

Becoming Active in an Election



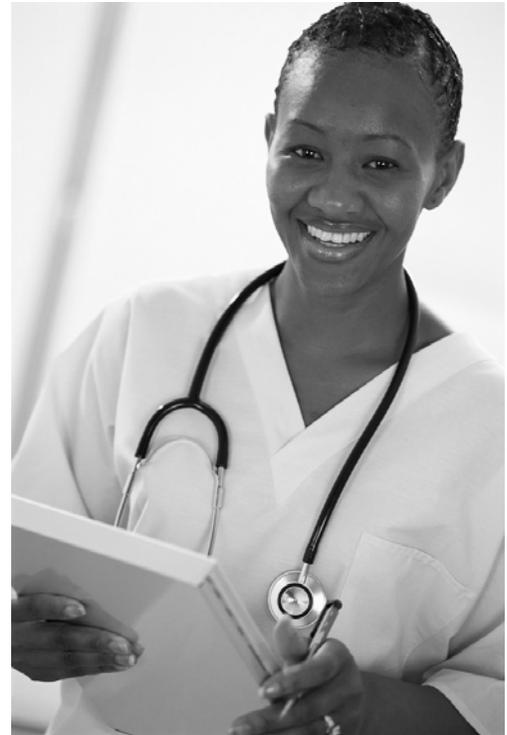
This section provides political action strategies specific to elections. It offers strategies on how to communicate a nursing perspective on health-related issues to candidates. For a more detailed discussion on current policy issues, refer to the Discussion of Current Issues section of this kit.

Becoming Active in an Election

Election campaigns provide a critical opportunity for nurses to influence the parties' policy positions. Because nurses are highly trusted by the public, nurses' positions on key issues carry a great deal of credibility and influence during elections. The earlier you become involved, the more influence you can exert!

Influencing public policy means acting individually and collectively in a show of strength. Working together with your Chapter, Region or Interest Group during an election campaign is a great way to show that strength.

We have prepared this section to assist you and your colleagues in becoming actively involved in these campaigns. You have a right and a duty, both as a citizen and as a nurse, to express your point of view. And, finally, you are not alone. There are more than 100, 000 registered nurses in Ontario. Let's use our power!



How to get your Chapter, Region, or Interest Group involved

- Call a meeting for those interested in getting involved. (Two people is a good start!)
- Identify which RNAO priority issues are most relevant to your local

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context.

- Determine which activities you are comfortable taking on/have the resources for.
- Call the Policy department for help!

During provincial and federal elections, visit RNAO's website for a comparison of the parties' platforms

RNAO's platform comparison will provide you with information on where parties stand on issues related to nursing, medicare, healthy public policy, and the social determinants of health. Knowing where the parties stand on platform issues will help you formulate more specific questions for your local candidate. It will also help you and those close to you to make an informed decision on election day.



During the lead-up to election day, you may unexpectedly meet a political candidate - distributing pamphlets in shopping malls, at the bus stop, or at your door. Take these opportunities to ask questions! The more often you do it, the easier it gets. And don't forget to let the candidate know that you are an RN and an RNAO member.

The following are strategies that you may wish to use before and after elections. **Please share with Home Office what strategies you used and the impact they had.**

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Election-Time Approaches to Candidates

1. Distribute questions for members to ask when candidates knock on their door.
2. Invite candidates to a panel discussion or forum on health-related issues at an RNAO Chapter or Interest Group meeting.
3. Send Chapter or Interest Group members to attend and ask questions at community all-candidates meetings. Refer to the section on all-candidates meetings for ideas.
4. Organize your own all-candidates meeting on health issues.
5. Call the candidates in your riding and invite them to your home so that you can discuss their platforms and your concerns in person (this can also be done in a small group).

Meeting or Interviewing a Candidate

This section contains some helpful hints for meeting with candidates. Once you have planned your first meeting, the others will be much easier to organize.

Why meet with a candidate?

- It lets candidates know what issues are important to you as a RN, and can influence their position and priorities.
- It is the best way to get direct answers to your questions.

While meeting with a candidate in person has many advantages, it can also be time-consuming. Examine your schedule and decide how many meetings you can realistically prepare for. Interviewing candidates from all three parties would be ideal – but speaking with even one can make a difference.

How should I go about setting up a meeting or interview?

- Within your Chapter, Region or Interest Group, establish a subcommittee to conduct the interviews and related activities.
- Ask candidates if they are willing to participate.
- Identify your key issues and prepare a set of questions to ask during the interviews. RNAO's Policy department can help you with this.
- Hold role-playing sessions for team members to practice before the meeting.
- Tell candidates in advance how you plan to use their responses (i.e. if you are keeping track of, or posting and circulating their responses).
- If you wish to record the interview, inform the candidate and obtain his/her consent.

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- Agree on a mutually acceptable time to conduct the interview.
- Decide how you will distribute the information you have collected.
- After the meeting, send a written thank-you note to each participant.
- Distribute your information! Send an email to Chapter, Region or Interest Group members, or write a letter to the editor.

