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# From Pay Cheque to Pay Cheque

**The Impact of the Rising Cost of Living  
on Health Care Workers**



**CUPE** | Canadian Union  
of Public Employees

**CUPE RESEARCH**  
Saskatchewan Region  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- CUPE 5430 represents over 13,000 health service providers working for the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and affiliates in five major classification areas: clerical, technical, nursing, support, and plant operations.
- From March 2013 to March 2023, the Saskatchewan Consumer Price Index (all-items) increased by 27% - about double the compounded percentage wage increase of 14% received by CUPE 5430 members during the same period. This period coincided with a regressive public sector wage mandate that saw wage increases depressed for several years starting in 2017.
- The CPI components for food and energy increased even further – 38% and 37% respectively.
- From March 2013 to March 2023, Saskatchewan’s minimum wage increased by 30%.
- A CUPE 5430 member employed as a Continuing Care Assistant (Pay Band 12) from March 2013 to March 2023, and earning the maximum rate, has seen a reduction in their real annual income of \$5,259.
- 1,985 CUPE 5430 members, or 15% of the entire membership, fully completed a nine-question survey that asked members how they were managing the increased cost of living.
- 86% of survey respondents said they cut back their grocery budget to make ends meet, 84% cut back on leisure activities/hobbies, 77% delayed a major purchase and 73% cancelled or scaled back vacation plans.
- 55% of respondents said they could not manage any unexpected expense, while only 19% of respondents said they could manage an unexpected expense of up to \$250.
- 70% of respondents said their household finances were either “poor” (54%) or “very poor” (16%).
- Nearly half of survey respondents (48%) took the opportunity to share their personal experiences about how they are making ends meet.
- These comments reveal that members, including full-time SHA employees, are working additional jobs or inordinate amounts of overtime just to make ends meet. Many CUPE 5430 members are skipping meals and using the food bank, while others are delaying retirement, cancelling vacations, and using credit cards to pay monthly bills.
- A substantial boost in wages is not only required to reverse the lost purchasing power of health service providers but it is also needed to address retention challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

This report examines how recent increases in the cost of living have impacted members of CUPE 5430, which represents over 13,000 health services providers working for the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and affiliate employers.

CUPE 5430 members work in a wide range of positions in five major classification areas: clerical, technical, nursing, support, and plant operations. Our members contribute to the well-being of hospital patients, long-term care residents, and home care clients throughout the province, including Regina, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Weyburn, Estevan, Melville, and dozens of smaller communities.

There are two components to this report.

First, this report compares the wage increases CUPE 5430 have received over the last ten years with the corresponding increases in the Consumer Price Index – specifically the Saskatchewan all-items index – as well as many of the main components of the CPI, such as food, shelter, and gasoline. The exact reference period for this analysis is March 2013 to March 2023.

Second, the report summarizes the results of a short survey that asked CUPE 5430 members how they have managed to cope with the increased cost of living resulting from extremely high levels of inflation over the last two years. The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative responses.

The survey was developed to assist CUPE 5430 with the negotiation of a fair wage increase in a renewal collective agreement with the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO), the bargaining agent for the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

The current CUPE-SAHO collective agreement expired March 31, 2023. Bargaining for a renewal agreement began in September 2023.

## INFLATION VS. GENERAL WAGE INCREASES

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 initially had a pronounced deflationary impact on prices as strict public health measures were implemented that limited gatherings and shuttered many businesses.

However, in the fall of 2021 the combination of supply chain disruptions, semi-conductor chip shortages, and pent-up consumer demand contributed to rising inflation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 further drove the price of oil, potash, and other commodities upward. Some economists have also pointed to “greedflation” as a factor, noting that corporate profits as a share of Gross Domestic Product have recently increased to record levels. These profits have been most pronounced in industries like supermarkets, petroleum, real estate and car dealerships.<sup>1</sup>

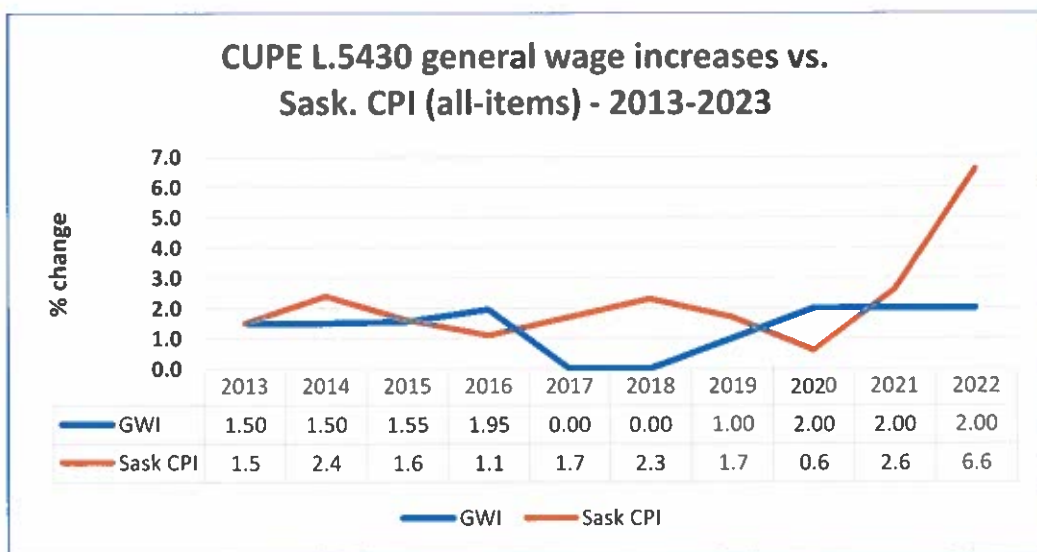
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<sup>1</sup> See Jim Stanford, “Profits, Not Wages, Have Driven Canadian Inflation,” Centre for Future Work, January 20, 2023, accessed at <https://centreforfuturework.ca/2023/01/20/profits-not-wages-have-driven-canadian-inflation/>

