



# Nursing in Ontario During COVID-19

Exploring the impact of the  
COVID-19 pandemic on nursing

**We RPN**

Registered Practical Nurses  
Association of Ontario

Findings prepared by the Registered Practical  
Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN)

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The Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) represents the professional voices of 47,000 registered practical nurses (RPNs) across the province. Throughout the course of 2020, WeRPN worked closely with its members and the healthcare community to support and advocate for the concerns of Ontario RPNs, during a time when they need it most.

The onset of the global pandemic has greatly impacted frontline health professionals, including nurses who play an integral role in keeping Ontarians safe. To better understand the impact the pandemic has had, WeRPN surveyed Ontario RPNs and members of the public to gather insights and attitudes on nursing in Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report is intended to provide nurses, healthcare organizations and policymakers with a glimpse into the significant personal and professional toll that COVID-19 has had on the nursing community. Many of these impacts will be longstanding as nurses cope with the realities they are currently facing. In the months ahead, it will be critical to take action to address these longstanding impacts and put forward new solutions to meet the needs of Ontario nurses. The following are key findings from the research.

**“** *“Even though our nurses are giving their all each and every day at work, COVID-19 is still taking a very raw and real toll on them, with lingering, long-term consequences ahead. For both the public and policymakers, this is our chance to show these dedicated frontline caregivers that we as a society will take care of them too – especially as they need it most right now.”* - **Dianne Martin, CEO, Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN).**



## Part 1

# **Wellness, Workload and Wages – How RPNs are Personally Coping Amid the Pandemic**

Survey examining the perspectives  
of Ontario nurses during COVID-19



## Introduction

In December 2020, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) conducted an online survey among 765 nurses across Ontario entitled, **“Wellness, Workload and Wages – How RPNs are Personally Coping Amid the Pandemic.”**

The comprehensive poll examined the impact of COVID-19 on RPNs in the province, who work in all sectors of healthcare, including high-risk areas such as long-term care, retirement facilities and hospitals. The survey, a first of its kind in Ontario, highlighted realities for nurses both at work and at home and revealed that RPNs are facing a critical breaking point, alarming mental health tolls and financial stresses as a direct result of their job since the pandemic hit in March 2020.

The following report shares key findings from the survey along with personal stories from Ontario nurses.



## Executive Summary

The survey entitled, “Wellness, Workload and Wages – How RPNs are Personally Coping Amid the Pandemic” administered by the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) revealed that nurses in the province are facing alarming mental health tolls and financial stresses.

While 67 per cent of Ontario’s registered practical nurses (RPNs) say they’ve never been more proud to be a nurse, 71 per cent also report experiencing a breaking point related to their job over the past several months. The dire mental health toll and financial stressors on nurses have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with one in three nurses (34 per cent) considering leaving this critical profession.

Nursing associations and health care partners have been warning about the consequences of Ontario’s nursing shortage. The findings from this just-released study further illustrates the immense pressure and strain being put on nurses. Key findings include:

- **Separated from family:** 83 per cent of nurses reported reducing time they spend with their immediate family due to concerns about exposing loved ones to the coronavirus from their work.
- **Increased workload, reduced wages:** 90 per cent of nurses said their workload has increased since COVID-19 became a reality, while 57 per cent are experiencing financial stress as a result of the pandemic. In addition, close to a third (32 per cent) of nurses have had to leave a job (pick one job over another) due to necessary, but personally challenging government policies restricting many nurses to one workplace. Incidentally, Ontario’s personal support workers (PSWs) recently received a temporary pay increase by the government for the important work they do. However, this wage increase was not extended to RPNs for their crucial contributions, which in many cases are taking place within the same environments.
- **Exponentially more stressed, without adequate mental health support:** Nearly all respondents (96 per cent) said their daily experiences at work have become exponentially more stressful due to the presence of COVID-19 in the province. Eighty-three per cent feel like their mental health has been adversely affected by their work, but even more alarmingly, 67 per cent say they don’t have adequate mental health support to face the second wave of COVID-19.

WeRPN is calling for the government to prioritize critical challenges facing our nurses now, as the pandemic continues to take a very real toll, with lingering long-term consequences ahead. Following a thorough analysis of the study's findings, the organization's top asks of policymakers are to:

1. Continue the swift rollout of COVID-19 vaccines so healthcare workers and residents/patients are protected, with immediate priority given to those who are most at risk or in high-risk settings.
2. Create more full-time positions for nurses and ensure RPNs are fairly compensated for the integral work that they do.
3. Enhance retention of the nursing workforce by creating more opportunities for continuing education and career advancement.
4. Enhance mental health supports for nurses and their fellow healthcare workers, specifically, to address the significant mental and emotional toll brought on by COVID-19, which will linger long after the pandemic is over.
5. Leverage the unique experience and expertise of nurses on the front lines by ensuring that their voices are foundational to any future consultations and decision making on healthcare reform and policy in Ontario.

