

BACKGROUNDER ON ONTARIO'S REGISTERED NURSES' WORKFORCE

February 2011

Overview of the RN workforce, which is broken into RNs in the general class RN(GC)s and RNs in the extended class (“NPs”). Unless otherwise specified, “RN” refers to RN in the general class. RPNs refer to registered practical nurses. Employment figures are snapshots taken at registration renewal time, which takes place over several months around January 1st of the each year. The bulk of RNs renewals occur shortly before January 1, but they range from October into February or March, depending upon the year. Please note that cross-Canada comparisons are done using CIHI data, which give slightly different figures for Ontario than do CNO data (see notes at end).

Number of nurses registered to practise in Ontario as of January 4, 2011

- 114,676 RNs in general class
- 1,825 Nurse Practitioners
- 116,501 all RNs
- 38,086 RPNs
- 154,587 all Nurses

Number of nurses working in nursing in Ontario in 2010 (2009 in brackets):

- 93,916 (93,171) RNs in general class
- 1,486 (1,120) Nurse Practitioners
- 95,402 (94,291) all RNs
- 30,442 (28,800) RPNs
- 125,844 (123,091) All nurses

Net Gains in Nursing Employment

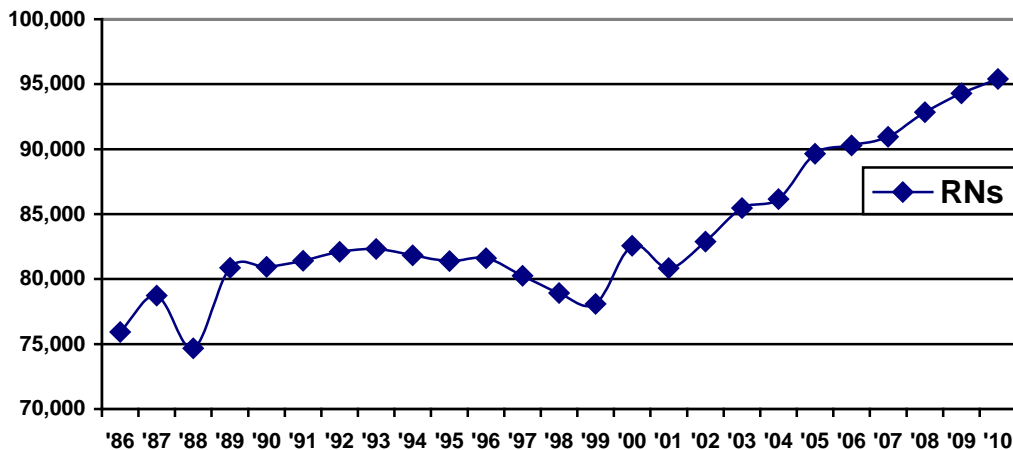
During the McGuinty government's first mandate (October 2003 to October 2007), it promised to create 8,000 nursing positions, and in the corresponding CNO data period (2004-2008), 9,669 nursing positions were created. Thus, we can say that the government met its commitment. In its second mandate, the government promised to create 9,000 additional nursing positions. Half way through the mandate, the numbers show that there has been a net gain of 5,579 positions, which represents more than half of the way to 9,000 positions. However, the growth in RN positions has been alarmingly slow, particularly for the year 2010.

1. Net Changes in Ontario Nursing Employment, 2004-2010						
	Nursing Employment			Net Gains in Nursing Employment		
	2004	2008	2010	2004-08	2008-10	2004-10
RN(GC)s	85,638	91,965	93,916	6,327	1,951	8,278
NPs	530	868	1,486	338	618	956
RPNs	24,428	27,432	30,442	3,004	3,010	6,014
All Nurses	110,596	120,265	125,844	9,669	5,579	15,248

Ontario Employment for RNs (General and Extended Classes)

The 1990s saw stagnation in the growth of the RN workforce, with falling employment in the latter 1990s. At the same time, the population continued to grow rapidly and age, so the need for nursing services was growing at the same time as RNs were being laid off (see Figure 2 below). The 1999 Nursing Task Force report outlined these problems, their implications for the profession and for client outcomes. Concerted efforts by successive governments since that time have reversed the downward trend in nursing employment. RN employment has been trending upwards since that time, as the above chart shows.

