



Dear Members

We are writing to let you know that we are nearing the end of this round of bargaining (other than negotiating a Bill 124 remedy for wages and benefits). The latest significant development is that the benefit improvements under Bill 124 have been finalized.

Under Bill 124, our wages and total compensation package (*i.e.*, wages + benefits) were restricted to 1% increases per year for the 3-year moderation period (2021 to 2024). A 1% increase in our benefits created room for new benefits beyond what we had previously. The “remainder” of money available for new benefits was further increased because some of the contributions that the employer pays as part of our compensation were capped; a 1% increase of that money spent by the employer could be directed towards additional benefits.

For over a year, the College Employer Council (CEC) claimed that there was only enough money available under Bill 124 for the introduction of a medical cannabis benefit. We fought that claim; OPSEU/SEFPO hired an expert from Queen’s University, Professor Robert Hickey, to calculate the “remainder”, and he concluded that there was significantly more money available for benefit improvements than the CEC asserted. Arbitrator William Kaplan agreed with that position, and we have consequently been able to obtain the following significant benefit improvements:

- **Medical Cannabis:** Reimbursement of 85% of the costs of medical cannabis prescribed by a licensed physician, up to a maximum of \$4,000 per year. This benefit has been in effect since 2021.
- **Dental Restoration:** An increase in reimbursement of costs for major restorative dental work from \$2,500 to \$4,000. This includes costs for dental implants to fill dental spaces that became open *following* the signing of the Collective Agreement.
- **Paramedical:** Starting January 2024, the percentage of paramedical costs to be reimbursed will increase to 90% from 85%; the annual maximum total reimbursement will increase to \$3,000 from \$2,000.

*This list and description is just a summary; the precise language negotiated is included at the bottom of this document.*

Lastly, in order to ensure that all funds were utilized that were available to our members under Bill 124, we negotiated a one-time “Health and Wellness Allowance” (valued at approximately \$50 per member). This one-time allowance will reimburse costs for approved health and wellness expenses that members incur between October 1st, 2023 and September 30th, 2024.

Members will submit receipts to their college, for reimbursement. Allowable health and wellness expenses include:

- Over-the-counter medications, including herbal remedies, not otherwise covered by the health benefits plan;
- Medical, paramedical and other health services not otherwise covered by the health benefits plan;
- Membership fees at a health and fitness club or facility.

The next steps include:

- Finalizing the 2021-2024 Collective Agreement, which includes a review for accuracy and translation; we expect this to be completed soon so that hard copies can be distributed to members.
- Establishing mediation dates (we expect that to occur this summer) for Bill 124 reopener negotiations. As noted, Bill 124 was found unconstitutional by the Ontario Superior Court last November. The mediator named in our arbitrated collective agreement to negotiate wages, if Bill 124 was struck down, was Gerry Lee; however, he is unavailable to mediate these negotiations and, as such, the Union and CEC have agreed to have Arbitrator Eli Gedalof to serve as mediator. Arbitrator Gedalof has experience in post-Bill 124 wage reopener negotiations, as he recently arbitrated the dispute between the Ontario Nurses Association and their Employers. We are hopeful for productive discussions at that time to determine a remedy for the damage caused by Bill 124, which prevented the Union from engaging in free and fair collective bargaining.
- Initiating and completing the Indigenous Knowledge Definition work for salary calculation purposes. The Colleges are refusing to collaborate with us on moving this arbitrated language forward. Instead, they are presenting concerns with the process of how this work will be completed, without providing concrete solutions. Given that they very readily agreed to initiate the Workload Taskforce prior to signing the collective agreement, we are a bit confused about their refusal to work with us to move this initiative forward now as well. Our team remains in place and ready. We have now requested the assistance of Arbitrator Kaplan in moving this work forward.

We will provide further information about these processes in the coming weeks, as more information becomes available.

Please distribute this information to your membership.

In Solidarity,

Your CAAT-A Bargaining Team

*P.S. On the next page, please find the negotiated language regarding the new benefits.*

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Detail</b>
Medical Cannabis (this benefit has been in effect since 2021)	Medical cannabis prescribed by a licensed physician to a maximum of \$4,000 per year; subject to prior authorization by the insurer to the eligibility requirements and terms and conditions of the Plan and for the conditions listed in the Plan. Reimbursement is at 85%.
Dental Implants (effective immediately)	Major restorative increased to \$4,000 annual maximum from \$2,500, 100% reimbursement, added implants, open space limitation
Paramedical Maximum (effective January 1st, 2024)	Paramedical increased to \$3,000 annual maximum from \$2000 and 90% reimbursement
Paramedical Coverage (effective January 1st, 2024)	Paramedical increased to 90% reimbursement from 85%