

CARE WE DESERVE

For our patients, our families and ourselves

Frequently Asked Questions: Joining UNAC/UHCP

About UNAC/UHCP

Q: Many of us are burned out, stressed out, and really suffering under the strains of working through the pandemic without the resources we need to take care of our patients, our families and ourselves. Many of us felt abandoned by our union in our time of need. How can UNAC/UHCP help with these issues?

UNAC/UHCP has been proactive at every level in advocating for members' needs before, during and after the pandemic, including mental and emotional health. UNAC/UHCP first surveyed members about the mental health impact of working during the COVID pandemic in 2021, which produced a groundbreaking report, *The True Cost of Being A Hero: Mental Health Strains in Nursing and Health Care*. The report detailed:

- staffing shortages and the inability to recruit and retain a stable health care workforce
- eroding care and safety standards for patients and workers
- lack of mental health care and treatment for caregivers

UNAC/UHCP's advocacy was shared widely by AFSCME, UNAC/UHCP's parent union representing 1.3 million workers nationwide. UNAC/UHCP victories include:

- the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Act, ground-breaking legislation signed into law by the President that will promote mental health among the health professional workforce.
- 2021 language in the national KP contract that includes mental health and wellness as part of the well-being model.

Q: Isn't UNAC/UHCP a union for nurses? Will our issues take a backseat to nurse issues?

UNAC/UHCP was founded 50 years ago on the principle of professionals representing professionals and still follows that practice. Physician assistants, optometrists, midwives, pharmacists, social workers, speech-language pathologists, and physical and occupational therapists are some of the health care professionals represented by UNAC/UHCP.

Physical and occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists at KP in Northern California (NCAL) recently joined UNAC/UHCP, with a bargaining team consisting of 24 frontline rehabilitation therapists representing the three disciplines and every region. The chief negotiator with UNAC/UHCP was a physical therapist who has negotiated multiple contracts at KP, including the contract for the Southern California PT/OT/RT unit.

Now the NCAL therapists have three UNAC/UHCP staff reps who were all hired from within the bargaining unit: one from each discipline. UNAC/UHCP contracts at Kaiser always include vehicles for members to have a voice in patient care and improving professional standards, such as professional practice committees. UNAC/UHCP contracts include incredible professional development and education benefits.

Q: Do members always bargain UNAC/UHCP contracts?

All UNAC/UHCP bargaining teams are composed of members from the bargaining unit, elected by coworkers, with as much representation as possible across classifications, worksites, units, shifts, etc. Bargaining teams are always supported by experienced staff negotiators and analysts, plus legal, research, political, organizing, representation, and communications support professionals. UNAC/UHCP bargaining sessions are open to member attendance, unless there are pandemic restrictions.

Q: Would we lose our seniority if we joined another union?

When we join UNAC/UHCP, our years of seniority since our Kaiser date of hire will translate into affiliate seniority. It will count toward job bidding, vacation, and holiday selection.



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Q: What is the benefit of the Labor Management Partnership?

The Labor Management Partnership (LMP) is a joint strategy to lead organizational change and involve frontline health care professionals in decision making. Through the LMP, UNAC/UHCP members have a seat at the table in every level of Kaiser Permanente from Unit Based Teams to professional practice, workload, and staffing committees. We know that patients and professionals benefit when we have a voice in how care is delivered.

Through the LMP, UNAC/UHCP members are eligible for a series of education benefits, including tuition reimbursement, funding for degree programs, and paid time off to study and attend class, as well as free continuing education classes.

UNAC/UHCP is one of the founding unions of the Alliance of Health Care Unions, an umbrella union with 50,000 members across most of Kaiser Permanente. In 2021, the Alliance was able to beat back a two-tiered wage system that would have slashed wages for incoming workers, leading to an even more critical staffing situation that would have had dire impacts on patient care.

There's no question that partnership saved Kaiser Permanente in the 1990s and brought it to the heights of quality patient care, membership growth, territorial expansion, and even the opening of a medical school.

Q: Wouldn't our current benefits be at risk if we have to bargain a new contract?

In recent years, UNAC/UHCP has negotiated first contracts for bargaining units of KP professionals numerous times: pharmacists, physical, occupational, and recreation therapists, speech-language pathologists, physician assistants and certified nurse-midwives. These professionals all achieved meaningful gains in wages, benefits, and working conditions. The contracts were negotiated by teams composed of members of those bargaining units and were then voted on by the members in a transparent, democratic process involving full discussion and the opportunity to review the tentative agreements before voting.

In addition, with UNAC/UHCP, you have power at the table and experienced negotiators who have bargained new contracts for other health professionals.

Why should we leave NUHW to join UNAC/UHCP?

Q: How can joining UNAC/UHCP help with our workload?

UNAC/UHCP therapists in Northern California, Southern California, and Hawaii have negotiated mandatory Workload Committees based on location and practice area to ensure professionals can address excessive workloads, inadequate staffing and patient care concerns at each medical center.

Northern California Therapists are ensured a minimum of five hours patient management time [PMT] per week, Hawaii Therapists are ensured five hours and 15 minutes, and Southern California Therapists are ensured six hours of PMT per week and canceled return appointments will first be scheduled with return patients.

Q: Do we have to clock in and clock out if we join UNAC/UHCP?

That's up to us. Members of each bargaining unit decide collectively what works best and negotiate accordingly. The physical and occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists in Hawaii and Northern California had the option to stay salaried or go hourly after they joined UNAC/UHCP and started bargaining. After extensive pay analysis, they chose to remain salaried while pharmacists in Hawaii opted to go hourly because it matched their interests better. UNAC/UHCP had the integrity and power to honor and achieve the choices each set of members made for themselves.



