



RNAO lays out plan to create vibrant communities and a healthy future

DURING THE 11TH ANNUAL DAY AT Queen's Park in January, it was a pleasure for President Wendy Fucile and me to unveil a political document that lays the foundation for a strong, vibrant, healthy province for all.

RNAO's platform, *Creating Vibrant Communities: RNAO's Challenge to Ontario's Political Parties*, sets out the priorities all political parties must adopt as they create their own platforms ahead of the next provincial vote on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2011.

RNAO was the first to issue a comprehensive call for action ahead of the upcoming election. We did so 20 months beforehand because we want to influence political parties and other stakeholders, including the public. The document contains evidence-based policies on six key elements: strengthening social determinants of health, equity and healthy communities; building sustainable, green communities; enhancing Medicare; improving access to nursing services; providing ways for nurses to build their careers in Ontario; and strengthening our public services. These areas are essential to create a strong, equitable province. They're also pillars that our members' advocacy can strengthen.

Creating Vibrant Communities is an important tool members can use to speak out for an Ontario that leaves no one behind. Time and again, you have shown your passion and

commitment to that vision through your well informed advocacy. In the 1980s, you lobbied for the Canada Health Act. In the 1990s, for 70 per cent full-time employment. In the last decade, you have spoken out for a full-time job guarantee for new grads, an increased minimum wage and a ban on cosmetic pesticides. Today, we continue our fight for permanent, full funding for registered nurse first assistants, the opening of all 25 additional nurse practitioner (NP)-led clinics, open prescribing for NPs and their right to admit, treat, transfer and discharge on inpatient units. The fuel behind all our work is RNAO's membership, and our ability to marry solid, evidence-based policy work on social, environmental, health and health-care issues with clinical and healthy work environment best practice guidelines, vigorous political advocacy and publicly accessible messages. It's work that is moving the association, and nurses' voices, from strength to higher strength.

In the 2007 election, all three major parties captured our policy ideas in some way. The McGuinty government promised 25 additional NP-led clinics. Eleven have already been announced and are expected to serve the public this year. We are also closer to having 70 per cent of all nurses working full time, with 65.6 per cent of RNs and NPs now holding that employment

status. We also called for an additional 9,000 nurses to be added to the workforce. The government is on track to deliver, so long as it doesn't balance budgets by cutting nursing positions.

Our voices are also being heard on determinants of health. In 2007, we asked MPPs to ban the use, sale and display of non-essential pesticides. One year later, legislation to do just that was announced. In 2008, we also welcomed the introduction of the province's poverty reduction strategy as a first step toward ensuring everyone in our communities lives in dignity and in health.

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These steps must now go further. That's why *Creating Vibrant Communities* points out the need for comprehensive measures to address poverty, including affordable housing, and sustainable funding for the poverty reduction strategy. We're also calling for measures to rectify poverty and environmental concerns in First Nation's communities.

We're also speaking out on the need to continue to make our health-care system more accessible and sustainable. That

includes an additional 50 NP-clinics opening by 2015, and adhering to the letter and the spirit of the Canada Health Act by eliminating privately financed, for-profit alternative financing and procurement (AFP) projects in the hospital sector and strengthening not-for-profit delivery.

To bring *Creating Vibrant Communities* to life, we need you to choose one or two areas you are most passionate about. Then, meet with your local MPP and share your views. Write letters to the editor and talk to local media. Be a change agent in your workplaces and communities. When the election campaign finally begins

next year, we know you'll all continue to organize all-candidates debates and speak out in public forums. Creating vibrant communities requires a healthy dose of democratic debate. Together, we have the values to drive our vision, the knowledge to anchor our discourse and the courage to lead and build truly vibrant communities for all Ontarians. **RN**

DORIS GRINSPUN, RN, MSN, PHD (CAND), O. ONT IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RNAO.