

WHY YOUR HEALTH MATTERS

People consistently rank their health care as a top priority. RNs know this and that is why the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO), wants to take a hard look at what we do right in Ontario and what we need to fix in our health care-system.

1. Same-day access to primary care

2. Hire 9,000 new registered nurses by 2015

3. Social determinants of health

4. Environment

1. Same-day access to primary care

A government working group* reports that Canada ranked 10th out of 11 countries in accessing after hours care without going to the emergency department and 9th in getting same or next day appointments when sick. The working group also reports that fewer than half of Ontarians can see their primary care provider when sick. The gravity of this gap in access to primary care is increased when unnecessary visits to emergency departments (ED) take place. This is costly and inefficient for the health system. It is also inconvenient for people who are forced to wait in EDs rather than being seen in the community, and can be tragic for patients who need urgent care. The Ontario government has made a commitment, through its 'Health Links' initiative to improve same-day access to care, beginning with complex patients. Health Quality Ontario identifies that a key strategy to achieve better access and efficiency in primary care is to optimize the roles of all health providers, including nurses**. In the summer of 2012, RNAO released a ground-breaking report calling for expanded scope of practice for the almost 4,300 nurses in primary care (2,900 RNs and 1,400 RPNs). Today, these numbers are even higher with 4,896 RNs and 2,564 RPNs. RNAO recommends this strategy be approached in two phases. Phase one involves ensuring all primary care nurses across the province are consistently able to practise to their full scope, regardless of practice model or geographic location. The second phase involves expanding the scope of practice of the RN to include the ability to prescribe medications and order diagnostic testing. Both of these phases have been proven nationally and internationally to improve access to primary care services, while producing health system efficiencies and improved patient experience and outcomes.

2. Hire 9,000 new registered nurses by 2015

Access to an adequate supply of registered nurses is key to ensuring people receive quality care that meets their needs in a timely fashion. But Ontario has the second worst RN-to-population ratio in the country. At a time when the population is growing - people are living longer and their care needs are more complex - we need more RNs to ensure patient care is not compromised. That is why RNAO is advocating the hiring of 9,000 additional registered nurses in Ontario by 2015.

3. Social determinants of health

Our health depends on more than health care and that's why registered nurses are committed to improving the social determinants of health. Given the overwhelming evidence that poverty is one of the main causes of premature death and ill health, RNAO calls on all parties and all Ontarians to work together to build healthier and more vibrant communities. As the provincial government develops Ontario's second Poverty Reduction Strategy, RNAO continues to urge action in three key areas: increasing the minimum wage, increasing social assistance rates to reflect the actual cost of living, and improving access to affordable housing.

4. Environment

Access to clean air and an environment free of toxics are key to safeguarding the future for our children. RNAO is advocating a reduction in all exposures to toxics found in the home, workplace and in consumer products. We need aggressive targets to reduce the creation, use and release of toxics; mandatory substitution of safer alternatives for toxic substances in production processes; proper product labeling on consumer goods; laws which protect the public's right to know about toxics; and the creation of an independent academic institute to identify, develop and promote cleaner technologies for all Ontario producers.

RNs know that these issues are worth talking about and taking action on. This is why RNAO urges all political parties to take these issues seriously. From ensuring quality patient care in a system that is publicly funded and not-for-profit to providing the social supports necessary to make sure people are healthy in the first place - your health matters. That's why we cannot afford to ignore these important issues.

Adopted from RNAO's *Why Your Health Matters* brochure

*www.trilliumresearchday.com/documents/2013_PHPG_Access-WG-Report_final.pdf

**www.hqontario.ca/portals/0/Documents/qi/qi-aae-interactive-workbook-en.pdf