The end result was inflation rates not seen in Canada, and Saskatchewan, in over 30 years. In 2022, the annual average percentage increase in the Saskatchewan CPI skyrocketed to 6.6%, up from 2.6% in 2021. While inflation has gradually moderated throughout 2023, prices continue to rise. Saskatchewan’s 2023-24 Mid-Year Report, released November 27, 2023, is now projecting an annual average CPI of 4.0% for the province in 2023.<sup>2</sup> This rate is higher than the projected 3.5% in the 2023-24 Provincial Budget and double the Bank of Canada’s longstanding target of 2.0%.

### How has inflation compared to general wage increases?

The chart below compares the annual average increases in the Saskatchewan CPI (all-items index) with the general wage increases of CUPE 5430 members for the period 2013 to 2023.



Although the effective wage increase dates of April 1<sup>st</sup> of every year don’t neatly correspond with the annual average CPI increases, the chart above shows that general wage increases have exceeded inflation in only two of these ten years – 2016 and 2020.

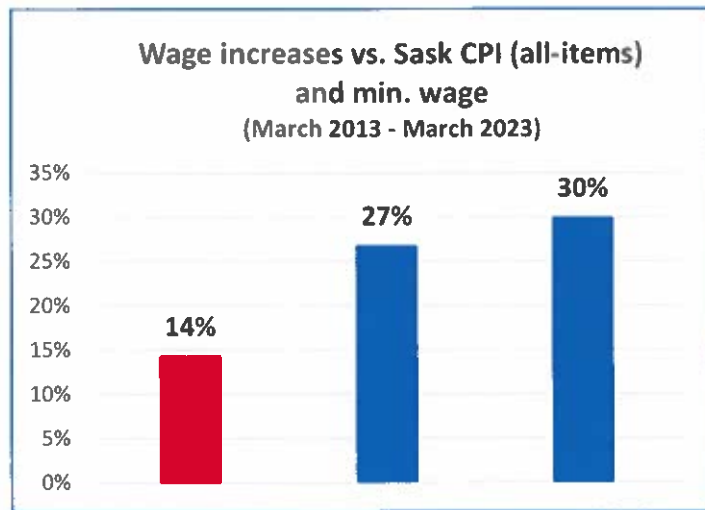
The erosion of real wages for CUPE 5430 members, and public sector workers more broadly, is partly due to the enactment of regressive public sector wage mandates by the Sask. Party government. In the 2017-18 provincial budget, the Sask. Party government mandated a reduction in total public sector compensation of 3.5% followed by three years of wage freezes. Fortunately, no public sector union agreed to these terms. Eventually, a pattern was set that saw workers covered by provincial public sector agreements receive wage increases of 0%, 0%, 1%, 2%, 2% over five years, sometimes with another 2% wage increase in the sixth year.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, 2023-24 Mid-Year Report, November 27, 2023, p. 3, accessed at <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2023/november/27/2023-24-mid-year-report-shows-revenue-growth-offset-by-expense-due-to-drought>

While CUPE 5430, and other public sector unions, avoided an outright rollback of wages and other monetary provisions as initially mandated by the Sask. Party government, members still saw their wages frozen for 2017 and 2018 and only received a meagre increase of 1% in 2019. As a result, the period 2017-2019 saw a reduction in purchasing power for health service providers even though inflation remained at average levels.

### How much purchasing power have CUPE 5430 members lost?

As the chart below shows, from March 2013 to March 2023, the hourly wages of CUPE 5430 members increased by 14% (compounded). However, during the same period, the Saskatchewan CPI all-items index increased by 27% - nearly double the compounded percentage wage increase.



The chart also shows that the 14% compounded hourly wage increase from March 2013 to March 2023 is less than half the 30% increase in Saskatchewan's minimum wage during this same period.

Sources: CUPE-SAHO collective agreements, Statistics Canada, Table: 18-10-0004-01, Government of Saskatchewan news releases

It's important to note that this percentage increase does not include the most recent increase in the minimum wage from \$13.00 to \$14.00/hour made effective October 1, 2023. The increase in the minimum wage since March 2013 jumps to 40% when the most recent increase in the minimum wage is considered. Despite these increases, Saskatchewan's minimum wage remains the lowest in the country.

### How has the loss of purchasing power affected annual incomes?

The table below shows the decline in real annual incomes that members would have experienced from March 2013 to March 2023 if they had been employed in one of the listed jobs for this period. For instance, a CUPE 5430 member employed as a Continuing Care Assistant (Pay Band 12) from March 2013 to March 2023, and earning the maximum rate, has seen a reduction in their real annual income or purchasing power of \$5,259.09. If the wages of a CCA had kept up with inflation during this period, this employee would be making \$27.55 per hour, instead of the current maximum rate of \$24.84 per hour.

