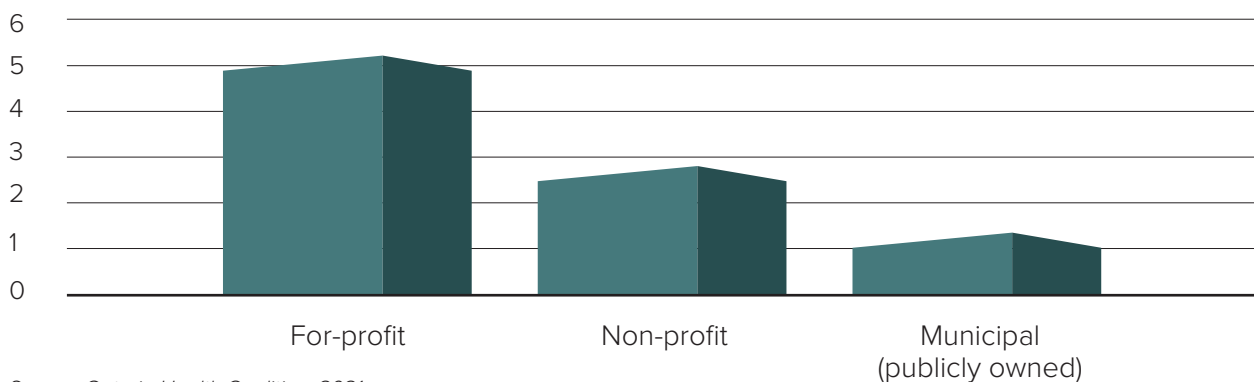
many COVID-19 infections and deaths as municipally operated homes.⁹⁴ Conditions were so bad in private LTC homes in Saskatchewan that the SHA took over the homes in 2022, after a report revealed that Extencicare failed to contain a deadly COVID-19 outbreak.⁹⁵

Much has been written about how COVID-19 brought to light long-standing structural shortcomings in the LTC sector, and many were hopeful that in a post-COVID world, these failings would be addressed. Canadians were shocked and appalled when the Canadian Armed Forces reported on the horrific conditions they found in LTC homes during the height of the COVID-19 crisis.⁹⁶ A CBC article covering the release of the report is still appalling to read, with conditions at the

homes described as “nothing short of horrid and inhumane as ill-trained, burned-out and, in some cases, neglectful staff coped with the growing care needs of elderly residents.”⁹⁷ The report detailed residents being bullied, drugged, improperly fed and in some cases left for hours and days in soiled bedding. It also spoke of abuse, neglect, and cruelty.

The Ontario Health Coalition followed this evolving crisis closely, documenting COVID-19 deaths and infections in LTC homes and analyzing the underlying causes of the tragedy. “The fact is that death rates for residents were much higher in for-profit long-term care (LTC) homes than non-profit and publicly owned LTC homes,” they concluded.⁹⁸

DEATH RATE PER 100 BEDS IN LONG-TERM CARE HOMES, TO DECEMBER 2020, BY OWNERSHIP



Source: Ontario Health Coalition, 2021.

⁹⁴ Oved, M. C., Kennedy, B., Wallace, K., Tubb, E., and Bailey, A. (2020, May 8). *For-profit nursing homes have four times as many COVID-19 deaths as city-run homes, Star analysis finds*. Toronto Star. https://www.durhamregion.com/news/for-profit-nursing-homes-have-four-times-as-many-covid-19-deaths-as-city-run/article_3b8dc7a1-cfb9-5d7b-93a5-16901349fb18.html

⁹⁵ Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA). (2022, October 12). *SHA formally assumes responsibility of five Sask.-based Extencicare long-term care homes*. <https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news-events/news/sha-formally-assumes-responsibility-five-sask-based-extencicare-long-term-care-homes>

⁹⁶ Mialkowski, C. J. J. (May 30, 2020). *OP Laser-JTFC observations long term care facilities in Ontario*. <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/6928480/OP-LASER-JTFC-Observations-in-LTCF-in-On.pdf>

⁹⁷ Brewster, M. and Kapelos, V. (2020, May 26). *Military alleges horrific conditions, abuse in pandemic-hit Ontario nursing homes*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/long-term-care-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-trudeau-1.5584960>

⁹⁸ Ontario Health Coalition. (2021, December 1). *BRIEFING NOTE: The Horrifying Truth About For-Profit Long-Term Care Homes*. <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/briefing-note-the-horrifying-truth-about-for-profit-long-term-care-homes/>

The Ontario Health Coalition notes that the LTC homes in Ontario with the highest death rates are owned by the corporations Southbridge (9 deaths per 100 beds), Rykka (8.60 deaths per 100 beds), Sienna (6.54 deaths per 100 beds), and Revera (6.26 deaths per 100 beds).

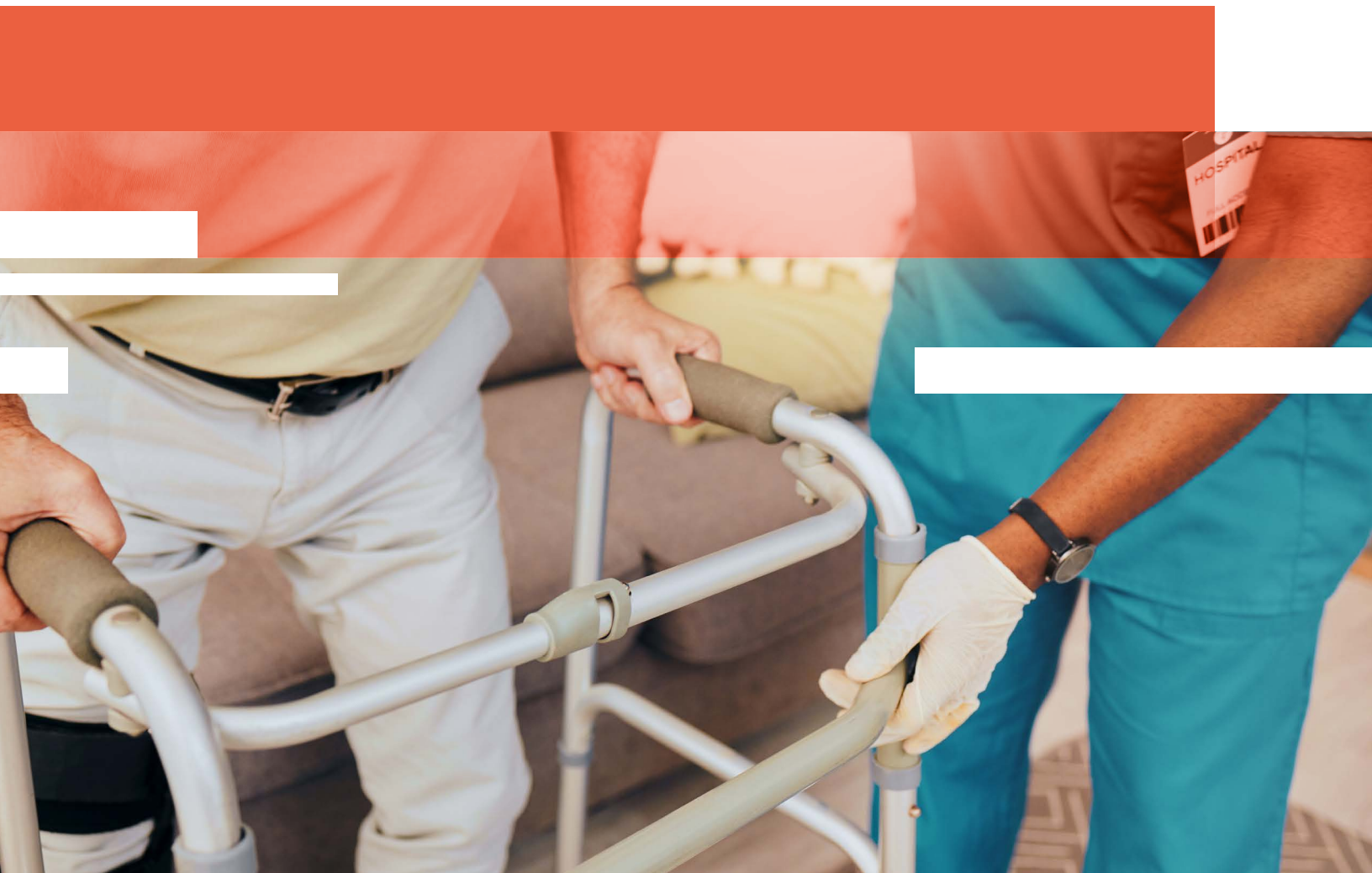
One opinion piece written by a front-line LTC physician in April 2020 was entitled “COVID-19 rips bandage off the open wound that is our nursing home system.”⁹⁹ In it, Dr. Amit Arya described the crowded and underserved conditions in which the elderly are kept and spoke of the poor working conditions of front-line LTC workers. He concluded that support workers need to be treated better: provided with proper protective gear, paid a decent wage, and

offered full-time work and benefits. Also, more staff are desperately needed to reduce unsustainable workloads and increase the quality of care for residents.

A diverse and mistreated labour force

In a report from Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO), the extent to which race matters was established when looking at the disparate impact of COVID-19 on the population in Canada. The disproportionate rates of infection and death among Black, Indigenous and racialized communities are explained in the context of long-standing health inequities which are influenced by socio-economic conditions. These include income, education, employment, and housing—often referred to as the social determinants of health. The CPHO wrote:

⁹⁹ Arya, A. (2020, April 26). *COVID-19 rips bandage off the open wound that is our nursing home system*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/opinion-nursing-homes-conditions-1.5541155>



“Members of racialized communities are more likely to experience inequitable living and working conditions that make them more susceptible to COVID-19, such as lower incomes, precarious employment, overcrowded housing, and limited access to health and social services.

“Many face increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to their employment in front-line essential occupations with frequent contact with other people and a limited ability to work from home. For example, many of the care providers in long-term care facilities in large Canadian cities are racialized women. Racialized employees also make up a large component of workers in our agriculture and food production system. The working conditions in these facilities, often coupled with higher risk living conditions at home, put these employees at an increased risk for COVID-19.”¹⁰⁰

In April 2020, Pat Armstrong stated that years of for-profit care had resulted in a serious deterioration in the labour conditions inside LTC homes which became ‘ground zero’ for COVID-19 deaths. “If you’re in the business of making a profit [...] in nursing homes, the overwhelming majority of the cost is labour. And that’s where you are going to try and save money,” she observed.¹⁰¹ Employers reduce labour costs, Armstrong added, by “hiring more people part-time, more people casual, more people at the last minute when you need them—rather than staffing up

with full-time workers that you have to pay benefits to and provide things like sick leave for.” Complaints of excessive workload, job insecurity, irregular work schedules, low wages, and slim benefits, including insufficient sick leave, abound in the LTC sector, and especially in privately run and owned facilities.

Other researchers conclude that staff in LTC homes in Canada were failed by LTC corporations and governments during the pandemic. LTC staff have been an underpaid and undervalued workforce for decades—they earn around half of what of their acute care counterparts do.¹⁰² Many of Canada’s LTC workforce are middle-aged, racialized women (45% more than the general population), and more than 35% are born outside of Canada—one of the highest proportions of any country.¹⁰³ Unregulated workers who provide 80 to 90% of direct care often work part-time in multiple settings to make a living wage, frequently without benefits.¹⁰⁴

In addition, long-standing health and safety threats against LTC staff, including abuse, physical harm, and discrimination, greatly impact their physical and mental well-being. A pilot study published in 2017, based on interviews in eight Canadian LTC homes, two each in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia, explored direct care workers’ experiences and perspectives related to psychological health and safety.¹⁰⁵ The study found a “relationship between workers’ psychological health, well-being and working conditions that include work overload, low worker control, disrespect and discrimination.”¹⁰⁶ Another study, completed

¹⁰⁰ Public Health Agency of Canada. (2021, February 21). *CPHO Sunday edition: The Impact of COVID-19 on Racialized Communities*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/02/cpho-sunday-edition-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-racialized-communities.html>

¹⁰¹ CBC Radio. (2020, April 24). *Canada’s for-profit model of long-term care has failed the elderly, says leading expert*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/sunday/the-sunday-edition-for-april-26-2020-1.5536429/canada-s-for-profit-model-of-long-term-care-has-failed-the-elderly-says-leading-expert-1.5540891>

¹⁰² Estabrooks, C. A., Ewa, V., Keefe, J., Straus, S. E. (2023, July 24). *The predictable crisis of covid-19 in Canada’s long term care homes*. *BMJ*, 382. <https://www.bmj.com/content/382/bmj-2023-075148>

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Braedley, S., Owsu, P., Przednowek, A., and Armstrong, P. (2017, May 9). *We’re told, ‘Suck it up’: Long-Term Care Workers’ Psychological Health and Safety*. *Ageing International*, 43: 91-109. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12126-017-9288-4>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and focused on one LTC home in Toronto, documented how racism and racialization impacted workers' mental, physical and social well-being.¹⁰⁷ This is particularly important in a sector where a majority of workers come from racialized and immigrant groups, and where the private sector has fewer protections for equity-deserving groups, including lower rates of unionization.

