

BACKGROUNDER ON ONTARIO'S REGISTERED NURSE WORKFORCE

February 2012

This backgrounder provides an overview of Ontario's Registered Nurse (RN) workforce, which is broken into RNs in the general class (RN(GC)s) and RNs in the extended class (nurse practitioners or "NPs"). Unless otherwise specified, "RN" refers to both groups. 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 each given year. Please note that cross-Canada comparisons are done using data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), which give slightly different figures for Ontario than CNO data (see notes at end). The data in this backgrounder are the latest available as of February 19, 2012.

Number of nurses registered to practise in Ontario as of February 2, 2012 (January 4, 2011 and change in brackets):

- RNs in general class: 114,332 (114,676; a decrease of 344)
- Nurse Practitioners: 2,064 (1,825; an increase of 239)
- All RNs (= RN(GC)s + NPs) 116,396 (116,501; a decrease of 105)
- RPNs 40,221 (38,086; an increase of 2,135)
- All Nurses (= All RNs + RPNs) 156,617 (154,587; an increase of 2,030)

Number of nurses working in nursing in Ontario in 2011 (2010 and change in brackets):

- RNs in general class: 93,415 (93,916; a decrease of 501)
- Nurse Practitioners 1,666 (1,486; an increase of 180)
- All RNs 95,081 (95,402; a decrease of 321)
- RPNs 31,492 (30,442; an increase of 1,050)
- All nurses 126,573 (125,844; an increase of 729)

Net Gains in Nursing Employment

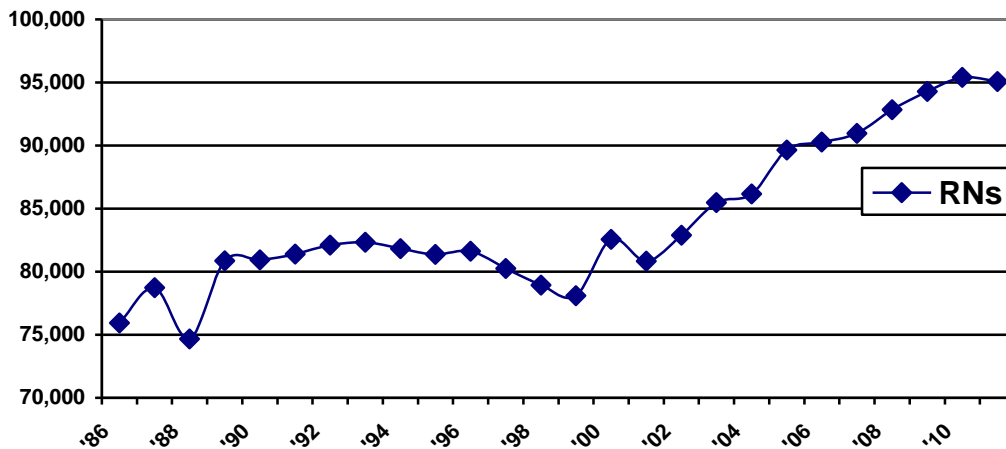
During the McGuinty government's first mandate (October 2003 to October 2007), it promised to create 8,000 nursing positions, and in the corresponding CNO data period (2004-2008), 9,669 nursing positions were created. Thus, we can say that the government met its commitment. In its second mandate, the government promised to create 9,000 additional nursing positions. According to latest available CNO data, the government was behind in its promise: three quarters of the way through the mandate, the numbers show that there has been a net gain of 6,308 positions, which was less than three quarters of the promised 9,000 positions. More alarmingly, nursing gains have slowed dramatically in the last two years, and RN employment actually dropped in the last year, January 2010 to January 2011

1. Net Changes in Ontario Nursing Employment, 2004-2011						
	Nursing Employment			Net Gains in Nursing Employment		
	2004	2008	2011	2004-08	2008-11	2004-11
RN(GC)s	85,638	91,965	93,415	6,327	1,450	7,777
NPs	530	868	1,666	338	798	1,136
RPNs	24,428	27,432	31,492	3,004	4,060	7,064
All Nurses	110,596	120,265	126,573	9,669	6,308	15,977

Ontario Employment for RNs (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners)

The 1990s saw stagnation in the growth of the RN workforce, with falling employment in the latter 1990s. At the same time, the population of Ontario 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, but it has dropped slightly in the past year. RN(GC)s lost 501 positions while NPs gained 180, for a net loss of 321 RN positions in the period January 2010 to January 2011.

