

# Health Care Workers at Children's Hospital Oakland Launch Strike Over UCSF Integration

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Health workers at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland strike on June 18, 2025, over UCSF's efforts to dissolve their union contracts amid a broader integration plan. Union members say the changes threaten job security and could lead to significant cuts in wages and benefits. (Beth LaBerge/KQED)

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Hundreds of health care workers picketed in front of [UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland](#) on Wednesday morning for an open-ended strike over what their union called an illegal plan by the University of California to cancel union contracts.

In total, more than 1,000 nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, medical technicians and other workers represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers could walk out in response to UCSF's proposal to integrate health care employees into the university system, a move that the union estimates could cost its members around \$20 million in reduced take-home pay.

Workers formed picket lines and marched for hours with signs that read "Hands off our jobs," "We want the old contract," and "Same work for less take-home pay? No way."

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"This is not a merger. This is an illegal integration," said Dr. Karen Villanueva, an acupuncturist at the hospital who joined the strike. "Patients will be affected because the workers are affected. The people that provide the care for them and have done so over the years are under attack."

Originally, the union planned to picket at Children's Hospital Oakland as well as an outpatient center in Walnut Creek. However, [UCSF officials](#) informed hospital workers that several satellite clinics, including the Walnut Creek location, would be closed in response to the strike, according to the union.



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A spokesperson for the university said the hospital has taken steps to ensure that patients will still have access to critical care services, such as the emergency department and operating rooms. Non-urgent procedures and appointments have been rescheduled or converted to telehealth appointments, and updates will be provided to patients as the strike continues, the spokesperson said.

Nobody wants to go on strike, Villanueva said, calling it a necessary sacrifice to make sure that workers are treated fairly and patients are given the best care possible long into the future.

"All of us have had to grapple with these different changes [UCSF is] proposing, but we never let our patient care slip," she told KQED. "It's taken a toll on morale."

As of now, workers at Children's Hospital Oakland and satellite clinics across the East Bay are employed directly by the hospital, a private nonprofit that functions separately from the university. Under the integration plan, which is set to take effect early next month, workers would be transitioned out of their current roles and into university employment.





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The plan would also require eligible workers to join UC unions, while those who are not eligible would be recategorized as at-will employees with no representation, according to the union.

Demonstrators striking at the Oakland hospital were joined by workers with the California Nurses Association, which represents registered nurses, and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 39, which represents workers who maintain hospital infrastructure.

Both unions submitted strike notices in solidarity with NUHW, said Sal Rosselli, the union's president emeritus.

Although professional workers in NUHW, including mental health therapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists, are unable to authorize a strike because of their ongoing contracts, many of them have agreed to respect the picket line, he added.

"I am here individually supporting the strike and refusing to cross the picket line, and I'm doing it for my patients," said Dr. Heather Stenger, a pediatric audiologist at the hospital. "What UCSF has is not what Oakland needs. We have very different populations, very different patient care and very different communities. To take from the city and bring it to Oakland is not going to be successful."



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Stenger said the clinic she operates is already struggling to keep up with demand. Thousands of children are on a waitlist to see her, and a weaker contract under UCSF would make it even harder to provide patients with the specialized services they need, she added.

The university's plans would hurt both workers and the East Bay community, Rosselli told KQED. Some employees may be forced to relocate to the university's San Francisco campus, while other workers could choose to leave or retire rather than face a difficult transition, he said.

The children's hospital would be left with fewer caregivers and support staff, he said.

"It's what we've been fighting against for the last 14 years," Rosselli said. "We've been trying to maintain services in the East Bay, Oakland and Contra Costa County that are accessible to the families and kids that live here."

According to a UCSF spokesperson, every employee currently represented by external unions will be moved to a position "in the appropriate unit at UCSF" without disruption. Any changes to take-home pay will be a result of workers contributing to the university's health insurance, pension and benefits plans — same as other UCSF employees, the university said in a statement.

"This transition supports long-term growth, aligns our teams under a single system, and strengthens our ability to serve children and families with high-quality, coordinated care," the statement reads. "We are taking steps to protect continuity of care throughout the strike and remain focused on what matters most: the children and families who rely on us every day."

In April, 98% of union members voted against integrating with UCSF. The union also filed a formal grievance in response to the plan, which Children's Hospital Oakland has refused to process, the union alleges. The union has filed a lawsuit to compel arbitration, and a hearing is scheduled for June 26.

"We'll continue to expose UCSF for its absolute disregard for patients and for folks that are caring for patients," Rosselli said. "We'll pursue federal lawsuits every step of the way to force UCSF to continue providing care in the East Bay."