THE BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF A UNION

If you become a Registered Nurse (RN) or Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN) in Saskatchewan, you will have to join a union - The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

What is a union?

A “union” is a group of workers who join together to form an organization that gives them a voice in their workplace to improve their working conditions, benefits and wages. Unions work on your behalf to define hours of work, wages and other conditions of employment, along with established procedures for dispute resolution. To ensure an employee and employer are aware of all of the employment conditions, they are defined in a document called a “collective agreement,” which is legally-binding. SUN negotiates collective agreements for all of its members.

Why do I need a union?

Did you know that almost one in every three working people in Canada belong to a union? Labour unions have a long history of championing on behalf of the worker. They are responsible for the development of many modern day enhancements to society and the workplace. For example, without the work of unions, you would not have Medicare, occupational health and safety standards, child labour laws, decent wages and humane working conditions.

What will a union do for me?

At SUN, our mission is to enhance the social, economic and general well being of our members, and to protect high quality, publicly funded and delivered health services. Through our mission we have a common vision to develop healthy members, a healthy union and healthy communities. It is our goal to achieve safe and healthy practice environments for all SUN members.

Under the Trade Union Act, SUN is obligated to: bargain terms and conditions of employment for our members and once in place, assist nurses in enforcing those conditions; and, fairly represent every member in a grievance or rights arbitration in a manner that is not arbitrary, discriminatory or in bad faith. SUN also provides social commentary on the delivery of health care in our province to the public and to the government. People of Saskatchewan depend and rely on SUN for that commentary.

SUN offers members ongoing education programs that are committed to providing members with knowledge and skills to enable them to recognize and resolve workplace issues. It has also committed to a representative workforce that includes Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, visible minorities, and women and men in non-traditional roles.

The following list is a small sample of what unions have achieved for working people over the years:

- Medicare
- minimum wage
- better work conditions
- long-term disability benefits
- employee benefits
- sickness and accident benefits
- stronger human rights laws
- voluntary overtime
- cost-of-living raises
- job security
- paid vacations and holidays
- bereavement pay
- guaranteed wage increases
- occ. health & safety laws/standards
- Canada Pension Plan
- free public education
- severance pay
- health and dental plans
- eliminating child sweat shops
- overtime pay after 8 hrs. of work
- maternity benefits
## EIGHT ADVANTAGES OF A UNION IN YOUR WORKPLACE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNION</th>
<th>NO UNION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages, benefits, working</td>
<td>Protected by legal contract.</td>
<td>At the whim of the employer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>conditions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>Spelled out in the contract.</td>
<td>Employers set the wages. Often this is done secretly; they are obligated by law to pay workers at least minimum wage.</td>
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<td>Raises</td>
<td>Bargained for everyone. All workers vote on the settlement.</td>
<td>Favouritism may determine individual raises.</td>
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<td>Discipline</td>
<td>The union will defend you.</td>
<td>Right or wrong, the employer has the final say.</td>
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<td>Promotions</td>
<td>Awarded fairly according to the negotiated contract.</td>
<td>Again, at the whim of the employer (favouritism, office romance, nepotism, blackmail).</td>
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<td>Vacations, shifts, layoffs</td>
<td>Based on negotiated agreement.</td>
<td>See above. There are some legal rights to vacation.</td>
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<td>Problems</td>
<td>Union will work with members to solve problems.</td>
<td>Depending on how forward-thinking the organization is, they may have a human resource office for handling problems; however, smaller organizations really do not have any set rules; often, there is no recourse for an employee when the employer makes a decision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give people a voice in the</td>
<td>Work for laws that protect working people and their families.</td>
<td>Take away or weaken all laws that protect workers (eg. Health and Safety, overtime, etc.).</td>
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<td>political arena.</td>
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Sources: SEIU “Why a Union” handout and UFCW1518 “Working with a Union Contract vs. Working Non-Union” handout.