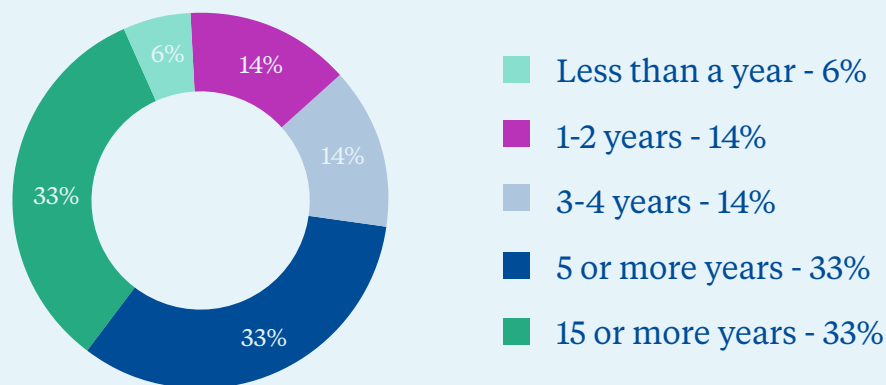
WeRPN is also asking members of the public to do their part by following public health guidelines as best they can to ease pressure on nurses. These include: Not seeing people outside of their immediate household, physical distancing in public, restricting trips outside of the home to essential purposes only, wearing masks, and carefully washing hands often.

In the interim, WeRPN is encouraging nurses across Ontario to also access information on the current mental health supports available at [WeRPN.com](https://werpn.com).

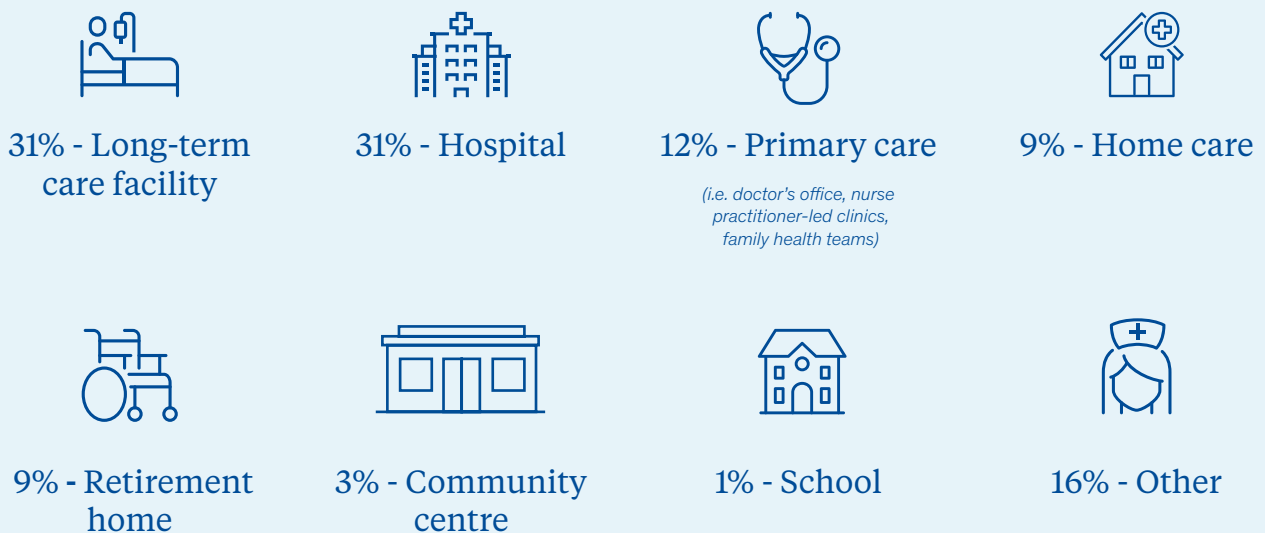
## Methodology

From December 3 to 18, 2020 an online survey was conducted among 765 registered practical nurses across Ontario, by the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN). The following is a snapshot of the nurses surveyed

## Length of time in the industry



## Working in the following sectors\*



\* Respondents were asked to select all industries that applied

## Reaching a Breaking Point Amid COVID-19

*The survey revealed that RPNs have reached a critical point amid the global pandemic. Almost three quarters of respondents have experienced a breaking point as a result of their work, reflecting how RPNs are suffering from an alarming mental health toll. This along with factors such as increased workload, financial stresses, and more, are prompting one third to reconsider the profession.*

**Nurses have reached their breaking point:** An alarming 71 per cent of nurses admitted that they have experienced a breaking point related to their job either at home or at work, during this pandemic.

**Exponentially more stressful:** Virtually all nurse respondents (96 per cent) felt their daily experience at work has become exponentially more stressful from the general impact of COVID-19. In addition, 83 per cent believe their day-to-day nursing work has changed dramatically due to the pandemic.

**Increased workload:** The majority of RPNs surveyed (90 per cent) felt that their workload had increased as a result of the direct impact of COVID-19 in the province.

**Considering leaving the profession:** The mental health toll that nurses are experiencing, compounded by financial stressors have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A third of nurses surveyed (34 per cent) are considering leaving this critical frontline healthcare profession.

Nurses who are considering leaving the profession cited the following factors as among the top factors contributing to their decision:

- > 66% - Wages
- > 59% - Workload
- > 43% - The impact of the pandemic on their well-being
- > 39% - The management around the pandemic
- > 37% - Workplace culture
- > 25% - Nature of the work
- > 20% - Workplace violence
- > 18% - Seeking a career change



# COVID-19's Toll on Mental Health

*Survey findings reveal that Ontario nurses' mental health is suffering considerably. While a large majority want more support in this regard, they don't feel like it is available to them at this time.*

**The impact on mental health:** 83 per cent of respondents reported that their mental health has been adversely affected, with 64 per cent saying the pandemic has taken a significant or noticeable toll on them.

