



Registered Practical Nurses
Association of Ontario

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Monday, November 16, 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 Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Elliott:

Re: Unintended Impacts of the PSW Wage Increase

On October 4, WeRPN submitted a letter to you outlining our concern, and that of our membership, on the temporary wage increase that was introduced for Personal Support Workers (PSWs). Today, I am writing to follow-up on that communication.

Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) understand the challenging and important role that PSWs play across on our health system and we support the government's plan to enhance the wages of these hard-working professionals. We know that this increase for PSWs is long overdue and well-deserved. However, we must reiterate the unintended impact this policy is having on Ontario's RPNs. These dedicated nurses feel strongly that this policy fails to recognize the equally important and challenging role of RPNs, alongside their PSWs colleagues, in caring for Ontarians across the province.

Over the past several weeks, WeRPN has received a hundreds of comments, emails and calls from our members in response this policy announcement. We have also been made aware of a petition on this topic, started by an Ontario RPN, that has garnered close to 9000 signatures. RPNs are telling us that they feel left behind and undervalued for the vital work they do. What's more, many RPNs have told us that they are even questioning whether they want to continue in the profession as many could make comparable wages in roles that are less demanding and stressful. We have heard that some RPNs are considering taking roles as PSWs, unit clerks or leaving health care altogether.

As an association, this is a worrisome trend that we have not seen before. We are deeply concerned that over the long term, this well-intentioned policy to support PSWs will negatively impact Ontario's nursing workforce - at a time when the need for nurses is greater than ever. While we support this pay increase for our PSW colleagues, we believe that prioritizing one health professional over another will have negative repercussions on our health system. We strongly urge the government to take steps to ensure that Ontario's RPNs are similarly compensated appropriately for the work they do.



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While the education and role of RPNs has continued to evolve over the past several years, wages have not kept pace. At the same time, wage disparities across sectors persist, with nurses in long-term care, retirement and home care receiving less than their counterparts in acute care settings. The COVID-19 pandemic has left many RPN with further financial hardship. Given the limited supply of full-time positions, like PSWs, many RPNs hold more than one-part time job to make ends meet. Over the past several months, many have been restricted to one workplace. While RPNs understand the need for this measure to curb the spread of COVID-19, this has had a significant financial impact as many were ineligible to receive government financial supports such as Employment Insurance or previously, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

WeRPN recognizes that your government values the voices of those on the frontlines. We too think that it is important for you to hear the direct experiences and concerns of Ontario RPNs and the impact of this policy on those who continue to be on the frontlines of care and the fight against COVID-19. In the pages that follow, we have included a selection of emails and messages that have been shared by Ontario RPNs.

We hope your government will listen to the concerns of these passionate frontline heroes and take steps to ensure they too receive compensation that is fair and commensurate with the important work they do every day on behalf of Ontarians.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dianne Martin'.

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



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Select Communications from Ontario RPNs

Joint letter- Received by Email

First of all, we would like to thank you for the article you posted on social media regarding unfair wages for Registered Practical Nurses in Ontario. It is greatly appreciated.

We are writing to you today to acknowledge and voice concerns regarding wage discrepancies in long term care homes, we are a group of Registered Practical Nurses who work at Meadow Park London Ontario. In light of the novel coronavirus or Covid- 19 pandemic, it was announced on October 1st, 2020 by Premier Doug Ford, that personal support workers in long term care homes would be receiving an additional \$3.00 per hour. This increase is intended to be temporary, and may extend until March 2021. Ford stated " We know the wages of PSW's do not reflect the critical role they have played throughout this pandemic, in addition to their ongoing care of our loved ones". As Registered Practical Nurses working in long term care, this announcement came as an insult to us. PSWs and RPN's work alongside each other in the home and have similar duties, though nurses work under legislation of the College of Nurses of Ontario and have a license to uphold. It is not correct or fair to state that one is more critical than the other as our jobs could not be completed without the other.

At our home, Meadow Park London, Registered Staff have the lives of vulnerable individuals on their hands each day. These staff members are the ones who PSW's report to when there is concern or help is needed. Each day RPN's are often brought to sacrifice their unpaid breaks and stay past their intended shift end. This issue has been brought forward before, but management has told us to "just take a break" or "leave when your shift is done". Unfortunately, due to the nature of our job and commitment we have to our residents, we cannot just leave. People's lives and well being are dependent on our care. We are overworked and under paid, pandemic or not.

