



CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF NURSES UNIONS  
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE  
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES  
ET INFIRMIERS

**CFNU Position Statement**  
**April 17, 2020**

## **The Need for Transparency Regarding the PPE to Protect Health Care Workers**

The SARS Commission — formed by the province of Ontario after the 2003 SARS outbreak — recommended a precautionary approach be taken during pandemics: that is, recognizing the fact that when a new infectious disease is identified, there is uncertainty about how it is transmitted, and thus health care workers need to wear the most protective mask possible.

In 2006, the federal government prepared a report on pandemic preparedness for influenza, in which it predicted a scenario very similar to the one we are in now, and recommended that stockpiles of PPE be maintained.

However, as the federal government has now confirmed, Canadian stockpiles are insufficient to meet current demand. Moreover, communication and transparency with the key stakeholder for frontline health care workers — their unions — is sorely lacking.

The end result is that health care workers across Canada are endangered, failing to receive necessary and appropriate PPE, or being asked to conserve and reuse PPE in ways that are putting their health and safety at risk. Further, they are risking the health of their patients and their own families.

To health ministers and health employers, we say: the responsibility to protect health care workers lies with you.

As nurses' unions, we have repeatedly asked governments to identify both the supply and demand of personal protective equipment, in order that we can work with governments and health authorities to implement strategies that focus on reducing hazardous exposures. This would be done in any other hazardous workplace.

In order to work with governments and health care employers on protecting our health care workforce, clear and direct communication with nurses' unions is required. To protect our membership, nurses' unions need greater transparency. This means accurate and detailed information about the current level of PPE supplies (i.e. surgical masks, N95 respirators, face shields, gowns, powered air-purifying respirators (PAPR) and ventilators), the efforts being made to increase supply, information on how supplies are being distributed, and finally — valid and accurate forecasts as to the longevity of PPE supplies.