

We are

Spring 2024

Practical Nursing

NURTURING CHANGE

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER
THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

We RPN

Registered Practical Nurses
Association of Ontario

Are you an RPN enrolled in Continuing Education?

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may be available!



As an RPN, you may be eligible to apply for an education grant from the **Nursing Education Initiative (NEI)** – a program administered by WeRPN and funded by the Ministry of Health. RPNs taking professional development courses can apply to have their base tuition course fees reimbursed. This includes registration fees for conferences, seminars and workshops! You could be eligible to receive up to \$1500 per fiscal year!

This program is open to RPNs registered to practice in Ontario and enrolled in courses or programs that enhance the quality of care. You must apply within 90 days of the last day of your course or exam.*

**Scan the code
to find out more!**



*Funding is not guaranteed.

We are Practical Nursing

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We RPN

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8

Strengthening nursing
education in Ontario

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BEGIN

Grow your career in Hospitals and Primary Care.

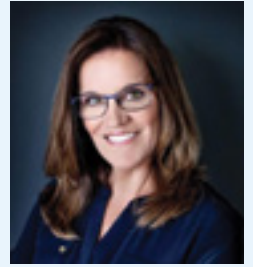
The Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing (BEGIN) program provides educational funding to nursing students and the chance to grow their careers in key sectors. Successful applicants can receive up to \$10,000* per year in tuition reimbursements, and access to exam prep resources, dedicated job search support, and more.

Recognizing the ongoing retention challenges in Hospitals and Primary Care, WeRPN has advocated to have two additional sectors included in the BEGIN program, helping to meet the urgent need for nurses. New BEGIN applicants can gain valuable experience, and complete their Return of Service in four rewarding sectors, including Long-Term Care, Home and Community Care, Hospitals or Primary Care.

Space is limited. Apply now at begin.werpn.com

*Eligible PSW-RPN students can receive a tuition and mandatory ancillary fee reimbursement of up to \$6,000 per year (maximum of \$15,000 over three years). Eligible RPN-RN/PSW-RN students can receive a tuition and mandatory ancillary fee reimbursement of up to \$10,000 per year (maximum of \$30,000 over three years). BEGIN participants who demonstrate financial need may also qualify for additional funding of up to \$5,000 per year.

Nurturing Positive Change Together



Although my natural inclination is to start this message by wishing you all well – which I do, I also know that many of you are struggling as you deal with the complex and very real challenges in our healthcare system. These challenges affect you and your nursing colleagues daily. Over the past few months, I have spoken with RPNs from across the province at our regional events and through our online sessions. I can see that our nurses, who are the heartbeat of the healthcare system, are grappling with unsustainable workloads that have been normalized and are truly hindering your ability to provide the care you want to give your patients.

For the past several years, you have demonstrated unwavering commitment to exceptional care for your patients in the face of very difficult circumstances. As issues such as staffing shortages and lack of support have regrettably become the norm, this has led to widespread moral distress and burnout. And now we see experienced nurses who have been “working overwhelmed” for years making the difficult decision to leave the profession altogether. This exodus is causing a void in experience and mentorship for new graduates, who are also an important piece of the healthcare system.

Frustration, fatigue, and hurt have bred resentment, affecting team cohesion. Research underscores the importance of workplace camaraderie, as you will read in the article “Thank you for being a friend: The Crucial Role of Workplace Friendships for Nurses,” but burnout has also led to disengagement and incivility. We’ve all seen it; perhaps you have acted out towards a fellow nurse.

It’s natural to turn on each other when hurt, resulting in a misalignment with your true values. This also feels terrible and will no doubt add to your stress. This breaks my heart because, as a nurse for over 45 years, I know the importance of

having those positive work relationships as a lifeline to help reduce stress and burnout while making work a meaningful place.