**Change in annual income (selected CUPE 5430 wage classifications)**

	March 2013 (max. rate)	March 2023 (max. rate)	If wages kept pace with CPI	Real hourly wage difference	Annual purchasing power loss
Food Service Worker (6)	\$18.28	\$20.88	\$23.19	-\$2.31	-\$4,476.35
Unit Clerk (8)	\$19.44	\$22.24	\$24.66	-\$2.42	-\$4,692.44
Recreation Worker (10)	\$20.61	\$23.55	\$26.14	-\$2.59	-\$5,030.22
CCA (12)	\$21.72	\$24.84	\$27.55	-\$2.71	-\$5,259.09
LPN (16)	\$33.87	\$38.72	\$42.96	-\$4.24	-\$8,230.70

*Notes:*

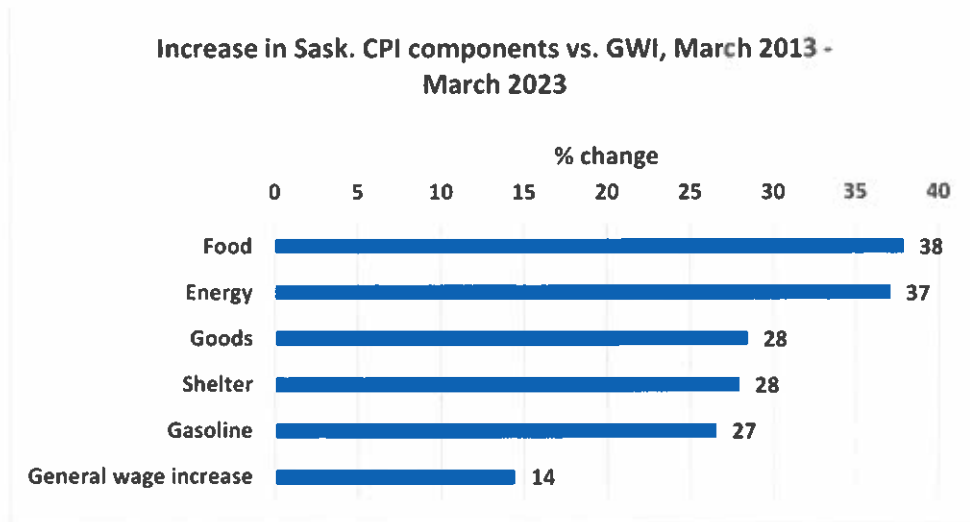
1 – Calculations based on maximum hourly wage rates and 37.33 hours per week as per CUPE-SAHO collective agreements.

2 – The figures above were calculated using data from Statistics Canada, Consumer Price Index, Table 18-10-0004-01

As the table clearly shows, a higher pay band results in a greater loss in real annual income. CUPE members in every classification would have experienced a loss in their real annual incomes during this period, though the loss would have been mitigated for those positions receiving a market supplement.

It is important to underline that the CPI is based on a broad “basket” of goods and services that is divided into several categories such as food, shelter, clothing and footwear, and transportation. Within each category, Statistics Canada selects the products that most closely reflect the spending patterns of all Canadians. However, the amount Canadians spend on basic necessities, like food and shelter, compared to other goods and services, will typically vary depending on income levels. Thus, it makes sense to look more closely at the increase in these major CPI components.

The chart below shows the increase in many of the major components of the CPI for Saskatchewan during the period March 2013 to March 2023. Food saw the steepest increase during this period (38%), followed closely by energy (37%), which includes electricity and natural gas. Prices for goods (physical commodities including non-durable goods, semi-durable goods and durable goods) and shelter increased at twice the rate of compounded general wage increases – 28% to 14%.



Source: Calculations using data from Statistics Canada, Table: 18-10-0004-01

Wage increases received by CUPE 5430 members have been outstripped by inflationary increases in the last decade. However, increases in basic necessities like food and energy have been even more pronounced.

The next section of this report will examine how CUPE 5430 members have managed these increased costs while receiving only modest wage increases.

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

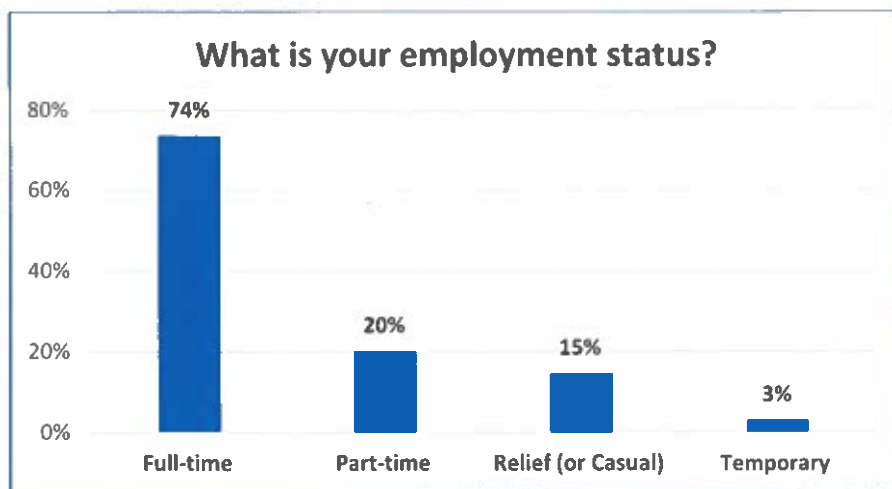
The membership survey was developed using the online tool LimeSurvey. The survey consisted of nine questions, including one open-ended question. The online survey was launched November 1, 2023, when the survey link was emailed to CUPE 5430 members, and closed at 7:00 p.m., on November 9.

