

Questionnaire: Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO)

Will your party expand the role of the RN to include prescribing medications and ordering diagnostic testing by 2015?

The Ontario Liberal Party recognizes the vital role nurses play in caring for our population. Nurses are the backbone of Ontario's healthcare system and enable timely access to quality care.

Ontario Liberals are proud that at the beginning of 2014, regulations came into force that permit Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses to dispense medications in certain circumstances.

This is a first step to continued expansion of the role of nurses in Ontario as we recognize there is room for growth. As announced to the RNAO, if given the opportunity, Ontario Liberals would expand the scope of practice of Registered Nurses to include prescribing a range of medications. We would also expand the scope of Nurse Practitioners to order the full range of X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, ultrasounds, and other diagnostic procedures.

We know that these changes would result in improved access to care for patients, and an appropriate use of the training held by RNs, RPNs, and NPs.

Will your party commit to expanding the role of the LHIN to encompass all sectors and phase out CCACs?

Ontario Liberals are proud of the progress we've made with our partners to transform our health care system. LHINs have played an important role in this transformation, improving health care delivery across the province. Throughout this year's all-party review of the *Local Health System Integration Act*, a strong consensus arose that LHINs have provided value to our system.

Our government recently announced an Expert Working Group on home and community care – led by a nurse – which was meant to explore questions about the future of home and community care. Importantly, this work would have taken as its starting point the way clients and caregivers experience the home care system.

The Expert Working Group was tasked with exploring the roles different organizations play in providing that care and offering advice on how government can improve the client and caregiver experience.

As we manage the health care system, we will keep our focus on Ontarians and patients. We will review Local Health Integration Networks, Community Care Access Centres, and Public Health Units to ensure that we are using financial, health, and human resources in the most effective way.

What will you do to narrow the RN access gap between Ontario and the rest of Canada?

Since taking office, Ontario Liberals have made great strides in stabilizing the nursing workforce in Ontario. Over 20,500 more nurses are working in Ontario since 2003, including 4,000 more nurses in 2013 alone. Ontario is one of the few jurisdictions in the world that offers a nursing graduate guarantee, from which more than 16,000 nurses have benefitted.

This strong commitment to nursing was necessary to rehabilitate a system that was left in disrepair with the previous Progressive Conservative government – having fired thousands of nurses.

Our Action Plan for Health Care commits to transforming our health care system into one that provides the right care, at the right time, in the right place. This is particularly important as Ontario's population ages, and nurses will continue to play a vital role in this transformation.

Ontario Liberals are committed to building on the successes that we have achieved together with the RNAO and the nursing community broadly. If given the opportunity, we would work with the RNAO and other system partners to achieve the optimal supply of nurses in Ontario.

To ensure that Ontarians receive access to quality care, will you commit to increasing the number of new NPs each year by a minimum of 250 NPs?

Ontario Liberals value the role of nurse practitioners within our health care system. Our government has made it a priority to expand access to the high-quality care NPs provide in acute and community-care settings.



In 2007, our government opened Canada's first Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic, leading to the successful expansion of 25 across the province, serving approximately 43,000 patients.

Earlier this year, our government announced that it would add 75 additional nurse practitioners in long-term care homes. This investment will improve access to primary care for long term care residents, reducing unnecessary hospital admissions and the incidence of other preventable conditions.

By the end of our mandate, we will guarantee that every Ontarian has access to a primary care provider, which we expect to be served in part by Nurse Practitioners. We will work with our partners to expand access to primary care, and develop targeted approaches for northern, rural and fast-growing communities.

Will your party support increasing the minimum wage immediately to \$14 per hour, and automatically index it to the rate of inflation thereafter, in order to bring workers 10 per cent above the Low Income Measure of Poverty?

Ontario Liberals increased the minimum wage 60 per cent from \$6.85 in 2003, to \$11 as of June 1st, making it the highest provincial minimum wage in the country. This important increase means that full time minimum wage earners will be above the poverty line after taxes and benefits - two more areas in which Ontario Liberals lead the way.

We appreciate the strong advocacy of the RNAO and others on this and other poverty issues, and regret that the New Democrats were silent on the minimum wage throughout the entire process when they had an opportunity to make a real difference; while the PCs make clear they would roll back gains made by workers over the years throughout our economy, the New Democrats sit back.

We further proposed to depoliticize the minimum wage increase process by linking annual increases to increases in the Consumer Price Index. This means that Ontario's working families will see their wages indexed to the cost of living, and the minimum wage will remain above the poverty line for full time workers. It is important to note that this inflationary increase would have begun next year, had the NDP not forced an election.