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Q: I'm tired of striking. How often do UNAC/UHCP members have to strike and how do they decide to walk out?

UNAC/UHCP members at KP have bargained standard-raising contracts without needing to strike since our last walkout in 1980. UNAC/UHCP's Kaiser members were prepared to strike in November 2021. We were able to reach agreement without striking because the threat of a massive strike with very high member participation across the nation was real - and KP knew it.

UNAC/UHCP's strike vote and preparations involved months of one-on-one conversations between member leaders in the workplace, numerous virtual townhall meetings (including one attended by 7,000 members) where members were able to ask questions of the bargaining team with full transparency and open dialogue, and a full 10 days to vote confidentially in an electronic election conducted by a neutral third-party vendor.

A 96% majority voted to authorize the strike. Thousands of members signed up to join the picket lines in the first days of the strike. KP was fully aware that the strike threat was real, with full member involvement and enthusiasm. Because of this, KP backed down.

Q: How much would our dues be if we joined UNAC/UHCP?

We will only pay dues after we bargain a contract, have the chance to review it and ask questions, then vote by a majority to approve it. If we don't believe the contract is worth the dues, we vote it down and keep negotiating until we reach an agreement that we approve. Any contract we approve will have raises and other gains that more than make up for the dues that we'll pay. UNAC/UHCP members' dues are based on a formula calculating the average wages of members in the bargaining unit and usually amount to about two hours of pay per month and that's just about the best bargain around. They come with guaranteed annual raises and a voice in patient care and working conditions, with the power of 24,000 UNAC/UHCP members and 50,000 Alliance of Health Care Unions members behind it all.

Q: I thought UNAC/UHCP won back the Southern California pharmacists' pension, but NUHW is saying that UNAC/UHCP bargained it away. What happened?

UNAC/UHCP fought to restore the pharmacists' pension, after a previous union bargained it away. The pharmacists who now make up the UPSC affiliate decertified that union and voted to join UNAC/UHCP to protect their benefits. Meanwhile, NUHW bargained away the pension for new employees hired in 2015 and after, in a similar scenario where a small group of union members tried to go it alone. Furthermore, UNAC/UHCP Southern California pharmacists who do not qualify for a pension receive higher defined contribution benefits than NUHW members do: At the six-year mark, the employer contribution goes up to 7% from 6%, and at 11 years, the employer contribution goes up to 8%. Meanwhile, in NUHW, the employer contribution remains at 6%.

Kaiser Permanente tried to force UNAC/UHCP and the Alliance to give away pensions for new employees and accept a two-tiered wage system in 2021 negotiations, but UNAC/UHCP had the power to defeat that proposal with the credible threat of a massive strike that could have hobbled KP in Southern California.

Q: We heard KP is going to eliminate all pensions by 2030?

A: If KP tries to take away pensions, your best bet is to be in a union with the power of 24,000 UNAC/UHCP members and the solidarity of 50,000 Alliance members who collectively have the ability to shut down KP if necessary.



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Q: During COVID, I saw UNAC/UHCP members inside KP getting PPE and extra shift incentives that we never got with NUHW. Why would Fountain Valley health care workers vote to leave UNAC/UHCP?

During the pandemic, many of us worked side-by-side with UNAC/UHCP members who had a constant supply of PPE, incentive pay, and other benefits and protections because UNAC/UHCP had the power at KP to advocate for their members. Hundreds of us signed authorizations for this election within just a few days. We've seen UNAC/UHCP's power at KP and the power they have from being in an Alliance that's 50,000-strong. We can see the results of NUHW's negotiations in the contract just ratified. At KP, NUHW is a small player. For our next negotiations, we can join 50,000 health care professionals that make up the Alliance for true power. A unit left UNAC/UHCP from Fountain Valley, a Tenet facility not in the Kaiser Permanente system. To note: 400 KP optical workers up north recently decertified NUHW.

Q: I heard Kaiser SoCal pharmacists have a website where leaders posted saying they opposed the tentative agreement in 2021?

A: UPSC is a success story for transparency and union member democracy. At UNAC/UHCP, members have the opportunity to fully view and discuss a tentative agreement before they vote. UNAC/UHCP held 55 virtual and in-person town hall meetings to discuss its TA before members voted.

The pharmacist group was the only unit to initially vote down the TA. Their voice was heard and UNAC/UHCP went back to the bargaining table with the UPSC bargaining team to address pharmacist concerns. The final contract passed by 97%. At UNAC/UHCP, we want members to speak up and raise concerns so those concerns can be addressed.

How do we join UNAC/UHCP?

Q: Can we still vote to join UNAC/UHCP in an election now that the NUHW contract has been ratified?

Yes! We can still vote to join UNAC/UHCP. The election to join UNAC/UHCP will proceed because we filed the representation petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) before NUHW ratified the contract – fulfilling requirements to hold an election by the NLRB. We will know the date of our election in the upcoming weeks – stay tuned for more information about when and how to vote to join UNAC/UHCP.

Q: What is the next step for having an election to join UNAC/UHCP?

A: The NLRB set a hearing date of April 1 to determine any outstanding election issues, if the interested parties do not come to an agreement covering election details before that date.

The parties that must agree are UNAC/UHCP, Kaiser Permanente, and NUHW. If we do not agree, the hearing will proceed. After the hearing on April 1, and any legal briefs are filed, the Board will issue a Decision and Direction of Election (DDE), setting an election date and the procedures surrounding that election. We will likely have an election in April unless NUHW delays our choice.