Effective November 1st, 2020 after our yearly wage increase as per determined and Doug Fords pandemic pay, PSW's will make \$24.91 per hour and RPN's \$26.20 per hour. This is a difference of \$1.29 per hour. PSW's do not uphold a license or have standards of practice under a regulatory body that they must adhere to when providing care to residents. How can the government give raise to one but not the other? This increase brings the pay of PSW's so close to RPNs, it comes as offensive to our profession and the education and training we have put forth over the years.

Registered Nurses working in our home make a considerable more an hour than Registered Practical Nurses. In our home RNs and RPNs share a very similar role.

It has saddened us to see some of our co-workers going from RPN positions to working in a PSW role due to the increased work load of RPN's and unfair wages for RPN.

We are asking for understanding and compassion. Over the last seven months, the importance of dedicated care has been needed more then ever during the Covid 19 pandemic. We are asking for an evaluation to end this wage gap for Registered Practical Nurses in long term care.

Thank You for your time and consideration,

Susan Proctor RPN
Julie Nooren RPN
Skye Serdarvich RPN
Linda Pridham RPN
Cassidy Pizarro RPN

Nicole Bailie RPN
Genet Kerda RPN
Aryd Vijayan RPN
Jaquilis Manual RPN



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Jodi, RPN - Social Media message

I left active nursing to get into an area where I am valued and paid appropriately.

Sarah, RPN - Social Media message

I value the PSW's I work with greatly. They really are so crucial to how my day goes. That being said I don't feel that it is fair that I will now only be making 40 cents more an hour for the amount of responsibility and liability I carry. I frequently go an entire shift with no break and no lunch. Am rarely out exactly on time, but they always get to leave on time and have breaks and a lunch. I then do a lot of what the RN is supposed to be doing as well, but don't make nearly what they do. For the stress and responsibilities I really am thinking being a PSW is the better way to go.

Think they have a PSW crisis??? Just wait to see what this is going to do for an RPN crisis.

Dana, RPN - Social Media message

I 100% believe PSWs deserve this money. That being said the pay difference between us is now 1.00 at the place I work. I spent 2 years going to school and pay fees every year. I'm also responsible for these PSWs. We deserve the same increase.

Katherine, RPN- Social Media message

It shows the lack of understanding that the gov't has for the current system. Eliminating the \$4 increase and eliminating the option for a 2nd workplace will cause a monster problem in LTC/ retirement setting. People are opting for hospital work or unemployment... this will cause a crisis soon, if its already not causing issues at individual homes.

Kelly, RPN- Social Media message

I am 100% behind a wage increase for PSWs. That being said I will now make three dollars an hour more than a PSW working in an Ontario hospital. I earn the most an RPN can earn now no matter the years of experience - I earn the same as a novice RN with no wage increase to look forward to as I add years of expertise, skill, and continued education (at my own expense) for Ontario hospital's and the public's benefit. I pay annual registration fees and maintain my own practice insurance. I am hard pressed to differentiate between the roles of RN and RPN on my medical unit. Our skill set and scope of practice is indistinguishable. I find myself in leadership positions, frequently being the most experienced nurse on the unit and providing orientation and teaching to new nurses (RN and RPN). Our scope of practice is ever-growing without the benefit of adequate compensation. This is a pay equity issue and must be addressed.

Tricia, RPN- Social Media message

Where I work, if a PSW calls in sick and can't be replaced, the unit RPN takes on the role as PSW as well as taking on his/her RPN role. This was never acknowledged nor plays a factor when the government decided on the pay increase. Unit RPNs are in close contact to every single resident on their unit whether it be administering medications, doing treatments, completing assessments, assisting with lifts/toileting etc. Also, during this Pandemic Active Screening for Covid-19 is completed on both days and evening shifts. RPN's are working overtime to complete all of their duties and leaving well after their shift ended. They are not paid for this overtime. Our role was ignored Yes, the PSW's need a pay raise but so to do the many RPN's/RN's working as unit nurses.

Melissa, RPN - Social Media Response

Although I appreciate the PSWs and their roles. This now leaves very little wage difference between the RPN and PSW. Not to mention the fact that we practice to very similar extents of the RN who make significantly more per hour than the RPN.



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Kevin, RPN - Received by Email

On October 1, 2020, the Ford Government announced a temporary wage increase for Personal Support Workers (PSWs), up to \$3.00 more per hour till March 31, 2021. Personally I have a lot of respect for PSWs as I have worked with many of them over the years. Having said that, this announcement will create the biggest wage chaos in most Long Term Care facilities and elsewhere.

