

RESOLUTION #1

Title of Resolution:

Strengthening Nursing Human Resources in Home and Community

Name of Submitter(s): Felicia Kontopidis; Kay McGarvey

Whereas:

There is a high turnover of registered nurses (RNs) working in the home and community care sector due to lack of recognition of specialized competencies, compensation and benefits.

Whereas:

RNs are the most trusted health care professionals and can therefore play a significant role in supporting Ontarians to remain safe and healthy in their homes and out of hospital settings.

RNs need stable employment and continuity in the home and community care sector to build a strong evidence-based knowledge and practice to provide optimal holistic supports to patients and their families/caregivers.

Therefore, Be It Resolved:

That the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) develop and implement an advocacy plan endorsed by all of RNAO's Interest Groups for fair and appropriate recognition and compensation for nurses working in the community, relative to other sectors; i.e. comparable compensation; acknowledgement of specialized knowledge and skills; a safe working environment including access to PPE, vaccinations, etc.

Background (Max 500 words):

The home and community care sector is a key part of the solution to ending hallway health care and transforming the healthcare system. It is more important than ever, for Ontarians' health care to be supported at home and virtual means – this includes transitional care to limit patients' hospital stay, chronic long-term care, palliative care as well as safe acute care services. The sector has seen a significant shift over the past decade with an increasing level of complex care patients in the community.

This sector requires a stable and highly competent nursing workforce who have critical thinking and problem-solving skills, inter-disciplinary communication/coordination and navigation capabilities as well as excellent clinical assessment, patient/family teaching and a wide range of technical skills to care for diverse patient groups. In addition, community nurses are intimately involved in addressing social determinants of health and associated inequities.¹ However, the sector will only be able to play its proper role if the recruitment and retention of nurses are addressed. Without the proper support in place for patients in their homes, they will be left with nowhere else to turn to for care other than Ontario's overburdened hospitals and long-term care homes. As was highlighted in recent reports, patients are having their hospital stays needlessly extended due to a lack of qualified human resources available in the community.²

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In Ontario, approximately 15% of all RNs work in the home and community care sector.³ These nurses and other home and community staff have not been recognized for their valuable contribution in keeping people well and out of the hospitals and long-term care homes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this lack of recognition was felt even more acutely – home care nurses were at the bottom of the list for getting access to PPEs, COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 vaccines.

Compensation gaps between sectors have grown over the years as a result of little to no increase in the rates paid by the government for home care services. Between 2004 and 2019, the maximum annual wage growth for RNs in home care was between 1.3% and 2.2%. This is comparatively lower than the hospital sector, which experienced an average annual growth rate of 2.7% during the same period. The median salary wage gap for RNs working in home care versus hospital was

\$11/hour.¹ The gap ranged anywhere from \$7.85 to \$16.37 per hour.² The government wage increase cap brought in by Bill 124 will only further exacerbate this situation. These challenges are expected to worsen as the growth in demand for home care is projected to be nine times the growth rate of the workforce. The creation of additional long-term care beds will place further strain on the limited supply of nurses across the province and impact the entire health system's ability to deliver care if not addressed. The gaps and shortages in home and community care will no doubt impact patients the most as they will have to wait longer in overcrowded hospitals while putting strain on nurses and other hospital staff. The gaps and challenges in home and community care, therefore, is a concern for all sectors.

References:

1. Schofield, R., Johnson, M., & LaLonde, S. (August 24, 2020). Community health nurses: the historical context and current reality in the COVID-19 pandemic. Available at [Community Health Nurses: The historical context and current reality in the COVID-19 pandemic | National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health \(nccdh.ca\)](#).
2. Ontario Community Support Association (2020). A system in need of rebalancing: Helping Ontarians live well through home and community care. Available at: [Ontario Community Support Association \(ocsa.on.ca\)](#).
3. Canadian Institute for Health Information (2021). Nursing in Canada, 2019. Available at [Nursing in Canada, 2019 | CIHI](#).