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Our plan for the minimum wage would have provided crucial security to Ontario's most vulnerable workers, and we will return to this and many other measures to protect them, if re-elected.

Will your party transform the social assistance system so that the income of people receiving Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) reflects the actual cost of living, including the cost of shelter, energy, and nutritious food?

Our party has made a major commitment to transforming social assistance guided by the work of the Commission to Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, the first comprehensive review of social assistance in the province in 20 years. Our ongoing reform of social assistance is guided by four key objectives:

- Motivate and support people to be successful in the workforce
- Provide adequate assistance
- Deliver modern, responsive services
- Ensure confidence in the system.

Our 2014-15 budget proposed to increase our investment in social assistance by continuing to lift the lowest rates and increasing support for individuals with disabilities.

It also planned to simplify employment benefits to provide greater flexibility to meet individual needs so that we can remove barriers to employment and provide greater support.

Taken together, the first two years of social assistance reform would mean:

- People receiving social assistance get more support.
- Increases are targeted to those receiving the lowest rates, particularly singles without children receiving Ontario Works. They would get a lift of \$50 a month in basic support, taking us halfway to the \$100 lift recommended by the Commission and many advocates.

- All social assistance clients will have access to a simple, flexible employment benefit that helps with the costs associated with entering the workforce, such as tools, training, and uniforms.
- People can earn more without reducing their assistance and can get help from Ontario Works without spending down all of their assets. These changes introduced in the 2013 budget allow earnings of up to \$200 a month with no reduction, and allow singles receiving Ontario Works to retain savings up to \$2500.

We are proud of the progress we have made and we look forward to continuing to engage with clients, partners and other stakeholders. Our partners will help us in implementing our most recent changes and further developing our ongoing plan for reform.

In particular, we have committed to work with partners in developing a method of assessing adequacy for rates and determining how best to support transition into employment where possible.

The 2014 budget further committed to:

Expanding the Ontario Child Benefit:

Ontario provides targeted support for low- to moderate-income families through the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). This benefit, along with other provincial and federal tax and benefit programs, enhances the incomes of low- to moderate-income families and helps provide a more stable income base for those who may experience uncertain earnings.

In July 2014, we will increase the maximum annual benefit to \$1,310 per child, enhancing the incomes of half a million families. We will also peg both the rate and the eligibility to the Ontario CPI.

The government is proposing to tie future increases to the OCB to inflation in Ontario, starting in July 2015, so that the value of the OCB keeps pace with inflation.

Expanding Low-Income Health Benefits:

Beginning in April 2014, the eligibility of the Healthy Smiles Ontario program, which provides dental services to children in low-income working families, is being expanded to give 70,000 more children access to dental services. We will further integrate existing publicly funded dental programs for children into the Healthy Smiles Ontario program to provide seamless enrolment and streamlined administration.

We are also proposing to further expand access to health benefits for children in low-income families, starting with prescription drugs, vision care, mental health services, and assistive devices. By expanding eligibility to approximately 500,000 children, these benefits and services would further improve health outcomes for low-income children and help their families remain in employment.

Expanding the Student Nutrition Program:

We are also expanding the existing Student Nutrition Program by investing \$58 million over 5 years, resulting in a total annual investment of \$32 million by 2016–17. This new investment would fund 340 new breakfast programs for an additional 56,000 children in higher-needs elementary and secondary schools, including on-reserve First Nation schools.

Will you increase monthly payments to single adults receiving OW by \$100; Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) payments to \$1310/child/year in July 2014, fully indexed to inflation; and increase OCB by \$100 annually?

Ontario Liberals are committed to a strong, reliable social assistance system. As noted above, we are halfway to the goal of increasing monthly payments to single adults receiving Ontario Works by \$100 and we are committed to continued increases.

Ontario Liberals are also the only party fully committed to reducing poverty. We were the first government to introduce a Poverty Reduction Strategy, which has helped to lift 47,000 children out of poverty. Within our first 60 days in office, we will release our second five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Our 2014 Budget proposed increasing the OCB per child to \$1,310 beginning in July, 2014. We also proposed indexing both the OCB rate and the eligibility threshold, effective July 2015, safeguarding the OCB from erosion due to inflation.

These changes mean that more families would have more money, each year, improving their lives and the health of the economy.