LTC workers' stories of dedication and resilience

Two CUPE members working in private long-term care facilities in New Brunswick and Ontario were interviewed for this report. Claire (not her real name) shared her stories of the conditions working for a private contractor and how these affect her as a female worker who identifies as Indigenous, and her racialized colleagues. Victoria (not her real name) described her diverse experiences working with large and small LTC facilities, public and private, and shared her hopes for better quality of care for aging Canadians.

Pay and benefits

Claire has been working at a LTC home run by a private corporation for three years. She started as a casual worker in assisted living, where wages were much lower (between \$16 and \$17/hour) and then became full-time and switched over to home care, where the wages are higher (\$21/hour). Claire explained that these good wages are the result of CUPE collective bargaining.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers at the LTC home received a one-time lump sum payment of between \$150 and \$200. Workers had to pay taxes on this income, even though they asked for it to be distributed over several paycheques to reduce taxes on the modest bonus.

Claire shared that she does not have to work a second job; however, she noted that

workers in assisted living, many of whom are from the Philippines, work two or three jobs to make ends meet and to send funds back home to their families. Wages are much lower in assisted living, so additional work is the norm.

As for benefits, Claire said workers in her LTC home enjoy a standard benefits package, but she complained that they do not have a pension plan. Apparently, the employer will match contributions to an RRSP up to 5%, but Claire said it is too complicated, so she has not signed up and many other workers do the same. Management will not bother explaining the process, she said, so they do not participate.

Victoria has been working in a privately owned home in rural Ontario as a personal support worker for the last four years. She has over 20 years' experience as a personal support worker (PSW) and said that she earned much higher wages with public sector employers than with private employers. She is presently earning \$24/hour, compared to \$27/hour at her last job with a public employer.

Like Claire, Victoria also said that she received much better benefits when she worked for public employers. Her package included physiotherapy and chiropractor services, for example, which she said are important in her line of work because of the physical strain of moving patients and equipment. Now she does not have those benefits and she asks her husband to massage her at home instead.

Sick leave is managed very strictly by Claire's corporate employer. When workers use sick leave, they get put onto a "step program" that could eventually lead to dismissal. Claire told us that one staff member was on step 5 of the program, and management suggested keeping her on as a casual worker to give her "another chance." But they did not call her back, so Claire speculated that this is probably a strategy to get her co-worker to quit. In the case of Victoria, she said she

¹⁰⁷ Syed, I. U. (2020). *Racism, racialization, and health equity in Canadian residential long term care: A case study in Toronto*. *Social Science & Medicine*, 265. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953620307437#preview-section-abstract>



could not complain about sick leave as she was accumulating 1.5 days a month and she rarely called in sick, except for during COVID-19 when she did exceed her accrued number of days.

Claire also shared that during the COVID-19 pandemic, she became sick while on vacation. When she came back, she was asked to sign papers to be put on step 1 of the sick leave program. Management argued that because she had contracted COVID-19 while on vacation, her sick leave was not justified and she had to be put on the step program. Claire stood her ground and refused to sign the papers. Eventually, management dropped their demand.

Working conditions

Claire shared that working hours are stable for full-time staff. Part-time and casual staff must bid on hours if there are any openings in the schedule. Management must use the seniority system to allocate hours. The system is complex, but it seems to be working, she said. However, later in the interview, when asked if there were enough

staff to do the job, Claire said that she and her co-workers are not convinced that calls are always being made when people call in sick or are on leave. Consequently, they are often understaffed and must take on the nine residents assigned to someone that is absent. This weighs heavily on the workload of those that are at work at any given time. She explained, “You know, they want us to do more and pay us less and we’re not doing [that], [...] because we’re in bargaining, they’re not allowed to give us anything extra to do, like they’re not allowed to put anything on our plates.”

Claire flagged some health and safety issues at her workplace: excessive heat in the building; insufficient or missing equipment (remote control for beds, lifts); and lack of proper training. Claire suffered a back injury at work due to the lack of staff, equipment, and training. At that time, training was provided online and workers were told to do the training from home, on their own time. Claire and other co-workers refused to do the training on their own time without being paid. Now management has started imparting in-class training during working hours.

For Victoria, the key issue around working conditions is the number of residents assigned to each PSW. She has worked in private and public homes where she was responsible for caring for 10 to 12 residents at a time. The quality of care that she could provide was below what she believes the residents need and deserve. She emphasized that residents are paying out of pocket to stay in these homes, and they should be receiving better care—more attention, more activities, more services. At the private home where she currently works, she is assigned to eight residents, which is an improvement, but she still finds it difficult to provide the one-on-one care that residents expect.

Victoria finds that residents are lonely, and they want social interaction. She believes they need more time and care, as she explained, “They’re the ones suffering for it.” Even though her workload is manageable, she thinks it should be more humanized.

“When you’re in a nursing home, it’s a rush, it’s go, go, go,” she said. She compared the daily routine at the LTC homes to an assembly line in a factory.

According to Claire, managers make a huge difference in how staff are treated and how they feel. She said there is a lot of turnover in management. She is not sure why, but wondered whether it might be because they do not receive training for the job. She said the current manager is great—has an ‘open door’ policy and talks about things respectfully. But not all managers are like this. “You get these general managers and they’re told to save money, cut corners, save money because it’s full in their pockets. Oh, I saved this much money, so I get this kind of a bonus.” Claire said the issues that could be addressed by management to improve quality of service to residents are food, safety, and staffing.



Victoria agreed that managers make a huge difference—in her experience, she has had good and bad managers. She has worked in LTC homes where managers did not care for residents and staff, but at her current job things are different. “Managers here go on the floor and help residents and PSWs instead of delegating work tasks to them.” Also, Victoria said that she feels that she can bring up her concerns to managers and they listen.

Harassment and discrimination

Cliques, bullying, and favouritism are common in the workplace according to Claire. Management seems unwilling or unable to address conflicts and bullying between staff members. “Health care is such a cutthroat business because it’s like everybody wants to get ahead of everybody else. We’re losing people because of the bullying and harassment, the favouritism”, she explained. “Favouritism has a racist connotation as well,” Claire said. “It’s the white people that are getting the favouritism.”

Claire revealed that it is not only management that discriminates against racialized workers at her job, but some of the other workers and union members also take advantage of immigrant workers. “I don’t want them doing my work for me, and there’s other members that feel the exact same way. But I feel that [some] members do take advantage of them because [...] they’re just getting here.”

Claire said she believes that there is a kind of hierarchy and a race element to discrimination because the people at the bottom of the ladder are new immigrants or temporary workers who have a lot to lose if they do not keep their head down and work hard. Employers take advantage of that. And then favouritism comes in. When talking about the situation of immigrant workers at the home, she said, “[If] something goes wrong [immigrants] feel that they can be deported back. That’s not fair on them to be worrying about this, to not know, you know, if they’re going to be safe here.”

In addition to the discrimination towards Filipinos that Claire describes as quite common, she spoke at length of her journey of self-identifying as Indigenous and her marriage to an Indigenous man, and the prejudice she encountered at work and in her family due to their identities. She shared this:

“I just find that some people look down on you [...] I can’t even explain it, like when people find out, you know, I do a lot with Indigenous people [...] Especially with Truth and Reconciliation, because they’re not approving our Truth and Reconciliation Day in September. They’re not allowing us to have a 13th day off. They scratched Truth and Reconciliation out!”

Impact on communities

Victoria’s story centers mainly around the impact of privatization on residents of the LTC home and the community. She shared that one of her main concerns is how the privately-run home she works in now picks and chooses what policies it will adopt and what programs it will follow. “Private is not a good thing. Not for the residents either,” she said.

“These LTC homes don’t treat residents as humans,” she said. “It’s the dollar sign they care about.”

Victoria believes the problem is not with the managers but rather with the LTC companies themselves. She says they are the ones putting in protocols that do not provide enough care for residents. The companies require families to provide a lot for residents with regards to equipment, supplies, and services, she adds.

When asked how the quality of services could be improved for residents, Victoria said that LTC homes can provide proper care by accessing more equipment and services, as she has seen in government facilities. Secondly, she stressed that residents need more one-on-one time with care providers to feel that they are being cared for. Victoria shared that her heart breaks when she sees residents who feel lonely because they are without their family, and she is so busy that

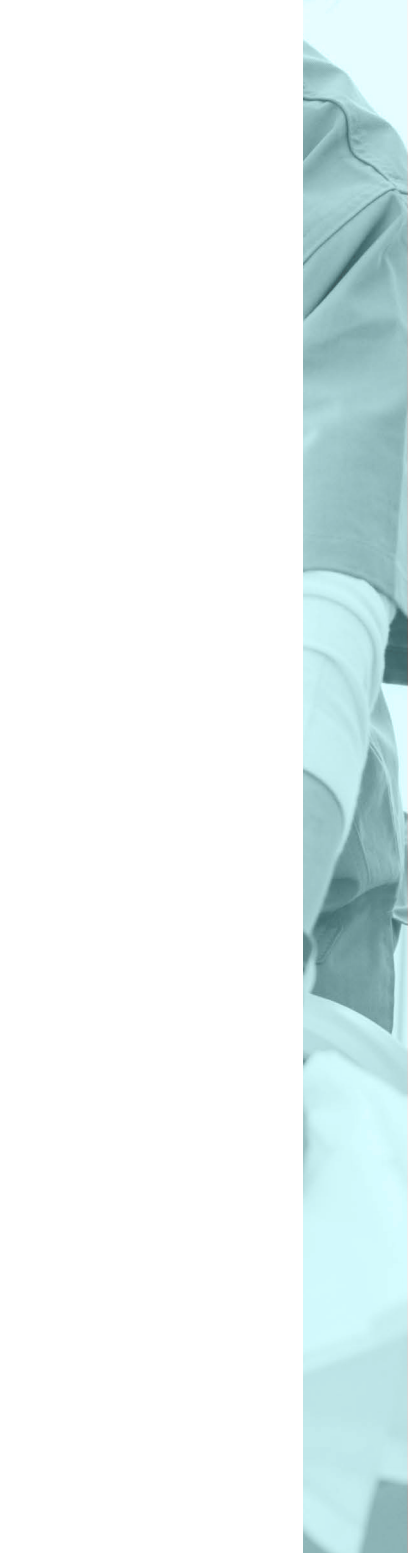
she can't give them the time they deserve. "It's physically and emotionally exhausting!", she said.

One resident told Victoria "I feel like I'm in a prison [...] the only thing that's missing are the bars." Victoria told us that her brother works at a prison in Sudbury and that there they have games and leisure time, which sounds better than the conditions in LTC homes. "Staff who work in prisons are paid better too," she added.

CONCLUSION

In the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular the devastating consequences for LTC residents, it is critical to hear the stories of those marginalized workers who have remained in the system despite unsustainable working conditions, illness, and death, and to act to address the crisis in the LTC sector. Claire's story reaffirms that working in LTC homes in Canada, especially when privatized, takes a toll on workers. The excessive workload due to understaffing and the difficult relationship with management—which is often tainted by disrespect, favouritism, and discrimination—stand out. These conditions have negative impacts on the health and safety of workers, particularly racialized workers, as well as on the well-being of the residents they serve. Victoria's story reinforces that community members, in this case residents at LTC homes, are the ones paying the price for deteriorating services and living conditions, especially in privately-run facilities, while workers are under increasing pressure to provide services under unsustainable conditions.





**“WE ARE BETTER
IN THE PUBLIC
SECTOR”—
BRINGING
SERVICES BACK
IN HOUSE IN
B.C. HOSPITALS**

CASE STUDY



Contracting out of support work in B.C. hospitals

Canadian public hospitals have increasingly turned to privatization schemes to deliver health care and 'non-core' services such as housekeeping, custodial, laundry, security, and dietary services. While the revenue from taxation and federal transfers allocates significant funds to public hospitals to cover part of their operational costs, there are ongoing challenges related to health care demands and shrinking funding that have led hospital administrators to contract out services. Hospitals have privatized services, jobs, and resources in the interest of saving money and improving the efficiency of services.