Altogether, 1,985 CUPE 5430 members fully completed the survey. This represents a participation rate of 15% based on the total CUPE 5430 membership of 13,000 members. (Another 214 members partly completed the survey, but these results were not included in the tabulation or analysis.)

This report summarizes the statistics of the raw survey data, using percentages to measure responses to the close-ended questions. Given the high volume of responses to the open-ended question, this report only includes a small, but representative, selection of these comments.

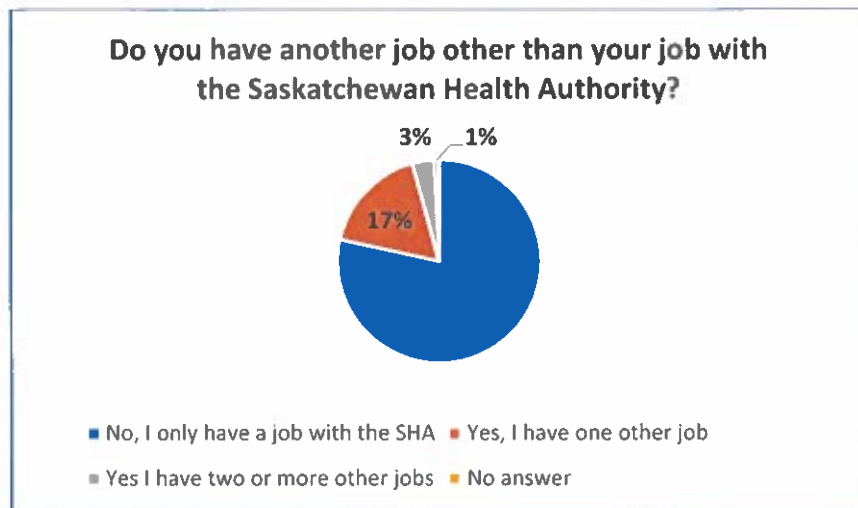
## **SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS**

As the chart below shows, almost three-quarters of survey respondents (74%) said they were employed full-time, as compared to 20% who said they were part-time and 15% who said they were employed as relief or casual staff. Only 3% of respondents said they were employed in a temporary position.





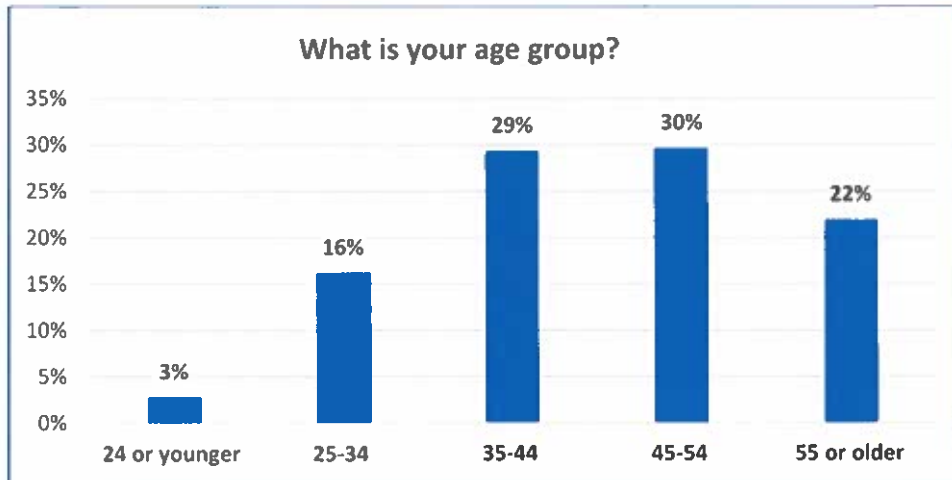
The chart below shows that over three-quarters of respondents (78%) responded that they only have a job with the SHA. However, 17% of respondents said they had one other job and 3% said they had two or more other jobs.



Not surprisingly, those respondents who reported they worked part-time or on a casual basis for the SHA were more likely to say they worked one or more other jobs than full-time employees. Still, 18% of full-time employees reported working one or more other jobs outside of the SHA. This compares to 24% of part-time employees and 35% of casual employees who work one or more other jobs outside the SHA.

Survey respondents were asked if they were the sole income earner in their household. The majority of CUPE 5430 respondents (60%) answered “no” to this question. Still, over one-third of respondents (35%) did say they were the sole income earner in their household. Five percent of respondents didn’t answer this question.

As shown in the chart below, CUPE 5430 members participating in the survey were also asked to select their age group from five options. Most respondents said they were in either the 35-44-year-old grouping or the 45-54-year-old grouping – 29% for the former and 30% for the latter. The category with the next largest percentage of members was the 55 or older category with 22% choosing this option. This was followed by 16% who placed themselves in the 25-34-year-old grouping and only 3% who said they were 24 years old or younger.



Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) said they were female, while only 13% said they were male. The survey gave respondents the option to choose “Another gender identity.” Only five respondents or 0.25% chose this option. Likewise, only six respondents or 0.30% didn’t answer this question.