Our Budget included all of these commitments to poverty reduction; and was called the most progressive Budget in decades. The NDP have put all of this at risk, choosing to defeat a budget that invests in people through supports like social assistance and the OCB.

Will your party increase access to safe shelter and stimulate job creation by building more affordable and supportive housing and by bringing aging housing stock up to standard? Will your party make permanent the 2013 transitional funding of \$42 million for the municipal Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative?

Ontario Liberals know that affordable and secure housing provides the stability needed to raise families and build futures. That is why we have invested more toward housing than any previous government –during both prosperous and lean economic times. To date, we have committed nearly \$3 billion for repairs, new construction and rent supplements. Through our investments, we have built and repaired more than 280,000 units and provided rental and down-payment assistance to over 81,000 households in need.

Our Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, a key component of our Poverty Reduction Strategy, is the first of its kind in Ontario. It addresses the need for affordable housing and homelessness prevention. Recently, we created the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), a 100 per cent provincially funded investment.

If re-elected, we are committed to enhancing annual funding for the CHPI by \$42 million starting in 2014-15, to a total of \$294 million. By consolidating five siloed homelessness-related programs into one program, we have provided greater flexibility to Service Managers to address local needs.

Another Key component of the Long Term Affordable Housing strategy is the jointly funded federal-provincial Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program. Through the IAH program, low-income households can access new affordable rental housing, receive down payment assistance to own an affordable home, and repair and modify their home to improve their living conditions and foster independent living. Prior to the election, Ontario was finalizing an agreement with the federal government to extend the IAH program for a further five years. The Ontario government will contribute \$80.1 million annually for five years to this program.

To help foster partnerships with local communities, the government is also investing \$50 million over five years to create a new poverty reduction fund targeted at supporting local solutions to poverty.

Our road to success has not been easy. Ontario's housing supply was put into a catastrophic state by the previous PC government. When in power, the PCs cancelled the creation of 17,000 new units following their first Cabinet meeting in 1995 – and downloaded the entire housing portfolio onto the backs of local governments.

They provided no funds to repair an aging system or to meet future demands. Meanwhile, the NDP does not have a concrete housing plan and has time and time again stood against our strategic investments that have helped increase our housing stock in Ontario.

Ontario Liberals have always been committed to ensuring that Ontario families have safe and affordable housing options. We are proud of this commitment and if re-elected, we will continue to build upon our track record of success to meet the affordable housing needs of Ontario.

However, we cannot go it alone. Ensuring that Ontario families have a safe, secure and affordable place to call home requires strong partnerships from all orders of government. Although we welcome the federal government's commitment to extend funding in the short-term, the fact remains that its contribution to affordable housing will evaporate over the next 20 years.

We continue to urge municipalities, other provinces, and other parties, to join us in asking the federal government to commit to stable and permanent funding for affordable housing. Working together with our housing partners and other levels of government, we will continue shifting Ontarians out of poverty.

What will you do to reduce people's exposure to toxics? What will you do to ensure that people have the right to know about the existence of toxics in the environment, in their homes, in their workplaces, and in consumer products?

Ontario Liberals are the only party with the track record and commitment to reduce toxic substances in the environment, reduce people's exposure to toxins, and ensure that people have the right to know about toxins in the environment. The Toxics Reduction Act, passed by our government in 2009, is now beginning to have an impact on the use of toxic substances in products, processes and workplaces.

The purpose of the Act is to prevent toxic pollution and protect human health by reducing the use and creation of toxic substances. In the first round Toxic Reduction Act of reporting, 40 per cent of industrial operations said that when they reviewed their operations, as called for in the Act, they found ways to reduce or eliminate the use of one or more toxic substances.

This approach has much promise. Economic efficiencies of not using toxins in particular operations are revealed to manufacturers as they continue to scrutinize their processes – now and in the future – as required by the Act.

The Liberal government has brought in the cosmetic pesticide ban, which prohibits the use of toxic substances for mere cosmetic purposes. Much of this toxic reduction occurs in densely populated areas, and protects large populations from gratuitous exposure to toxic substances. Testing of waterways that flow through urban areas has shown an 80 per cent reduction in pesticide residues – demonstrating the ban's effectiveness.

We have completed the shutdown of the province's five coal-fired electricity generating stations. These plants had emitted neurotoxins such as mercury, and cancer-causing heavy metals into the air, to be breathed, and to contaminate land and waterbodies.



Our government recently upgraded the Drive Clean program, so it keeps even more smog-causing substances out of the environment. Automobile emissions also contain chemicals known to cause cancer, such as benzene.

