

# Framework for Political Action



**This section provides a general overview for registered nurses on how and why to become politically involved.**

# Introduction

**As professionals who practice at the intersection of public policy and private lives, nurses are ideally situated and morally obligated to include political advocacy and efforts to influence healthy public policy in their practice.**

(Adeline Falk-Rafael, 2005)

Every day, registered nurses witness the impact of health and social policies on the lives of Ontarians. As health-care providers, we must address our patients' immediate health concerns, but we also have a responsibility to speak out on the broader social, economic, and political issues that influence and shape health outcomes. By speaking out on health-care and nursing issues, we speak out for our patients, for our colleagues – and for ourselves.

## **What is advocacy?**

Some people see advocacy as organizing protests and marches. Others may define advocacy as writing a letter to the editor, or talking to your colleague about issues that arise in your practice. Advocacy encompasses all of these approaches.

***Advocacy is a combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political and community support for a particular goal. Action may be taken by, or on behalf of, individuals and groups to create living conditions which promote health (WHO, 2005).***

## Why should registered nurses take action?

- Nurses have a very high level of credibility with the public.
- Nurses bring a unique perspective and knowledge to health policy issues.
- Nurses are successful advocates! See the “Success Stories” of this kit for details.

Many of the skills you have developed as a nurse are directly transferable into the political arena. Nurses are highly skilled in interpersonal communication, assessment and planning. The challenge, then, is learning how to apply these skills to other spheres of influence.

**I do all the things you think of that nurses do. But I also work upstream. I can treat homeless kids for anemia, but I also participate in the province wide “raise the rates” campaign which seeks to increase social assistance rates so that poor children don’t become anemic in the first place.**

(Kathy Hardil, Street Nurse, 2005)

## How can registered nurses become involved?

- Talk to your neighbours and co-workers about a health policy issue
- Respond to an Action Alert
- Write to your MPP or MP about a health policy issue that is important to you
- Lend your expertise and voice as an RN to a community issue
- Run for office
- Don’t forget to call Home Office and ask for assistance
- Use this Kit as a resource!

## Where to start

Becoming politically active can often seem overwhelming – there are so many issues that need to be addressed! Deciding on one area that you want to target is not always easy. Choosing an issue that has currency with politicians and the public will provide you with more opportunities to act, and increase the likelihood that your message will be heard.

### What issues should I become involved with?

- One that is important to your colleagues, neighbours, family, or community.
- One that is important to your patients.
- One that is important to YOU.

Nurses are busy people –we are constantly juggling work, family, and community responsibilities. Adding “political action” to our daily to-do lists may seem difficult when faced with an already full schedule. But it doesn’t have to be overwhelming.

Remember – you don’t have to go it alone! Work together with family, friends, and colleagues. Contact the Policy department and ask for assistance. The more people involved in a project, the easier it is to accomplish.



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Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario 2006

## REFERENCES

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World Health Organization (2005). "Introduction to Toolkit". From Health Service Planning and Policy-Making: A Toolkit for Nurses and Midwives. World Health Organization, p. 4.

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