



More than 150 RNs and nursing student leaders of our association got a taste of policy in action at Ontario's legislative building during RNAO's *Queen's Park Day* event in February.

# THE POWER OF POLICY

Members met with MPPs over breakfast, sat in on Question Period, listened to party leaders and their health critics discuss key issues, asked the tough questions, and took in a special announcement from the minister of health. BY MELISSA DI COSTANZO



# THE POWER OF POLICY

## It was a testament to the gains of years of advocacy when one of RNAO's long-held asks finally became a reality at the association's 14th *Queen's Park Day* earlier this year.

Ontario's minister of health pledged to boost the number of NPs in long-term care homes over the next three years, something RNAO believes will cut down on unnecessary, costly and inefficient transfers to hospital ERs, and eliminate the emotional toll such transfers have on vulnerable residents and their loved ones.

Health Minister Deb Matthews said the province will hire 75 new NPs: 15 this year, 30 next year and 30 more in 2016. The news was greeted with a standing ovation from the RNs, NPs and nursing students in attendance. Currently, there are 18 NPs working in 22 long-term care homes. There are more than 630 long-term care homes across the province.

"I am very, very excited about this initiative," Matthews said. "I know that an NP on site every day, all day will really make a difference...and, most importantly, our residents will be happy."

In an effort to help long-term care homes recruit and retain these NPs, Matthews also announced expansion of the *Grow Your Own Nurse Practitioner in Long-Term Care Program*, to support RNs who would like to become NPs.

RNAO CEO Doris Grinspun called the announcement a wise government investment. "Nurse practitioners will advance the timeliness and quality of care for residents in long-term care homes, improving their safety and quality of life and providing peace of mind to families and staff," she said.

Jill Burkholder, president of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario (NPAO), an interest group of RNAO, said research findings show the "integration of NPs into a long-term care home improves outcomes for the residents, leads to fewer transfers to hospitals and reduced length of stay, and is better value for money."



**"Will you commit to support RNAO's position that we need concrete action in the next budget to hire new RNs?"**

RNAO's Region 7 board representative  
Claudette Holloway to  
PC Health Critic  
Christine Elliott

Matthews' announcement came during the afternoon presentations from a number of high-profile guests, including Premier Kathleen Wynne, Conservative Leader Tim Hudak and PC Health Critic Christine Elliott, and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath with NDP Health Critic France G elinas. Each guest fielded tough questions from nurses, who pushed for further investments in nursing, an explanation for the lower than expected change to the minimum wage, same-day access to primary care providers, and a guarantee to hire more RNs to address Ontario's troubling RN-to-population ratio.

Claudette Holloway, RNAO's Region 7 board representative, reminded politicians that Ontario is rated second worst in Canada for its RN-to-population ratio. "Will you commit to support RNAO's position that we need concrete action in the next budget to hire new RNs?" she pointedly asked Elliott. "Yes, absolutely," the health critic responded to applause. "There's no question we need to urge this government to fulfill its commitment."

Horwath, for her part, said the NDP has "always opposed cuts to nurses and other front-line health-care staff," while Matthews defended her party's work since taking office, suggesting there are almost 10,000 more RNs working in the province now than 10 years ago. Indeed, RN employment growth has exceeded population growth since 2004 (the Liberals took office in October 2003), so the RN-to-population ratio has improved. However, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Ontario still lags behind the rest of the country, and requires 17,588 more RN positions to catch up.

Another hot-button issue at the event: Community Care Access Centres (CCAC). The two opposition parties called for changes



“I do firmly believe that when it comes to our health-care system, nurses are the absolute experts. You know the system inside and out, and you know what makes it tick and what makes it break. And I want to say I value your advice and your insights very, very much.”

Andrea Horwath, Leader, Ontario New Democratic Party (far left, and flanked by NDP Health Critic France Gélinas)



“It’s outstanding RNAO takes the time to be here at Queen’s Park... thank you for what you do.”