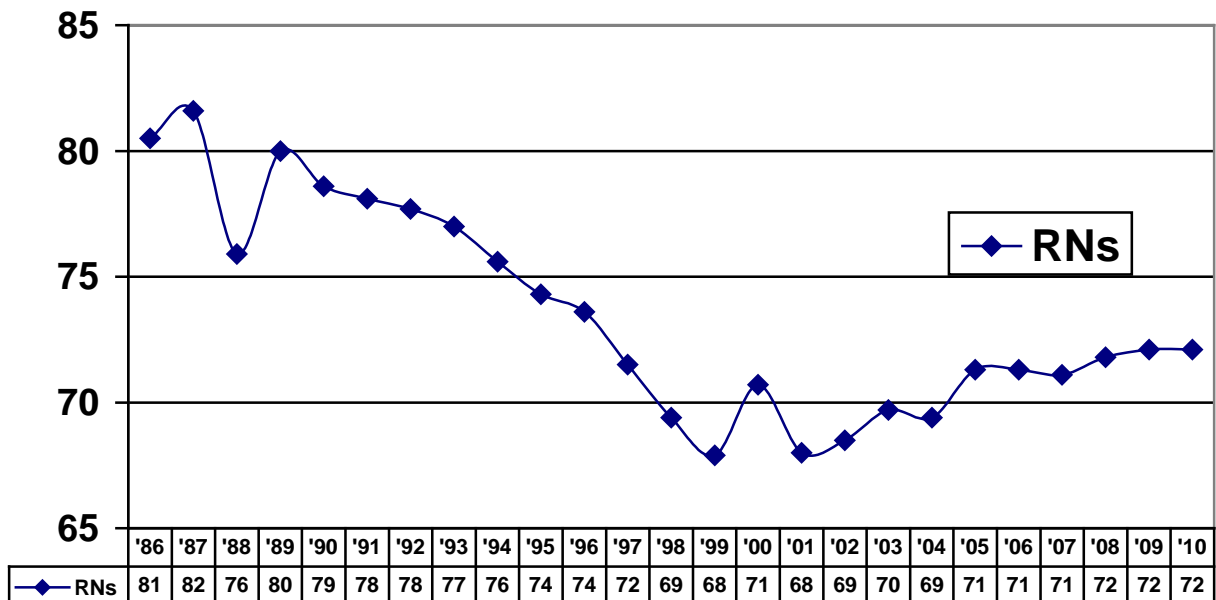
2. Trend in Ontario Employment: RN (General and Extended Classes)



Number of Working RNs/10,000 People (General and Extended Classes)

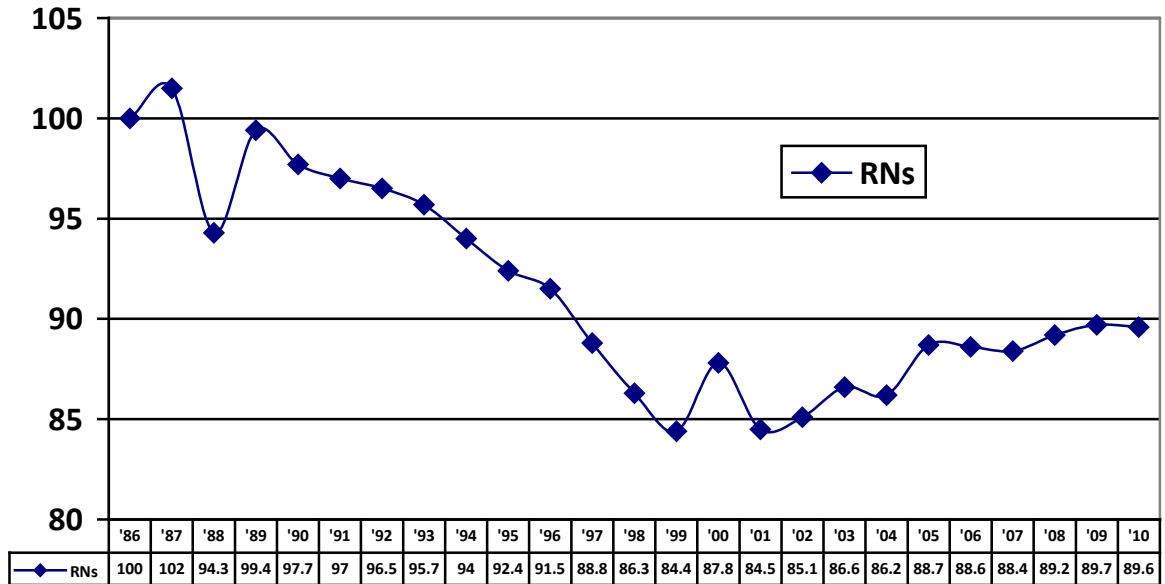
The plunging RN/population ratio provides a direct measure of access to nursing services. As the ratio falls, the number of people each RN must care for increases. Figure 3 shows the striking pattern from 1986 to 2010: the nursing workforce first plummeted from over 80 per 10,000 people to 68 in 1999 and again in 2001. After that, it trended up, reaching 72 by 2005. The sharp drop was caused by a declining nursing workforce and a rising population. The reversal was due to growth in RN employment that exceeded population growth. The bulk of the gain under the current government occurred during the first year of its first mandate, but the general trend remains upwards.