I recall a time when I was working a particularly difficult shift in the labour and delivery department. I was still a new nurse and was starting to get overwhelmed by the competing demands of my patients. I’ll never forget the feeling of calm that came over me when I locked eyes with a fellow nurse, and she simply said to me, “Don’t worry, I’m not going to let you sink today.” That was a defining moment for me as a nurse, where I learned that having each other’s backs is at our core. The disconnect that you may be experiencing is hurting us all.

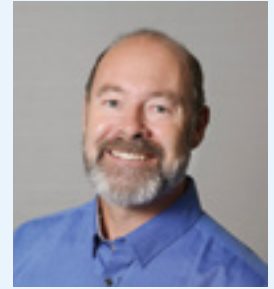
It’s time for a collective embrace to reclaim who we are, individually and as a nursing community. WeRPN is here to amplify your voice, sharing your stories with elected officials until patient ratios and working conditions improve. By advocating on your behalf, we hope this will allow you to focus on mending your caring and supportive selves. As leaders, our focus needs to shift to nurturing friendships and fortifying collective resilience.

Together, we’ll un-normalize the pressures, creating an environment where nurses thrive personally and professionally. This is our ongoing commitment to you. I promise you I am not going to let you sink either.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Martin".

Dianne Martin, RPN
CEO, WeRPN

Fostering Resilience and Unity: A Call to Reclaim the Essence of Nursing



The pressing challenges from the evolving nursing landscape have cast a shadow upon our once unshakable sense of pride in the nursing profession. The fabric of our community has been frayed, revealing the need for collective introspection, support and strategic actions to restore the resilience and unity that define us.

One of the concerning trends we are seeing is the departure of experienced nurses from the profession. This has left a knowledge gap that is taking a toll on new graduates. When I joined the profession, I had the advantage of relying heavily on my nursing colleagues for their advice and mentorship, and now we're seeing many newer nurses missing out on that guidance.

The problems we're facing have changed how our teams work together. Our once friendly and collaborative environment is starting to change in a way that might harm our unity. We're at a crucial point with many choices ahead, and we have a chance to make things better by encouraging teamwork and camaraderie in our workplaces.

Over the years, research has consistently highlighted the crucial role of workplace friendships in fostering resilience. We must recognize this fact and actively work towards rebuilding supportive networks that empower us to face the challenges of our profession with strength and solidarity.

With growing levels of moral distress impacting nurses, I have heard from several nurses who are feeling disengaged. In some instances, this is making existing problems worse and can even lead to workplace tensions and bullying toward each other. We must come together as teams again, rebuild our relationships and find ways to connect with the caring and supportive people we are outside of work.

In response to these challenges, I implore you to embark on a journey of reflection and action. Let us come together to reclaim the essence of our profession and revitalize our sense of pride and unity.

Embrace mentorship as a powerful tool to reignite passion where seasoned nurses can inspire their newer colleagues

by providing professional guidance, emotional support and encouragement.

Be proactive and plan to practice self-care through nutrition, exercise, spending time with loved ones or any other activity that helps you re-center yourself and connect with the people who are important to you. As difficult as it can be to prioritize our well-being, we can better provide the high level of care our patients deserve when we do so.

Contact your coworkers to check in on their well-being and offer a compassionate ear. These steps are also essential to restoring our resilience and unity. Small acts of kindness can go a long way in rekindling the pride of those feeling disheartened or isolated.

Unite your voices to advocate for systemic changes to address the root causes of declining morale in this profession. Engage with healthcare leaders and policymakers to champion solutions that foster a positive and nurturing work environment.

Lastly, as we stand at this crossroads, let us remember that the strength of our profession lies in our collective resilience and unwavering commitment to excellence. Together, we can triumph over our hardships and emerge more robust and united than ever.

Wishing you all renewed resilience and a profound sense of pride in our shared journey.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dickon Worsley'.

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President, WeRPN

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New online courses!

Registration is now open for our summer online courses. These eight-week courses are offered online in an asynchronous learning format to fit nurses' busy schedules. Beginning June 17, 2024, we are pleased to offer topics including:

- Introduction to Leadership
- Leveraging Critical Thinking
- Introduction to Nursing Research for RPNs

Scan the code for
registration details
and more info!