## **COST OF LIVING**

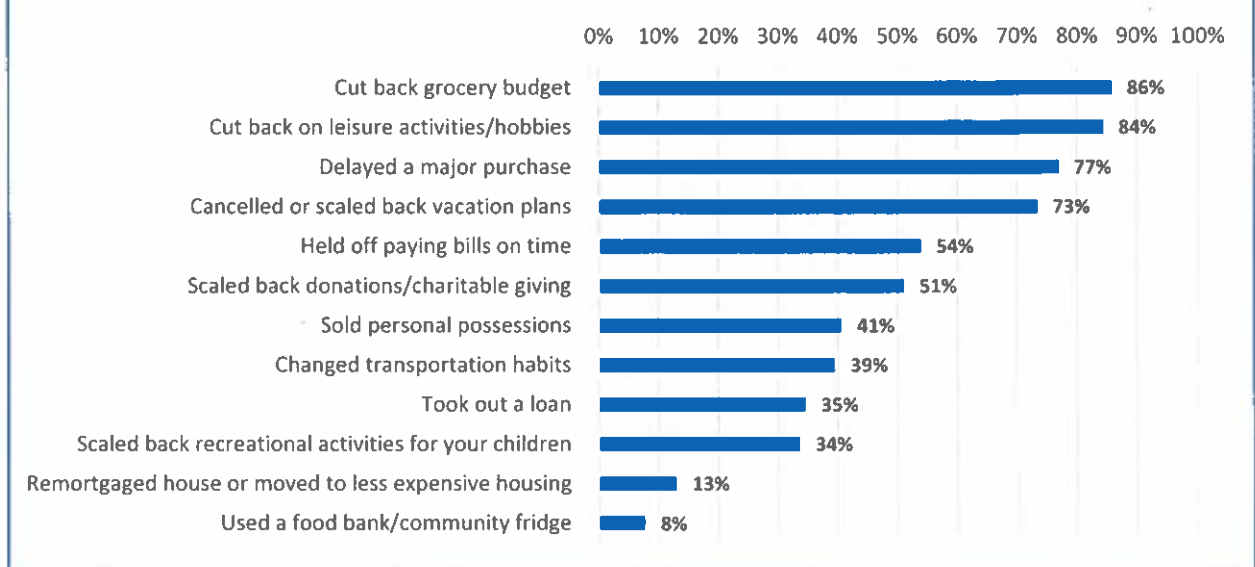
Three close-ended questions and one open-ended question were used to gauge how well CUPE 5430 members were coping with the increased cost-of-living. The results of these questions are sobering.

### **Cost-saving measures to make ends meet**

The first question of this section asked respondents: “In the last year, have you or your household done any of the following to make ends meet?” Respondents were presented with 12 cost-saving measures and asked to check all that applied to their situation.

The chart below shows that an overwhelming percentage of respondents (86%) cut back their grocery budget to make ends meet. This was closely followed by 84% of respondents who said they cut back on leisure activities/hobbies, 77% who delayed a major purchase and 73% who indicated they cancelled or scaled back vacation plans.

**In the last year, have you or your household done any of the following to make ends meet? [check all that apply]**



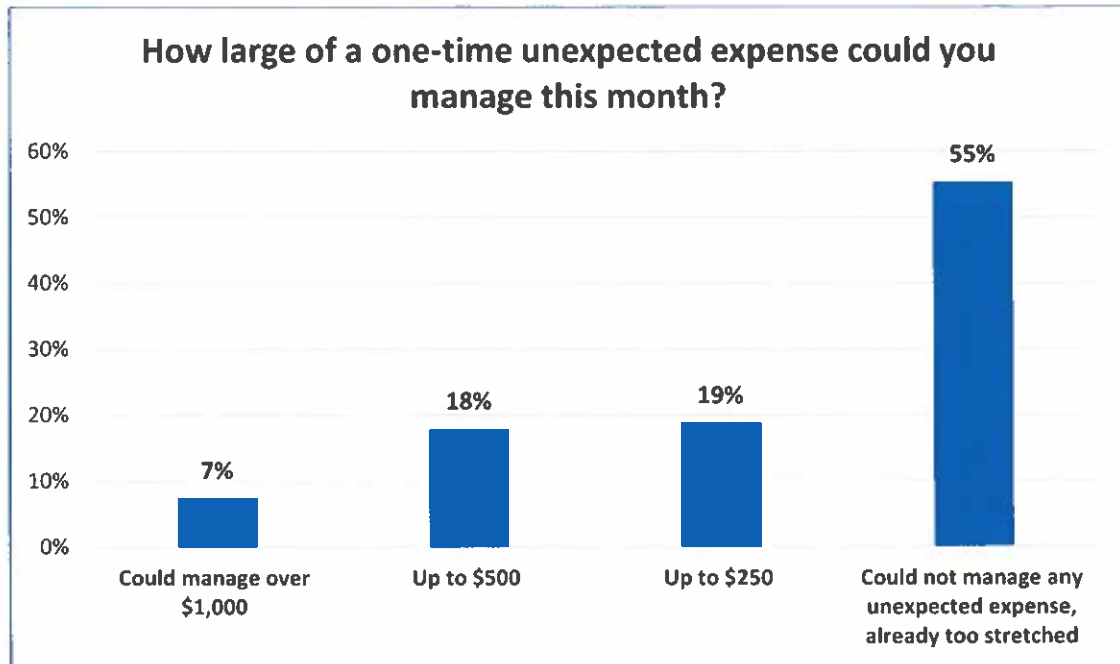
A majority of members held off paying bills on time (54%) and scaled back donations/charitable giving (51%).