3. Ontario Trend in RNs/10,000 Population (General plus Extended Classes)



This provides a vivid statistical picture to explain the sharp rise in workloads reported by many RNs. In percentage terms, the ratio deteriorated to 16 per cent below 1986 levels in 1999 and 15 per cent below in 2001. It has recovered to about 10 per cent below now (see Figure 4). We have not recovered to ratios that prevailed in the 1980s, but the reversal is important, and the improvement is significant. There was a marginal deterioration in the RN/population ratio in 2010 (72.11 from 72.15 in 2009), as nursing employment took the brunt of spending restraints announced in October 2009 as part of the government's attempt to deal with a recession-driven deficit. RNAO continues to hear concerns about workloads, and the data show that ratios are considerably less favourable than they were in the late 1980s, when the provincial client base was younger and its health-care needs were lower. The index of the RN/population ratio in Figure 4 clearly shows the percentage deterioration since 1986.

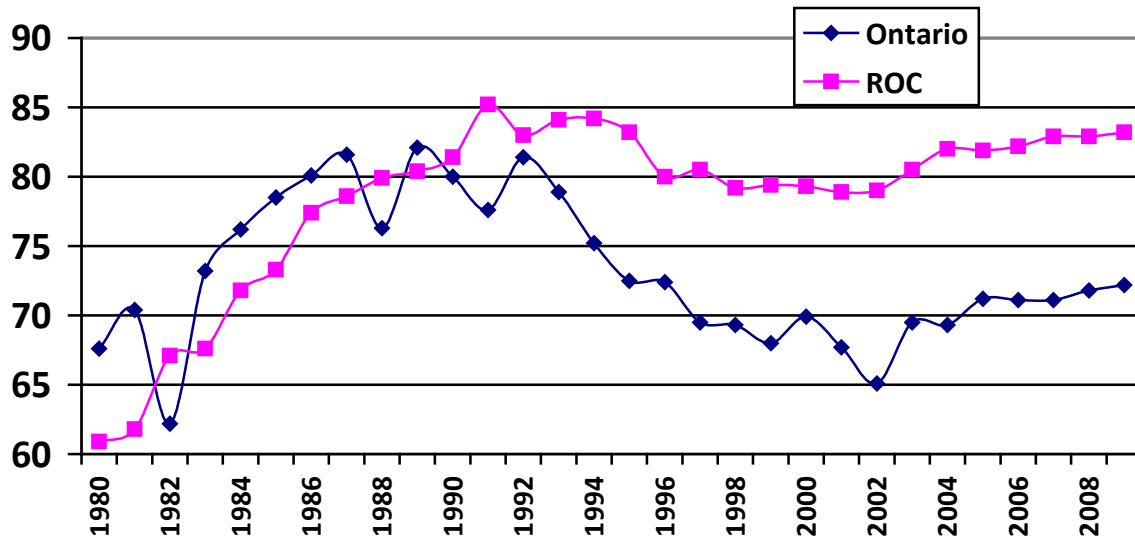
4. Index of Ontario RN-to-Population Ratio: 1986 = 100 (General and Extended Classes)