The most extensive case of health care privatization took place in B.C. in the early 2000s. B.C. Liberal Premier Gordon Campbell's government took several steps to facilitate widespread contracting out in long-term care and health care, including allowing providers to avoid unionization and/or opt out of the master collective agreement to lower labour costs and increase profits. Bill 29, the *Health and Social Services Delivery Improvement Act* was passed in 2002, to allow public health authorities to contract out custodial, housekeeping, laundry, and dietary work in hospitals and long-term care homes. The following year, Bill 94, the *Health Sector Partnerships Agreement Act*, allowed for contract-flipping in the health sector. These laws excluded health care workers from successorship and other provisions of the B.C. Labour Relations Code.

An estimated 8,500 workers represented by the HEU¹⁰⁸ were fired from their jobs.¹⁰⁹

Researcher Bailey Garden claims that this was the largest mass firing of women workers in B.C. since the end of Second World War and the broadest privatization of health care support services in Canada.¹¹⁰

The biggest blow to this group of workers—most of whom were women and racialized immigrants—was losing employment. Workers lost their strong "no contracting out" collective agreement protection, successor rights, and bumping language that had helped higher-seniority workers avoid losing their jobs.¹¹¹ Members who successfully reapplied for jobs with the private contractors lost their pensions and union protection, including their seniority rights. Their salaries dropped from an average of \$19/hour, to almost \$10/hour, forcing many workers to rely on additional jobs outside of hospitals to get by.¹¹² Workers had to move between hospitals and take on temporary work assignments at their employers' will.

Hospital administrators saved money by contracting out, but this came off the backs of low-paid, racialized women workers. According to a 2002 HEU membership survey, 85% of their members were women.¹¹³ About three in 10 HEU members were workers of colour and one-third of members were born outside Canada, many in the Philippines and India.¹¹⁴

Research studies identify the consequences of this mass privatization on workers and their families. A study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in 2005 found that 100% of participants said it felt very hectic working for a for-profit contractor.¹¹⁵ Workers reported that they had an overwhelming workload due to the physical demands of work, unpredictable

¹⁰⁸ The Hospital Employees' Union is CUPE's B.C. health services division, and is the biggest health care union in B.C., with more than 50,000 members. Since 1944, HEU has advocated for better working and caring conditions, and defended public health care. HEU locals protect members working in every area of health care across B.C..

¹⁰⁹ Stinson, J. *et al.* (2005).

¹¹⁰ Garden, B. (2021).

¹¹¹ Camfield, D. (2006). *Neoliberalism and working-class resistance in British Columbia: The Hospital Employees' Union struggle, 2002-2004*. *Labour/Le Travail*, 57, 9-41.

¹¹² Garden, B. (2021).

¹¹³ Camfield, D. (2006).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Stinson, J. *et al.* (2005).

work assignments, additional work requests, lack of training, and high staff turnover. Eighty-three per cent of participants said their job negatively affected their physical health, manifesting in stress, exhaustion, pain, illness, and injury alongside feelings of depression, upset, and frustration.

Former in-house workers said they felt severe depression due to the loss of their former jobs, the reduction in pay and benefits, loss of seniority, and heavier workload.

Most participants, 88%, said their job had a negative impact on their personal relationships. Workers described spending less time with family and friends due to

work exhaustion, and their reduction in pay meant that workers who sent money to family members outside of the country had to decrease the amounts they sent. Researchers concluded that contracting out would cause serious damage to the health care system and these consequences would become evident over time.

Another study with HEU members in 2011 found similar results, as workers explained how contracting out has a negative impact on their working conditions.¹¹⁶ Participants described pay cuts, understaffing (on a daily basis), heavier workloads, erratic work schedules, and observed that the contractors took shortcuts in health and safety measures. The study concluded that private contractors opted for these measures to increase their profit margins, but this goal runs counter to what the health care system is for—providing the highest quality of care possible to save lives. It also concluded that the more private contractors exploit health care support



¹¹⁶ Zuberi, D. M., and Ptashnick, M. B. (2011, January 27). *The deleterious consequences of privatization and outsourcing for hospital support work: The experiences of contracted-out hospital cleaners and dietary aids in Vancouver, Canada*. *Social Science and Medicine*, 72: 907-911. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21324410/>

workers, the more they reduce the quality of care provided to patients and increase their risk of hospital-acquired infections.

HEU's campaign against contracting out

HEU and their allies ran a campaign for almost 20 years to reverse the consequences of Bill 29 and Bill 94 on the health care system in B.C. HEU was committed to fight privatization and bring these workers back into the employment of public health authorities. HEU organized protests, short-term occupations, wildcat strikes, pickets and rallies to defy private contractors and the B.C. government.

On November 22, 2002, HEU leaders took radical action against K-Bro Linen Systems which had a 10-year contract to ship masses of dirty laundry to Calgary to be cleaned.¹¹⁷ HEU leaders Chris Allnutt, Fred Muzin and Mary LaPlante blocked a road with bales of

hay near the Chilliwack industrial park to stop the trucks carrying laundry from Fraser Valley hospitals en route to Calgary. They were later arrested for their blockade. LaPlante said of the action, "We fought a big, long, hard fight. Getting arrested wasn't something that I wanted to do. It wasn't in the intent that I had that morning. But you know what, if you feel strongly enough about protecting your membership, you're gonna do what you're gonna do."¹¹⁸

During a tense round of bargaining in 2004, members voted 89% in favour of a strike at hospitals across the province. When 40,000 members went on the picket lines, the B.C. government brought in back-to-work legislation through Bill 37 that imposed a new two-year contract. For four days, HEU members defied the legislation and were supported with sympathy

¹¹⁷ Hospital Employees' Union (HEU). Guardian, 2003, volume 21, number 1. https://www.heu.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resource/2003/03/30/03_Guardian_1Spring.pdf

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*



strikes by thousands of CUPE members in municipalities, schools, and libraries, as well as teachers and workers in railways, sawmills, a pulp mill, and hydro.¹¹⁹ In the end, the union had to make the extremely difficult choice to return members to work to avoid fines that would have depleted the union's finances, and knowing that province-wide support would eventually dry up.

In 2007, members won some relief when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down parts of Bill 29 as a violation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The court found that removing protections against contracting out, bumping rights and layoff notices contravened the Charter's guarantee of freedom of association. This was a major victory after a five-year court process that involved several appeals, and set precedent for the labour movement across Canada. This ruling means that working people across the country now have a constitutionally protected right to freely negotiate the conditions of their work. Yet, this decision did not bring the work back in house, so HEU continued to campaign for years afterward to dial up pressure against the B.C. government.

In response to HEU's pressure, in 2018, B.C. Health Minister Adrian Dix introduced Bill 47, the *Health Sector Statutes Repeal Act*, which finally reversed the privatization of jobs in hospital support services and long-term care homes, bringing those jobs back into the local health authorities and restoring workers' pensions, benefits and wages, which had been cut almost two decades before. As of 2023, approximately 4,600 workers have been rehired back into public health authorities.

In June 2023, HEU and CUPE held a focus group and follow-up survey to ask HEU members about their experiences when their jobs were contracted out and when they were brought back into the public health authorities. The focus group included four racialized members and one Black member,

who all identified as women and who work in housekeeping services in B.C. hospitals. Participants had between five and 20 years of experience in these jobs. Their jobs were brought back in house in April 2022, except for one member whose job at a P3 hospital was brought back in house in May 2023.

Workers mobilize against privatization

Members expressed sheer joy when speaking about their union's historic victory in bringing their jobs back into the public sector. They organized in HEU's "Living Wage," "Care Can't Wait" and "Make It Public" campaigns to put political pressure on B.C. Members of the Legislative Assembly to transfer their jobs back in house. For some of these HEU members, it was the first time they were active in their union, and they described their personal growth from the campaign. One HEU member described with great emotion the difference to her life now that her job is in house, and how the experience of mobilizing members in the campaign impacted her:

“Being in a private company—it’s way different than now, to be honest. When we were in Sodexo it felt like—I’m getting emotional [...] When I saw the problems getting piled up. And I was like, ‘Okay, I’ll try. I’ll try to get involved in the union.’ [...] [My co-workers] don’t really know what the union does for us until the “Make It Public” campaign. And when we went back in house, they were all thankful because they were like, ‘Thank you for stepping up.’ [...] They were so happy because they went back in house [...] I was so happy and proud that I was able to push myself to do this for them.”

¹¹⁹ Shortly after May Day 2004, HEU made a tentative agreement with the provincial government which modified the terms of Bill 37 to change the dates on which a wage cut was imposed, limit job losses to 600 Full Time Equivalents over two years, and give \$25 million in severance payments.

Seeing her co-workers join the campaign to bring their jobs in house made her feel elated. She explained, “When I saw colleagues rallying in the street, I was so happy and proud.” Another racialized member, Maria (not her real name), expressed gratitude for the B.C. NDP government that passed legislation to bring hospital support staff in house. She explained, “We know this government will stand for us—for low-wage worker[s].” Other HEU members expressed how this change made a huge difference in their lives. As one member said,

“We are better in the public sector in every way. We are thankful that our union and other affiliates [were] able to fight for us and bring us in the better place. Thank you to all who make this possible to us [...] Solidarity forever!”

Other members said they were grateful that their jobs were brought back in house, but they were frustrated with the slow pace of the process. Workers at a P3 hospital were one of the last groups of workers to be brought in house. They felt demoralized from their low pay and high workloads. As one HEU member described it, “It was hard for us [...] It was very traumatic, it was stressful. I had to get a lot of support for people, telling them we are still trying to push, so that the P3 could also come in with them [...] And when it came this May, it was just an amazing thing. A beautiful feeling.”

Despite the change, however, Maria discussed her ongoing commitment to working to defend the rights of her co-workers. She explained that she and some of her co-workers could move to another department or job due to their high seniority, but they have chosen to stay in their current positions to help their co-workers with concerns about their working conditions.

She said,

“We could go to other departments [...] But we remain in housekeeping because I think our co-workers need us still [...] We stand for our co-workers. We’re not thinking about ourselves. It’s like—if we are not there, who’s going to stand for them? Our hearts belong to our co-workers too.”

Maria’s story shows the deep bonds members made by campaigning to bring their jobs back in house. The rest of this case study will detail how members’ compensation and working conditions changed because of being brought back in house.

Pay and benefits

Participants in the focus group emphasized the important increases in pay and benefits that came about after their jobs were brought back in house.

Hourly wages for participants went up more than \$6/hour—from \$17.20/hour to \$23.38/hour. This incredible jump in pay brought many workers near a living wage.¹²⁰

A racialized worker, Althea (not her real name), said her day-to-day life was hectic and stressful when she worked for a private contractor. Because the private contractors reduced workers’ wages, she had to take on multiple part-time jobs in private care and hospitality to support herself and her family living outside of Canada.

¹²⁰ The Living Wages for Families B.C. campaign calculated the living wage to be \$24.08/hour for the Metro Vancouver area in 2022.

She revealed her grueling work schedule when she worked for private contractors:

“Before we were in house [...] I don’t know if you’re going to believe me. I woke up in the morning at 6:00, drove my kids to school. After I drove them to school, I’d go to my part-time job from 8 a.m. until 2 in the afternoon. I’d go home at 2 o’clock and prepare dinner for my kids [...] and then I’d go back to the housekeeping job. And sometimes I’d still cook something [to sell for more money] [...] I’d do that for side money to help my parents back home [...] After 19 years we became in house and I was really, really, very happy for that [...] Finally we got this!”

When jobs were brought back in house and workers received their pay increase, Althea no longer had to work so many jobs, which drastically improved her and her family’s quality of life.

Member benefits also improved when their work was brought in house. Their sick leave increased from eight to 18 days, and all participants said they have more vacation, bereavement and lieu days. Before they were brought in house, one participant said they had to beg and cry to their managers for vacations. Now they have designated months when they can request vacations which are approved based on seniority. Additionally, workers can now take days off in lieu of holidays worked, and these days can be attached to their regular days off, allowing for a longer break. As one HEU member said about this change, “You can plan for a holiday, how nice! Like everybody’s just laughing loud, so excited [...] People are so excited! I’m really excited!”

In addition, public sector employers have raised wages for evening and night shifts, “graveyard” or overnight shifts, and weekend shifts. Participants said that their colleagues often prefer to work these shifts and not regular full-time weekday shifts because the pay is much better.

