

POLICY AT WORK

RNAO sets health policy priorities ahead of next Ontario election

It's anyone's guess when a provincial election may be called; however, RNAO is ready if and when politicians hit the campaign trail.* Anywhere between 10 months to a year ahead of each provincial election, and with the intention of influencing all parties, RNAO issues policy recommendations related to nursing, the health-care system and the health of our communities. The association also prepares detailed, evidence-based backgrounders to support its recommendations. This year is no different. Anticipating a provincial election within the next 12 months, RNAO released its challenge to Ontario's political parties in the presence of the board of directors and party representatives at Queen's Park on Jan. 30. The event coincided with RNAO's regular board meeting.

The platform, *Why your health matters*, includes recommendations nurses believe will help lift people out of poverty. It also has suggestions for cleaning up the environment. Other areas of RNAO's plan call for faster access to primary care and access to home health care for everyone who needs it. A key plank in the platform demands full utilization of all health-care professionals, including RNs, so there is increased access to quality care that is centred on the patient. Given Ontario's standing as the country's second

worst jurisdiction with respect to RN-to-population ratios, the platform also asks for 9,000 additional RNs by 2015.

RNAO takes Queen's Park Day "on the road"

With Ontario's legislature suspended at the request of former Premier Dalton McGuinty last October, most MPPs headed back to their constituency offices. RNAO decided to take its *Annual Day at Queen's Park* "on the road." This proactive approach will ensure RNAO's leaders and politicians have an opportunity to meet and discuss health policy priorities. The meetings will bring to life the newly released RNAO platform, *Why your health matters*. The association will work with chapters, regions without chapters, and interest groups to meet the target of 90 meetings between now and April. Interested in setting up a meeting with your MPP? The policy department can help. Contact Kayla Scott, 1-800-268-7199, ext 214.

RNAO responds to health ministry's seniors strategy

Ontario's Ministry of Health released highlights of its long-awaited seniors care strategy in January. The report, *Living Longer, Living Well*, was led by Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai and Toronto's University Health Network. Sinha was tasked with mapping out a strategy that would help Ontario seniors stay healthy and live longer at home, and RNAO was among the key stakeholders invited to provide recommendations.



Saint Elizabeth home care nurse Tamara Condry cares for one of her senior clients in London.

The report contains a number of sound proposals. Among them: ensure every older person has access to primary care; increase funding for the home and community sector by four per cent; and address the need for more supportive housing and transportation, especially for seniors living in poverty. One of the recommendations, however, raised grave concerns for RNAO and relates to a proposal to develop "an income-based" test for people who require home and community support services. RNAO says the idea runs counter to the province's *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act* and is an open invitation to privatize health services. The full report is expected to become public shortly.

Racism in health care

RNAO is encouraging nurses to read a Health Council of Canada report that examines how First Nations, Inuit and Metis people say they are treated when accessing health care in large urban cities. Many report instances of racism and stereotyping. The study, *Empathy, dignity, and respect: Creating cultural safety for Aboriginal people in urban health care*, found aboriginal people sometimes feel intimidated by Western approaches to health care. One of the report's conclusions calls for changes to health-care environments so culture is taken into consideration. For a copy of the study, visit www.healthcouncilcanada.ca **RN**

For a copy of *Why your health matters*, visit www.RNAO.ca/platform2013

*Although voters went to the polls in October 2011, the Liberals did not win a majority, which means the party needs the support of either opposition party to pass legislation.