**Experiencing moral distress:** 68 per cent of RPNs surveyed admitted that they've experienced moral distress as a result of the pandemic. Moral distress is defined as the emotional state that arises from a situation when a nurse feels that the ethically correct action to take differs from what he/she is tasked with doing.

**Not enough mental health support:** 67 per cent of respondents said they don't feel like nurses have had adequate mental health support during this second wave of COVID-19, and 50 per cent said they don't feel supported in their current role.

**Seeking more help:** Overall, 73 per cent felt they could be provided with more mental health support for the toll the job has taken on them.

## From RPNs in their own words

*"It is stressful. I am leaving my current job due to mental health struggles with no support. Having to give all my free time to help patients in home is exhausting."*

*"We need enough staff to take a mental health day to recoup. I'm finding it way more physical and emotional these days than ever."*

*"Leaders do not realize the effect the outbreak has had on our mental health."*

*"We are grateful to have each other. A lot of nurses did go on mental leave, resulting in a shortage of staff. We are all taking it day by day because of the unknown future."*

*"I am extremely disheartened at how 'shafted' for lack of a better term, nurses are. As previously mentioned, there are many jobs with much lower expectations (and are much more predictable) who make very similar wages to RPNs. Our jobs are physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing. We miss many events, weekends, and holidays with our loved ones to take care of others. We are abused on a daily basis in many aspects. Many workplaces are also not properly staffed, and we are inclined to missing our breaks, getting injured, etc."*

*From RPNs in their own words*

## Personal Toll

*While nurses have committed themselves to connecting patients, clients and residents to their family members as much as possible, often virtually, this pandemic has forced nurses to miss time with their own family. These challenges, which also come with financial stressors are forcing the families of nurses to make personal sacrifices as well. Additionally, nurses are often present for a patient or resident's final moments. This experience, which has unfortunately become more prevalent due to the pandemic, represents an intimate bond shared between nurse and patient, but is not without its own personal challenges.*

**Making sacrifices as a family:** 83 per cent of nurses were so worried about the risk of exposing loved ones to COVID-19 from work, that they intentionally reduced time they spent with immediate family.

**Experiencing financial stressors:** Almost 3 in 5 (57 per cent) nurses reported experiencing financial stress as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, close to one in three nurses (32 per cent) reported having to leave a job (pick one job over another), due to provincial government policies restricting nurses to one workplace .

**Connecting families:** Since the pandemic, 70 per cent of nurses reported having to play a more prevalent role in connecting patients, clients and residents with their family members since they are often unable to make direct contact.

**Witnessing final good-byes and supporting loved ones:** Many nurses shared that they were present for intimate final moments, and provided support and strength to family members who may not have been able to be there in person.

## From RPNs in their own words

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*“ I'm a single mom. When COVID-19 hit in March, I moved to my parents' apartment, and they moved to my house to care for my 3-year-old. It was devastating to us all. I stayed away until COVID-testing was opened to anyone and I could be sure that I was not infected. But my daughter now suffers from separation anxiety and sleep issues.*

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*“ I slept underneath a desk, as I couldn't leave the nursing home because there were too many critical patients that needed my attention, and we had no staff. I've had to be a caregiver, a nurse, housekeeper, family, friend, dietitian and even infection control lead.*

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*“ I've used my phone and my own data to connect patients with their family when visits are not allowed. I've seen my colleagues on phones in the staff room during their breaks talking to family members, updating them, and letting them tell stories about their loved ones.*

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*“ We provide support to families whose loved ones are dying or who have died. That for me is heroic - keeping it together as a nurse and not breaking down in front of family members.*

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## Wages

Wage compensation is a cause of concern for many RPNs. For years, RPNs have experienced significantly lower wages than their colleagues in different nursing categories such as registered nurses and nurse practitioners. RPNs have also historically been underemployed- having to pull together two or more part time positions to achieve full time hours. The survey revealed that a majority of RPNs currently do not feel fairly compensated for their roles. In addition, for those looking to leave the profession altogether, wages were identified as the leading factor. Further, many RPNs have experienced financial stressors as a result of the pandemic, including having to pick one job over another due to COVID-19.

**RPNs do not feel fairly compensated:** A majority of respondents (86 per cent) do not feel they are fairly compensated for their roles as RPNs.

**Experiencing financial stressors:** Almost 3 in 5 nurses (57 per cent) reported experiencing financial stress as a result of the pandemic.

**Forced to pick one job over another:** Close to one in three nurses (32 per cent) reported having to leave a job (pick one job over another), due to necessary, but personally challenging government policies restricting many nurses to one workplace.

**Wages is the top factor for leaving the profession:** RPNs who expressed a desire to leave the profession overwhelmingly cited wages as the top factor for their departure (66 per cent), followed by workload (59 per cent) and the impact of the pandemic on their well-being (43 per cent).

**RPNs feel left out:** At the end of 2020, the Ontario government announced a temporary pay increase for personal support workers (PSWs) for their work during the pandemic and to aid retention efforts. While RPNs recognize and celebrate the important work being done by their PSW colleagues, and believe in fair compensation, many were surprised that the wage increase was not extended to RPNs for their crucial contributions. A resounding 98 per cent of RPNs surveyed believe they deserve a temporary pay increase in order to align with the policy the government has already put in place to recognize PSWs for their crucial contributions.

