SMUFU Health & Life Trust Fund Annual Report

October 15, 2026, Submitted by Dr. Nicole Conrad, Chair

Brief Background of the Health & Life Trust Fund

On June 1, 2008, the TRUST assumed responsibility for creating our BENEFITS PLAN and contracted with Great-West Life to provide benefits for the 280+/- members of the Plan. (Great-West Life changed its name to Canada Life and is our current provider).

The key incentive for withdrawing from the Employer's plan was to improve the standard of living for our members, by obtaining and maintaining control of which benefits are covered, the amount of coverage, when improvements to coverage occur and for whom. In the 18 years since the TRUST was established, the Board has changed and improved every part of our plan and every benefit offered. The Trustees continue to explore ways to improve benefits in the most equitable and cost-efficient way and recognizes that control of our plan is a fundamental component of our benefits plan.

Annual Report Time Period:

October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2026.

Administrative Changes:

As previously communicated, Dr. Bob Konopasky, who led the Board since its inception in 2008, has officially retired from the university and from the Board of Trustees.

As of September 1, 2026, our Board of Trustees includes:

- Dr. Nicole Conrad (Chairperson & Trustee)
- Dr. James O'Brien (Trustee)
- Ms. Cindy Harrigan (Trustee)
- Ms. Alison Manley (Alternate Trustee)
- Dr. Jason Ivanoff (Alternate Trustee)
- Dr. Karen Grandy (Alternate Trustee – on sabbatical)

Our Board would like to formally thank both Dr. Bob Konopasky and Dr. Francis Boabang for their years of service to our members, and for all the lessons the remaining Trustees have learned from both over the years.

To ensure a smooth transition and to take advantage of the experience and industry knowledge that Bob has acquired over his 18 years of service, Bob will continue to advise the Trust as a paid consultant for the next 3 years. When making this decision, the Board consulted with our third-party administrator, the union executive, and our lawyer to ensure a fair agreement that will continue to support our responsibility to our members.

We have engaged Doane Grant Thornton LLP as our new auditor.

Education of Trustees:

In August 2026, Dr. Conrad, Dr. O'Brien, and Ms. Harrigan attended the International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans annual conference. Dr. O'Brien and Ms. Harrigan began their education in the Foundations of Trust Management Standards certificate, while Dr. Conrad continued her education in the Advanced Trust Management Standards certificate. These courses ensure our Board stays up to date on benefits trends, costs, and legislation.

Work Completed by the Board:

- Supported our union negotiation team with benefits issues.
    - This resulted in an MOU Benefits in our current collective agreement which provides an option for the "*employer to reduce by up to 1% the wages payable to Employees pursuant to Article 16 and contribute an amount equal to the requested percentage reduction to the Health and Life Trust maintained by the Union for its members."* Consultation continues with the Union Executive on whether this option is feasible and/or desirable for members of the plan.
- Reviewed our investment policy for the Trust's assets.
- Reviewed and approved a new privacy policy.
- Negotiated a new contract for benefits with Canada Life.
- The plan improved optional dependent life insurance benefits, increasing from $20,000 to $40,000 (information forthcoming)
- The Board met formally five times over the last year to discuss negotiations, benefits, members' concerns, investments, governance, and leadership changes.

Work in Progress by the Board:

- Consultation with the Union Executive regarding the MOU: Benefits in the current Collective Agreement, which states that:

  "Within 3 months of the signing of the Collective Agreement, the Parties shall strike a committee to determine whether there would be cost savings or other mutual benefits if SMUFU members joined a benefit plan managed by the Employer"

  To be clear, the Board does not support any proposal that comes from the Employer that does not ensure we (union members) retain control of our benefits plan.
- The board continues to explore options for benefits coverage for retirees and notes that there are optional plans available on the plan website.
- The board is currently working with our third-party administrator to update our plan website.

Moving Forward:

As the Trust was hopeful that an increase in the Employer's contribution to benefits would be negotiated to offset inflation during the term of the current Collective Agreement, members' premiums were not increased in 2025 and not in 2026. As this negotiation was not successful, and there was inflation of costs, the Trust paid for the deficits, or the difference between members' premiums and the cost of members' use of benefits for 2025 and 2026.

If our membership does not convert some salary to an increase in the Employer's contribution to benefits (as per the MOU Benefits), then the Trust will be faced with either continuing to pay for inflation out of the Trust Fund, increasing members' premiums, or reducing benefits. As reducing benefits is not supported by the Trust, the Trust will work with the Union to make one of the other choices.

Further, the Trust looks to work with the Union negotiating team well in advance of the next negotiation in aid of negotiating an increase in the Employer's contribution that pays for inflation and reduces members' premiums and does so in a way which is tax-efficient and fair to all members.