The return to the public sector also means members will now be part of the government pension plan that covers other public sector health care workers. In bargaining with private contractors, HEU members demanded a pension plan with employer contributions, but the private contractors never agreed to it. Now, even if a member only has three to five more years before retirement, “At least we will go home with something. Initially we would go home with nothing if we were still with the private sector. So now with the public [sector] at least we go home with something [...] Which is good.”

Another unexpected benefit of the transition is public transit fares subsidized by the employer. As Althea said, “My transit fare decreased by 50%. My three-zone Compass Card was \$185.20/month, now [it is] \$92.60/month.” For Althea, paying less for transit, increased paid time off, and working fewer jobs has greatly improved her work-life balance.

Working conditions

All focus group participants reported that their working conditions have improved significantly after being brought in house. They said their cleaning equipment is better organized, they have more health and safety training, they have oversight from workers who are trained in infection control, and they have a better relationship with management. As one HEU worker said, “We get huddles in the morning. We feel special and they care for us, [such as] our safety in the workplace. Our carts are well organized nowadays. They’re giving us extra trainings. Unlike Sodexo, it was like, ‘Go there, find your cart, do your thing.’”

That's it." She also reflected on the difference in managers' treatment of workers when working for a private contractor. She recalled, "It's way different in terms of management because we had a really bad manager before who didn't have respect at all [...] Screaming here and there [...] To her, we were like slaves."

After being brought in house, participants shared that their workloads have decreased in terms of the rooms and areas that they are required to clean, but they are still given extra work because workers on leave are not replaced, and new staff are not trained properly. Senior workers are assigned to train new staff on the job and the training ends up creating more work for them. As one HEU member argued, "Training and workload I think go hand in hand." When new staff are not trained, it stresses out existing members due to the extra work they are asked to do, so they argued that casual workers need proper training. However, one racialized worker, Rachel (not her real name), said that at her work site, there are new staff being hired and sufficient training is provided for them.

Participants shared that scheduling is a problem for many workers. Schedulers are a new feature since participants' jobs were brought back in house. These schedulers use a more sophisticated and technological system for workers to bid for shifts online. Some workers are slower to learn how to use the technology than others, and some are unable to use technology well. A worker's seniority is still the deciding factor to choose employees for shifts, but if a worker does not place a bid for a shift, then they are not considered. Participants expressed skepticism that this system is fair, and some believe that managers are playing favourites, though there is a mechanism to make complaints about these issues.

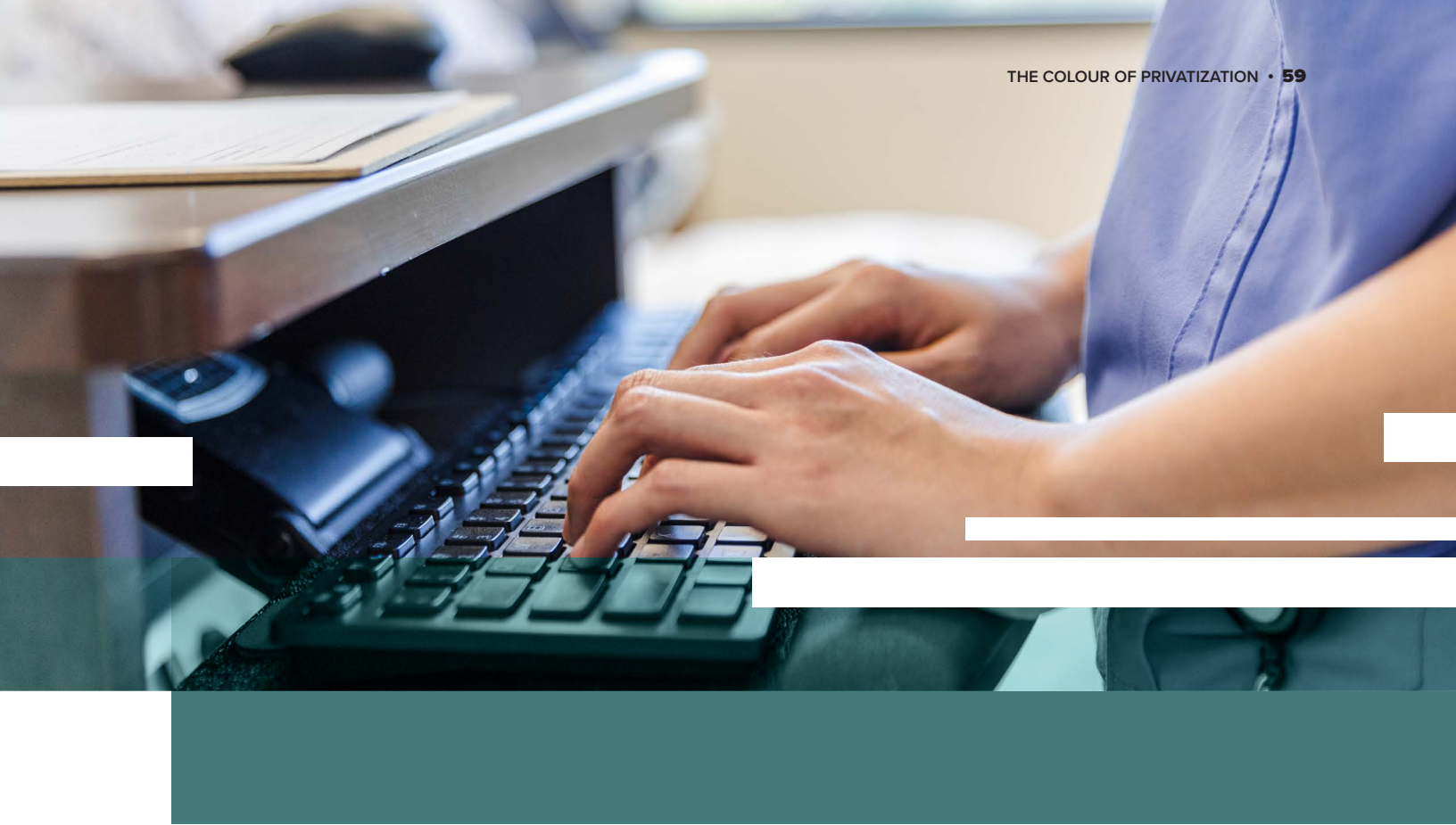
Several participants shared that when they initially applied for their housekeeping jobs, they were attracted by the fact that these

were unionized jobs, so they believed they would have benefits and long-term job stability. They did not necessarily understand they would be working for a private contractor when their jobs were privatized. One member said that she did not think she would have a job at all, based on her perceived race. She explained,

"If it were not for the union, we would lose our jobs depending on how vocal you are. I would always hear this underground talk that they will not hire Blacks because we are 'vocal' and 'troublemakers.' This is not true."

Another member said she lost her full-time job working for a private contractor because they did not approve of her taking four days off to care for her ill mother who lived overseas. She explained,

"It was difficult to work with contractors before [...] I needed to go back home because my mom was dying. So, I had no choice. My family is important to me. I was stressed and depressed that time, but I needed to decide [...] Two days after I came back from vacation, there was a worldwide lockdown because of COVID and when my mom passed away, I couldn't go home. Good thing I took care of her before she died."



Now that jobs have been brought back in house, participants said they feel they have better job security, and they are able to apply for better employment openings across the system which helps them maintain long-term job security. Housekeeping jobs can serve as a stepping stone to jobs with higher pay and other tasks, such as supervisors, porters, food services workers or care aides. They said this change is critical for younger workers, so they can later access higher pay, better benefits and job security, as they progress in their careers.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, some participants said that even though they can apply for other jobs now given their seniority, they have decided to stay in housekeeping. When asked why they stayed in housekeeping despite other job options open to them, one member said she wants to stay and help her co-workers—her experience with the private sector where rights were not respected has made her determined to be there for her colleagues.

Harassment and discrimination

Participants said they are upset that they still endure harassment at work because their managers were not replaced when services were brought back in house. As one racialized member, Rachel explained, “The same management that was tormenting us, that was unprofessional—the same people have [been kept on] [...] People feel short-changed.” She insisted that they need to hire new management so that “people feel the fight was worth fighting.” It is an unfortunate decision by the public health authorities, considering that as part of the onboarding process for bringing hospital support staff in house, workers were asked about management and made complaints.

Some participants expressed improvement in management, which makes them feel cared for, yet many old processes and practices have lingered because management has not changed fast enough. For instance, managers have told union leaders that they cannot talk to new hires. Housekeeping staff

are not allowed to eat in the staff lounge or use the staff fridge. When members told management that they have the right to access these amenities because it is the public health authority's policy, they have been met with contempt. They have asked for workplace policies to be posted on a notice board for all workers to see. Participants said they also have problems with uniforms because they are not given new ones or not given a sufficient supply, and so they use hospital scrubs. Then they are told they are not allowed to use them because they are for "hospital staff" which makes them feel discriminated against. As one HEU member put it, "We want to feel that housekeepers are not discriminated. We are treated like crap in the hospital!"

Most participants said the solution to workplace harassment is to replace their managers. One member said, "For the future, we need new management—let people take interviews, let them get professional managers and supervisors [...] They yell at us, shout at us, send people home for no apparent reason—and these are the same people we are going in house with!" To her, it is incredibly frustrating that the same management remains and continues to harass workers. However, participants said they feel more empowered to push back against or call out abusive and unprofessional behavior. A couple of managers have been fired and others are being more considerate in their

treatment of workers, which is a positive change compared to when they worked for private contractors. One participant said she faced a different experience because her managers were replaced when her job was brought back in house, and she has a good working relationship with them.

Participants said they feel more empowered to push back against or call out abusive and unprofessional behavior.

Impact on communities

Participants reported that hiring practices by the public health authorities have become more inclusive and they see a more diverse workforce. According to participants, some private contractors opposed the hiring of workers' family members, but that changed after the workers were brought in house. Now, many couples are working in the same location and some of their children are even being brought in. This is a good sign, as workers recruit their family members because work and conditions are good. They can recruit their children to start working for the public health authority and go 'up the ladder' with better opportunities in the future.



CONCLUSION

Participants in the focus group saw critical improvements to their jobs and livelihoods with the reversal of the contracting out of hospital support staff in B.C.—a group of workers where racialized immigrants and women are overrepresented. The biggest impacts were in their wages and working conditions. When their jobs were brought back in house, they immediately saw an increase in pay that brought them above a living wage, and they saw dramatic improvements to their leaves, along with access to a pension plan for the first time. When employers are not motivated by the drive to make profit, they will offer racialized women workers better working conditions and compensation. Participants were ecstatic with these changes. Their stories reflect the need for public sector employers to reverse privatization so that workers are treated with more respect for their hard work. However, participants stressed the importance of changing management when jobs are brought back in house, to end bad practices and the daily harassment they face as racialized housekeeping staff.



CASE STUDY

4

**PRIVATIZATION
AND THE HOUSING
CRISIS—A TALE
OF CORPORATE
DOMINANCE AND
PUBLIC SECTOR
RETREAT**



CUPE members work in various jobs across Canada providing services related to housing. Our members administer housing benefits to low-income tenants, work with people who are experiencing homelessness and provide crisis intervention as first responders, personal support workers and social workers. They are at the frontlines of the housing crisis in Canada in shelters, hospitals, public housing corporations and several other workplaces, including public libraries.¹²¹

Despite the critically important role our members play, these are workers that remain underpaid and often come from marginalized groups. An Indigenous CUPE member in rural Saskatchewan, on the frontlines of the fight against homelessness, told us that she works long hours with an unpredictable schedule while navigating dire situations for her clients who are at the mercy of profit-hungry private landlords.

Not only do our members have a front-row seat to the housing crisis, they are also victims of it. In this section we will discuss the context of the housing crisis in Canada, explore the impacts of privatization on housing affordability, and include testimony from a Black CUPE member in New Brunswick who saw her life turn upside down because of unaffordable rent increases from corporate landlords.

Increasing costs

Canada's housing policy has been in the spotlight as rents have increased and home prices have spiralled out of reach of the

working class. In 2023, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report analyzing data from 2022 to examine the rental wage, meaning how much people need to earn to pay rent without spending more than 30% of their income.¹²² According to the report, only three metropolitan areas of those analysed in Canada have one-bedroom rental wages lower than the minimum wage. All three¹²³ are in Quebec—a province that, until the conservative Coalition Avenir Québec government effectively wound down social housing programs in 2023,¹²⁴ had some of the country's strongest tenant protections and government investments in public and social housing.