## From RPNs in their own words

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*“ We do a lot of work, carry a lot of responsibility and have patients’ lives in our hands. Yet, we don’t make a lot of money.*

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*“ We are exhausted mentally and physically and so many healthcare workers are talking about leaving the profession. We are definitely not paid near what we should be for what we endure.*

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*“ There needs to be a comparable wage increase for RPNs in Ontario to better reflect the amount of knowledge, skill and judgement that we have.*

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*“ I feel abandoned by the government. They won’t allow me to work more than one job, while giving me zero compensation for the jobs they won’t allow me to work at.*

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*“ RPNs are not being supported financially, mentally or socially. With the pandemic second wave, there was no talk about a part time increase in wages, which could motivate some people to work more, allowing places not to be short staffed. Emotionally mentally, COVID-19 has taken a toll. There are limited resources available to access the help we need when we need. Socially, we are not allowed to see families, friends, and loved ones especially during the holiday season. This also impacts our residents who we love and care for. This negatively impacts residents causing behavioural development, which leads to extra monitoring, extra care, 1:1 staffing, changing in medications leading to further monitoring with no relief from the government on more staffing to support the needs of not only the nurses, but the residents as well.*

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***RPNs who had to pick one job over another due to necessary, but personally challenging provincial policy weighed in:***

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*“ Job insecurity has caused increased stress and financial stress in my family.*

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*“ I was not able to pay my mortgage and had to sell my house.*

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*“ I am the only income for my household. It greatly puts my family at risk of being homeless.*

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*“ This affected me astronomically. I have had a hard time meeting my bill payments and rent on time because my husband passed away due to long term illness. I am relying solely on one income. The financial struggle makes up most of my mental stress. I am not alone. Other nurses are struggling financially plus the stress and anxiety of getting infected by COVID at work.*

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## Preparation for the Second Wave

*The survey findings revealed that Ontario nurses are in need of more support in the workplace, by way of greater governmental action, a focus on improving workplace cultures, and in many instances, better workplace preparation.*

**Workplace preparation:** In their personal experiences, 50 per cent of nurses agreed that their workplaces were adequately prepared for the second wave of the pandemic, while 35 per cent disagreed, and 15 per cent were unsure.

**Greater government support needed:** 76 per cent of respondents did not believe the government was doing enough to support RPNs during the second wave.

**Workplace culture:** 51 per cent of nurses felt they did not have a supportive workplace culture to help them face the second wave of the pandemic.





# Nursing Culture

*Pride and heart in nursing still reigns strong according to this study despite such difficult times, often with nurses personally supporting each other. However many nurses have also communicated that their workplace is struggling with a “toxic culture” that needs to be addressed.*

**Pride in nursing:** Despite these current dire circumstances, 67 per cent of nurses said they’ve never felt more proud to be a nurse.

**Finding heart in this fight together:** 50 per cent also said since the pandemic hit, they have experienced a positive, rewarding, memorable moment on the job as an RPN.

**Toxic Culture:** Despite their pride in nursing, some respondents have shared that the culture of nursing at their workplace has become “extremely toxic and negative.” These nurses have been left feeling underappreciated and overworked.

## From RPNs in their own words

### *Humanity at the heart of nursing amid COVID-19*

*“ My co-workers on another unit of our rehabilitation unit had to transition from Rehab to the COVID-19 unit very quickly. They continued to be the best nursing staff they always were - treating their patients with dignity and compassion while giving each other support and encouragement.*

*“ Nurses are supporting each other more physically and emotionally. Nurses are working harder to try and keep patients and their loved ones connected. It’s difficult times during this pandemic but we are in this fight together.*

*“ I want to recognize the support other nurses provided to my family and I during the pandemic. I am a RPN in a hospital setting and I contracted COVID-19, which quickly spread to my family who I live with. Although management never showed any true support to my nursing crew or myself, all my co-workers helped me get through that rough patch. Nurses not only are helping patients get through this pandemic but we’re carrying each other through it as well.*

## From RPNs in their own words

### *Challenging workplace dynamics*

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*“ There is a lack of appreciation for what we do and the burden we bear.*

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*“ Nurses need more respect. There is a lack of appreciation.*

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*“ The joy of doing what I love is being taken away by other nurses' stress levels exhibited in sarcasm, cutting remarks and an unpleasant atmosphere of fear.*

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*“ At the beginning of the pandemic, I felt appreciated by my workplace. However, now I feel that it is a stressful place to be and that we are only considered a number and not as human beings*

# Nurses Describe Where They Need Support

*Survey findings uncovered many areas where critical attention is needed to better support nurses as they face the consequences of COVID-19 head on with their integrated health teams. The following categories were identified by nurses as requiring urgent action for change (in no particular order).*

## More staffing and adequate reprieve

- > *“Adequate staffing would make a huge difference. We have not been allowed to take vacation because of staff shortages. All registered staff are getting tired and feeling the stress.”*
- > *“More feet on the floor that was promised at the start of the pandemic.”*
- > *“Staffing and more infection control knowledge and support.”*
- > *“Funding and hiring more staff. I feel guilty refusing shifts even though I shouldn’t. It’s not my job to worry about staffing. It should be the facility and, in this case, the government.”*

