



Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
Hepburn Block, 10th floor
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Oct. 11, 2022

Dear Minister Jones,

Re. permanent funding for public health nurses in Ontario schools

I am following up on last week's excellent meeting with you and Premier Ford. Specifically, I want to reinforce the need to make permanent the addition of 625 public health nurses (PHN) to Ontario schools and to make a further increase to the number of school-based PHNs.

RNAO applauds you for your leadership on this issue. Student wellbeing and overall school health are important pillars of an effective education system – especially as we move back to full in-person school functioning after the era of lockdowns. The school-focused PHNs have been instrumental in providing COVID-19-related supports to schools and school boards, resulting in reduced student, parent and staff anxiety, better infection prevention and control, and healthier school communities. Allocating more PHNs to Ontario schools has also had a critical impact on the health and wellbeing of students, parents, teachers and other staff in Ontario's schools.

Minister, we call for **permanent funding for these 625 PHN positions** before the current funding expires. PHNs have now taken on a more important role than ever in our schools as students, parents and staff contend with COVID-19 variants and other enduring effects of the pandemic, including ongoing and post-traumatic stress. They are essential for a renewed focus on reinstating comprehensive health promotion measures in schools, and on improving health education, supports for teaching staff, and student and family mental health.

In light of the success of this initiative, RNAO also recommends **a further increase to the number of school-focused PHNs** – that is, more than the 625 positions previously added. This will ensure equitable access to the supports PHNs provide across Ontario's school system, maximizing the benefits for **all** students, parents and staff. The provision of permanent resources must also take into account and address the unique needs and circumstances of First Nations school populations and communities.

Sustained funding must reflect the policy direction in place for the existing program – all PHNs must continue to be:

- registered nurses (RN) holding bachelor of science in nursing (BScN) degrees, per public health standards and College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) requirements^{1 2 3}
- located in local public health units across the province under the purview of the Chief Nursing Officer, subject to any agreement with First Nations to accommodate their circumstances and needs
- provided with on-boarding that enables awareness of local community resources for COVID-19, mental health and addictions, youth supports, employment services and social services.

The role of PHNs in schools must also continue to include:

- educating, teaching, training, facilitating, interpreting and communicating information in a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 environment
- contributing to policy, planning, education and delivery models related to the COVID-19 vaccination
- applying their existing expertise, critical thinking and problem-solving skills to ensure community stability in the post-pandemic period and beyond.

As discussed at our meeting, RNAO urges you to expand the school-based PHN role and make it a permanent part of Ontario's public health system for the health and wellbeing of our schools and communities across the province.

Warmest regards,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), Dr(hc), FAAN, O.ONT.
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

CC Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Dr. Karima Velji, Chief of Nursing and Professional Practice and Assistant Deputy Minister
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, minister of finance

¹ Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7.

² College of Nurses of Ontario. (2018). *Practice Guideline. RN and RPN practice: The client, the nurse and the environment*. Retrieved from <https://www.cno.org/globalassets/docs/prac/41062.pdf>

³ RNAO. *Careers in Nursing: Public Health Nursing*. Retrieved from <http://careersinnursing.ca/new-nursing-and-students/career-options/nursing-practice-profiles/public-health>