

Decent Work for Better Health

Can we count on your support to improve the health of workers by supporting labour laws that provide all workers, regardless of size of their employer, with access to 10 days of unpaid personal emergency leave?

Would you also support changes that would give all workers the chance to accrue one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked (about seven paid sick days per year for a full-time employee)?

Do you support raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour with no exemptions regarding age or sector?

The province of Ontario is to be credited for its current examination of the province's outdated employment and labour laws through the Changing Workplaces Review.¹ With precarious employment as the "new norm" causing social stress across the income spectrum,² it is critical that employment and labour standards be strengthened and enforced. RNOA welcomed the July 27, 2016 release of the *Interim Report of the Changing Workplaces Review*, however, more work needs to be done.

Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has an employer-size (50+) eligibility threshold for personal emergency leave (PEL). For basic fairness, this arbitrary exemption should be removed so that all employees can have equitable access to unpaid PEL to deal with personal illness, injury or health emergency, death, or urgent matters concerning an employee's family.³

In addition to modernizing PEL by updating the *Employment Standards Act*, all employees should be able to accrue a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked, up to 52 hours of paid sick time per year (unless, of course, the employer selects a higher limit). This would work out to about seven paid sick days per year for a full-time employee. This would support the health of individual workers and their families, improve productivity, and lessen transmission of communicable diseases in public spaces that occurs when workers feel compelled to show up for work despite the fact they are contagious.⁴

Besides ensuring fair legislation and enforcement of labour standards, an immediate increase of the minimum wage to \$15 per hour would strengthen the possibility that good jobs can be a pathway out of poverty.⁵ The current minimum is \$11.40, which is about 15 per cent below the Low Income Measure of poverty for a single individual. For perspective, to make basic ends

meet, a living wage⁶ for two working parents with two children was estimated to be \$18.52 per hour in Toronto (2015).⁷ The minimum wage must apply equally without exemptions by age or sector. Ontario is the only jurisdiction that permits employers to pay a lower minimum wage to young workers.⁸ With the exception of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, no other jurisdiction allows those who serve liquor to be paid a lower wage.⁹

References:

¹Ministry of Labour (2015). *The Changing Workplaces Review*. Toronto: Author.
<http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/about/workplace/>.

²Mojtehdzadeh, S. (2015). Precarious work is now the new norm, United Way report says. *Toronto Star*, May 21, 2015. <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/05/21/precarious-work-is-now-the-new-norm-united-way-report-says.html>.

³Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2016). *RNAO submission on personal emergency leave*. Toronto: Author. August 31. <http://rnao.ca/policy/submissions/letter-personal-emergency-leave>.

⁴Grinspun, D. (2016). Paid sick days for a fairer and healthier Ontario. *Hamilton Spectator*, February 3. <http://www.thespec.com/opinion-story/6259946-paid-sick-days-for-a-fairer-and-healthier-ontario/>.

⁵Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2017). *Ontario Pre-Budget 2017: Nurses call for an upstream strategy*. Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Toronto: Author, 13. http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_Pre-Budget_Submission_2017.pdf.

⁶All four communities listed use the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' living wage calculator for a family of four "to meet its basic needs, participate in the economic and social fabric of their community, and purchase items that can help them escape marginal subsistence." These expenses include rent, food, child care, transportation, clothing, internet, and laundry costs. The income calculations are based on a 37.5 hour work week and include relevant government transfers such as child benefits and the Working Income Tax Benefit.

Tiessen, K. (2015). *Making Ends Meet: Toronto's 2015 Living Wage*. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario. April 2015, 5-8.
https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2015/04/CCPA-ON_Making_Ends_Meet.pdf.

⁷Tiessen, K. (2015). *Making Ends Meet: Toronto's 2015 Living Wage*. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario. April 2015, 5-8.
https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2015/04/CCPA-ON_Making_Ends_Meet.pdf.

⁸Government of Canada (2016). Current and Forthcoming Minimum Hourly Wage Rates for Young Workers and Specific Occupations. <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt3.aspx>.

⁹Government of Canada (2016). Current and Forthcoming Minimum Hourly Wage Rates for Young Workers and Specific Occupations. <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt3.aspx>.