

Fair Wages and Work for Better Health

Can we count on your support to improve the health of workers who are low-paid and/or precariously employed by:

- 1) Raising the minimum wage to at least \$14/hour?
- 2) Ensuring all workers, regardless of form of work, are protected by inclusion in and enforcement of the *Employment Standards Act*?

Nurses know that meaningful action on poverty is critical to sustaining lives, supporting health, and enabling human dignity. That is why Ontario's RNs, NPs and nursing students continue to implore elected leaders to accelerate our collective efforts to address poverty on such issues as raising the minimum wage, improving access to affordable housing and increasing dangerously low social assistance rates.¹²³

Today we would like to talk about ways to help work become a pathway out of poverty for those who are able to participate in the paid workforce.⁴⁵

The minimum wage in Ontario was frozen at \$6.85 per hour from 1995 to 2004, which corresponded to a 17 per cent cut in purchasing power. From February 2004 to March 2010, important increases brought the minimum wage to \$10.25 per hour. After staying flat for four years, the minimum wage increased to \$11.00 per hour as of June 1, 2014 and indexed to inflation. The next increase will be effective on October 1, 2015 to \$11.25 per hour, with some exceptions.⁶ While this increase is welcome, it will still leave a full-time worker 17 per cent (or \$4,301) below the Low Income Measure (LIM).⁷⁸ RNAO continues to support the community call⁹ to set the minimum wage 10 per cent above the Low Income Measure.¹⁰ In 2015, a full-time worker would need \$14.75 per hour (or \$26,856 per year) to reach 10 per cent over the LIM.¹¹

Ontario has been particularly hard hit by the loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs over the last decade,¹² regular full-time employment with benefits has been increasingly replaced by non-standard contingent employment, often in the service sector.¹³ Those with precarious work, which is often part-time, temporary, or casual with low wages, few or no benefits, little job security, and minimal control over working conditions, frequently struggle to survive.¹⁴ Women, racialized persons, Aboriginal persons, newcomers, youth, and people with disabilities are over-represented in precarious work¹⁵¹⁶ as they are in poverty.¹⁷¹⁸ While precarious employment has the worst impact on low-income households, it "hurts everyone who experiences it, regardless of income levels."¹⁹ Precarious employment takes an immense toll on the health and well-being of individual and families as well as the social cohesion of communities.²⁰²¹²²²³²⁴

The province of Ontario is to be credited for its current examination of the province's outdated employment and labour laws through the Changing Workplaces Review.²⁵ With precarious employment as the "new norm" causing social stress across the income spectrum,²⁶ it is critical that employment and labour standards be strengthened and enforced.

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