



Registered Practical Nurses
Association of Ontario

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Monday, October 5, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Christine Elliott
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5th Floor
777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Elliott:

Re: Wage Increase for PSWs

I am writing regarding the Government's recent announcement to temporarily enhance wages for Personal Support Works (PSWs) in Ontario.

PSWs are vital members of the health care team. Ontario RPNs work alongside PSWs every day across all corners of our health system and therefore, understand better than most the important and challenging role that PSWs play in providing quality care to patients, residents, and clients. We agree that our colleagues should be compensated fairly for the important work they do every day. At the same time, the government's announcement has left many RPNs under-supported for the essential role that they have been playing alongside PSWs, putting themselves and their families at risk, in the fight against this pandemic. We are also concerned that this policy may have unintended consequences that will hurt the province's health human resources over the long-term and have a negative impact on the culture and morale in workplaces across the province, particularly as our front-line workers battle a second wave of COVID-19.

As you know, Ontario RPNs are knowledge-based health professionals who complete a two-and-a-half-year long College degree and must be registered to practice with the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO). RPNs are also required to undertake regular, ongoing professional development as part of the Quality Assurance required by the CNO. Their role requires a greater breadth and depth of knowledge and RPNs also face a higher level of accountability with their practice as compared to their PSW colleagues. PSWs are responsible for the critically important work of supporting activities of daily living of patients, residents and clients. However, it is nurses who conduct assessments, evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and identify and respond to patients' new and changing conditions in order to ensure care needs are addressed in a timely manner.

RPNs appreciate the government's efforts to help recruit and retain PSWs in our health and long-term care systems. The shortage of PSWs has a direct impact on the level of care RPNs are able to provide given increasing workloads. But we fear that by recognizing the work of one health care provider over another, with whom they work side by side, will have negative ramifications.

Since this announcement was made, WeRPN has fielded hundreds of calls and emails from RPNs who have described how this wage enhancement will mean that PSWs in their workplaces are receiving a wage that is very close to or more than that of some RPNs. One RPN noted that a PSW they supervise will now earn a higher wage than them. As a result, many RPNs feel that their knowledge, experience and commitment to supporting patients and residents has been unrecognized by the government with this policy. RPNs have remained steadfast in their commitment to caring for Ontarians, including our most vulnerable; they have already faced financial hardship after being limited to one workplace, and they have put themselves and their families at risk to care for others. They feel that this policy ignores and devalues their critical contribution.

As has already been noted, we also have concerns that this wage enhancement will impact Ontario's health human resources. While the province currently has a steady supply of RPNs, this policy creates a disincentive for some newer RPNs to continue along a path in nursing, where they will face growing levels of moral distress, a higher degree of accountability and additional personal costs to keep up their registration, without the compensation to match it.

Additionally, one of the government's stated intentions with this policy was to create greater wage parity across the health system for PSWs. While we agree with the need to take action to create a fairer compensation system, this is not something that should be limited to one category of health care provider. WeRPN has long been urging the government to implement greater wage consistency across our system to help recruit and retain RPNs and other health professionals to areas where there is significant need - such as long-term care. Failure to take a more comprehensive and inclusive approach will not address the government's objectives to retain more front-line staff in our health care system.

Finally, we believe this policy will negatively impact the workplace culture across our health institutions. In the Long-Term Care staffing study released this summer, the Expert Advisory Committee members urged the government to take action to improve culture in long-term care. Now, more than ever, is a time when health care professionals need to be united. Unfortunately, we fear this approach will only heighten tensions across our health system, rather than improve them.

We support government's actions to enhance wages for our PSWs colleagues. At the same time, we strongly urge the government to consider implementing similar enhancements for Ontario RPNs. Failure to do so, will not only demoralize these hard working and committed professionals, it risks causing further unintended consequences down the road.

As always, we are available to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Dianne Martin
Chief Executive Officer

Cc:

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health
Richard Steele, Deputy Minister of Long-Term Care
Michelle Acorn, Chief Provincial Nursing Officer
Matthew Anderson, President & Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Health