Over one-third of respondents said they sold personal possessions to make ends meet (41%), changed transportation habits (39%), took out a loan (35%) and scaled back recreational activities for their children (34%).

**Managing unexpected expenses**

The next question asked survey respondents: “How large of a one-time unexpected expense could you manage this month?”

As the chart below shows, a majority of respondents (55%) answered that they “could not manage any unexpected expense, already too stretched.” Only 19% of respondents said they could manage an unexpected expense of up to \$250, while 18% said they could manage up to \$500 for an unexpected expense. Only 7% of respondents said they could manage an unexpected expense of over \$1,000.



Not surprisingly, cross-tabulation analysis reveals that nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents who said they were the sole income earner in their household reported that they could not manage any unexpected expense. By contrast, 50% of other respondents (not identifying as a sole income earner) reported they could not manage any unexpected expense.

Those respondents who reported having one or more jobs other than their SHA job were also more likely to say they could not manage any unexpected expense. While 54% of those with only a SHA job said they couldn't manage an unexpected expense, 58% with one other job indicated they couldn't manage an unexpected expense, and 69% with two or more other jobs said the same.

Employment status did not seem to alter the response to this question, as 56% of full-time respondents said they could not manage an unexpected expense compared to 54% of respondents who said they did not work full-time (e.g., part-time, casual or temporary).

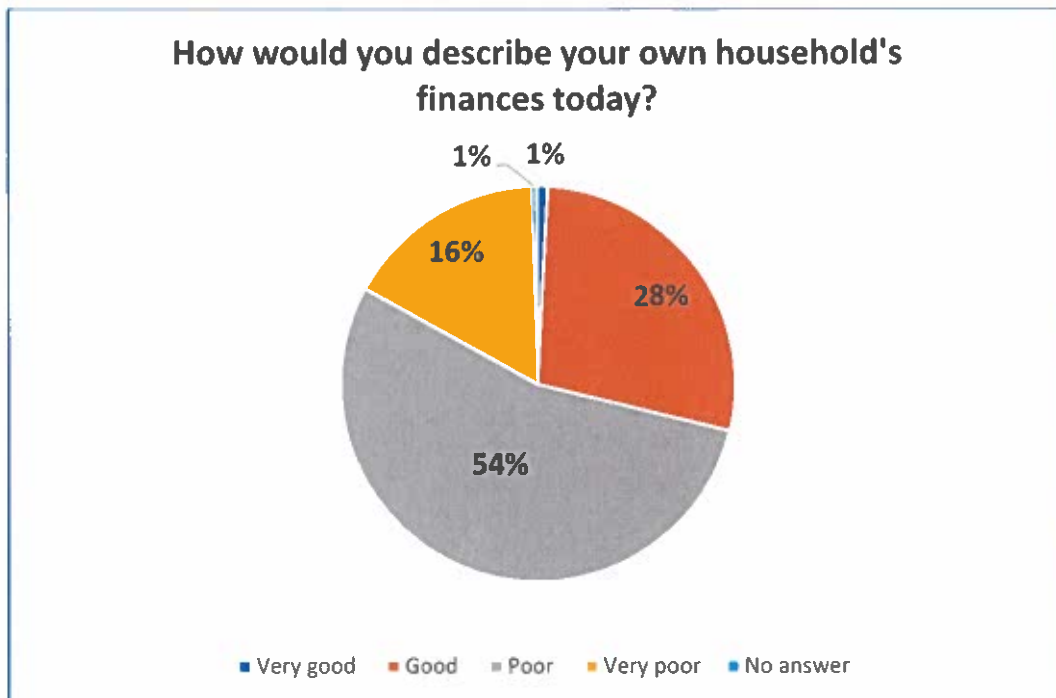
Those respondents in the combined age cohort of 35 to 54 years-old were the most likely to report that they could not manage an unexpected expense since they were already too stretched – 60% of the 35-44 age cohort and 62% of the 45-54 age cohort responded this way.

Female respondents were somewhat more likely than male respondents to report that they could not manage an unexpected expense – 56% to 50%, respectively.

### **Household finances**

The final close-ended question asked respondents: “How would you describe your own household’s finances today?”

A solid majority of respondents (70%) said their household finances were either “poor” (54%) or “very poor” (16%). Only 28% said their household finances were “good” while 1% said they were “very good.”



For respondents who said they were the sole income earner in their household, the financial picture is even bleaker. Only 19% describe their household’s finances as good, while 56% say their finances are poor and 24% describe their finances as very poor.

Likewise, 85% of those respondents who reported having two or more jobs described their finances as poor or very poor, compared to 75% of respondents with one other job and 69% of respondents who only have a job with the SHA.

Employment status did not impact how respondents answered this question, as both 71% of full-time employees and 71% of other respondents (those working part-time, casual and temporary jobs) described their household finances as poor or very poor.

The age cohorts that described their household finances in the bleakest terms were respondents aged 35 to 44 years old with 77% reporting their finances as poor or very poor, followed by respondents aged 45 to 54 years old with 74% describing their finances that way.

### **Open-ended responses**

Finally, survey respondents were prompted “to share additional information about your experience managing the increased cost of living on your current wage.”

Nearly half of respondents (48%) took the opportunity to share their personal experiences about how they are making ends meet.

A small but representative sample of these 953 comments is featured below. The anonymous comments are verbatim, aside from minor edits to ensure clarity.

As can be seen, several themes emerged in these comments. Many CUPE 5430 members report that they are working two or more jobs, even when they have a full-time job, and working as much overtime as they can to make ends meet. Others report that they are working past age 65 since they can't afford to retire.