Decline in government role

The majority of Canada's housing is provided by the private sector. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), approximately 95% of all housing stock is in private hands, from single-family homes to large apartment buildings.¹²⁵ But this was not always the case.

Canada's post-war public policy effort included a government-led initiative to build tens of thousands of units of housing annually. An earlier iteration of the CMHC, the Wartime Housing Corporation, built nearly 46,000 houses for workers and returning soldiers across Canada.¹²⁶ In the 1970s, federal government investment accounted for 40% of new projects. That share dropped to 14% in the 1980s.

¹²¹ Velji, A. (2022, February 19). *Strengthening Communities: The Role of the Public Library as a Site of Connection*. Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/strengthening-communities-role-public-library-site-connection>.

¹²² MacDonald, D. and Tranjan, R. (2023 July 18). *Can't afford the rent – Rental wages in Canada 2022*. CCPA Monitor. <https://monitormag.ca/reports/cant-afford-the-rent/>

¹²³ The report notes that Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières and Saguenay have rental wages lower than the minimum wage. However, in all three, the report notes that affordability is on the decline.

¹²⁴ Barrett, O. (2023, March 2). *Vers une fin des logements sociaux au Québec ?*. <https://pivot.quebec/2023/03/02/vers-une-fin-des-logements-sociaux-au-quebec/>

¹²⁵ Scotiabank. (2022, January 13). *Addressing Canada's housing crisis calls for a full society response: CMHC CEO*. <https://www.scotiabank.com/ca/en/about/perspectives.articles.impact.2022-01-cmhc-addressing-canada-housing-crisis.html>

¹²⁶ Begin, P. (1999) *Housing and Parliamentary Action*. Political and Social Affairs Division of the Parliamentary Research Branch, PRB 99-IE. <https://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/modules/prb99-1-homelessness/housing-e.htm>



By the 1990s, federal government investment all but dried up. The federal government ended its support for building co-op housing¹²⁷ and affordable housing completely for the first time in half a century, leaving the public good at the mercy of the private sector.¹²⁸ Around the same time, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) began to emerge as a new way to own and profit from housing as a commodity.

Increase in financialization

REITs are corporations, often multinationals, that own and operate housing across Canada. They operate tax-free and cost the federal government approximately a quarter of a billion dollars in tax exemptions.¹²⁹ REIT control of the rental market has skyrocketed since the government's divestment and

deregulation of the rental market. According to one researcher, between 1996 and 2021, REITs went from owning zero to nearly 200,000 rental units in Canada.¹³⁰

REITs are a phenomenon of “financialization” of housing—trading housing as a commodity for profit rather than guaranteeing it as a human right. Financial firms, including REITs, now likely own as much as 30% of Canada's rental stock.¹³¹

Privatization drives financialization

Financialization of housing is a consequence of privatization. As one researcher argues, the relentless pursuit of profit is a key driver of tenant exploitation and housing insecurity.¹³² For companies that control Canada's rental

¹²⁷ According to the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada “Housing co ops provide at-cost housing for their members. They are controlled by members who have a vote in decisions. There is no outside landlord.” Retrieved from <https://chfcanada.coop/about-co-op-housing/> on August 25, 2023.

¹²⁸ Canadian Centre for Housing Rights. (2022, May 26). *Fifty years in the making of Ontario's housing crisis – a timeline*. <https://housingrightscanada.com/fifty-years-in-the-making-of-ontarios-housing-crisis-a-timeline/>

¹²⁹ Elmarzougui, E. (2023, April 3). *Cost of removing the tax exemptions for Real Estate Investment Trusts*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. <https://www.pbo-dpb.ca/en/publications/RP-2324-001-M--cost-removing-tax-exemptions-real-estate-investment-trusts--estimation-couts-elimination-exemptions-fiscales-accordees-fiducies-placement-immobilier>

¹³⁰ August, M. (2022). *The financialization of multi-family rental housing in Canada: A Report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate*. Canadian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/august-financialization-rental-housing-ofha-en.pdf>

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Tranjan, Ricardo. (2023). *The Tenant Class*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

housing, income from rents is a lucrative source of returns for their shareholders. Killam REIT, one of Canada's largest REITs, notes that it is eager to take advantage of "opportunities for rental increases" in rent-controlled units upon turnover where their rents are lower than market rates.¹³³

In jurisdictions like New Brunswick, where there is no robust rent control, Killam REIT plans to "reposition" affordable units into income-generating assets for its investors.¹³⁴ The company aims to do so at such a fast pace that the province of New Brunswick is expected to take decades to catch up on building affordable housing.

Kelly (not her real name), a CUPE member and long-term care worker in New Brunswick, told us that she was renting at a relatively affordable rate of \$500/month, until her new corporate landlord chose to increase her rent by 60% to \$800/month. Without rent controls, this was perfectly legal. The apartment was in a bad state (with humidity and other issues), and the landlord refused to fix it. This situation pushed Kelly to consider homeownership instead, at a time when homes were still relatively affordable in New Brunswick prior to the pandemic. Having recently moved to a unionized job with CUPE, Kelly saw a \$7/hour pay increase. This made the decision to purchase a home make more sense.

But rents have increased in New Brunswick faster than anywhere else in the country,¹³⁵ and property values are skyrocketing because of speculative corporate investment in New Brunswick real estate. This left Kelly with a significant property tax increase that nearly doubled her monthly housing payment. Her monthly housing cost is now 75% of her income. According to Statistics Canada,¹³⁶ paying more than 30% of one's income towards housing is considered being in core housing need. She told us that the internet, her phone, and food are "luxuries."

"I'm putting myself a little more in debt and a little more in debt because I'm using my credit cards to pay this and to pay that, and then at the end of the month, I don't have that money to [pay it back]," Kelly told us.

Kelly finds herself trapped in a home she can no longer afford. But leaving is not an option because she cannot afford the penalty of breaking her mortgage and there is nowhere affordable to rent.

"I would have to file for bankruptcy and then I'd be homeless because I can't have a credit card. After you file for bankruptcy, [...] most places to rent, you must have a good credit record," she said.

Her \$500/month apartment is now advertised at \$1,600/month.

¹³³ Killam REIT. 2022 *Annual Report*. https://killamreit.com/sites/default/files/financial_reports/Killam%202022%20Annual%20Report.pdf. Page 37.

¹³⁴ Hayes, M. (2021, November 9). *New Brunswick's Rental Housing Crisis: A call to action*. *Journal of New Brunswick Studies*, 13(2), 41-49. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JNBS/article/view/32611>

¹³⁵ Poitras, J. (2023, June 28). *New Brunswick tenants dealing with Canada's fastest-rising rents*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/new-brunswick-tenants-fastest-rising-rents-1.6890652>

¹³⁶ Statistics Canada. (2022, September 21). *Core housing need in Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022056-eng.htm>

Governments add fuel to the fire

In New Brunswick, under pressure from tenants' groups for action, the Progressive Conservative government conducted a study of the rental market during the COVID-19 pandemic. Remarkably, they concluded there was no housing crisis despite noting that New Brunswickers were "making hard choices to stay housed." For instance, one tenant said there were several days per month when they could not eat because they had to save money for rent.¹³⁷ Shortly after that report was released, a Moncton family received a \$2,000 increase on a \$975/month rent, almost tripling the rent, before that landlord backed down amid widespread outrage.¹³⁸

In Alberta, where the United Conservative Party government has rejected calls for rent control, one tenant received a 50% rent increase.¹³⁹

In Manitoba, the Progressive Conservative government has rapidly been divesting from public housing, causing significant harm to housing affordability for low-income Manitobans. The Lions Place building in Winnipeg saw federal and provincial funding disappear after a 35-year operating agreement to maintain affordability ended in 2022.¹⁴⁰ The residents of the 287-unit building have been at the mercy of their

new corporate landlords from Alberta since then. Meanwhile, the provincial government has chosen to subsidize the private landlord's profits to the tune of \$1.2 million to keep rents affordable instead of keeping rents low by maintaining non-profit or public ownership.¹⁴¹

This story is likely to get worse as governments continue relying on the private sector to solve a problem it created. Today, for every affordable housing unit built, 15 are being lost to the private sector.¹⁴² In Nova Scotia, 31.5% of owners of housing are now investors.¹⁴³ Nearly half of all condominiums in Toronto are investor owned.¹⁴⁴

Impact on Indigenous, Black and racialized communities

Indigenous peoples in Canada face particularly high rates of housing insecurity. In 2021, 16.4% of Indigenous peoples lived in a home needing major repairs—a rate three times as high as the non-Indigenous population.¹⁴⁵ This number is 30% in the Northwest Territories,¹⁴⁶ where tenant protections are virtually non-existent, leading to a significant proliferation in REIT activity.¹⁴⁷ In Yellowknife and Iqaluit, 80% of all multi-unit private rental housing is owned by just one REIT.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁷ Rao, A. (2021, May 13). *Rental review highlights need for strengthened tenant protections*. NB Media Co-op. <https://nbmediacoop.org/2021/05/13/rental-review-highlights-need-for-strengthened-tenant-protections/>

¹³⁸ Basa, J. (2021, May 17). *Shock turns to relief after Moncton landlord says he'll reverse \$2,000 a month rent increase for tenant*. CTV News. <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/shock-turns-to-relief-after-moncton-landlord-says-he-ll-reverse-2-000-a-month-rent-increase-for-tenant-1.5432179>

¹³⁹ Gonzalez, X. (2023, May 5). *Skyrocketing Rents Make Some Alberta Voters 'Afraid'*. The Tyee. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2023/05/05/Skyrocketing-Rents-Alberta-Voters-Afraid/>

¹⁴⁰ Peters, S. and Hirschfield, K. (2022, September 27). *Lions Place residents speak out about potential privatization of home*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9159662/lions-place-residents-sale/>

¹⁴¹ Winnipeg Free Press. (2023, January 26). *Buyer getting \$1.2 million to subsidize Lions Place rents*. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/this-just-in/buyer-getting-1-2-million-to-subsidize-lions-place-rents>

¹⁴² Pomeroy, S. (2020). *Why Canada needs a non-market rental acquisition strategy*. <https://www.focus-consult.com/why-canada-needs-a-non-market-rental-acquisition-strategy/>

¹⁴³ Fontaine, J. and Gordon, J. (2023, February 3). *Residential real estate investors and investment properties in 2020*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/46-28-0001/2023001/article/00001-eng.htm>

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Statistics Canada. (2022, September 21). *Housing conditions among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in Canada from the 2021 census*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021007/98-200-X2021007-eng.cfm>

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ August, M. *supra* note 93.

¹⁴⁸ Last, J. and Cohen, S. (2021, August 16). *The landlord's game*. CBC News. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/the-landlords-game/>

Patricia (not her real name), an Indigenous CUPE member, works primarily with Indigenous peoples in rural Saskatchewan who are suffering from, or at risk of, homelessness. Her clients often deal with significant challenges, including addictions and intergenerational trauma from residential schools.

Public and affordable housing is scarce in that part of the province, including on the nearby reserves, with waitlists that could last months. In harsh prairie winters, this can mean life or death.

Just four private landlords control the rest of the available housing in the area. A social worker by training, Patricia routinely negotiates with these profit-hungry companies to get her clients into affordable housing. She battles illegal rent increases, fights unlawful eviction notices, and regularly stands up to these landlords as best as she can. But with homes renting for between \$900 and \$1,500/month, she has limited leverage. Sometimes she must negotiate housing several people—often strangers—in the same home.

Without eviction protections, landlords routinely evict people to find tenants who can pay more in rent. This further contributes to the homelessness crisis that Patricia is working tirelessly to address. Meanwhile, houses are not kept up. Housing repairs are not done. Ceilings fall apart, and people live with mould as well as broken windows and doors. Power and water are not hooked up, and in some homes, there is no heat. Tenants are deprived of essentials with entire walls missing.

“Whether or not the rent is paid, they don’t care to keep the house in decent shape,” Patricia told us.

Privatization disproportionately hurts those who are already living at the margins of society, with 11.3% of racialized Canadians living in what is considered “core housing need.”¹⁴⁹ There are also significant disparities within Black and racialized groups when it comes to homeownership rates. While over 70% of Asians, Southeast Asians and South Asians lived in homes owned by a member of their household, less than half of Black Canadians, Arabs and Latin Americans can say the same.