## Financial support

- > *“Moral support from management. Currently if we are off sick related to COVID-19 or because we are waiting for testing results, we are not paid for our time off. This is unfair and a slap in the face.”*
- > *“Working as a supervisor we are all putting in double our workdays on a regular basis with no compensation...in fact we had our pay cut 15% in the first wave.”*
- > *“I feel a raise would be appropriate for all the hoops we’ve had to jump through with all the new rules and regulations in the workplace... In the clinic setting I feel the wage is not very comparable to that of other RPNs employed elsewhere. I feel our role is very important and we use a variety of our skills daily. Just frustrating sometimes.”*

## Mental health support

- > *“Mental health: I have had to go on anti-depressants and a mood stabilizer because of the stress related to COVID-19.”*
- > *“Anything and everything. Mental health, workplace safety, increased infectious disease knowledge and advocacy for nurses, and a better work environment.”*

### Support from management

- > *“Peer support, the morale in my workplace is really low right now.”*
- > *“Recognition and understanding when we tell them how mentally and physically devastating this has been to our seniors. Listen more.”*
- > *“Increased recognition from managerial levels of the extra work required as a result of the pandemic.”*
- > *“More team meetings to help us debrief and keep us informed on what is going on within the hospital setting.”*

### PPE

- > *“More support from the Infection Prevention and Control team and Infectious Diseases specialists. Proper PPE, like masks that fit smaller faces and face shields that are padded with foam as they are more comfortable. Support from Occupational Health and HR and management.”*
- > *“There seems to be a lot of uncertainty regarding when certain PPE is needed and how to get it. Making this information more clear would be helpful.”*
- > *“Confidence that proper and sufficient PPE will be supplied.”*

### Acknowledgement and input on policies affecting healthcare workers

- > *“Dialogue with policymakers. Frontline workers are left out in making policies.”*
- > *“Acknowledgement of my work by my organization and by the government.”*
- > *“Nurses who are not directly caring for COVID patients are not recognized enough. It is not easy providing emotional support to dying patients and their families in the middle of a pandemic.”*

### More regulation and processes adhering to public health guidelines

- > *“People recognize nurses but do not do enough to reduce the workload (i.e. they say thank you for your service, yet go out to malls and do not social distance).”*
- > *“Society presents itself with so many challenges that mostly stem from the citizens themselves and the choices they make. If everyone would just follow the Public Health guidelines, this pandemic would be well under control.”*

**Actions that could convince them to stay:** We asked RPNs that were considering leaving the nursing profession if any actions could be taken (e.g. by their employer, government or nursing community) to increase the likelihood of them staying. The following represents consistent themes in their responses:

- > Wage increases
- > Education and professional development
- > Recognition for their roles
- > More mental health supports
- > Support from management
- > Increased recruitment of nurses to address staffing shortages
- > More opportunities for full-time work
- > Providing a safer resident to nurse ratio/more balanced workload
- > More technology and access to virtual care

**Caring for patients:** When asked if there was one thing, they could change to make the day-to-day experiences for their patients, clients, or residents better, top answers included:

- > Adding more staffing to provide better care and offer more time to patients/residents
- > Better support and clear communication to handle a particular situation
- > Fostering communication between patients and family members
- > Supporting those who may not have access to technology to do so
- > Providing more recreational activities for mental health support and care of patients/residents



## Conclusion

Based on a thorough analysis of the survey findings, with a specific focus on how to better support nurses (so they can continue caring for patients, families and the community through this pandemic), WeRPN has identified the following calls-to-action:

WeRPN is asking our government to prioritize the critical challenges facing our nurses now. Based on the data outlined in this report, the organization's top asks of policymakers are to:

1. Continue the swift rollout of COVID-19 vaccines so healthcare workers and residents/patients are protected, with immediate priority given to those who are most at risk or in high-risk settings
2. Create more full-time positions for nurses and ensure RPNs are fairly compensated for the integral work that they do
3. Enhance retention of the nursing workforce by creating more opportunities for continuing education and career advancement
4. Enhance mental health supports for nurses and their fellow healthcare workers, specifically, to address the significant mental and emotional toll brought on by COVID-19, which will linger long after the pandemic is over
5. Leverage the unique experience and expertise of nurses on the front lines by ensuring that their voices are foundational to any future consultations and decision making on healthcare reform and policy in Ontario

In the interim, WeRPN is encouraging nurses across Ontario to also access information on the current mental health supports available at [WeRPN.com](https://werpn.com)

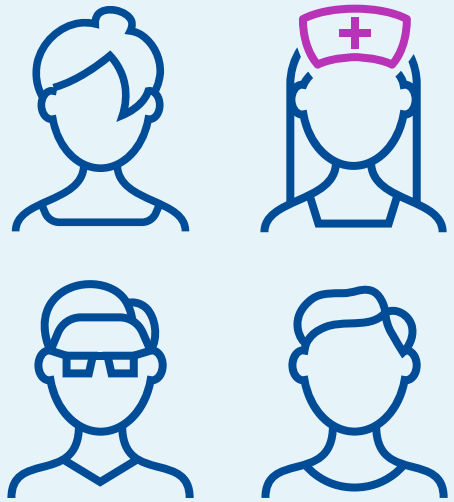




## Part 2

# **Examining Public Attitudes and Sentiment Regarding Ontario Nurses Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Omnibus Survey on the Angus Reid Forum:  
Nursing in Ontario During COVID-19



## **Public Perceptions About Nursing in Ontario During COVID-19**

To capture public attitudes and sentiment about nursing in Ontario during COVID-19, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) commissioned an Omnibus poll from December 3 to 4, 2020 surveying 807 Ontarians who are members of the Angus Reid Forum.

