

**News Conference Statement  
Cathy Dickson, President  
Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan  
Prince Albert  
May 6, 2011**

Good afternoon. Thank you for coming.

This afternoon, as required by law, the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan is providing health care employers and the Wall government with **48 Hours strike notice**.

This means that job action involving our specialized health care professionals could begin as early as Sunday across the province.

Exactly where and how job action will begin, and which of our more than three-thousand professionals will be involved, will be made public at the appropriate time.

We want the people of Saskatchewan to know that we have done everything possible to avoid a strike, but the Wall government and health care employers have given us no other option.

We have spent more than two years at the bargaining table, trying to convince health care employers to actually negotiate, and provide a fair and reasonable contract offer.

For more than two years, on the direction of the Wall government, health care employers have stonewalled and refused to get on with the job.

More than two months ago, when presented with a contract proposal that our members described as “insulting”, our union’s Negotiating Committee was given an 88% strike mandate.

In recent weeks, to try to avoid strike action, we have presented health care employers with no fewer than **four different contract proposals**.

Each time employers have dismissed our proposals, and refused to even negotiate.

We have gone to the Legislature to try to convince the Wall government to revise its health sector mandate, but all we’ve heard and seen from the Health Minister is misinformation and disrespect.

Two weeks ago, also in an attempt to avoid strike action, we publicly called on Premier Wall to agree to send our contract dispute to independent, binding arbitration.

The Premier has shown complete disrespect for our specialized health care professionals by not even responding to our request.

Enough is enough.

Throughout this long and frustrating contract dispute we have focused on two fundamental problems with the Wall government’s approach to health care:

- First, it is allowing health care employers to balance their budgets by **chronically understaffing** our professions, which risks the health of many patients, and forces others to wait unacceptable lengths of time for needed health care services

- Second, they are allowing recruitment and retention problems for our professions to worsen by failing to keep our wages and benefits **competitive** with other provinces, like Alberta, or even with other Saskatchewan health care professions, like Registered Nurses

We have decided that we have to take a stand.

Unless the **chronic under-staffing** is stopped, Saskatchewan patients will continue to be put at risk.

Unless wages and benefits become **more competitive**, Saskatchewan's recruitment and retention of our professionals will only worsen.

Health care employers have tried to deny they are under-staffing our professions, but the facts show they are misleading the public.

Independent research from the *Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI)* shows that Saskatchewan has fewer Respiratory Therapists and Occupational Therapists per capita than **anywhere else in Canada**. And we have fewer Physical Therapists and Audiologists per capita than **anywhere else in Western Canada**.

In addition, many health care employers are practicing "vacancy management", which simply means they drag their feet on replacing our professionals when they leave a position, hoping the public won't notice.

What about competitiveness? Here too health care employers and the Wall government have misled the public.

The Health Minister claims we have been offered "**competitive**" wages and benefits. On average, our Saskatchewan health care professionals trail their Alberta counterparts today by 25%, and Saskatchewan Registered Nurses by more than 35%.

Even health care employers confirm that if we accepted their insulting contract offer, 16 of 26 professions would still be paid **below** the Western Canadian Average.

In fact, for professionals like our EMS workers Saskatchewan will be **dead last** among the Western provinces! Not competitive. Not even close.

In spite of the frustration of the past two years; in spite of the disrespect shown our members by health care employers and the Wall government, strike action can still be avoided.

They have 48 hours.

The ball is now totally in Premier Wall's court.

He can **avoid strike action** by instructing health care employers to agree to send this contract dispute to independent, binding arbitration.

We call on Premier Wall to show some leadership, and to show some respect for Saskatchewan health care professionals.

Sir, if you truly believe that you are making a fair and reasonable contract offer, why not have the courage to submit your position to independent scrutiny?

We await your answer, Mr. Premier. Thank you and I'd be happy to respond to your questions.