The most common response is that members are cutting back on grocery purchases in some way - buying less meat, fresh fruit, and vegetables, skipping meals and in some instances, relying on the food bank. Many members report relying on credit cards or line of credits to pay monthly bills or delaying payment of bills. Several members are experiencing housing insecurity. Others report struggling to provide for family members, including elderly parents and children. Members are also cutting back on social and recreational activities for themselves and their children.

Not surprisingly, many comments report that these day-to-day struggles to make ends meet are negatively impacting their mental health and quality of life.

## **MULTIPLE JOBS**

- *For the last year I have been working 2 part time jobs on top of my full-time position.*
- *Have had to get two part-time jobs over and above the full time [job] I own. Not sure how much longer I can keep up.*
- *I have to work 2 jobs, one outside SHA, and still struggle. I sometimes have to choose between groceries and bills.*
- *I have one full time job plus I work 3 additional jobs to just have a roof and some groceries.*
- *I have to hold a full-time position in the SHA as well as a part time job at another company, working up to 65 hours a week to pay for expenses.*

## **RELIANCE ON OVERTIME**

- *I'm having to take more overtime shifts so that I'm able to buy grocery items that we have become accustomed to having that now are more expensive. I'm tired and exhausted but need to keep at this pace because of the increased cost of living happening right now.*
- *The only way we can catch up is endless overtime which is exhausting and depressing.*

- *Having to work overtime to have extra money for the increase of cost of living. There is no more balance of work life and family life.*
- *Having to try and work massive amounts of overtime while my body is falling apart due to working so much.*
- *Unless I pick up overtime and spend even less time with my family for work, I can't afford life. I don't live above my means and that's just not fair for a full-time SHA employee to be struggling.*
- *Its very hard as I'm [the] only wage earner and in my 60's. I work all my shifts. Plus do overtime just to try make extra at a time when I should be slowing down but can't afford to.*
- *I manage to get by but only because I work at least 80+ hours of overtime each month and I have a partner that shares the bills.*

## **DELAYING PAYMENT OF BILLS**

- *Many of my bills have become in arrears because of everything going up except wages.*
- *As a household with 2 working parents and 3 kids that live at our house we are struggling to make ends meet. We have to wait to pay bills or sometimes not pay them at all and make small payments just to keep creditors off our backs.*

## **RELIANCE ON CREDIT CARDS, LINE OF CREDITS, BORROWING**

- *Both my husband and I work for the SHA. While I believe we USED to make a decent wage, with the recent extreme increase in cost of living, we are often relying on our credit cards and credit line for purchases for things such as groceries and gas.*
- *I've acquired debt and had to declare bankruptcy because I am a single income family.*
- *Am forced to put groceries on credit card, the balance of which is continuously climbing. I am working extra jobs and feeling burnt out.*
- *Borrowed money to make ends meet, cut off some grocery and clothing expenses, no recreation or travel and cancelled vacation plan.*
- *Have to use credit card more to pay other bills. And the high interest from it makes it worse.*

- *We have had to cut back and have gone further into debt to get even the bare essentials covered. I have had to work any overtime shifts offered to cover basic bills. I worry that I may not be able to retire at 65.*
- *I have had to use my line of credit to make ends meet. My hope is a decent tax return and lots of overtime will help me pay this off eventually.*
- *I struggle everyday, I have had to borrow money from friends and family for groceries and to help with bills and my mortgage.*
- *Max out credit card just to be afloat on our monthly expenses.*

## **CUTTING BACK ON GROCERIES AND MEALS**

- *I can't afford fresh vegetables. I've relied on game meat donated by family more now than before.*
- *I'm lucky if I get to eat 1 meal a day so my kids can eat 3 meals a day.*
- *With the cost of living increasing, I have had to skip many meals so that my family can eat. There are times when our cupboards are bare.*
- *We are trying as much as we can to meal plan and buy only whichever is on sale. We don't do birthday dinner anymore.*
- *We are using the food bank to survive but that doesn't help pay the bills. We are constantly behind, and they are threatening to cut off utilities.*
- *I basically live on sandwiches, have to rely on the food bank.*
- *Grocery bill has doubled, have had to change menu items to way cheaper options e.g., cereal for supper is now on the menu and not a fun option.*
- *Barely making ends meet and using the food bank. I have 3 kids and mortgage to pay. Groceries too expensive, sometimes tried to eat twice a day or one to save a little for kids.*
- *Currently I am having most of my lunch on last coffee break, so supper can be avoided.*
- *I rarely even stop at the meat section other than processed meats which is about all I can afford.*
- *I now eat less meat than I did before. I try to make dried food dinners and I skip one meal a day.*



## SELLING POSSESSIONS

- *Sold my home... still broke. 34 years seniority, barely hanging on.*
- *Looking at selling our car for a cheaper one. We are renting out our extra room.*
- *I go twice weekly to donate plasma and am compensated for it.*

## HOUSING

- *My husband and I moved in with his parents, as we could not afford rent anymore. We are still struggling to pay off loans and make our income last. [T]he thought of my financial situation has caused my anxiety and depression to increase drastically.*
- *I am one paycheck away from being homeless.*
- *We are on a variable mortgage so on top of all the costs, we are working with a mortgage that is \$900 more a month than when we originally had it.*
- *Just sold my house to cope with everything.*