## Introduction and methodology

In December 2020, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN), which represents the voices of 47,000 registered practical nurses (RPNs) across the province, commissioned an Omnibus poll. The survey, designed to examine the public's views and attitudes towards Ontario nurses in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, was conducted via the Angus Reid Forum.

In total, 807 Ontarians who are members of the Angus Reid Forum took part in the survey from December 3 to 4, 2020, sharing their perspectives on the impact nurses have had in Ontario as the public healthcare system grapples with COVID-19. For comparison purposes only, the sample size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.46 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

Note: This Omnibus poll was conducted as a follow-up to a separate Omnibus poll that was conducted earlier in the year (January 2020), to commemorate the WHO's designation of 2020 as being the "Year of the Nurse and the Midwife" and capture Ontarians' vision for the future of nursing in the province.

The following executive summary captures key findings from the December 2020 Omnibus poll.

## General impressions and experiences with nurses in Ontario During COVID-19

*Ontarians were asked to think about their impressions and experiences with nurses in Ontario in various settings (e.g. at hospitals, clinics, schools, long-term care facilities, etc.) and to consider if their viewpoints have changed or evolved in the context of the global pandemic.*

*A large majority of Ontarians say their respect for nurses has “greatly increased” since the onset of the pandemic.*

*While the public generally believes service from nurses has had a direct and positive impact on their physical and mental health during this difficult time, they also expressed their concern for the opposite impact being felt by nurses. Ontarians overwhelmingly believe nurses are experiencing increased stressors at work, and for that, they want to see nurses receive additional mental health support through this pandemic.*

Diving into the findings:

**The public’s respect for nurses has grown significantly:** 81 per cent of Ontarians said their respect for nurses has “greatly increased” since the onset of the global pandemic. Women are significantly more likely to say this compared to men (85 per cent of women versus 76 per cent of men).

**Nurses have a direct impact on our mental health:** 91 per cent of respondents said they believed, as our society grapples with COVID-19, the support and care nurses are giving us has had a direct and positive impact on both people’s physical and mental health.

**Nurses are keeping families connected:** more than 4 in 5 Ontarians (83 per cent) believe nurses have played an important role in helping connect family members, and helping them cope amid the difficulties of COVID-19. Women, again, are more likely to report this compared to men (86 per cent versus 79 per cent).

**Increased stressors on mental health:** a full 94 per cent of the public think nurses have had increased stressors put on their mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents from Eastern Ontario and the GTA were most likely to say this (97 and 96 per cent, respectively). And women are also more likely to agree with this compared to men (96 per cent versus 92 per cent).

**Ontario needs to give nurses better mental health support:** 90 per cent of Ontarians want nurses to receive additional mental health support amid the pandemic. In fact, 94 per cent of the public believe nurses have had increased stressors put on their mental health as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.



# Soliciting public opinions on healthcare approaches that could better serve Ontarians

*Ontarians were asked to consider how the public and the healthcare system could better support nurses (if at all) to deliver better care across the province in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. They were presented with several possible approaches and were asked to identify which one approach they believed could make the biggest difference in addressing issues in the current system.*

*The approaches discussed in the survey were: 1) Investing in more nurses immediately; 2) Redesigning operational systems to reduce burnout among nurses; 3) Adopt a long-term viewpoint to provide greater systemic support to nurses (such as mental health supports); 4) Invest in better technology that allows nurses to more safely connect with and monitor patients and communicate with their families; 5) Provide nurses with a greater voice and influence in the healthcare system (seeking their input and consultation on healthcare matters and government policies). Respondents were also given the option to specify other factors or note that they believed further intervention was not needed.*

Diving into the findings:

**The public believes intervention is undoubtedly needed:** Firstly, an overwhelming majority of Ontarians believe some form of intervention is needed in the province's current healthcare system. Only 5 per cent of all respondents said they didn't think any further interventions are needed at this time.

**Ontarians believe the province needs to hire more nurses immediately:** The one approach that was cited the most, and stood out above the rest, was to invest in more nurses immediately – meaning hiring more RPNs, RNs and NPs where they are needed most. This was chosen by one-third of all Ontarians (33 per cent). Women were more likely to cite this option than men (36 per cent versus 29 per cent). Ontarians over the age of 55 were also more likely to choose this option (39 per cent) compared to their younger counterparts.

**Giving nurses a greater, more influential voice:** the second most-cited approach that Ontarians felt would make the greatest difference to improve the healthcare system was: providing nurses with a greater voice and influence in the system by seeking their input and consultation for system improvements and policy development. A full quarter of all Ontarians (25 per cent) would want to see this happen.

**More men advocate for investing in better technology than women:** Men were twice as likely as women (10 per cent versus 5 per cent, respectively) to say that investment in better technology would have the greatest impact, thereby allowing nurses to monitor and connect with their clients more safely.

## Based on personal experiences, where do Ontarians say more nurses are needed most?

*Respondents were asked to consider their own experiences and engagement in the current healthcare sector, and to then identify where they would like to see an increased nursing presence, if at all. They could choose multiple options if they liked.*

*Findings suggest that Ontarians almost universally want to see more nurses hired across many different community locales. In fact, 96 per cent of respondents would like to see an increased nursing presence in at least one type of healthcare facility in the province.*

Diving into the findings:

**Long-term care facilities most-cited for needing greater nursing presence:** 75 per cent of Ontarians want to see an increased nursing presence in long-term care facilities – by far the most widely, and frequently-mentioned service gap among respondents. This desire was slightly higher among Ontarians aged 35 to 54, and those who are 55 and older (77 per cent and 79 per cent respectively).

