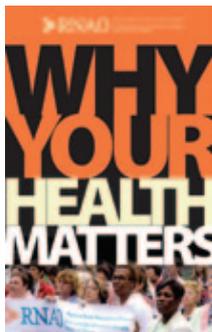


QUEEN'S PARK ON THE ROAD

Members meet with MPPs in their own communities, and engage in political action ahead of the next election. BY MELISSA DI COSTANZO



For the last 14 years, RNAO members have visited Queen's Park to meet one-on-one with MPPs and cabinet ministers. Dubbed *Queen's Park Day (QP Day)*, this RNAO tradition allows RNs, NPs and nursing students to discuss and debate local and provincial health issues. Through patient anecdotes and well-informed discussions of key policy recommendations put forward by the association, nurses can press for meaningful change that addresses what we do right, and the issues we need to fix in our health system.

Late in 2012, Ontario's former Premier Dalton McGuinty prorogued the legislature, meaning many MPPs would not be in their Queen's Park offices at the time *QP Day* would normally take place. Undeterred, RNAO members agreed to take the association's signature political advocacy event "on the road." They began planning last fall to meet in their own communities with their MPPs, an initiative referred to as *Queen's Park on the Road (QPOR)*.

Over 80 MPPs – including Conservative leader Tim Hudak and NDP head Andrea Horwath – signed on to participate in meetings stretching from Elliot Lake to Temiskaming Shores to Cornwall to Windsor.

To provide a starting point for discussion, and fuel for *QPOR* conversations, nurses turned to RNAO's platform of health recommendations laid out in a document called *Why Your Health Matters*. With the release of this platform, RNAO is challenging all political parties to consider and adopt the recommendations that nurses feel will build an even stronger Ontario.

Released in January, the platform is well timed. The Liberal party may have found a new leader in Kathleen Wynne in January, but its minority government status means it requires the support of either opposition party to pass legislation. Without that support, Ontario could be plunged into an election at any time.

RNAO wanted to position itself to help shape political dialogue at a time when the province has a new premier, and MPPs may be preparing to campaign. The

POVERTY



Do you know that **one in 10 people in Ontario live in poverty?**

That amounts to 1.3 million people who do not have what they need to stay healthy.

ENVIRONMENT

Nurses know that **environmental determinants** of health play a huge role in the well-being of people.



NURSING CARE

The next provincial government should strengthen access to nursing care by:

Hiring **9,000** additional RNs by 2015

Ensuring **70%** of all nurses work full-time

Securing **fair wages** for nurses

MEDICARE

Research shows that publicly funded, **not-for-profit health care delivers better health outcomes at a lower cost.**



association guided members to structure their conversations with their political representatives around the pillars of *Why Your Health Matters*: poverty, environment, nursing care, Medicare and funding.

Specific targets have been identified within each pillar. When it comes to reducing poverty, Ontario needs to increase the minimum wage, improve access to affordable housing, and transform the social assistance system to reflect the cost of living. In committing to become clean and green, the provincial government must immediately close all remaining coal plants, and make sure people know about the existence of toxics in their homes, workplaces and consumer products. Nurses are also asking the government to impose green taxes to help pay for the damage polluters cause.

Strengthening access to nursing care means hiring 9,000 additional RNs by 2015, ensuring 70 per cent of all nurses work full-time so patients have continuity in their care and care provider, and securing fair wages for nurses working in all sectors. The government must maximize and expand the role of RNs to deliver broader care (such as prescribing and ordering lab tests), guarantee all existing nurse practitioner-led clinics are funded to operate to full capacity, and open NP-led clinics in areas where patient need exists. More focus is also needed to ensure patients are active partners in their health at their first point of contact with the system.

On Medicare, the government must commit to and expand our publicly funded, not-for-profit health system in areas such as home care, reject efforts to commercialize or privatize health-care delivery, including immediately stopping medical tourism in our hospitals, and focus more on evidence-based practice to ensure Ontario is a healthier place to live and work.

Nurses know that Ontario's economy is still recovering, and that it's affected by global events. This is why RNAO urges political leaders to work on restoring Ontario's fiscal capacity by making sure people pay their fair share in taxes. The association argues tax cuts for the wealthy and spending cuts for social programs hurt the most vulnerable and our economy. **RN**

MELISSA DI COSTANZO IS STAFF WRITER AT RNAO.

Paul Miller: There were two main concerns up for discussion during a March 1 meeting between (L to R) RN Joanne Crawford, nursing student Claire Wolfe, NDP MPP Paul Miller (Hamilton East-Stoney Creek), and nurses Leanne Siracusa and Wilma Andres: hiring 9,000 additional full-time RNs by 2015; and the region's poverty rate. Since 21 per cent of people live below the poverty line in Miller's riding, the group explored the topic of raising the minimum wage.

Rick Bartolucci: Sudbury's Liberal MPP Rick Bartolucci sat down with RNAO's Sudbury chapter executive members Maria Casas, co-president (left), and Barb Eles, vice-president, on March 1. The trio focused on poverty, the environment and nursing care, with the latter leading to a conversation about the need to expand RNs' scope of practice and boost the number of RNs in the province.

Sylvia Jones: Karen Hilliard, immediate past-president of RNAO's Peel chapter (left), and Maria Nelson, policy and political action representative (right), met with Conservative MPP Sylvia Jones (Dufferin-Caledon) to talk about raising the minimum wage and social assistance rates, and utilizing RNs to their full scope of practice. Hilliard and Nelson called the Feb. 15 meeting positive, enlightening, and a great learning experience.

Madeleine Meilleur: Liberal MPP Madeleine Meilleur (Ottawa-Vanier) (third from left) visited with RNs (L to R) Jennifer Bennett, Chantal Backman, Wendy Pearson, Una Ferguson and Sandra Stec on Feb. 15. The nurses called the meeting successful, saying they touched on various points in *Why Your Health Matters* as well as the specifics of Meilleur's role as Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs and Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Catherine Fife: During a March 8 meeting with NDP MPP Catherine Fife (Kitchener-Waterloo) (second from right), nurses (L to R) Andrea Baumann, Kathy Moreland Layte and Sabalda Hanifa addressed a number of topics including: appropriate housing for all – especially those with chronic mental health issues – the need for a unified strategy for the prevention of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and the importance of creating and maintaining full-time RN positions.

Steve Clark: Conservative MPP Steve Clark (Leeds-Grenville) (centre) met with Brockville nurses on March 1. (L to R) Nursing student Jordan Schaille, and RNs Andrea Campbell, Debora Steele and Claire Farella used the opportunity to address health care and nursing needs in the Brockville area.





Rick Bartolucci



Madeleine Meilleur



Steve Clark

To access political resources for meeting with your own MPP, or to read the platform in full and view other meeting photos, visit www.QPOR.RNAO.ca