Drive Clean alone reduces the amount of benzene going into the environment province-wide by 12 per cent. At least one of our opponents has pledged to abolish Drive Clean. We will continue to bring down costs for Drive Clean and ensure it provides ongoing benefits to human health and the environment.

Ontario Liberals are committed to continuing to remove large amounts (more than one-third) of toxic substances from automobile exhaust – a major source of pollution. Ontario Liberals have taken effective steps to make toxic use transparent to the public.

The raw data reported by manufacturers under the Toxics Reduction Act are available online, and the public may view toxics information chemical-by-chemical and facility-by-facility. The results of pesticide residue testing in urban streams, and regular reports about Drive Clean are posted on the MOE website for public scrutiny. We have also published in popular magazines advice to households on how to reduce their families' exposure to toxic substances.

As a new commitment, we will work with business and industry to find ways to provide Ontarians with better information about chemicals linked with cancer, and identify ways to support industry to ensure children's products on Ontario shelves are as safe as products in the US and European Union.

Anyone examining the approaches of the three main political parties will find that the Liberal Party is the only one with a credible commitment to reducing people's exposure to toxins in Ontario, and to public awareness of toxins.

Will your party safeguard Medicare by prohibiting experiments in medical tourism?

Like the RNAO, Ontario Liberals are fully committed to a publicly-funded health care system in Ontario. That is why we passed the *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act*, which reaffirms Ontario's commitment to the principles of universality, portability and accessibility as articulated within the *Canada Health Act*.

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The goal of our Action Plan for Health Care is to ensure the sustainability of our health care system, and it is important for Ontarians to have full confidence that hospitals prioritize their care. Ultimately, our party is committed to ensuring that public dollars are only used for Ontario patients, and that Ontario patients always come first.

Will you work to promote pharmacare at the national level through the Council of the Federation to expand medicare to include pharmacare, and will you also work to bring pharmacare to Ontario, irrespective of whether the federal government proceeds to introduce a national pharmacare plan?

Ontario Liberals have a strong track record of working with our provincial and territorial counterparts to increase the availability of therapies for Ontarians, while maximizing the value of taxpayer dollars. For example, to date, the Pan-Canadian Pricing Alliance has completed over 30 negotiations, creating \$80M in drug expenditure savings nation-wide.

Ontario Liberals believe that the national level would be the most appropriate one at which to create a national pharmacare program. However, it is clear that the federal government has an interest only in retreating from health care in Canada. Ontario Liberals believe that this is not in the best interest of Ontarians or Canadians.

We will continue to push the federal government to come to the table so that we can provide affordable access to medication for all Ontarians, building on the success of the Ontario Drug Benefit and other programs.

In our 2014 Budget, *Building Opportunity, Securing Our Future*, our government committed to establishing a low-income health benefit for children which would cover drugs, vision care, dental care, assistive devices and mental health services. This is a major step forward in providing some of the most vulnerable in our society with the resources they need to live healthy, productive lives.

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Do you support creation of a dedicated fund with new revenue sources to pay for a substantial expansion of transit and active transportation? Do you support devotion of a kick-start fund for an immediate, visible improvement in transit, as recommended in the Golden panel report?

Yes. The 2014-15 Liberal Budget commits to a \$29 billion dedicated transit fund which identified new revenue sources to continue our work on the largest transit expansion initiative in Ontario's history.

Key to the expansion is an immediate start to electrifying the GO rail system to deliver 15-minute service on all GO trains, making it easier and more cost-effective for residents to take transit across the GTHA and taking more car trips off our roads. An electrified GO train system has the added benefit of taking diesel trains off the tracks, resulting in significant health and environmental benefits for our communities.

The Liberal "Big Move" plan includes significant investments in municipal and regional transit projects, for example, Brampton's Zum system and the Durham Pulse bus lines. Liberals will continue to invest in municipal transit initiatives.

The GTHA Chief Medical Officers of Health state that the annual costs of physical inactivity and obesity in the GTHA are now \$4 billion, including \$1.4 billion in direct medical costs.

In their words, implementing Metrolinx's Big Move with modest increases in walking and cycling would increase physical activity and reduce traffic emissions, "preventing over 330 premature deaths per year (\$2.2 billion), over 1,000 cases of diabetes per year, and over 90 hospitalizations a year. Numerous additional health benefits would also be expected."

