



Excitement builds for annual visit to Queen's Park

JUST AS THIS ISSUE OF THE *JOURNAL* went to press, I and 150 of my fellow RNAO members, including the board of directors (BOD), the assembly, and our CEO Doris Grinspun, gathered at Queen's Park for one of my favorite advocacy days.

Next to the annual general meeting, Queen's Park Day is the largest event on the RNAO calendar. It is an incredible opportunity to bring nursing and health priorities to life through evidence, and to hear the stories of those with lived experience and those who work in the system on a daily basis.

This full day of discussion and debate also allows us, both as citizens and as clinical professionals, to engage with Ontario's top policy makers – MPPs – on the issues that our association knows will make a difference in patient health outcomes, the delivery of health and health-care services, and our profession as a whole.

During my time on the board, I have had the privilege of attending several of these events.

I recall one year in particular, as I was walking to the legislature, I glanced around to see fellow members – I'm sure we numbered more than 100 – descending on Queen's Park. What a sight to see. It was an exhilarating moment to witness such a critical mass of RNAO's leaders physically present at the place of government in this province. We were about to make our mark and add our

knowledge and influence to important issues, such as stopping medical tourism and poverty reduction.

During the morning session, when each of the party leaders spoke to those assembled, I vividly recall standing at the microphone addressing Premier Kathleen Wynne about

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the importance of income security as a foundational determinant of health. I related my experiences as a registered nurse and my public health work with clients who struggled to secure employment, adequate housing and food.

We've made much progress on some of these issues, such as medical tourism. Our work on other issues such as poverty reduction continues. That's why this year we are calling for a more upstream approach to government policy making because the money we invest today will translate into cost-savings down the road, not to mention better health for the people of this province.

Here are just two examples. By investing one per cent of the province's budget in affordable housing, we can increase the

number of housing units for those who don't have adequate shelter. And by raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, the working poor will have more money to help make ends meet, including paying rent and buying nutritious food. Each of these measures will improve people's health

an understanding of how they can use their voice to influence the system they will one day work within.

For those of you who are, or have been, part of our assembly, you likely already know about the power and positive energy this event generates. I would like to invite members who are

and also lead to lower health-care costs.

We also know we can improve the efficiency of our health system by expanding its capacity, especially in primary care. We can increase access to care by removing the barriers that prevent NPs from prescribing controlled substances and permit RNs the authority to write prescriptions independently. While the government has committed to making both of these happen, we want to see faster progress.

Queen's Park Day would not be complete without the participation of nursing students who take time away from school to attend this special event. For them, it is often their first experience actively participating in the policy process, and developing

not as familiar, but are intrigued by the opportunity, to run for office on your local chapter or regional executive so you can be part of this amazing platform.

This is a powerful example of the endless opportunities that RNAO provides for members to advocate, to influence, and to be inspired about the difference we make through engagement in our professional association.

Ontario is in the process of transforming the health system. What better chance to continue to shape the future than to spend time with the premier, party leaders, our minister of health, and other MPPs to ensure our voices continue to be heard and accounted for. **RN**

CAROL TIMMINGS, RN, BScN, MEd (ADMIN), IS PRESIDENT OF RNAO.