

# Healthy reform afoot during summer's heat, but challenges await us in the fall



## Whatever journeys

RNAO members are on this summer – whether it's traveling with family or relaxing with friends, pursuing professional development, or continuing to

enhance the health, comfort and quality of life of Ontarians – you should take heart that health-care reform has shown few signs of a summer slow-down.

Since the onset of summer, Health Minister George Smitherman has made a handful of announcements about investments to strengthen the community and long-term care sectors – essential prerequisites to ensuring the success of the government's health-care transformation agenda. The announcements have included: \$58.3 million more for community-based mental health services; \$112.7 million for home and community care services; \$2.7 million to ensure new research and best practices help improve the health and the care of long-term care residents (see pg.7 for more on this); and a freeze in long-term care accommodation costs.

Hospitals have not been shut out of receiving good news either. On the first day of summer, individual hospitals received their first multi-year funding announcement in the province's history – an announcement that included at least \$1.75 billion over three years in new funding for hospitals. Meanwhile, the creation of a new Ministry of Health Promotion could hold promise that public health may finally receive the attention and resources it deserves.

RNAO members, especially long-standing ones, will also likely be aware that on July 25th, Premier McGuinty announced \$28 million for late-career nurses working

in hospitals and long-term care homes. The investment gives Ontario's nurses who are older than 55 the chance to keep on nursing, but in less physically demanding roles, such as working as mentors, patient and family educators or staff advisors on clinical issues. This announcement is only one piece of the health human resource puzzle, but it is a critical piece if we are to retain the knowledge, expertise, wisdom and commitment of experienced nurses.

These announcements are obviously incremental and only drops in the health-care reform bucket. Some may even be viewed as re-announcements or roll-outs of previously proclaimed public investments. Neither do these announcements negate the anxiety of nurses whose jobs may be threatened during the government's balanced-budget process.

But it's important for nurses and the public they serve to recognize and support the government when it takes steps in the right direction along the winding road to reforming health care. The government's creation and initial staffing of one of its key reform initiatives – Local Health Integration Networks, or LHINs – may be a case in point. As executive director Doris Grinspun says in our cover piece (pg.12): "Anything that helps to create a more seamless, navigable and accessible system is a good thing.... We have to remember that LHINs are merely a tool, and we are all responsible for how they're used. As nurses, we need to be vigilant at this early stage to ensure LHINs evolve to strengthen medicare."

So as summer fades away and the fall beckons, nurses will have many questions

to ask, issues to raise, and points to make to the government, to health-care employers, to each other, and of course to the public as we work together to improve the health-care system.

For instance, we will be looking to the Health Minister to announce this autumn that he will be implementing the best and strongest recommendations from Elinor Caplan's review of the competitive bidding process, including the elimination of the "elect to work" model that has marginalized home-care nurses for too long.

We will continue to press for protecting RNs from layoffs. We will be awaiting the latest statistics from the College of Nurses of Ontario to see how much closer we are to reaching the 70 per cent solution. We will urge government to invest funds to find positions for all of Ontario's new grads, and employers to hire them. We will monitor the government's progress on health-care reform to ensure nurses'

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knowledge, expertise and experience continue to contribute to shaping the future of health care. And, of course, we will be vigilant in our efforts to ensure two-tiered health-care does not take hold in Ontario or the rest of Canada.

In the meantime, enjoy the rest of your summer. Please make sure you renew your membership and bring many new members early in the fall. That way more RNs will continue to enjoy the myriad events and opportunities offered by RNAO. We will continue to serve our members with commitment, knowledge and passion.

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