

University Medical Center nurses in New Orleans to launch 3-day strike over staffing

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Nurses at the University Medical Center New Orleans (UMCNO) are set to walk out for three days November 11-13 over staffing and other issues. The 600 nurses are still seeking their first contract since voting to unionize in December 2023.

This is the fifth strike at the medical center in little over a year. A previous strike in July 2025 lasted two days. In a statement posted on the National Nurses United website, Kisha Montes, a member of the bargaining team, said, “It’s not hard to recruit highly talented nurses to a Level 1 Trauma Center in a city like New Orleans, but we’re tired of seeing those nurses leave for other jobs. LCMC [Louisiana Children’s Medical Center] needs to work with us to retain the necessary staff to take care of our patients.”

Jackie Gamble, a nurse quoted on the NNU website said, “Nurse retention isn’t complicated. It’s as simple as competitive wages, decent benefits, and good working conditions where we can take care of our patients.”

Emily Blau, a nurse in UMCNO’s neurological intensive care unit said in a statement, “What we’re asking for are measures to make sure those nurses stay here, working at our hospital in our community. It’s time to get this deal done so we can protect not just our current nurses, but ensure we have great nurses working here for years to come.”

Hospital management is resisting demands to address staffing issues. In the response to the strike vote, UMCNO issued a statement declaring, “UMC will file an additional unfair labor practice charge against NNU for its continued unlawful behavior. UMC has participated in 36 total sessions, including eight negotiation sessions, since the July 2025 strike. UMC has four additional sessions already scheduled before year-end.”

Reflecting the hard line of management, LCMC Health’s Chief Nursing Executive, Allison Guste, claimed, “I don’t think you can say that turnover is a major issue for our state, or LCMC in general, so we’re doing much better than the national average.”

The hospital says it will remain fully operational during the walkout by employing strikebreakers, noting, “We have proactively partnered with an experienced outside agency to ensure qualified replacement nurses are available to support patient care and uphold our standards of excellence.”

This is the latest in a continuing series of strikes by healthcare workers around the United States over the question of short staffing, including the recent walkout by 46,000 healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente hospitals on the West Coast, a one-day strike October 31 by 3,100 nurses at Tenet hospitals in California and a walkout by 1,400 registered nurses at Keck Medicine (University of Southern California) facilities.

There is an acute shortage of nurses in hospitals and healthcare facilities nationwide. This follows the mass exodus of nurses during the pandemic and nurse burnout due to chronic overwork. The crisis is compounded by the predatory, for profit healthcare system subordinating social need to parasitic financial institutions.

Most walkouts have been limited, spanning only several days aimed primarily at dissipating worker anger. In the few cases that open ended strikes have been called, such as the ongoing strike at Henry Ford Genesys hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan, the struggles have been isolated by the trade union bureaucracies, undermining their impact.

The University Medical Center nurses are the first private-sector nurses to unionize in Louisiana and reflect a growing mood of militancy by healthcare

workers determined to oppose intolerable conditions and defend the right to quality healthcare.

New Orleans is one of the poorest big cities in the United States, conditions highlighted by the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster. The “recovery” from Katrina left residents, if anything, more impoverished than before.

The city has an overall poverty rate of 21 percent and a child poverty rate of 43 percent among African American children. Median income in the city and life expectancy are well below the national averages, with the poorest neighborhoods seeing a 25 percent gap in life expectancy. In a “healthiest cities” ranking by SmartAsset (2025), the city of New Orleans was identified as the unhealthiest among the 100 cities it ranked. This included indices such as drug-overdose deaths, poor mental health, obesity, air pollution and prevalence of diabetes.

Post-Katrina, New Orleans became a test case for “free market” reforms aimed at the total subordination of all aspects of social life to the dictates of the capitalist market. This has included the 100 percent charterization of the school system.

As part of this, all of the facilities in the city’s Charity Hospital, founded in 1736, which had operated as a state-owned teaching hospital and free clinic for the poor, were closed. It was one of the last remaining reformist measures instituted during the era of Louisiana Governor Huey Long.

All the other facilities statewide in the Charity Hospital system were sold off to private operators in a drastic cost-saving move that included the layoff of 3,500 state workers. Republican Governor Bobby Jindal sold them so quickly that winning bidders were picked that didn’t even fill out the application correctly.

Its replacement, UMCNO, was not opened until 2015 and is privately operated. As a result, the poor have been increasingly shut off from receiving healthcare while the private hospital operators have prospered.

The strike takes place as the Trump administration is accelerating its attacks on healthcare, slashing billions from Medicare and Medicaid and seeking the elimination of subsidies under the Affordable Care Act. It has declared a war on science with the dismantling of the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes for Health and the appointment of anti-vaxxer quack

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as secretary of Health and Human Services.

The struggle by UMCNO nurses for safe staffing is part of a broader fight. The defense of high quality healthcare as an essential social right involves a battle against the whole system of private, for-profit healthcare, not just one or another hospital or provider. Despite the amazing advances in science-based medicine, basic indices such as life expectancy and infant and maternal mortality are stagnating or declining in the US. This is taking place as vast amounts of wealth are squandered each year on the military and handouts to corporate billionaires.



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