Trend in RN Employment (General plus Extended Classes) per 10,000 Population: Ontario vs. Rest of Canada

Even though Ontario's RN-to-population ratio has improved in recent years, the province consistently ranks below the rest of the country (ROC). Only British Columbia has the distinction of having a lower RN-to-population ratio than Ontario. As of 2009, Ontario had 72.2 RNs per 10,000 people, compared to 83.2 for the rest of the country.¹ This inevitably has significant workload implications. In order for Ontario to catch up with the rest of Canada, it would have to add 14,481 more RNs to its workforce, an increase of 15.4 per cent. In terms of direct care alone, 9,697 RNs would have to be added to catch up to the rest of the country (for data on access to direct RN care, see Figure 6).

5. RNs per 10,000 Population: Ontario vs. Rest of Canada (General and Extended Classes)



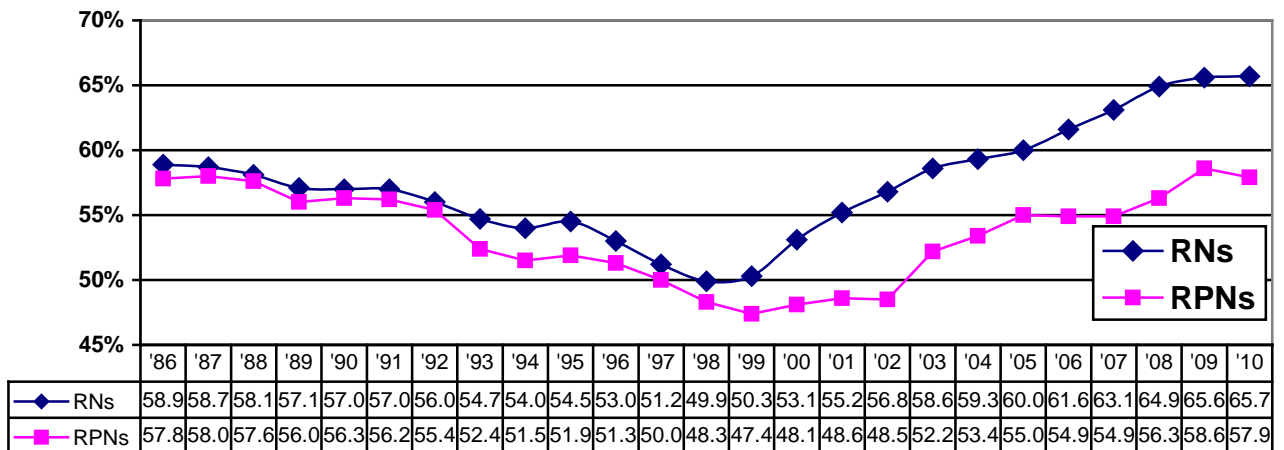
6. Interprovincial Comparison of RN Workforce per 10,000 Population Against Ontario (General and Extended Classes)

Jurisdiction	All RNs		Direct Care RNs
	1994	2009	2009
N.L.	90.1	114.5	101.7
P.E.I.	87.1	99.7	87.7
N.B.	101.4	105.0	93.9
N.S.	98.8	95.2	79.3
Man.	89.8	91.3	71.4
Sask.	84.1	88.5	78.2
Que.	85.1	84.4	72.0
Canada excluding Ontario	84.2	83.2	71.8
Alta.	80.7	79.7	70.3
Ont.	75.2	72.2	64.4
B.C.	75.0	69.4	61.7

Employment Status

The measured share of full-time employment for RNs in the general and extended class rose from 59.3 per cent to 65.7 per cent between 2004 and 2010. The trend has been very positive since 1998, when the share of full-time employment for RNs in the general class was below 50 per cent. RPN employment followed a similar pattern, bottoming out in 1999 at 47.4 per cent full-time, and rising to 58.9 per cent in 2009, before unfortunately dropping back to 57.9 per cent in 2010. In spite of poorer results in the past year, we are well on the way to achieving our objective of 70 per cent full-time for RNs and RPNs, as stated in RNAO's platformⁱⁱ and as committed to by the McGuinty government.