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Using advocacy to **strengthen nursing education** in Ontario

If you want to change the status quo, you have to be willing to speak up.

WeRPN has worked with the provincial government to address Ontario's nursing shortage through various efforts. One of the most innovative programs to date has been the Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing (BEGIN) program.

"As a professional association, it's our role to listen to RPNs and bring forward solutions to government to address the challenges they're facing. We helped design this program to help keep nurses in the profession at a time when they are urgently needed – which benefits our colleagues and ultimately our patients", said Dianne Martin, CEO, WeRPN.

Tailored to bolster the nursing workforce, BEGIN offers a comprehensive support system for PSWs and RPNs seeking further education and professional growth. The program's multifaceted benefits offer financial support and career advancement opportunities.

BEGIN will have its biggest year yet in 2024 – there are more than 2,300 participants in the program. But it wasn't

easy to turn this WeRPN initiative into reality. Setting up such a program with two key provincial ministries – required dedicated advocacy and strategic collaboration.

At the heart of BEGIN is the advocacy work that WeRPN has always believed in, helping the province's nurses and supporting their professional development.

"We want to help Ontario's nurses grow in their role or expand their career in different ways. BEGIN offers more support for them to do that," Tiff Blair, WeRPN's Chief Strategy Officer.

The genesis of BEGIN was marked by proactive advocacy aimed at addressing the nursing shortage, which had been expected for years and was exacerbated by the pandemic. At a time when nurses were struggling with unsustainable workloads, this program offered an incentive to help attract and retain people in the nursing profession.

"The government may not have funded programs like this

if it didn't become glaringly obvious during the pandemic that the nursing profession was in trouble," says Julia Scott, WeRPN's Director of Innovation and Program Initiatives.

While there were existing programs like the Nursing Education Initiative which supported continuing education for nurses, there was nothing that completely covered tuition. That is why WeRPN advocated to the government for a program that would support RPNs who were interested in becoming an RN.

"When COVID happened, there was additional urgency to finding more ways to keep nurses in the health system and help meet the needs in certain sectors like LTC and Home and Community care. By offering tuition reimbursements in exchange for a commitment to work in these sectors for a period of time, we could help support nurses to grow their careers while also meeting the need for nurses," Tiff Blair explains.

BEGIN was developed through intensive collaboration with the provincial government and two separate ministries, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Long Term Care, each with their own individual mandates, respectively. But, Blair adds, both ministries were willing to help develop the program to bring about change.

"There was a critical juncture where WeRPN showed that putting forward this priority was a response to a challenge that was on the government's radar," Blair says, emphasizing the alignment of WeRPN's advocacy with the government's recognition of the healthcare challenges.

The program has evolved from focusing solely on tuition support to encompassing ancillary costs and expanding eligibility. This dynamic response is how WeRPN says the

BEGIN program is addressing the changing landscape of healthcare needs. One of those changes has also been where nurses are working.

"Now we're able to accept students who want to work in hospitals and primary care, not just home care and long term care," Scott pointed out, illustrating the program's adaptability and the government's willingness to broaden its scope in response to sector-wide shortages.

The program was announced in 2021 and launched in early 2022. At the time it only included LTC and HCC. It was expanded in fall 2023 to include hospitals and primary care. That expansion was in response to feedback we heard from nurses and also the increased need to grow the nursing workforce in both those sectors as well.

The support from the ministries of Health and Long Term Care was not just financial but also strategic, enabling BEGIN to address both immediate and long-term needs within the healthcare system.

"Health and Long term care are the two ministries. It's been very positive because BEGIN is viewed as a really positive program that's having a significant impact," Blair says.

Through BEGIN, WeRPN, in its work with the provincial government, has laid a foundation for a stronger, more resilient nursing workforce in Ontario.