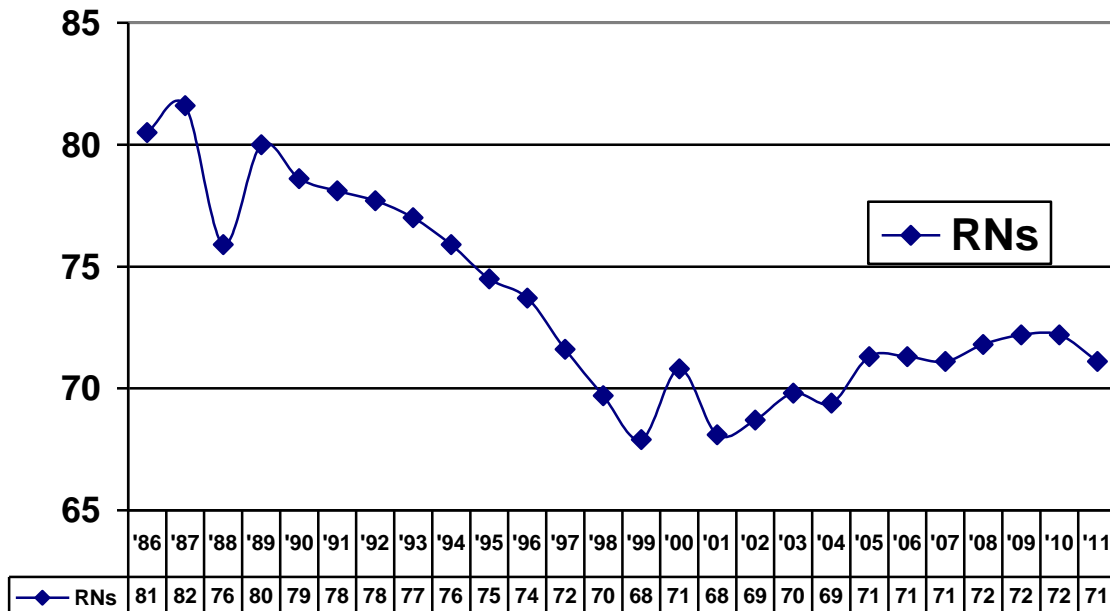
2. Trend in Ontario Employment: RN (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners)



Number of Working RNs/10,000 People (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners)