## STRUGGLING TO SUPPORT FAMILY MEMBERS

- *I work full-time and so does my husband. We both have what are considered "good" jobs. We are stretched so thin month to month with the increased cost of living that I am having to tell my kids "sorry pal I can't afford to drive 2.5 hours and [at] a hotel to stay to watch you play hockey!"*
- *I used to be able to not live paycheck to paycheck and was able to help my parents financially. Now even with 2 jobs I can hardly make ends meet. I don't have emergency fund and I worry for the future all the time.*
- *I can't help my 83-year-old mother back home with her medication anymore.*
- *Not only us affected but also the kids. We learn to say no for them to join other sports since priority is to buy groceries and pay the rent.*

## IMPACTS ON SOCIAL LIFE AND VACATIONS

- *I have no social life anymore because I cannot afford it.*
- *Our family doesn't take holidays or do any leisure activities.*

- *Can't afford going out to a movie or supper. Christmas is stressful worrying about where I will get the money to shop. Can't afford to buy clothes for myself.*
- *Skipping vacations this year- which adds to the burnout healthcare professionals already feel. Struggling to put anything away for my children's future.*
- *We are not doing Christmas gifts.*
- *I don't take vacations or eat out or go out.*

## **DELAYING RETIREMENT**

- *I should have retired this year, as I am 70 but still have to work to cover as many bills as I can. I still have a mortgage and will have to remortgage because the payments are too high. I either pay my fuel bill or my mortgage so sometimes it is cold in my house.*
- *My hubby is almost 67 and can't retire as we would be unable to pay the bills even with his pension.*
- *Two of us working FT hours and one of us retired after working for SHA for 40 years. We have all cut back on everything and are still extremely tight every month. The retired one is talking about having to go back to work if things get too much worse. This is not fair...we shouldn't have to work ourselves to death just to be able to pay our standard bills.*
- *We wanted to retire at 65 but now we are looking at 70+ due to mortgage rates increased. So instead of having our mortgage done at 65 it will be 70 yrs of age. We had to pull from our pensions this year. Just to help pay our monthly bills.*

## **IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

- *I feel right now we can't get ahead. I feel like I am on a treadmill.*
- *There is no managing. We are drowning. I cannot afford the basics of life for myself or my family.*
- *It feels almost impossible to stay afloat.*
- *I feel like I am being used, overworked and burnt out. Just over all coming into work for nothing, struggling to make ends meet and this is on two incomes.*
- *Barely surviving.*
- *The cost of every day living is extreme. Hard to find happiness when the struggle to survive is real.*

- *It feels like I am living to work, not working to live. I have nothing really to show for the money from working full time.*
- *Not being able to afford groceries to feed my kids, not being able to afford gas for travel to and from work, having some utilities cut off. It's brutal trying to keep the mask on and try to keep from falling into a deep depression.*
- *One whole paycheck goes to rent, other paycheck goes to utilities and groceries. Left with nothing to enjoy life.*
- *Literally hanging on by a thread and not sure how I am even gonna keep paying bills and keeping food on the table.*

## RETENTION

- *I'm just keeping the lights on. After bills and groceries there isn't much left. I'm seriously considering leaving the province. I can make way more money with my qualifications somewhere else.*
- *The increases lately are very hard to manage and unless better wages happen, I may have to leave the SHA.*
- *Left my full-time position for employment with another company. New company offered me more money and better work conditions. I have 18 years seniority and only make \$22/hour.*
- *I used to be proud to have a health care job but now I'm looking for other opportunities because I've realized I invested so much time and effort into a job that pays their so-called valued employees bottom wages for the work we do.*
- *I don't think I can afford to work for the SHA anymore. I have been in the trades for 20 years and have never had this many insulting raises in my life. This isn't the life I imagined. I don't wanna work full time and still struggle.*

## CONCLUSION

Despite being hailed as heroes during the early months of the pandemic, health care workers in Saskatchewan have seen their wages fall far below the increased cost of living, particularly in recent years when the CPI reached levels not seen in over three decades.

This report shows that in the last decade, the Saskatchewan CPI has increased at almost double the rate of the compounded wage increases of CUPE 5430 members – 27% to 14%. Prices for basic necessities, like food and energy, have outstripped wage increases by an even wider margin. This erosion of purchasing power has resulted in the loss of thousands of dollars in real annual incomes for all CUPE 5430 members.

The survey results outlined in this report show that CUPE 5430 members, who are overwhelmingly women, are experiencing high levels of economic insecurity. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (86%) report that they have cut back on their grocery budget, 55% say they could not manage any unexpected expense, and 70% describe their household finances as poor or very poor.

This is not sustainable.

Health care workers in Saskatchewan deserve a significant wage increase. Our health care system simply cannot function without the day-to-day contributions of CUPE 5430 members.

However, full-time health service providers are working additional jobs or inordinate amounts of overtime just to make ends meet. Many workers are delaying retirement and accumulating more debt as they use credit cards and lines of credit to pay for monthly bills. Several members used words like “barely surviving”, “hanging on by a thread”, and “almost impossible to stay afloat” when asked how they are managing the increased cost of living on their current wage. All of this has negatively impacted the mental health and quality of life of CUPE 5430 members and their families.

A substantial boost in wages is not only required to reverse the loss of purchasing power of health service providers but it is also needed to address retention challenges. Sadly, many CUPE 5430 members are concluding that they cannot secure a decent standard of living working as a full-time health care provider and are looking elsewhere.

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