While 27% of the total population in Canada rents, that number is significantly higher for Black Canadians at 52%.¹⁵⁰ The Black population is also more likely to live in housing that is considered unsuitable (30%) compared to 19% of the total population who are renters.

According to the Community Housing Transformation Centre, racialized people struggle to find adequate housing. Immigrants have their inquiries routinely ignored by

¹⁴⁹ Statistics Canada. (2023, January 23). *Housing conditions among racialized groups: A brief overview*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230123/dq230123b-eng.htm>. Core housing need, according to Statistics Canada, is defined as “households which do not meet the threshold of at least one of the housing adequacy, affordability or suitability indicators and that would have to spend at least 30% of its total before-tax income on the median rent of another acceptable dwelling.”

¹⁵⁰ Statistics Canada. (2022). *Black History Month 2022... by the numbers*. https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/dai/smr08/2022/smr08_259

landlords and are often illegally forced to pay extra due to their lack of a credit history in Canada—sometimes up to six months’ rent in advance.¹⁵¹

The lack of social housing is an issue of concern in Canada. Advocates from across the country convened in Winnipeg in 2023 to call for a plan from all levels of government for more social housing where rents are geared to income.¹⁵² After all, Canada has the lowest share of social housing in total housing stock among OECD countries at just 3.5%, half the OECD average of 7%. In comparison, the Netherlands’ share is 34.5%.¹⁵³

Movement of capital, not people, to blame

Public policy solutions to make housing more affordable, meanwhile, are focused on treating the very communities that suffer from financialization as the perpetrators. New rules preventing foreign home buyers from purchasing homes made it impossible for foreign workers to buy a home¹⁵⁴ before the federal government backtracked and made changes to the rules.¹⁵⁵ Residents own 96.5% of private property in Canada.¹⁵⁶ With the share of non-resident ownership so low, there

is no consensus that such a ban, particularly with the significant number of exceptions within it, would have any effect.¹⁵⁷

Yet, this approach has been taken even though there is no evidence that demand from migrants is causally linked to fuelling the crisis. When New Zealand banned foreign home buyers, the foreign ownership rate dropped, but home prices continued to increase.¹⁵⁸

There is no clearer indication than homelessness among refugee claimants, mere blocks from the wealthiest companies in Canada on Bay Street, that this is a manmade crisis.

However, the impact of financialization on the housing crisis has been widely documented.¹⁵⁹ In Toronto, with shelters at capacity, refugee claimants have been forced to live on the

¹⁵¹ Community Housing Transformation Centre. (2023, March 23). *Racialized People and the Housing Crisis*. <https://centre.support/racialized-people-and-the-housing-crisis/>

¹⁵² Manitoba Research Alliance. (2023). *Social Housing and Human Rights Conference. Organizing for Change*. <https://mra-mb.ca/social-housing-and-human-rights/>

¹⁵³ OECD. (2020). *Public policies towards affordable housing*. <https://www.oecd.org/housing/data/affordable-housing-database/housing-policies.htm>

¹⁵⁴ Radio Canada. (2023, January 3). *New federal law prevents health-care worker from buying home in Quebec*. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/rci/en/news/1945773/new-federal-law-prevents-health-care-worker-from-buying-home-in-quebec>

¹⁵⁵ Raycraft, R. (2023, March 28). *Federal government eases some restrictions on non-Canadians purchasing property*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/government-housing-ease-restrictions-non-canadians-1.6793247>

¹⁵⁶ Statistics Canada. (2021, September 17). *Canadian Housing Statistics Program, 2020*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210917/dq210917b-eng.htm>

¹⁵⁷ Mannie, K. (2023, January 4). *Foreign buyers ban won't fix housing market – could make it worse, experts say*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9386999/foreign-homebuyers-ban-housing-market-canada/>. See also Younglai, R. (2022, December 21). *Ottawa offers details on new federal ban on foreigners buying homes in Canada*. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-federal-ban-foreigners-buying-homes/>

¹⁵⁸ Radio Canada. (2022, December 30). *Will Canada's ban on foreign home buyers make houses more affordable? Some experts have doubts*. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/rci/en/news/1945292/will-canadas-ban-on-foreign-home-buyers-make-houses-more-affordable-some-experts-have-doubts>

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *Financialization of housing. Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing*. United National Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/financialization-housing>

streets. There is no clearer indication than homelessness among refugee claimants, mere blocks from the wealthiest companies in Canada on Bay Street, that this is a manmade crisis caused by the prioritization of profit over the human rights of ordinary people. As advocates have noted in response to anti-refugee voices, “this is not a refugee crisis, this is a housing crisis.”¹⁶⁰

Landlords increase rents because doing so increases profits for shareholders and investors, not because there are more newcomers. Since blaming migrants for problems that are rooted in capitalism will always remain an alluring political strategy, union members must remain vigilant against these efforts to divide the working class.

Role of pension funds

As a labour union, it is imperative to consider the impacts of pension funds on the housing crisis. Canadian pension funds are routinely invested in global markets to increase the value of the fund and ensure solvency to pay pension obligations. These funds are now some of the world’s largest investors. The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, for example, manages over half a trillion dollars.¹⁶¹ Canadian pension funds are now some of the world’s most active privatizers and profiteers of public goods and services.¹⁶²

As it relates to housing, the Manitoba Teachers’ Retirement Allowances Fund partly owns Heron Gate, an Ottawa apartment complex that was at the centre of a controversial and rights-violating effort to displace hundreds

¹⁶⁰ Tetelepta, S. (2023, July 18). *This is a housing crisis, not a refugee crisis*. Spring Magazine. <https://springmag.ca/this-is-a-housing-crisis-not-a-refugee-crisis>

¹⁶¹ Benefits Canada. (2021, August 17). *CPPIB assets crosses \$500BN mark: report*. <https://www.benefitscanada.com/news/cir-news-news/cppib-assets-crosses-500bn-mark-report/>

¹⁶² Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). (2020, October 29). *Toolkit: Keep our pensions out of privatization*. <https://cupe.ca/new-toolkit-helps-members-keep-pensions-out-privatization>



of low-income renters, the majority of whom were Black and racialized people, including refugees.¹⁶³

In British Columbia, a co-operative with 224 affordable units was threatened when the pension plan that owned the properties decided to sell to the highest bidder in order to maximize their return on investment.¹⁶⁴ The residents, many on fixed incomes, were faced with possible evictions. It was not until the B.C. NDP government stepped in, and the City of Burnaby took ownership of the property, that the eviction was averted. This example is more evidence proving that public ownership and non-profit approaches are the most effective antidote to the affordability crisis in housing.¹⁶⁵

Pension funds have also played a significant role in financing discriminatory housing practices against Black people. The Public Sector Pension Investment Board entered a \$700 million joint venture with U.S.-based corporate landlord, Pretium, which was found to have targeted Black renters in the United States for evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁶

What next?

Canada's response to the housing crisis has included historic investments of more than \$80 billion through the National Housing Strategy. The strategy was adopted in 2017. Two years later, the federal government passed the *National Housing Strategy Act* which recognizes the right to adequate housing in law.

The 2017 strategy, however, was never updated to be aligned with right to housing principles. This has meant that the strategy has been failing despite massive investments, according to the federal auditor general. In a 2022 report, the auditor general found that the government did not know whether it was reducing chronic homelessness and that different government departments passed the buck on who was ultimately responsible.¹⁶⁷

Advocates have long argued that the federal strategy was doomed to fail. The strategy uses several different definitions of "affordability," has funneled billions to private developers to build housing that is not affordable,¹⁶⁸ and has not required provinces to enact tenant protections as a condition to receiving federal dollars.

Canada's strategy to address the housing crisis cannot succeed if the cornerstone remains a reliance on the private sector to deliver affordable housing.

Black, Indigenous and racialized communities will continue to bear the brunt of the unrelenting effort to maximize profit at the expense of all else.

Federal spending on housing must be directed towards non-profit and co-operative housing. Taking profit out of building housing is more likely to guarantee affordability.

¹⁶³ Rockwell, N. (2022, March 30). *A public pension fund is Canada's newest mega landlord*. The Breach. <https://breachmedia.ca/a-public-pension-fund-is-canadas-newest-mega-landlord/>

¹⁶⁴ Co-operative Housing Federation of BC. (2021). *Burnaby housing co-op threatened by sell-off to private landlords*. <https://www.chf.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CHF-BC-statement-on-IUOE-pension-fund-co-ops-1.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ Little, S. (2022, July 11). *BC Housing, Burnaby reach financing deal to preserve threatened co-op housing*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8981703/burnaby-co-ops-saved-affordable-housing/>

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, N. (2022). *The Uneven Racialized Impacts of Financialization*. Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/uneven-racialized-impacts-financialization>

¹⁶⁷ Auditor General of Canada. (2022, November 15). *Chronic Homelessness: Federal government does not know whether the efforts put forward so far have improved housing outcomes for vulnerable Canadians*. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_202211_05_e_44151.html

¹⁶⁸ Cuthbertson, R. and Luck, S. (2021, September 15). *Ottawa is lending billions to developers. The result: \$1,500 'affordable' rents*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/rental-construction-financing-cmhc-loans-average-affordable-rent-1.6173487>



Indeed, according to a report from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, co-ops have been shown to offer affordability over the long term as rents are used for building and community maintenance, not profit maximization. Even in an overheated market like Vancouver, housing co-op rents are 55 to 64% of the going market rate, according to the report.¹⁶⁹

Without rent control and eviction protections, public subsidies for housing supply will do little to address the housing crisis. People will remain at risk of homelessness while it remains legal for landlords to increase rents or evict tenants easily. The federal government must use its spending power to require provinces to enact tenant protections as a condition to receiving federal housing money.

The labour movement also has a role to play in tackling the housing crisis. Many CUPE locals and divisions have made housing advocacy one of their central issues as

members continue to face the brunt of the crisis.¹⁷⁰ Some CUPE locals have rent subsidies negotiated into their collective agreements for certain job classifications. The BC General Employees' Union is making waves by building affordable housing directly.¹⁷¹ The student union movement in Ontario is taking housing back into their hands by focusing on developing co-operative housing for students at University of Toronto Mississauga.¹⁷²

CUPE is focused on doing more to ensure that members see their right to housing protected. This includes better understanding members' housing needs, training members to support and organize tenant unions, building workers' power to bargain housing-related protections in collective agreements, advocating for a right to housing framework as central pillar of all Canadian public policy in housing, and mobilizing for legislative change so that workers can take control of pension fund investments.

¹⁶⁹ Suttor, G., Otogwu, C. and Falvo, N. (2022). *The Co-op Difference – Comparing co-op and market rents in five Canadian cities*. <https://chfcanada.coop/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Co-op-Difference-report.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Drost, S. (2022, January 14). *Does Mr. Higgs want New Brunswick seniors to freeze?* <https://nbmediacoop.org/2022/01/14/does-mr-higgs-want-new-brunswick-seniors-to-freeze/>

¹⁷¹ Vescera, Z. (2022, October 28). *How high-priced housing became a union issue*. The Tyee. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2022/10/28/High-Priced-Housing-Union-Issue/>

¹⁷² House Canada. *Affordable Housing for Post-Secondary Students in Mississauga*. <https://www.housecanada.org/our-projects>

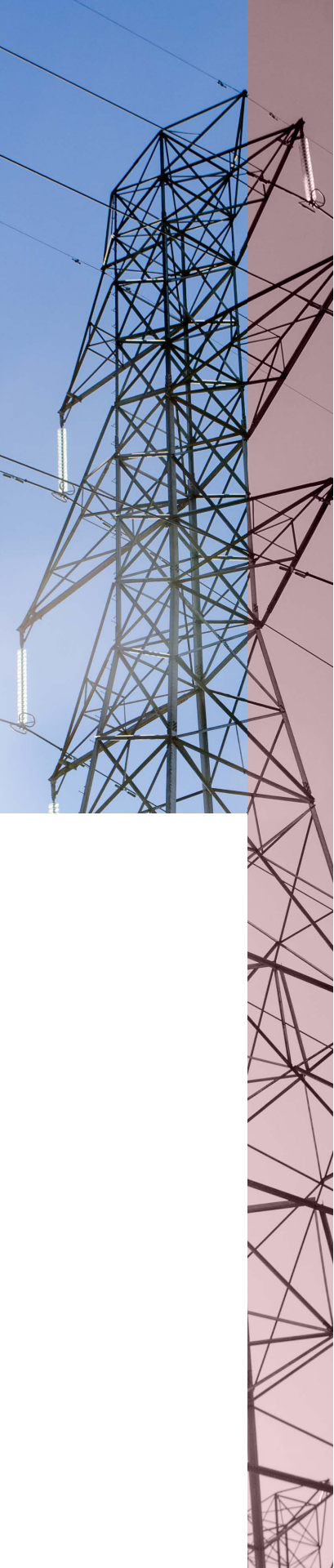
CONCLUSION

Evidence is piling up that relying on the market to solve a problem that the market has created is not a viable strategy to tackle the housing crisis. Our members' experiences show that unregulated housing markets are driving costs up for ordinary people. Black, Indigenous and racialized workers, who tend to be lower paid than their white counterparts, are disproportionately affected by the affordability crisis. As Kelly noted, increased property taxes due to inflated property values, coupled with increased interest rates, have her feeling trapped in her own home—unable to afford to live, and unable to afford to leave.