**Hospitals and retirement homes also popular areas for greater support:** Following long-term care facilities, the second most popular areas where Ontarians want to see more nursing support are hospitals and retirement homes. Two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) want to see more nurses in the province's hospitals. 65 per cent also want to see an increase in support at retirement homes.

**More nurses for in-home care:** Next, half of Ontarians (50 per cent) want to see more nurses hired for in-home care. Women were more likely to select this option than men (55 per cent versus 44 per cent).

**Primary care and healthcare clinics:** 41 per cent of Ontarians want to see more of a nursing presence in primary care, such as doctor's offices, nurse practitioner led offices, and family health teams. Similarly, 40 per cent of all respondents believe health care clinics could also benefit from more nursing staff.

**Schools and community centres more popular among younger Ontarians:** Younger Ontarians (under the age of 55) are significantly more likely to mention schools (29 per cent versus 19 per cent) and community centres (27 per cent versus 18 per cent).

## It takes a special person to be a nurse

*Ontarians' respect for nurses often stems from personal experience and a great majority hold nurses in high esteem. When asked how they would describe their experiences and impressions of the nurses from whom they've received care, they spoke very highly of nurses.*

Diving into the findings:

**A favourite nurse has left a lasting impression:** For 66 per cent of Ontarians, when they think back to the care they received from nurses in the past, they do have a “favourite” nurse that stands out. They clearly recall how their nurse helped them and made them feel.

**Going above and beyond the call of duty and leaving a really positive impact:** 4 in 5 respondents (79 per cent) said nurses should be celebrated, as they believe nurses often go above and beyond the call of duty. Moreover, 83 per cent said being under a nurse's care has had a really positive impact on their health (or that of their loved ones).

**Nursing knowledge + high emotional intelligence = success:** a full 95 per cent of Ontarians said they believe that to be a successful nurse, one has to have both nursing knowledge and high emotional intelligence.

**Taking on a day-in-the-life of a nurse would intimate most Ontarians:** Two-thirds (65 per cent) said if they had to trade jobs for a day and work as a nurse, they don't think they'd make the cut! This figure jumps to 71 per cent among Ontarians over 55 years of age.

## Sharing gratitude with Ontario's nurses

*Many Ontarians are grateful for the service nurses provide in this province, and many members of the public put their gratitude into action to extend their personal thanks to nurses. This sense of deep appreciation for the crucial contributions of nurses has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were asked, if they had an opportunity to thank a nurse today, which areas they would highlight as being most meaningful to them.*

Diving into the findings:

**Nurses are a key practitioner within a healthcare team:** according to 56 per cent of Ontarians, the province's nurses are to be most appreciated for their overall support, and the role they take on as a key practitioner within their healthcare team for patient and community care. Nurses are described as: practitioners who show great commitment and leadership every day. Interestingly, women again are more likely than men to cite this reason (60 per cent versus 52 per cent).

**Kindness from nurses also climbs towards the top of the list:** At a time when the vast majority of Ontarians (94 per cent) believe nurses are experiencing much greater stressors at work, kindness and understanding during difficult times was the second-most popular reason that Ontarians would want to personally thank nurses. Half of all respondents (49 per cent) cited this reason.

**Expert quality care from nurses stands out to Ontarians:** 45 per cent of the public say nurses' expert health care skills (applying their education and expert experience to provide quality care where it is needed most) are most worthy of recognition.

**Knowledgeability and communication skills round out this list:** For close to one in three Ontarians (31 per cent), nurses serve as a go-to resource for keeping the public safe amid COVID-19 (e.g., being informed, helping maintain safety protocols, etc.) Furthermore, another 31 per cent cite communication skills (helping people better understand their healthcare situation, communicating with the family as needed, etc., as a key standout reason to share gratitude with nurses.

**Offering gratitude to nurses for their care is a priority:** Over half of Ontarians (56 per cent) reported going out of their way to personally thank a nurse (or nursing team) in the past year, for the care they are giving to the public.

# Wage adjustments and fair pay during COVID-19

*Ontarians were asked a number of questions pertaining to wage adjustments within the healthcare system in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, and specifically about wage increases and fair pay for the province's nurses.*

*A large majority of Ontarians across the province would advocate for additional pandemic pay for nurses. They want to see nurses' pay bumped up in tandem with the government's current wage increase for personal support workers (PSWs). Of those who support a pay raise for nurses, two-thirds want these wage increases to become a permanent change rather than a temporary one. Across the board, women, and Canadians earning less than \$50,000 a year, were consistently and statistically more likely to want to advocate for greater pay for nurses.*

Diving into the findings:

**Advocating for pandemic pay for all nurses:** 78 per cent of Ontarians believe all nurses across the province should receive additional “pandemic pay” for their work though the COVID-19 health crisis. This figure jumps to 82 per cent among GTA residents, 83 per cent among women (versus 71 per cent among men), and 85 per cent among Canadians earning less than \$50,000 per annum.

**Temporary pay bumps should become permanent:** Of those who supported additional “pandemic pay,” 65 per cent believe any temporary pay policies approved for nurses during COVID-19 should be applied permanently after the pandemic.