Helpful hints:

- At first, try not to let your own opinions or political views intrude or the candidates may just tell you what you want to hear. However, it is a good idea to leave the candidate with a clear understanding of where you – and RNAO - stand on the issues.
- After the meeting, watch for signs that your key messages have been incorporated into her/his speeches or platform. If so, call, email, or write a letter to the candidate to let him/her know that you are very pleased. If not, send a written note restating your point.

All-Candidates Meetings

An all-candidates meeting is another way to lobby key decision-makers on issues that are important to registered nurses. It is a great way to assess competing candidates - while they are in the same room! It also provides an opportunity for many people to get the input they need to make an informed choice on election day. Finally, it is an ideal way to increase RNAO's and nurses' public profile.

There are two ways to approach all-candidates meetings:

1. Organize your own all-candidates meeting with other members of your Chapter, Region or Interest Group, or;
2. Attend meetings held by other community partners.

Organizing an all-candidates meeting

Get together

Gather a group of RNAO members to form a planning committee, and decide on the specific issues you want addressed.

Choose the format for the meeting: panel or debate

- *Panel:* Form a panel of RNAO members or community “experts” who will pose questions to the candidates. Ideally, choose a moderator who is well-known locally. This will draw a larger audience, and help attract media coverage. Allow time for questions from the audience.
- *Debate:* Select the issues for discussion and choose a moderator.

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Again, it is ideal to choose a moderator who is well-known locally. This will draw a larger audience, and help attract media coverage. Allocate a set amount of time for each candidate to express her/his views, as well as time for a question period.

Negotiate the details

- Coordinate a convenient date and time with the candidates and other participants.
- Choose a neutral location with nearby parking.
- Arrange for audio-visual needs, podium, risers, chairs, etc.

Spread the word

- Advertise your meeting in the local newspaper, community calendars, and through public service announcements on radio and TV.
- Take advantage of free local weekly newspapers which have wide circulation.
- Call the media outlets in your community to let them know about the meeting. RNAO's Communications department will be happy to help you with this.
- If your budget allows, print and post flyers in supermarkets, laundromats, libraries, and other high traffic public locations.

The meeting itself

- Have a glass or bottle of water available for each of the candidates and the moderator.
- Designate a timekeeper to sit where the speaker can see her/him. To help candidates stay within the agreed time limit, have one piece of paper that says "3 minutes left" and another that says "1 minute left", and show them to the speaker at the appropriate intervals.

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- Have RNAO materials on hand for the public to take home. For advice on which documents to make available, contact the Policy department.

After the meeting

- Send a written thank-you note to the candidates, moderator, and venue (if appropriate).
- Email your Chapter, Region, or Interest Group about the event, and copy RNAO.
- If the media was not present at your event, you may follow up with local media to see if you could submit a short article about the meeting for publication.

Attending a community all-candidates meeting

Get together

Gather a group of RNAO members from your riding who are interested in and comfortable posing questions to candidates in front of a community audience.

Form a plan

- Look through your local newspaper or community newsletter for information on all-candidates meetings in your area.
- Draw up a schedule of all the meetings that will be held in your riding.
- Have each member of your RNAO team attend one of the meetings. If there are not enough members to cover all meetings, arrange a rotating schedule.
- If possible, have members attend in pairs for moral support.
- Brainstorm a list of questions to ask candidates. We have included some sample questions on the following page to help you with this. Try to ask different questions at each meeting.

At the meeting

- Arrive 15 minutes early to get a seat close to the floor microphone. Long line-ups can materialize very quickly!
- Take a deep breath. Speaking to candidates in front of an audience can be stressful, especially if it is your first time doing so. Remember – other people in the audience will likely have the same questions you do, but may be too shy to ask. Not only will you receive an

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answer, but others will as well!

- When it's your turn to speak, introduce yourself as a registered nurse and an RNAO member. Speak slowly and clearly, and make eye contact with the candidates. Don't be afraid to try for a follow-up question.

Questions to Ask

- When I look around my workplace, I don't see enough fresh young faces among my nursing colleagues. In fact, the average age of RNs in Ontario is 45. That means we will need a lot more nurses - - thousands -- over the next ten years. If your party is elected, what will it do to increase the number of nurses in the future?
- What is your position on for-profit delivery of health-care, and on public/private partnerships in health-care?
- How will your platform address poverty and homelessness in Ontario and Canada?

Post-Election Approaches to Politicians

- Send a congratulatory letter to the politician in your riding and reintroduce yourself as a registered nurse and a member of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO), and identify your role within RNAO. In your letter, offer to serve as a resource for consultation and/or information on nursing and health-care issues.
- Ask to meet with them within the first few weeks after the election to discuss your views on local health issues. This will help you establish rapport and increase your influence. Again, offer to assist by serving as a resource for consultation and/or information. Remember, politicians need to be informed in order to successfully represent their constituencies – by helping them succeed, you will make yourself indispensable!
- Invite them to a local Chapter or Interest Group meeting to participate in a question and answer session or panel discussion. Send a written thank-you note after the event, and follow up with an email to Chapter members or even a report in your Interest Group newsletter. Advise politicians that you intend to publish their remarks.
- Keep them informed about events and initiatives that you, your Chapter, Region, or Interest Group have organized. This is a way of keeping in touch and ensuring that she/he remains aware of health-

care and nursing issues and RNAO's positions on these issues.