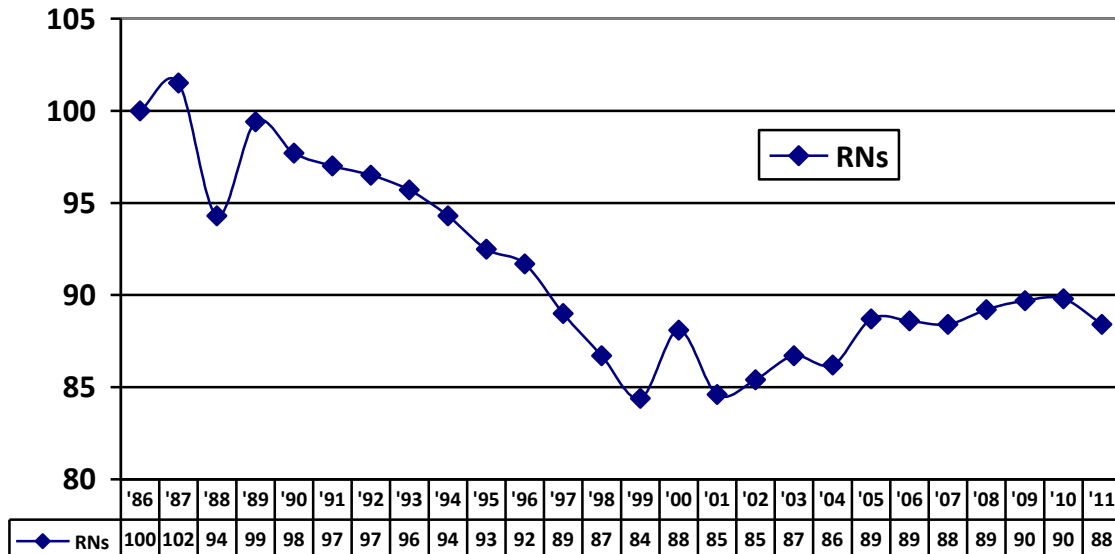
The plunging RN/population ratio provides a direct measure of access to nursing services. As the ratio falls, the number of people each RN must care for increases. Figure 3 shows the striking pattern from 1986 to 2010: the nursing workforce first plummeted from over 80 per 10,000 people to 68 in 1999 and again in 2001. After that, it trended up, reaching 72 by 2008. 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 remained upwards until the drop in 2011.

3. Ontario Trend in RNs/10,000 Population (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners)



This chart 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 recovered to about 10 per cent below by 2009, but deteriorated to 12 per cent below in 2011 (see Figure 4). We have not recovered to ratios that prevailed in the 1980s, but the reversal is important, and the improvement is significant. The deterioration in the RN/population ratio in the last two years follows the hit nursing took in spending restraints announced in October 2008 as part of the government's attempt to deal with a recession-driven deficit.¹ 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.

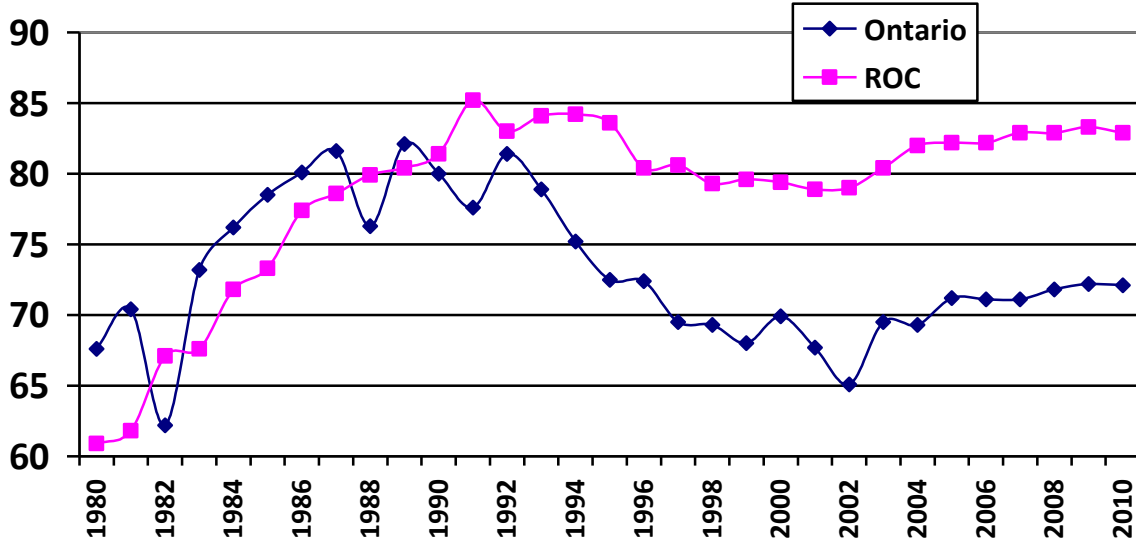
4. Index of Ontario RN-to-Population Ratio: 1986 = 100 (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners)