**Make temporary pay increases consistent across healthcare teams:** The Ontario government recently announced a temporary pay bump for personal support workers (PSWs) for the important work they do. However, this pay bump was not extended to RPNs who work alongside PSWs. Across the province, the public widely supports extending this pay bump to RPNs as well. A full 83 per cent of all respondents want to see this. This figure jumps to 88 per cent among women (versus 78 per cent of men), and 91 per cent among those who earn less than \$50,000 per annum.



## Conclusion

Large majorities of Ontarians across the province say nurses play an integral role in the public healthcare system and their respect for nurses has greatly increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

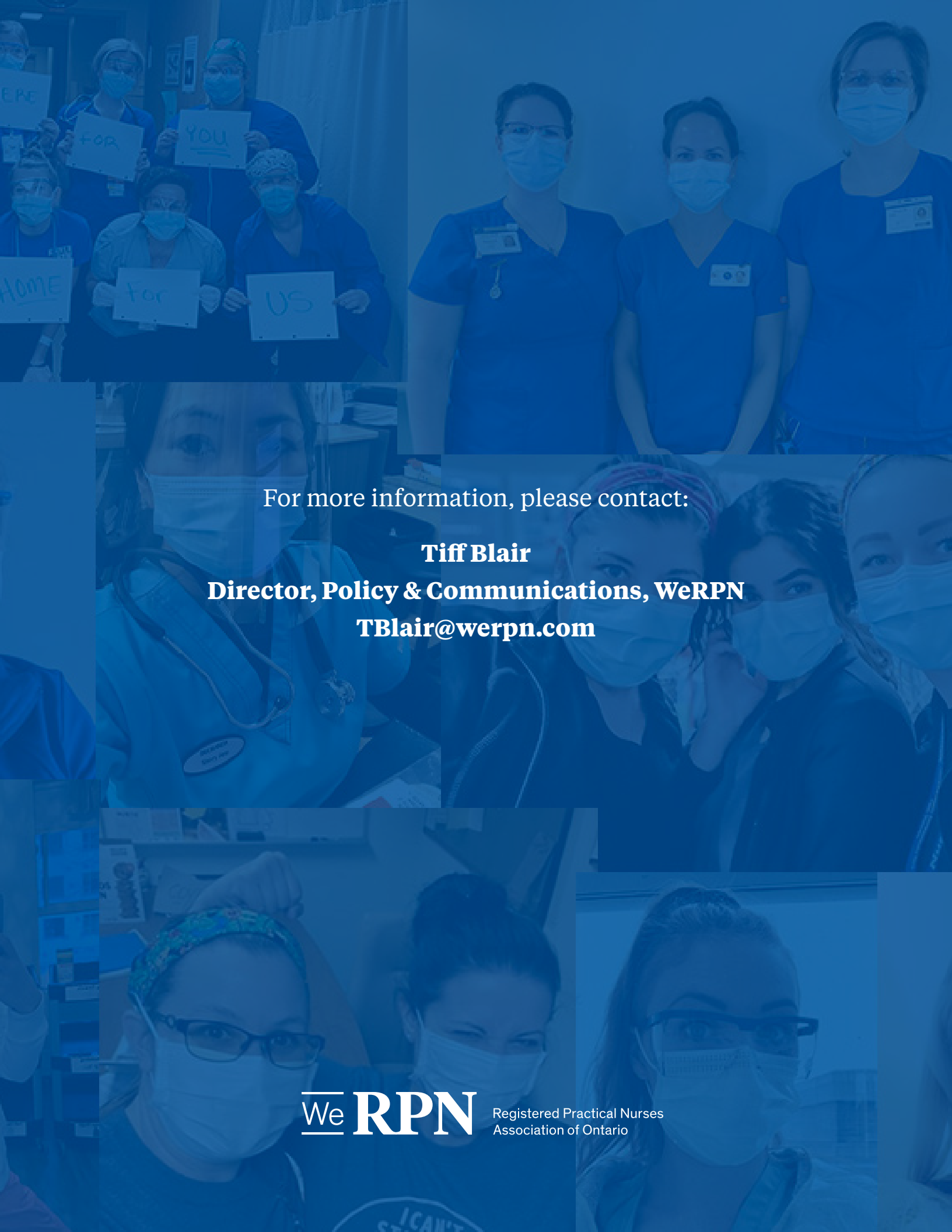
The Omnibus poll measured the real and positive impact Ontarians said they felt from a nurse's care, and the results show nurses have a direct impact on both the public's physical and mental health for the better. Nurses were widely recognized for going above and beyond the call-of-duty, for their kindness, their expert health care and communications skills, and their high emotional intelligence.

At the same time, the public sees large gaps among the healthcare system, both in needing better care for nurses, and to actually hire more nurses to fill urgent needs.

Of note, 90 per cent of Ontarians want to see greater mental health support for nurses, and 78 per cent want to support nurses with a pay increase for their work during COVID-19. Three-in-five who support such a pay increase also want to see those wages become permanent.

Last but not least, many Ontarians also want to give nurses a greater, more influential voice in shaping the system in which they work. One in four Ontarians sees promoting input and consultation from nurses as the single greatest priority in addressing the province's healthcare issues.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontarians are calling for better care of our province's nurses, with better pay, better mental health support and better, more inclusive input from this essential group of healthcare professionals.



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