

April 28, 2021

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health  
777 Bay St., 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

The Honourable Merilee Fullerton  
Minister of Long-Term Care  
400 University Ave., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 1S5

The Honourable Ross Romano  
Minister of Colleges and Universities  
438 University Ave., 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Dear Ministers:

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) and Ontario's universities remain steadfast in our commitment to working with you and the Ontario government to support the province's fight against COVID-19 and rebuilding Ontario's health workforce.

Results of a January 2020 RNAO survey of its members showed that an alarming number of young RNs are planning on leaving the profession post-pandemic. In addition, an even higher proportion of late career nurses indicated their intention of retiring in the next few months. This anticipated scenario threatens to worsen the already high RN vacancy rates across the health care system brought about by illness or pandemic burnout, with dire consequences for Ontarians' access to quality care.

We are eager to support all efforts to help rebuild Ontario's health care system from the devastating effects of COVID-19. In addition to accelerating staffing in long-term care, we encourage you to also address the staffing needs in acute care, public health, mental health and addictions, as well as increasing access to healthcare in rural, remote, Northern and Indigenous communities.

To this end, Ontario's universities are able to immediately increase our intake in baccalaureate nursing programs (encompassing everything from accelerated 19-month programs, to three- and four-year programs) by **451 additional students this Fall, and an additional 100 students in Winter 2022**, with appropriate government funding for operations and clinical placements.

In its *Vision for Tomorrow* report, the RNAO Nurse Practitioner Task Force's first recommendation is to increase the supply of NPs across all sectors and settings. Nurse practitioners in Ontario enable improved access to primary care, acute care and long-term care. NPs provide comprehensive care for vulnerable and underserved populations, and lead to improved health and health care cost outcomes across all sectors, as well as increased access to care, particularly in rural and remote areas. *Ontario's Long-Term Care Staffing Plan* identified

NPs as vital contributors to the health of LTC residents, and instrumental in avoiding unnecessary visits to emergency departments. We are delighted to share with you that Ontario's NP programs are able to increase enrolment into their programs by **70 positions this fall**, with government approval and funding. This would constitute an approximately 25% increase.

As you know, a critical element to maximizing the contributions of the current and future health workforce is optimizing and appropriately expanding nurses' scope of practice, commensurate with their education and experience. A number of proposals for expansion to nursing scopes of practice are being contemplated. These require careful consideration to balance access to care and the science of public safety. RNAO and Ontario's universities encourage government to consult with nursing stakeholders on the Joint Provincial Nursing Committee (JPNC) on proposals to expand scope of practice to ensure that the changes are appropriate to the education and experience of that category of nurse.

Given the urgent need to plan for the fall reopening, Ontario's universities look forward to an immediate decision for an increase in the number of students we enrol this Fall in BScN and NP programmes. RNAO will continue to engage students, employers and government to support smooth implementation of this expansion.

Together, we can partner to ensure Ontario has the healthcare workforce it needs to build a brighter future for communities throughout the province.

Yours sincerely,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD  
LLD(hon.), Dr(hc), FAAN, O.ONT.  
CEO, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario



Steve Orsini  
President and CEO  
Council of Ontario Universities

- c: Heather Watt, Chief of Staff, Minister's office, Minister of Health  
Ari Laskin, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Blair Hains, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office, Minister of Long-Term Care  
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Long-term Care  
Shelley Tapp, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care  
Dr. Michelle Acorn, Provincial Chief Nursing Officer