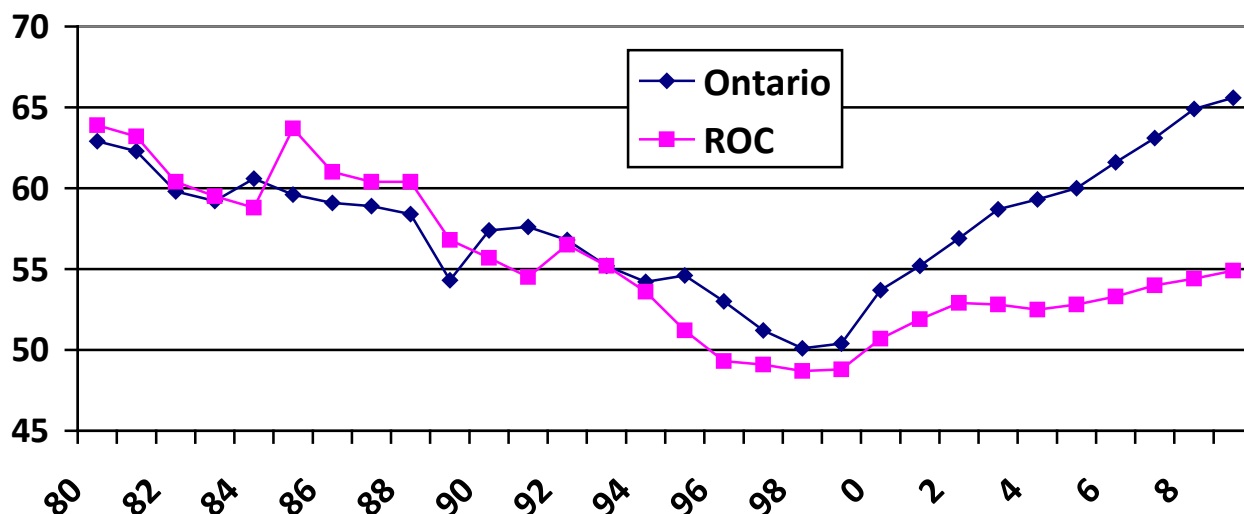
7. Full-time Share of Employment RNs (General and Extended Classes) and RPNs



Employment Status: Ontario vs. the Rest of Canada (RNs (General plus Extended Class))

Ontario and the rest of Canada experienced similar patterns with respect to shares of full-time employment over time. They both started well above 60 per cent in 1980, and followed a general trend downwards over time, bottoming out at or below 50 per cent by 1999. After that, both trended upwards, with Ontario rising much more quickly than the rest of the country. As of 2009, Ontario RNs were 65.6 per cent full-time, whereas in the rest of Canada, they were 54.9 per cent. It should be noted that Ontario's much higher full-time share means that its RN/population ratio understates its comparative access to RNs relative to the rest of the country. An estimate of RN FTEs per 10,000 population would put Ontario into eighth place in Canada, pulling ahead of Alberta.

8. Per Cent of RN (general and extended classes) that is Full-time: Ontario vs. Rest of Canada



There is considerable variation across the country in terms of shares of RN employment that is full-time. It ranges from 41.2 per cent in Alberta to 74.9 per cent in Newfoundland. Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are grouped in the mid-60s per cent range. The rest of the provinces and territories all fall in the 50s per cent range, except for Manitoba, which falls below 50 per cent. Newfoundland demonstrates that a goal of 70 per cent full-time employment is very achievable. Newfoundland also has the highest RN/population ratio, which suggests that its residents unequivocally have more access to RN services.