Trend in RN Employment (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners) 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 2010, Ontario had 72.1 RNs per 10,000 people, compared to 82.9 for the rest of the country.² This inevitably has significant workload implications. In order for Ontario to catch up with the rest of Canada, it would have to add 14,383 more RNs to its workforce, an increase of 15.1 per cent. In terms of direct care alone, 8,607 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 Class plus Nurse Practitioners)

Jurisdiction	All RNs		Direct Care RNs
	1994	2010	2010
N.L.	90.1	118.0	103.8
P.E.I.	87.1	103.5	90.1
N.B.	101.4	107.8	96.9
N.S.	98.8	97.3	85.1
Man.	89.8	94.1	77.7
Sask.	84.1	91.2	80.8
Que.	85.1	83.9	71.8
Canada excluding Ontario	84.2	82.9	71.2
Alta.	80.7	77.1	69.8
Ont.	75.2	72.1	64.7
B.C.	75.0	68.2	55.2

Figure 7 shows the number of NPs per 100,000 population for 2005 to 2010. In 2010, Ontario had 59.6 per cent of all the NPs in Canada, and we know that the number of NPs continues to grow quickly in Ontario. It is not surprising that Ontario has substantially more NPs per 100,000 population (11.2) than Canada as a whole (5.9; excluding Ontario, the ratio would be 4.8). However two provinces have higher ratios: Newfoundland (18.8), and Saskatchewan (11.7). Note that Newfoundland also has the highest RN-to-population ratio of the provinces as well. Nunavut/Northwest Territories have a much higher ratio still: 72.8. We are unable to calculate ratios for some of the provinces due to data suppression for privacy reasons.

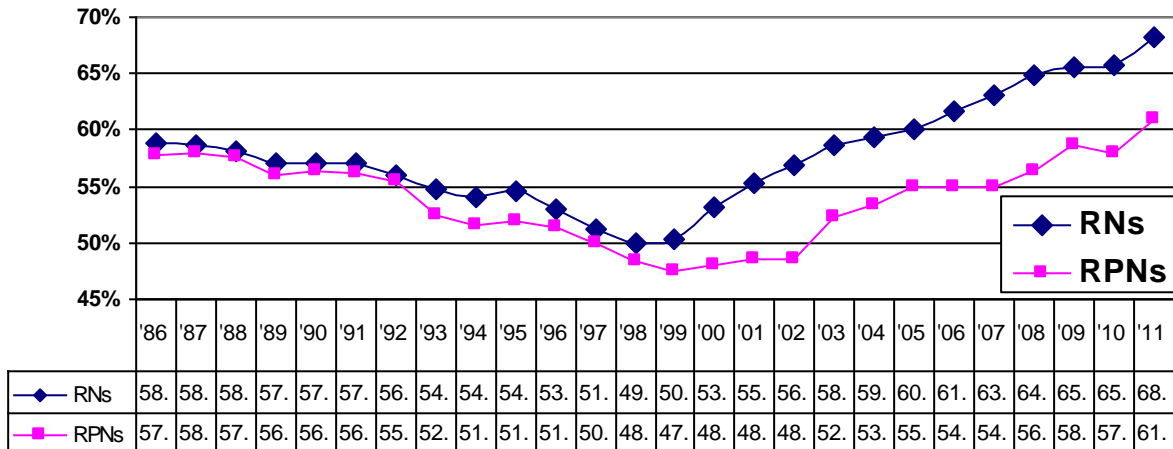
7. Interprovincial Comparison of NPs/100,000 Population						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
N.L.	12.84	17.44	18.95	19.55	18.47	18.83
P.E.I.	*	*	*	*	*	*
N.S.	3.95	6.50	7.69	8.54	9.06	11.14
N.B.	2.53	3.22	3.89	6.56	7.34	9.18
Que.	*	0.22	0.22	0.37	0.49	0.81
Ont.	4.70	5.05	5.71	6.74	8.60	11.22
Man.	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sask.	7.47	8.87	9.70	9.67	10.78	11.67
Alta.	3.96	4.56	5.01	5.84	6.81	7.07
B.C.	*	*	1.16	2.01	2.67	2.85
Y.T.	*	*	*	*	*	*
N.W.T./Nun.	26.12	21.62	56.14	69.02	60.83	72.75
Canada	2.92	3.47	4.08	4.88	5.90	7.29