Liberals are the first - and only party - to make active transportation a central focus of transit and transportation planning. Liberals introduced Ontario's first cycling strategy, #CycleON, in August, 2013. Within the first set of priorities, Liberals committed to "partner with municipalities to implement complete streets policies and develop cycling or active transportation plans as applicable.

What will you do to ensure the fiscal capacity to deliver all essential health, health care, social and environmental services? Will you shift revenue to more efficient sources that encourage environmental and responsibility (such as environment levies like carbon taxes)? Will you work with the federal government to research the scope of tax evasion losses, and then put in resources to recover the lost revenues?

The Ontario Liberal Party is committed to balance the budget by 2017–18 in a fair and responsible way. Like the RNAO, the Ontario Liberal Party rejects the reckless tax cuts proposed by both the PCs and the NDP.

It is impossible to provide high-quality public services while cutting taxes. PC and NDP claims that taxes can be cut while public services are preserved or expanded are unrealistic and impractical.

The Ontario Liberal Party has a practical and realistic plan to balance the budget while continuing to invest in jobs and priority services. Our plan includes both targeted tax increases and a careful review of spending to determine which programs should be enhanced or reduced, while transforming public services to increase efficiencies and improve outcomes.

The Ontario Liberal Party is also committed to making investments in the Ontario economy to create jobs, increase opportunity and support long-term prosperity, while continuing to manage the Province's finances responsibly.

We would continue to make important decisions to control costs while supporting key public services to, for example, reduce health care wait times and improve student achievement. These outcomes speak to spending effectively in areas that have the greatest benefit to Ontarians, both now and in the future

These decisions would enable Ontario's economy to take full advantage of the expected return of stronger global economic growth. This will create the new jobs necessary to generate revenue to help support eliminating the deficit.

Those same choices will put Ontario on a path to begin to pay down the debt to reduce Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio to its pre-recession level of 27 per cent.

Our measures to balance the budget and raise revenues include:

- A proposed Personal Income Tax increase on taxable incomes above \$150,000, affecting the top two per cent of Ontario tax filers.
- Legislative amendments that would improve the fairness of dividend tax credits.
- To support public transit, transportation infrastructure and other priority projects.
- A proposed change to better target the small business deduction; and
- A proposed increase to the tax rate on aviation fuel.
- An increase to the tobacco tax rate from 12.350 cents to 13.975 cents per cigarette and per gram of other tobacco products.
- Enhanced compliance measures to preserve the integrity of the tax administration system.
- An expenditure review to find greater efficiencies.
- Moving forward to unlock value from its interest in shares in General Motors and certain Provincial real estate assets to reinvest in public infrastructure, and establishing the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets to assess options for other Provincial assets, with priority given to maximizing the annual revenues.

With respect to ensuring compliance with our tax system, an Ontario Liberal government would work both independently and with the federal government to enhance revenue integrity. Measures include:

- An action plan focused on addressing illegal activities in high-risk sectors. The approach would focus on increasing public awareness, coordinating

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enforcement activities and working with industry partners to encourage businesses to operate in accordance with the Province's laws

- Working with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) on enhancing compliance activities to address the underground economy (as part of a multi-year agreement negotiated in 2013, the CRA has been able to generate more than \$60 million in additional tax revenues for Ontario in 2013–14).
- Strengthening tobacco enforcement, by proceeding with the implementation of the raw leaf oversight system effective January 1, 2015 and introducing amendments to the *Tobacco Tax Act* that would increase fines for offences related to marked tobacco products, impound vehicles used to transport illegal tobacco and strengthen other enforcement measures.
- Tender Contract Tax Compliance initiative launched in February 2014, that requires businesses engaged in procurement activity with the Ontario government to demonstrate (via certification of tax compliance) that they are compliant with their provincial tax obligations prior to being awarded government contracts.
- Supporting the various initiatives undertaken by the federal government, including those in the 2014 federal budget, to address aggressive international tax planning. An Ontario Liberal government would introduce legislative amendments to the *Taxation Act, 2007*, requiring corporations in Ontario to disclose aggressive tax avoidance transactions to the federal Minister of National Revenue, who administers Ontario's corporate taxes (through the multi-year enhanced compliance agreement signed with the CRA last year to address aggressive international tax planning, Ontario received increased revenues of more than \$150 million in 2013–14).
- Directing additional resources to its Flexible and Integrated Risk System (FAIRS) program to identify high-risk audit cases across several tax statutes, expected to generate an additional \$10 million in tax revenue annually (cumulatively, the new compliance activities introduced over the past three years now contribute an additional \$75 million annually in tax revenues).