

## Progressive Social Policy for a Healthier Ontario

- 1. The government wants to end chronic homelessness within 10 years. However, RNAO knows that goal can't be achieved without a serious investment. Will you join us in urging for dedicated funding?**
- 2. RN, NPs, and nursing students see that many affordable housing units are badly in need of repair. Will you support investing one per cent of the province's budget to address this backlog?**
- 3. Many workers do not have access to paid sick days. Will you support RNAO's call for changes to the *Employment Standards Act* so that all employees can accrue a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked?**

### **Social determinants of health:**

The circumstances in which people are born, grow up, work and live all play a factor in their health. Why some people are healthy and others are not is linked to many social determinants, including income, access to housing, occupation, and social standing.

The province has made a commitment to end chronic homelessness within 10 years and to implement recommendations from the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Co-chairs Deb Matthews and Ted McMeekin and other members of the panel should be commended for prioritizing action to reduce homelessness in four key areas: Aboriginal, chronic, youth (particularly LGBTTTQ and racialized youth) and homelessness following transitions from provincially funded institutions, such as jails and hospitals.<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> Although a promising start, RNAO is concerned that no new money was announced to realize this plan and \$10 million over two years in targeted funding from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund is insufficient to meet the tremendous need that has been identified.

Despite over \$4 billion in provincial funding for affordable housing since 2003, wait lists have increased by over 40,000 during that time period.<sup>4</sup> RNAO believes one way to reverse this trend is to invest one per cent of the province's budget. The money will help create new affordable housing stock and address the backlog of existing affordable housing units in need of repair.<sup>5</sup> RNAO recommended this to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing when it was updating the province's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association has calculated that a provincial commitment of \$1.3 billion per year, over ten years (or roughly one per cent of province's annual budget), would be required to assist all households living in Persistent Core Housing Need and help address homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

The Ontario government's review of its employment and labour laws is a positive and long overdue measure. With precarious employment as the "new norm", it is critical that employment and labour standards be strengthened and enforced.<sup>7</sup> In Ontario, 1.6 million people do not have access to protected unpaid emergency leave, let alone paid sick days. In addition to basic fairness, expenditure on paid sick leave is frequently linked with higher economic productivity. Working while sick actually increases employer costs due to increased instances of chronic disease, increased risk of work accidents, and the ensuing health effects on co-workers. RNAO urges the government to take two important actions related to the *Employment Standards Act*: 1) repeal the exemption for employers of 49 or less workers from providing personal emergency leave; and 2) allow employees to accrue a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked or about seven paid sick days per year for a full-time employee.<sup>8</sup>

## References:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2015). Media release: Ontario commits to ending chronic homelessness in 10 years. Toronto: Author, October 28, 2015.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/10/report-of-the-expert-advisory-panel-on-homelessness.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2015). Backgrounder: A Place to Call Home. Toronto: Author, October 28, 2015.

<http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/10/a-place-to-call-home-report-of-the-expert-advisory-panel-on-homelessness.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2015). *A Place to Call Home: Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness*.

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, *2015 Waiting Lists Survey*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2015). RNAO Input on Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update. Toronto: Author. September 16, 2015.

<http://rnao.ca/policy/submissions/rnao-input-long-term-affordable-housing-strategy-update>

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (2014). *Big Problems Need Bold Solutions: An ambitious model for solving Ontario's most pressing housing needs*. Toronto: Author, 3.

[https://www.onpha.on.ca/onpha/Content/PolicyAndResearch/Other\\_Research/BigProblemsNeedBoldSolutions.aspx](https://www.onpha.on.ca/onpha/Content/PolicyAndResearch/Other_Research/BigProblemsNeedBoldSolutions.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2015). *RNAO's Response to the Changing Workplace Review*. Toronto: Author, 10. Retrieved January 18, 2016

[http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO\\_Submission\\_to\\_Changing\\_Workplaces\\_Review\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_Submission_to_Changing_Workplaces_Review_FINAL_2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Workers Action Centre (2015). *Still Working on the Edge*, 30-31.