



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

Hon. Kevin Flynn
Minister
Community Safety and Correctional Services
George Drew Building
25 Grosvenor Street, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

December 22, 2016

RE: Addressing urgent nursing staffing shortages within corrections

Dear Minister Flynn,

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) welcomes the Dec. 15, 2016 announcement that Ontario will hire 239 additional staff to increase supports for inmates, "particularly those with significant challenges related to long-term segregation."¹ The hiring of an additional 22 nurses and 22 mental health nurses is a step in the right direction. The reality, however, is that chronic and severe nursing understaffing across the provincial correctional system must be addressed in an urgent and systematic way.

As of Nov. 14, 2016, there were 268 registered nurses (RN) working full-time for 26 correctional facilities with more than 10,000 beds and a vulnerable population with greater health needs than other Ontarians. At that time, there were 29 vacant nursing positions within Ontario corrections. Recruitment was in progress for 11 positions, while the remaining 18 vacant positions were pending approval for recruitment. Not only must the announced 22 nurses and 22 mental health nurses be quickly hired, but these 29 vacant nursing positions must also be filled immediately.

This is a positive first step, though the investigation by the independent advisor on corrections, Howard Sapers,² will likely reveal more action needed to ensure the health of people in Ontario's correctional system. The ministry should also explore more effective models of governance of health services, including transferring this authority to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.^{3 4}

Findings from multiple inquests, law suits, human rights challenges, media reports, ombudsman reports, people with lived experience of being in custody, and those who work within correctional services (including RNs and nurse practitioners) all point to a provincial correctional system that is not meeting its fundamental responsibilities for safety, health, and equitable access to health care equivalent to the community standard.^{5 6 7} The status quo is causing people to die prematurely, including those who are mentally ill and inappropriately placed in segregation.

Minister Flynn, we look forward to your action to improve critical nursing staffing shortages within corrections.

Warm regards,



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Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

CC: Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario

References

¹ Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (2016). Ontario hiring more staff and enhancing supports to reform correctional services. December 15, 2016.

https://news.ontario.ca/mcscs/en/2016/12/ontario-hiring-more-staff-and-enhancing-supports-to-reform-correctional-services.html?_ga=1.166704830.1210947085.1464111271

² Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (2016). Ontario appoints independent advisor on corrections, November 8, 2016.

https://news.ontario.ca/mcscs/en/2016/11/ontario-appoints-independent-advisor-on-corrections.html?_ga=1.204766992.1210947085.1464111271

³ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2016). Letter to Minister Hoskins: Improving health outcomes and health care within the provincial correctional system. December 2, 2016.

http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_to_Minister_Hoskins_health_in_corrections_-_dec_2_2016.pdf

⁴ John Howard Society of Ontario (2016). *Fractured Care: Public health opportunities in Ontario's correctional institutions*. Toronto: Author.

<http://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Fractured-Care-Final.pdf>

⁵ Ontario Human Rights Commission (2012). *Minds that Matter: Report on the consultation on human rights, mental health and addictions*. Toronto: Author.

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Minds%20that%20matter_Report%20on%20the%20consultation%20on%20human%20rights,%20mental%20health%20and%20addictions.pdf

⁶ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2011). RNAO Submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Safeguarding Human Rights, Strengthening Mental Health and Well-Being. Toronto: Author.

http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/Safeguarding_Human_Rights_Strengthening_Mental_Health_and_Well_Being.pdf

⁷ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2016). Transforming Ontario's Correctional Services: Starting, but Not Stopping, with Segregation. Submission to the Segregation Review. Toronto: Author.

http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_submission_segregation_Feb_22_2016.pdf