Without rent control and eviction protections, the residential real estate market becomes more attractive for a business model that relies on extracting as much wealth as possible from working people. Government policy that sees all investment in housing as good investment is likely worsening the situation. Institutional investors are interested in maximizing returns on their investments, not in ensuring that ordinary people can afford their homes. Still, large amounts of federal subsidies have gone to for-profit corporations to build unaffordable housing.

To protect the human right to adequate housing, it is imperative that governments re-orient their investments away from subsidizing private profits and towards building public, non-profit, and co-operative housing.





**INDIGENOUS
WORKERS IN
QUEBEC—
BREAKING
THE MOULD**

CASE STUDY

19

A total of 12 participants were interviewed for the four case studies presented above, of which three identify as Indigenous. Two are LTC workers, one in New Brunswick and the other in Ontario, and the third is a social worker in the housing sector in Saskatchewan. Two more Indigenous persons were interviewed in Quebec. This case study centers around their first-hand experiences with privatization, discrimination, and union activism. Though both CUPE members work in publicly-run organizations, their employers are increasingly relying on private sector contractors to fill new vacancies. The threat this poses to their workplace is discussed in this case study.

Estrellita (not their real name) works in the Quebec public health and social services system. They work as a social aide providing support to families who have children with learning and physical disabilities and autism. Estrellita and their family immigrated to Canada when they were still a teenager and they identify as Indigenous—they come from an Indigenous community in their home country, and they work in solidarity with Indigenous communities in Canada.

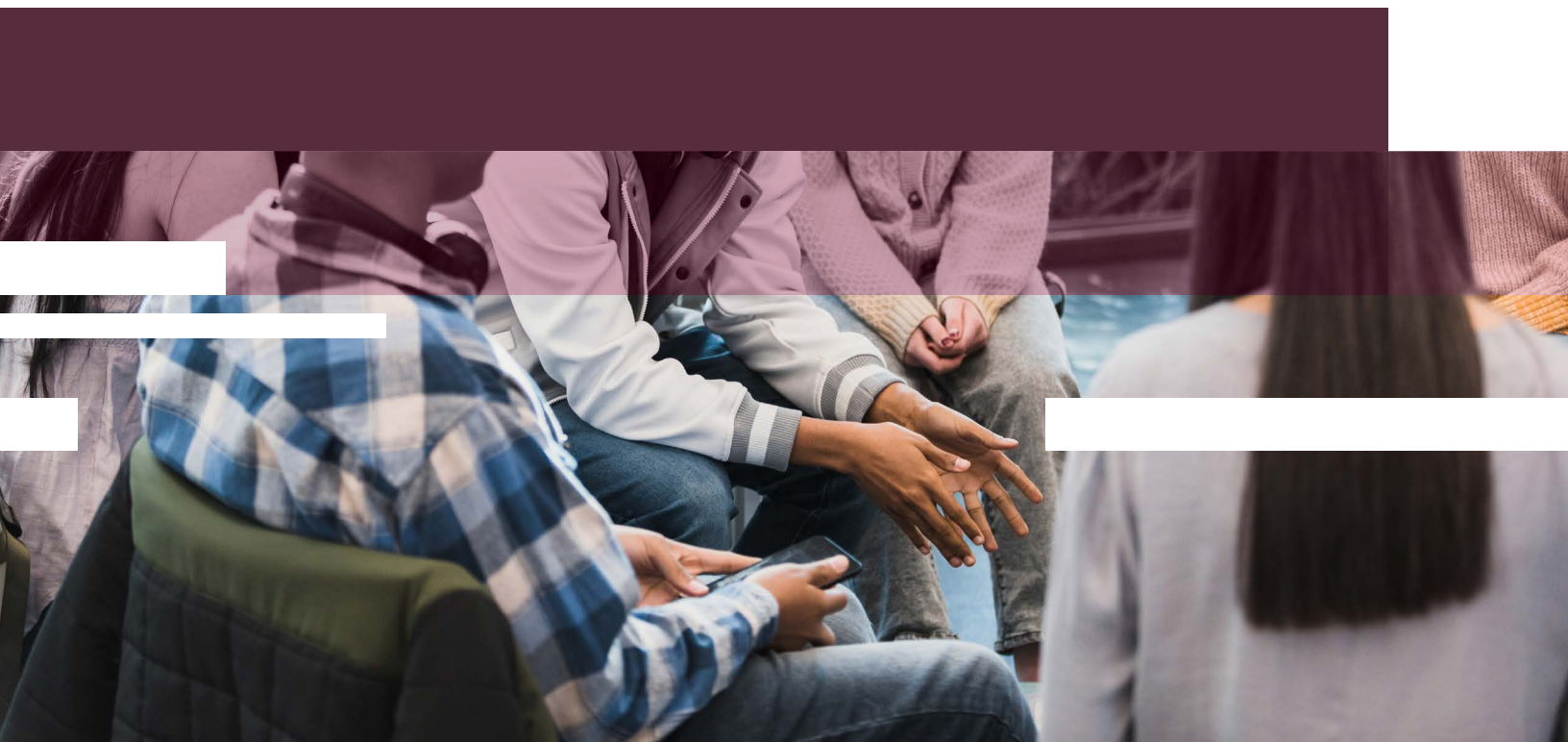
After three years of struggling with addiction issues and living on the streets, Estrellita decided to study social work. They are

currently completing a social work technician certificate. They have been working in the health and social services system for a couple of years now. They have a lot of lived experience which they believe makes them very good at their job.

When asked what motivated them to work in this field, they talked about the lifesaving support they received from social workers when they were living on the streets. They shared,

“It is important to give back what one has received. The people that helped me were very open, they listened to me and supported me. They did not judge me, and this allowed me to get out of the situation I was in. I started off working in organizations that support homeless people, providing support to get them off the streets. And this led me to study social work.”

Noelia (not her real name) is an Indigenous woman who has worked at a publicly owned energy corporation for over 22 years and is currently a lead line worker. As such, she is one of very few women working



in a traditionally male-dominated trade. The corporation is one of Quebec's top employers, one of the largest hydroelectricity producers in the world, and has the most extensive transmission system in North America. Out of the corporation's more than 22,000 employees, Noelia estimates that there are barely 400 Indigenous workers overall, mostly employed in the trades.

Noelia has been active in CUPE for the last eight to nine years in her local and at the provincial and national levels. Estrellita finds that having a union is a game changer for them and their colleagues. "Through my involvement in the union, I am not only helping myself, but it helps me to help others," she said.

Pay and benefits

Both Estrellita and Noelia noted that, with the government as their employer, they were making a lower hourly wage than workers who were brought into their workplaces by private contractors. However, they also noted that those same workers had no benefits or job security, which they believe the higher wage rates did not make up for. An important difference, however, is that at the energy corporation, the private contractors were only hiring non-Indigenous and non-racialized workers, whereas Estrellita shared that they had not seen a single non-racialized private contractor at their social services workplace—all of them were immigrant or racialized workers.

One demotivating fact that Estrellita shared with regards to their salary is that when they complete their training as a social work technician, their hourly wage will not increase immediately. They will be eligible for two additional steps at the end of the salary scale, but their hourly wages will not change until they reach them.

The reliance on lower-paid and less-trained workers in the health and social services sectors across Canada has been extensively documented. As a result of labour shortages,

this trend has been reinforced. Estrellita confirmed that at their workplace, social work technicians and aides are paid the same salary. Social workers, however, are paid two to three times more. Yet, there are very few of them on staff, so aides and technicians end up doing the work that social workers should be doing.

Working conditions

Estrellita shared many stories of excessive workload fueled by discrimination in their workplace. In contrast, Noelia spoke of the importance of strong policies, like the ones at her employer, to ensure good working conditions, a diverse workforce, and to combat discrimination. Both agreed that unions have an important role to play in leveling the playing field for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers.

Unions have an important role to play in leveling the playing field for Indigenous, Black and racialized workers.

Estrellita described a working environment where teams are understaffed and overworked, with huge backlogs and families in dire need of support from overstretched and underresourced teams. Estrellita said they do not have enough time to do their job correctly and that their tasks are always increasing. They shared how in their short career with health and social services, they have repeatedly been given tasks and responsibilities that are above their pay grade. More importantly for them, these are tasks that they are not trained or supported to take on. Estrellita spoke of excessive case load, unpaid overtime and the mental stress caused by the huge tasks and responsibilities imparted to them, and often without being consulted and despite their hesitation.



They shared,

“Since there aren’t enough social technicians or social workers being hired, the social aides, who are supposed to support the work of the social technicians and social workers, are often having to do their work instead. The tasks that aides are doing are exactly those that should be done by a technician or social worker.”

Estrellita said that their main concern in this situation is that social aides lack the training and experience to take on certain tasks. They shared that recently staff received a one-hour training session to do work that normally social workers do, and noted that is not nearly enough.

Mental and emotional stress have become a big concern for Estrellita given their situation. The work they do is emotionally demanding. Given their high case load and packed days, they do not have the time to step back and recharge, which they feel is important to do the job well. They also speak of the lack of

support in doing their work as a social aide. “My employer never asks how I am doing, what I have seen, how I can be supported. This makes me feel less empathetic, which is what I think is most important, to be empathetic with the families I meet and try to support,” they said.

Harassment and discrimination

Estrellita believes that their stressful working conditions are related to the fact that they are an immigrant and identify as an Indigenous person. They have noted that they are treated differently than their other co-workers, who are mostly white. For example, they shared that other aides are assigned one or two family visits per day, while they are pressured to cover at least four if not five families per day. They are not allowed to take appropriate breaks between visits and recharge emotionally after what are often very difficult interactions with families in great need. Instead of offering support or guidance, their supervisors are checking up on them constantly and pressuring them to work faster, which they do not do with other aides. Furthermore, they must constantly receive or witness racist remarks about Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and other racialized people—be it workers or clients.



Estrellita says they have at times done overtime and have not been paid for it. “I felt pressure to produce more and so I stayed overtime to complete tasks. I feel that when people are discriminated [against] because they are not white, they feel pressure to perform more and do better.”

They are one of the few immigrant workers in their current placement, and this has also been the case in their other placements at health and social services. “There is no sensitivity to the situation of Indigenous peoples,” they say. Denigrating and dismissive comments are common, according to Estrellita, as are disrespectful attitudes toward communities that are not mainstream—including immigrants as well as Indigenous, rural, and migrant people. Their co-workers will say things like, “Blacks, or community people, they do not know how to live, are not like us.” Estrellita laments these strong prejudices and wonders how people with such prejudices can help those in need.

Estrellita spoke of an instance when they made a complaint to their manager at their previous work location, when a white co-worker yelled at them in front of the whole team and treated them badly. Nothing was

done. They feel that they were transferred to their new location because the manager did not want to handle their complaint. “I first felt that I was doing something wrong and was trying to understand why I was being treated so badly. I cried every night. I did not know what to do, where to get support.” Estrellita shares how they then discovered CUPE and found the support they needed. “Now that I am in the union, I have started reading the CA [collective agreement] and am aware of my benefits and rights,” they said.

As for Noelia, when asked whether as an Indigenous woman in a traditionally male trades sector she had faced discrimination, or observed others facing discrimination, she said, “Not really. If there is any discrimination it is more because I am a woman than because I am Indigenous.” She says that there is pressure on her to outperform men in her work, because there is a sense that she might have been hired because she is a woman or Indigenous.

Contracted-out workers

Both the health and social services system and the energy corporation rely on private contractors to provide workers to fill gaps when surge capacity is needed.

At the energy corporation, Noelia confirmed what others working in the energy sector in Quebec have observed, that this is a growing trend. She shared that, often, when surge capacity is needed for new operations and lines, repair work, and other tasks, contractors are brought in to work alongside permanent workers. This is more the case in big cities and less in the regions.

