

**Living through the pandemic radically changed the way Canadians live and work. Everyone had their working life turned upside down. Remote work has become a part of everyday life for many Canadians, including PSAC members.**

Our employer must accept that our working lives have changed for good, and that remote work – whether a full time or hybrid system – makes sense for so many reasons.

The government can recruit talented people from across the country to help deliver the programs and services Canadians depend on. Meanwhile, we're able to explore career opportunities that aren't tied to where we live.

Without a daily commute, we have more time to live our lives and take care of family responsibilities. This makes us happier and more productive and is also good for the environment.

Over the past two years, PSAC members continued to deliver the vital services Canadians depend on. We got new programs up and running in record time and we proved the public service is just as effective with workers working remotely as when they were in the office.

According to a survey done by our union, 75 per cent of PSAC members have been working remotely since the pandemic started, and more than 90 per cent want to continue working remotely when the pandemic ends.

The Treasury Board Directive on Telework came into effect in April 2020, just after the pandemic really hit. The directive aims to support an inclusive public service, a healthy work environment, and give workers access to more choices when it comes to work arrangements.

But the policy is already out of date and up to the discretion of managers.

We need to address issues that have come up out of the shift to remote work during the pandemic – things like work expectations, undue surveillance, expenses related to working from home, accommodations, ergonomics and health and safety – right now.

And we want more transparency in the process. It's important that the new rules around remote work are part of the collective agreement – not laid out in a directive that can change without any input or consultation – and that's what our bargaining teams are fighting for.

### The right to disconnect

The bargaining teams are also fighting for the right to disconnect. The increase in remote work has blurred the lines between work life and private life. We all know this.

PSAC's survey showed that one out of five respondents felt like they were expected to look at emails and/or do work outside of their scheduled working hours at least a few times a week.

We shouldn't have to do this, and the employer seems to agree.

The federal government set up the Right to Disconnect Advisory Committee in 2019. In 2021, the committee engaged in further consultations on how right to disconnect laws could be adopted in the federal sector. The [final report](#), which is geared towards workers in the federally regulated private sector covered by the Canada Labour Code – not federal government workers – was released in February 2022.



It's clear the government intends to bring forward a plan for a right-to-disconnect policy in Canada. What is not clear is what that would look like.

It's time for the government to walk the walk by adding language to our contract right now that clearly says we shouldn't have to check emails and work phones after hours. The collective agreement should also spell out what the employer must do to make sure this doesn't happen.

The right to disconnect is an important issue. Smartphones and other technology shouldn't be used to force us to work longer hours.

Treasury Board has so far refused PSAC's proposals to include remote work provisions in the collective agreement. They say the inclusion of remote work is unnecessary and language on the right to disconnect is redundant.

PSAC recognizes how important these issues are for workers, and isn't about to take the government at their word that they'll work out these issues on their own. Our bargaining teams are going to make sure we have clear language on work-life balance in our next contract.

## PSAC members on the front lines

While tens of thousands of members continued serving Canadians while working remotely, many others have been on the front lines of COVID-19 since day one, often under very challenging personal and working conditions.

PSAC's bargaining teams are calling on the employer to recognize the challenges facing those of us who work on site by exploring options to improve work-life balance.

Our bargaining teams will continue to push for work arrangements that allow members to shape their workday to match their personal and family responsibilities, clear rules around remote work, the right to disconnect, and for expanded leave provisions.

These things all improve work-life balance, morale, and productivity in the federal public service, and they all make sense.

With over 165,000 members bargaining with Treasury Board this year, we have a lot of power at the table. We can use it to improve our working lives **and** push the government to lead by example, making life better for many more Canadians.