Using my former workplace as an example. Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) make approximately \$2.00 more per hour than a PSW. Once this current pay raise for PSW's goes into effect, PSW's will now be making more than RPNs! This is completely unacceptable and outrageous!!!

When the government implemented their previous Pandemic Pay program, it was essentially equal across the board to all essential front line workers in LTC facilities. The pay differences between the different job classifications (for the most part) didn't change as they were all treated equally. The previous Pandemic Pay program included the various eligible workers

So, instead of reinstating the previous Pandemic Pay program as it was set up before, the Government has singled out PSW's only!!!! Every single RPN across Ontario should be outraged by this. Suddenly an unregulated health care worker will now be getting paid more than a Regulated Professional in the same workplace!

The Ontario Government is essentially saying that RPNs are worth less than PSWs in the same workplace. This is in spite of the fact that RPN's are regulated and accountable to the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Instead of strengthening and stabilizing the frontline workforce in LTC, the Government will be creating conflict, animosity, etc. Furthermore, RPNs will now have an incentive to leave their current positions and work in PSW positions, thus creating a nursing crisis in these facilities.

The Government needs to immediately scrap the current PSW wage increase plan and replace it with the previous Pandemic Pay program. Since there is no indication as to when this Pandemic is going to end, the Pandemic Pay program needs to remain in place until the Pandemic is declared over by the World Health Organization (WHO).

So much for 2020 being the year of the Nurse (as declared by the WHO). Actually in Ontario, will 2020 will be known as the year Nurses (and other Front Line Health Care Workers) are treated like garbage, as usual? The LTC sector and those who work in it need more stabilization and respect during this Pandemic, not more chaos.

Cathy, RPN - Social Media message

The PSW staff where I work are amazing and I think they 100% deserve a permanent pay raise for all the hard work they do we are short staffed so often that they are worked to the bone with extending their hours and double the workload.

In saying that as an RPN our workload has also almost doubled with having more monitoring taking vitals in every resident daily along with assisting the PSW staff with the residents' personal care, transfers, feeding, etc We step up as much as we can to help out the residents so our charting and desk work gets put on the back burner putting our own work behind. I definitely feel the government should realize that all the staff working in the health care field deserve the same acknowledgement and pay raise at all times not just during this pandemic

Lisa, RPN - Social Media message

While I agree that PSW's deserve the pay raise it should be permanent not temporary. But, in saying that, as an RPN that works home care I know PSW's that work in hospitals that make way more than what I do and I have a license to maintain. All wages need a major adjustment.



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Holly, RPN - Received by Email

We are left out. PSWs are now making close to what the entry level RPN in nursing homes make. This is wrong, and may end up discouraging anyone entering healthcare from choosing becoming an RPN.

For example, RPNs are critical to healthcare and this incentive to PSWs of \$5000 just to become one, then a raise in hourly wage, will discourage those entering healthcare from choosing RPN education.

Why would someone spend the extra time and money to become an RPN when they can get \$5000 for becoming a PSW, and then a wage that is not that much less than the starting wage for the RPN in nursing homes?

This ill-conceived decision will create a shortage of RPNs in the future and a shortage of RPNs will be even more devastating for healthcare, as we not only do our own jobs – which is nursing, but also help the PSWs and the RNs. In other words, we are the “jack of all trades” in the nursing home.

And when will there be wage parity for the RPN, as the RN has, we as RPNs should make the same wage regardless of where we work, hospital RPNs make more than nursing home RPNs and we do more! I have done both, so know first-hand.

Denise, RPN - Social Media Response

My sons father is a PSW in a nursing home attached to a hospital. He makes more on a weekend night shift with premiums than I do in an hour of no premiums. I’m an RPN. He deserves more but so do I. But don’t get me wrong, I love PSWs that I’ve worked with. Without them I can’t do my job!

Nava, RPN - Social Media Response

I’m proud to be a RPNAO member after seeing this letter to the Ontario government. Our wage increase never happened with our union bargaining table. I was about to quit being an RPN and work as a unit Clerk because we make about the same wages, but we carry a 2 years college diploma. In our hospital there is no work difference between RN patient load RPN load and duties. The sad part is RN makes \$20 more than RPN does and no one was there to be voice for us.