* indicates small cell size or data suppressed to meet CIHI privacy standards

Working Status

The measured share of full-time employment for RNs in the general class plus nurse practitioners rose from 59.3 per cent to 68.2 per cent between 2004 and 2011. 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 hit a new high of 61.0 per cent in 2011. Ontario is well on the way to achieving the objective of 70 per cent full-time for RNs and RPNs, as stated in RNAO's platform³ and as committed to by the McGuinty government.

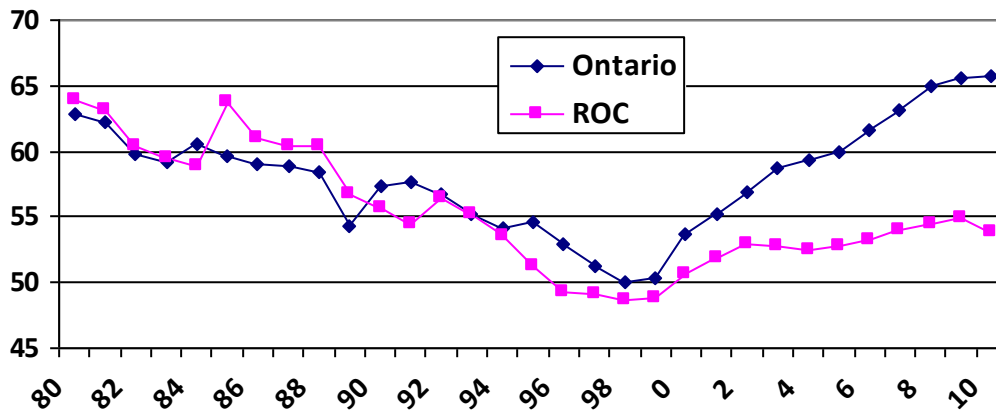
8. Full-time Share of Employment RNs (General and Extended Classes) and RPNs



Working 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 2010, Ontario RNs were 65.8 per cent full-time, whereas in the rest of Canada, they were 53.8 per cent. The ratio in the rest of the country deteriorated in 2010, so Ontario and the rest of the country are diverging. 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 full-time equivalents per 10,000 population would put Ontario in eighth place in Canada, ahead of Alberta.

9. 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 40.4 per cent in Alberta to 74.7 per cent in Newfoundland. Joining Ontario in the 60 per cent range were Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. Three western provinces had less than 50 per cent full time: Alberta, Manitoba (46.5 per cent) and BC (49.9 per cent). The rest of the provinces and territories all fall in the 50 per cent range. 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.

10. Per cent Shares of RN (General Class plus Nurse Practitioners) Employment that is Full-time, 2010	
Province/Territory	Full-time Share
N.L.	74.7%
P.E.I.	50.5%
N.S.	65.4%
N.B.	64.5%
Que.	56.9%
Ont.	65.8%
Man.	46.5%
Sask.	60.3%
Alta.	40.4%
B.C.	49.9%
Y.T.	56.4%
N.W.T./Nun	58.0%
Canada	53.8%

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
Nurse Practitioner: 45.7
RPN: 44.2

The share of RNs (general class) 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 (general class) 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 ten years and meet the need for additional RNs.

11. 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

12. 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.

¹ The Government anticipated \$50 million in savings for 2008-9 alone by delaying the completion of the promise to hire 9,000 more nurses. Ontario Ministry of Finance. (2008). *Managing Expenditures*. Retrieved February 14, 2012 from <http://news.ontario.ca/mof/en/2008/10/managing-expenditures.html>.

² 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.

³ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2010). *Creating Vibrant Communities*. http://www.rnao.org/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=3176&SiteNodeID=472&BL_ExpandID=.