

Info-nego #12

What will it take to get an agreement in health and social services?

While the strike has helped move talks forward at the sectoral table, there are still major stumbling blocks to a satisfactory agreement. If the government wants to put these negotiations behind it and send a signal that it is committed to improving our working conditions, it must stop being so intransigent.

Key issues remain to be resolved

At the time of writing, there are still major unresolved issues at the sectoral table. To reach an agreement, the government will have to give ground.

It will have to give up its mania for even more control over our work. If giving managers ever more power was the way to improve things in the public system, it would have worked by now. Our employers and the government have been doing it for decades, and things have only gotten worse.

So we are sticking to our demand that the government drop its insistence on being able to move employees around against their will and assign them to multiple shifts. Workers have high expectations for these contract talks. After years of austerity, multiple reforms and a pandemic, they expect the government to finally improve their working conditions. To take away what little stability they have left is just asking for a wave of resignations.

Progress must also be made on overtime and on-call duty outside regular working hours. We put solutions on the table to increase employee availability and address the challenge of staff shortages. Instead of listening, the government announced in the middle of the negotiations that it wants to eliminate double overtime.

The government says it wants to bring staff back from the private agencies but it is only willing to talk about seniority. We have proposed ways to attract and retain staff in the public system. The best way to convince people to come back is to reduce the workload.



When the government talks about flexibility, it means more control and power for itself. It has shown no openness to discussing work-life-study balance. For a workforce with a large majority of women, this is not great. There are zero-cost proposals and the government refuses to even talk about them. Workers are deserting the public system for the agencies precisely because they want more control over their schedules.

The government says the issue of premiums is one of its priorities at the sectoral table. It's a priority for FSSS-CSN members too. However, we have been waiting for a response from the government for three weeks now.

For the night nurses the government is always talking about, it is offering a meagre 1% increase in the night premium. That's definitely not what's going to convince people to work the least desirable shifts. Contrary to what the government claims, we're open to discussion, but we need more from the government in order to fill these shifts.

Mobilization has made a difference at the table

The exemplary mobilization by workers has yielded progress at the bargaining table.

We are moving towards important gains that will improve labour relations in the health and social services system. From one reform to the next, labour relations have become ever more litigious and the resolution of disputes and grievances ever more protracted. That is why we want a mediation-arbitration mechanism. This would be a major gain that would speed up resolution of workplace disputes.

For office and administrative staff, we are making progress towards more favourable conditions such as modulation of work schedules to facilitate access to the process for recognition of acquired competencies, access to qualifying training and training projects.

Working in northern Québec has its own challenges. We are engaged in constructive discussions about improving and expanding access to the provisions of Letter of Agreement #37 regarding the Far North.

At a time of massive hiring, we have made progress on a budget for supervision of new recruits.

However, despite these significant advances, much more needs to be done to attract, retain and value workers in the public system and to guarantee the public access to health care and social services. So despite the tough going, we continue working all-out in the hope of reaching an agreement before 2024.