9. Per Cent Shares of RN (general and extended classes) Employment that is Full-time

Province/Territory	Full-time Share
N.L.	74.9%
P.E.I.	53.1%
N.S.	64.9%
N.B.	65.2%
Que.	56.9%
Ont.	65.6%
Man.	47.2%
Sask.	58.7%
Alta.	41.2%
B.C.	56.2%
Y.T.	50.7%
N.W.T./Nun	56.5%
Canada	58.7%

RN (General Class) Employment Sector in 2010

- 64.9 per cent (60,958) work in hospitals
- 19.0 per cent (17,838) work in the community
- 8.1 per cent (7,604) work in long-term care facilities
- 6.9 per cent (6,483) work in other places (such as education, government, physicians' offices etc)
- 1.1 per cent (1,033) not specified

Age of Nurses (2010):

RN (general class): 46.5

RN (extended class): 45.7

RPN: 44.2

The share of RNs under 30 and over 55 is rising. The rise in the share under 30 indicates that the effort to recruit and educate new RNs is already yielding tangible gains. The dramatic decrease in the share of RNs ages 30 to 49 points to the need to develop a mid-career nursing strategy to retain mid-career nurses. The rise in the share over 55 indicates that further recruitment and retention efforts are needed to ensure sufficient replacements for the many RNs who will retire over the next 10 years and meet the need for additional RNs.

10. Trends in Distribution of Age Groups among RNs (General Class)						
Age Group	1992		1999		2010	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
18 - 24	1,801	2.2	810	1.0	1,674	1.8
25 - 29	10,246	12.5	5,548	7.1	7,481	8.0
30 - 34	11,129	13.6	8,809	11.3	8,159	8.8
35 - 39	14,086	17.2	12,002	15.4	10,354	11.0
40 - 44	14,427	17.6	12,379	15.9	11,630	12.4
45 - 49	12,480	15.2	14,823	19.1	14,196	15.1
50 - 54	8,771	10.7	11,902	15.3	13,164	14.0
55 - 59	5,512	6.7	7,905	10.2	14,240	15.2
60 - 64	2,835	3.5	3,019	3.9	8,746	9.3
65+	806	1.0	597	0.8	4,266	4.5
Not Specified	12	0.0	1	0.0	6	0.0
Total:	82,105	100.0	77,795	100.0	93,916	100.0

Gender of Nurses in 2010

The gender ratio has been fairly stable over time, and heavily balanced toward females.

- RNs: 95.0 per cent female
- NPs: 95.6 per cent female
- RPNs: 93.4 per cent female

RN (general class) Employment by Region

9. LHIN Employment Regions 2005 to 2010						
LHIN Region	2005		2008		2010	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Erie St. Clair	4,252	4.8	4,480	4.9	4,419	4.7
South East	4,379	4.9	4,462	4.9	4,408	4.7
Champlain	9,637	10.8	10,114	11.0	10,448	11.1
North Simcoe Muskoka	2,971	3.3	3,096	3.4	3,131	3.3
North East	4,968	5.6	5,122	5.6	5,202	5.5
North West	2,344	2.6	2,343	2.6	2,449	2.6
South West	8,361	9.4	8,665	9.4	8,848	9.4
Waterloo Wellington	3,884	4.4	4,056	4.4	4,092	4.4
Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant	10,330	11.6	10,387	11.3	10,383	11.1
Central West	2,506	2.8	2,652	2.9	2,641	2.8
Mississauga Halton	5,104	5.7	5,573	6.1	5,615	6.0
Toronto Central	14,840	16.7	15,612	17.0	16,214	17.3
Central	6,596	7.4	7,082	7.7	7,523	8.0
Central East	7,704	8.7	7,748	8.4	7,745	8.3
Not Specified	1,178	1.3	573	0.6	798	0.9
Total	89,054	100	91,965	100	93,916	100

A Note on the Data

The Ontario nursing data come from the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO). The national RN data for interprovincial comparisons come from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) RN database. The population data used to help generate the RN/population ratio come from the CIHI National Health Expenditure data set. The calculations, analyses, conclusions, opinions and statements expressed herein are those of RNAO, and are not necessarily those of CNO or CIHI.

ⁱ Interprovincial comparisons are done using CIHI data, which differs slightly from CNO data because CIHI adjusts CNO and other provincial RN workforce numbers for RNs who work on both sides of the provincial border.

ⁱⁱ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2010). *Creating Vibrant Communities*.
[http://www.rnao.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3176&SiteNodeID=472&BL_ExpandID=.](http://www.rnao.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3176&SiteNodeID=472&BL_ExpandID=)