Tim Hudak, Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario (above, centre, and flanked by PC Health Critic Christine Elliott (left) and RNAO President-Elect Vanessa Burkoski (right))



“We are better in Ontario because of the work you have done.”

Health Minister Deb Matthews (above, right)

“We’re going to continue to work to strengthen nurses’ role in the system. That...(has) been one of our achievements, and it will continue to be one of our objectives. We will continue to be your champions.”

Premier Kathleen Wynne (far left)

# THE POWER OF POLICY

to exorbitant executive salaries and ballooning administrative costs of the province's 14 CCACs, with Hudak calling both "tragic." Just two days before RNAO's event, Elliott asked the auditor general to investigate. And Gélinas wants an immediate public review. "I want to thank RNAO," she said about the association raising the alarm. "You were at the front of the pack."

Matthews said the government is expecting to introduce legislation capping executive compensation.

RNAO's concern with CCACs goes beyond these skyrocketing salaries and administrative costs. Since the release of the association's 2012 *Enhancing Community Care for Ontarians* (ECCO) report, RNAO has pushed for 3,500 care co-ordinators to be transferred to primary care, to continue their important work at their current compensation. ECCO proposes these expert care co-ordinators join primary care NPs, RNs and physicians and focus on providing care co-ordination and system navigation for complex patients.

The Liberal government's increase to the minimum wage was also a loaded topic, and one that came up with all of the party leaders. In January, Wynne pledged to raise the minimum wage to \$11 per hour as of June 1, 2014. But RNAO, in partnership with



Carol Timmings, RNAO board member-at-large for nursing administration, told the premier that a \$3 minimum wage bump gives "Ontarians a chance at health."

poverty groups, has long been urging \$14. Nurses continued this call. Carol Timmings, RNAO board member-at-large for nursing administration, told the premier that a \$3 bump gives "Ontarians a chance at health."

"I would love nothing more than to say 'let's have a \$14 an hour minimum wage today,'" replied Wynne. "If we had done that, there would have been a backlash from the business community that would have been extremely difficult for us to deal with...because of the potential job loss, and that's what I was most worried about."

Horwath proposed an increase to \$12 by 2016, raising eyebrows among nurses who have looked to the NDP for support on this particular issue. "I know it's not where everybody wanted to be right away, but it's certainly headed in the right direction, and it's certainly an improvement on where the government was willing to go," said Horwath. Grinspun said nurses felt let down by this NDP position. She assured Horwath the association will continue to press all parties

for a \$14 minimum wage, adding: "If we don't support people to keep healthy, we will have to keep patching them up." **RN**

MELISSA DI COSTANZO IS STAFF WRITER AT RNAO.



**(LEFT)** Nursing students from across the province take in the energy at Queen's Park, and embrace the opportunity to see politics in action.



(LEFT) Conservative MPPs Todd Smith and Laurie Scott (who is a nurse) address members and colleagues at a networking breakfast arranged to allow open dialogue between RNs, nursing students and politicians. (BELOW) Liberal MPPs Bob Chiarelli (left) and John Fraser (third from left) engage in conversation with members of RNAO's Region 10. (BELOW, LEFT) RNAO CEO Doris Grinspun looks on as members share their views with NDP MPPs Monique Taylor (centre), Paul Miller (second from right) and Peggy Sattler (bottom right corner, not visible).



“Consider it (*Queen’s Park Day*) an investment in nursing in Ontario, one that is very much appreciated by the membership. I left, as always, feeling renewed and excited about the work that we have to do.”

Elizabeth Edwards, president, Quinte chapter, co-chair, PNEIG (Below: third from left, front row)



(LEFT) Members of RNAO's Executive Network Structure, including policy and political action officers and communications officers, were invited as special guests to Queen's Park, affording them the opportunity to fully engage in their respective roles as the voice of local chapters and interest groups.

To view more photos from the event, visit [www.RNAO.ca/QPGallery2014](http://www.RNAO.ca/QPGallery2014)