Estrellita said that it is hard to know who is brought in by a private agency and who works directly for the government at first.

But they soon realized that the agencies hire mostly immigrants. They relayed that it is as if immigrant staff are required to do more work than non-racialized workers. “And managers, coordinators and other white workers all behave this way,” they said. Estrellita described the situation of immigrant staff like this:

“So far, I have not encountered anyone that is ‘from here’, that works for an agency—all are immigrants, Maghreb or Black. They are paid a little more, \$5 more, but have no benefits at all. And, more importantly, they are treated very poorly, given the hardest, dirtiest and less desirable tasks. They can’t complain about the workload or the treatment because they need the work. They don’t have a union to represent and defend them. I feel that they are treated like slaves. They are treated horribly. They also work overtime to complete tasks, but they aren’t paid for it. They have no job security. So, they must accept any type of situation to keep their jobs. These agency workers are even abused and humiliated by other workers who want to work with them because they get the agency workers to do all the hard work.”

In a positive development, the Quebec government has recently announced its intention to ban the use of private agencies and self-employed workers in the health and social services network.¹⁷³ Given the dire scarcity of workers in the sector, the hope is that this will translate to more direct hires,

better working conditions and more job security for racialized workers.

At the energy corporation, workers brought in by private contractors are mostly non-Indigenous and non-racialized. Given that private contract work is an entryway to eventual permanent work with the corporation, Noelia sees this as a limitation for a diverse workforce.

Noelia explained that companies like her employer have robust hiring policies which promote the hiring of minorities, like women and Indigenous peoples. Though she does not necessarily think she was hired because she is Indigenous, or a woman, she knows there is an important commitment from the company to provide a level playing field for workers from minority communities. This commitment is protected by the union. Because of the treaty that the Cree have around James Bay and “The Peace of Braves,” she suspects they are the group that most directly benefits from the company’s robust hiring policy.¹⁷⁴

Noelia also believes that the lack of robust hiring policies like what is in place at her employer is the greatest risk for Indigenous and racialized workers with the current trend towards privatization. She said, “Contractors will not have hiring policies that promote hiring of Indigenous and racialized workers. I have not met a contractor to date that is Indigenous or racialized.”

What next for Indigenous workers?

When asked what the main issues of concern for Indigenous workers in her sector are, Noelia names three: hiring policies; conditions in collective agreements that affect Indigenous peoples, like cultural holidays; and the use of Indigenous languages. Privatization, she says, does not feature highly in their immediate concerns.

¹⁷³ CTV News Montreal. (2023, July 26). *Quebec will mostly ban the use of private health agencies starting next year.* <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-will-mostly-ban-the-use-of-private-health-agencies-starting-next-year-1.6494599>

¹⁷⁴ The Grand Council of the Crees. *Main Agreement of the Cree Nation Government.* <https://www.cngov.ca/governance-structure/legislation/agreements/>

Noelia notes that even though there is a privatization committee at her local, it is not active. When asked why, she said that the work needed to document the privatization trends was not being done. She explained, “Information is needed, a directory of what contractors are working where, under what conditions, and so on. The work is not being put in, perhaps because workers that have secure jobs do not sense the immediate threat of privatization to their jobs.”

Noelia also noted the lack of data about which CUPE members are racialized, Indigenous or Black—including where they work, (what sectors, regions, and jobs) and under what conditions. Noelia pointed out that CUPE needs better information on the identity of its members to understand their needs, issues, and the threats they face.

As for Estrellita, they are focused on the role of the union, and their role supporting their co-workers through their local, as the way forward. They said,

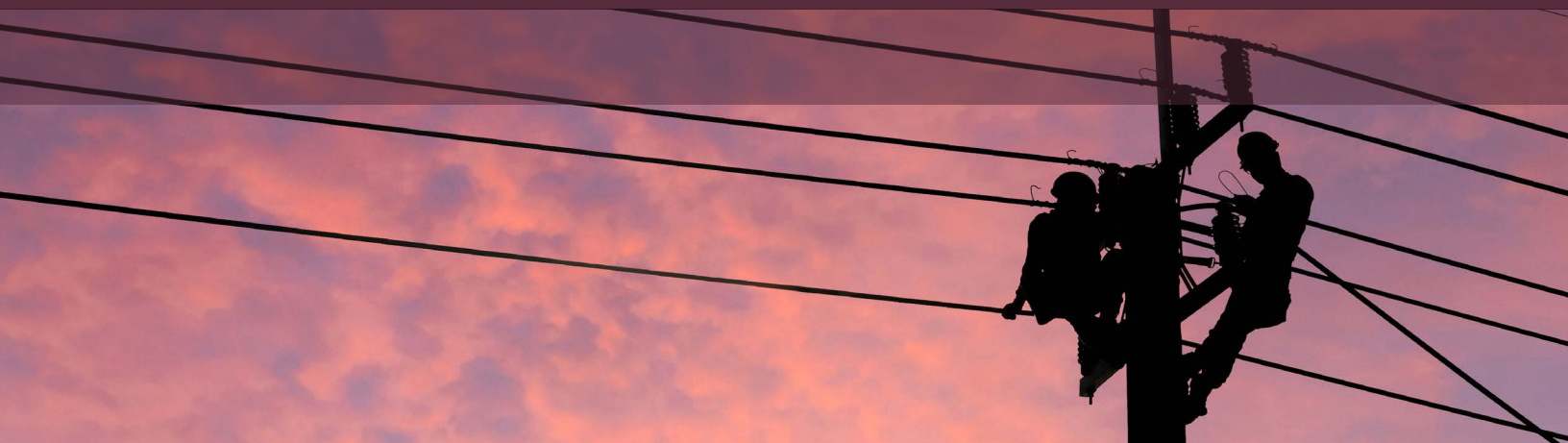
“I think the union is like a gateway to help people like me [...] In the union, I am learning about my rights, I can ask other colleagues questions, and am always treated with respect, like everyone else. I do not feel different because I am an immigrant. I get the same treatment as everyone else. I have never felt discriminated against. I am heard and get support when I need it. The union is a support for me, and it allows me to support others that live the same reality as me. I can help others defend their rights.”

CONCLUSION

The stories shared by Estrellita and Noelia, two Indigenous workers in Quebec, highlight the need to better understand the unique challenges faced by Indigenous members with respect to discrimination and privatization, and to prioritize the work to address them. Private contractors, while they may provide higher wages, exhibit higher levels of discrimination against Indigenous workers along with poorer benefits. To address this effectively, more information is needed on the work location, working conditions, and living situations of Indigenous unionized and non-unionized workers.

Governments at all levels, as well as CUPE and other unions, need to improve their data collection to strengthen their respective work on equity and anti-racism.

These needs are further explored in the next section of this report.



RECOMMENDATIONS

This report calls on all levels of government to protect workers and their communities from the consequences of privatization, which undermines their own stated commitments to racial and gender equity. It also calls on unions, like CUPE, to continue their commitment to anti-privatization, equity, and anti-racism.



This report recommends the following actions:

All levels of government must do what they can to stop privatization and improve public services

1. Governments and public sector employers must stop the privatization of public services. Halting the privatization of public services, especially the contracting out of work, would reduce the inequities experienced by Indigenous, Black and racialized workers.
2. Governments should protect the rights of workers and put a stop to the race to the bottom in wages and working conditions that privatization provokes, by expanding successorship rules (which keep the union, and their collective agreement in place) to cover contracting out and contract flipping in public services.
3. The federal government must update the National Housing Strategy to be compliant with the right to adequate housing. In addition, the federal government should: establish national standards for tenant protections; create acquisition funds for non-profit and co-operative housing; and end the tax loophole for Real Estate Investment Trusts.
4. Statistics Canada, public sector employers, and government contractors should collect and provide disaggregated data on Black, Indigenous and racialized workers and their compensation, benefits and working conditions.

CUPE should continue its commitment to anti-privatization, equity, and anti-racism

1. CUPE should strengthen its anti-privatization strategy to better challenge the privatization of public services and ensure our anti-privatization campaigns, communications and bargaining priorities are informed by the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized members.
2. CUPE should prioritize collecting data on Black, Indigenous and racialized members working for public and private employers including their compensation, benefits, and working and living conditions.
3. CUPE should continue to bargain collective agreement language related to anti-privatization, equity, and anti-racism, aim for wage parity between members in public and private sectors, and develop bargaining language related to the housing needs and rights of its members.

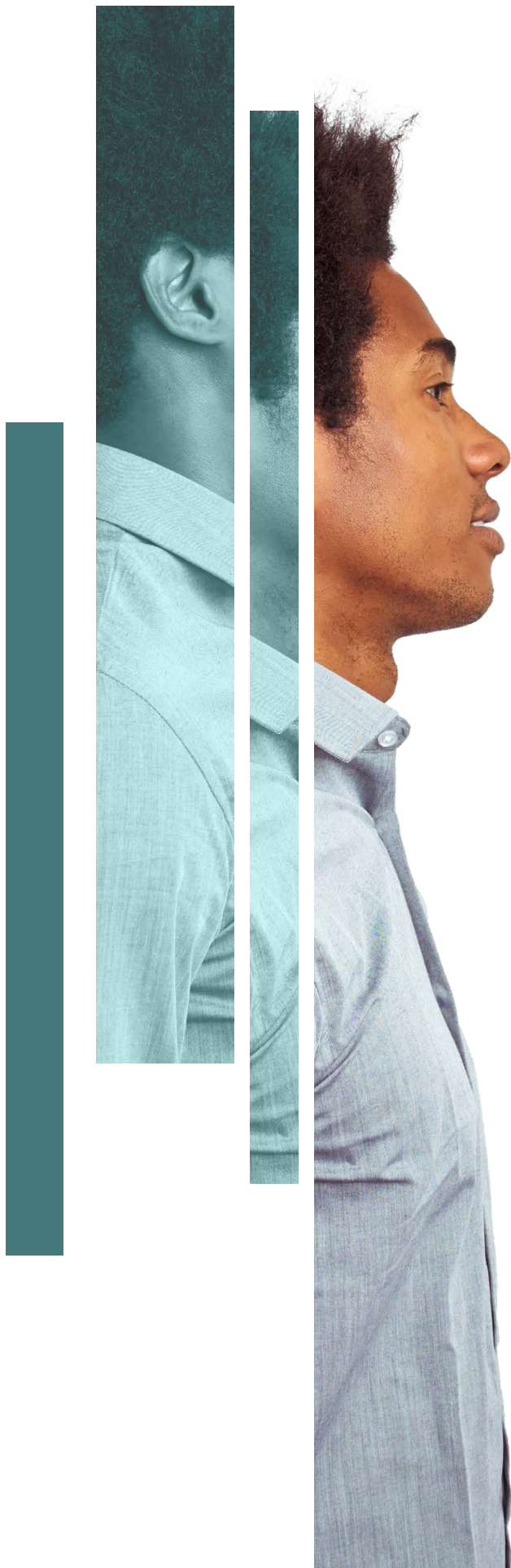
Other goals related to equity and anti-racism are outlined in CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy.¹⁷⁵



¹⁷⁵ Canadian Union of Public Employees (2021).

CONCLUSION

This report discusses privatization of public services in Canada and beyond, and focuses on the consequences on Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and their communities. Stories from CUPE members working in privately run services in post-secondary institutions, long-term care homes and hospitals, as well as those struggling to access affordable housing, illustrate the negative consequences of privatization and contracting out on equity-deserving workers and their communities.



Cuts to wages and benefits, job insecurity, poorer quality of services, heavy workloads, harassment, and discrimination against the most marginalized in the workplace are some of the consequences of privatization identified by CUPE members interviewed for this report. These negative impacts on the well-being of workers and communities are consistent with the deterioration of living and working conditions identified in past studies on privatization of public services. This report shows how discrimination against Black, Indigenous and racialized workers magnifies the negative impacts of privatization that these equity-deserving groups must endure.

This report reinforces the need for CUPE to continue its focus on equity, anti-racism, and anti-privatization. In researching this report, the scarce data on work location and working conditions of Indigenous, Black and racialized workers became evident. Both governments and CUPE need to strengthen their data collection to identify and address the working and living conditions of equity-deserving groups.

The negative consequences of privatization are the result of the private sector's insatiable drive for profit. We must not allow for-profit corporations to continue exploiting equity-deserving communities. All CUPE members deserve fair working conditions and to live in dignity, which requires us to enhance our efforts to fight privatization and support publicly owned and operated services.



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