The latest evolution and focus for BEGIN is its recent expansion to new sectors.

That said, it doesn't mean the program won't continue to shift and evolve, Blair says

"WeRPN is always listening to participants and looking for ways to make the program more responsive to their needs," Blair says.

BEGIN by the Numbers

Total numbers of participants since BEGIN's beginnings, by role (PSW or RPN) and by sector they have chosen for their Return of Service as of March 17, 2024.

SECTOR	PSW – RPN	PSW – BScN	RPN – BScN	TOTAL
LTC	811	24	301	1136
HCC	282	11	280	573
Hospital	130	25	652	807
Primary Care	2	–	14	16
Total	1225	60	1247	2532

Enhancing the Role of Registered Practical Nurses through *Strategic Research Initiatives*

WeRPN Team



WeRPN members have shared that they continue to feel undervalued and underappreciated in their workplace. This is largely rooted in a need for more understanding about the unique role of highly skilled and competent RPNs in various practice settings. Now more than ever there is a need to recognize the pivotal role of evidence-based research in dismantling barriers and showcasing the invaluable impact of RPN practice on patient care.

WeRPN's strategic research plan prioritizes demonstrating the significance of RPNs, aiming to foster meaningful change in their recognition and utilization within the healthcare system.

WeRPN's Research Program

WeRPN's research program is designed to empower RPNs by providing resources to build research capacity, enhance critical appraisal skills, and facilitate connections with researchers. Addressing the perceived intimidation associated with research, the program aims to equip RPNs with the tools to contribute meaningfully to evidence-based practices.

Advocacy for Representation

There is a palpable need for increased representation of RPNs in research initiatives. This extends beyond acknowledging the depth of RPNs' knowledge and scope; it serves as a mechanism for influencing policy changes related to work assignments, fair compensation, nursing curriculum, and practice guidelines.

Barriers to Research Engagement

While RPNs are expected to incorporate evidence into their practice, traditional constraints have limited their active participation in research. Some RPNs have shared that research can feel “daunting” and “intimidating,” especially as direct care and outcomes always take center stage in our nursing practice. WeRPN acknowledges these challenges and encourages RPNs to identify and overcome together the barriers hindering their engagement in research. The healthcare system will only benefit from tapping into the wealth of knowledge nurses possess.

Dispelling the misconception of RPNs as less skilled, there exists a transformative potential for RPN engagement in research to strengthen professional relationships, improve care delivery, and advocate for policy changes.

Fellowship Program

WeRPN's commitment to breaking down barriers includes developing informational videos and a fellowship program tailored to support RPNs interested in research. By offering funding for applied research knowledge in real-world contexts, the fellowship aims to foster connections, enhance communication skills, and contribute to research that advances the role of RPNs across various settings.

WeRPN is here to support your research goals!

We encourage you to connect, share ideas, ask questions, and actively participate in initiatives that advance your expertise, drive evidence-based practices, and contribute to the advocacy, influence-building, and innovative growth of the RPN profession.

Through collaborative efforts, a more robust evidence base can be built to advance the role of RPNs in the broader healthcare continuum.

Collaborating in Research with RPNs

Manon Lemonde, RN, PhD

Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences,
Ontario Tech University

As a registered nurse with 45 years of experience in the field and an associate professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences at OTU for the last 20 years, I take pride in the incredible opportunity to work on research initiatives with Registered Practical Nurses.

I experienced a true sense of “reciprocity and mutuality,” which, as defined by Heaton, Day, and Britten (2016), is the degree to which stakeholders are open and interested in learning from each other, also referred to as the “knowledge appetite.” This is precisely why I am also GLAD (grateful, learned, accomplished, delighted) to share the benefits of including RPNs in research initiatives.

Collaborating with RPNs in research is no different than working with any healthcare provider. When working together, it's less about titles or designations and more about the person who will be contributing with me, other researchers or a patient partner involved in co-designing a research project. I'll convey my experiences working with RPNs using the acronym WeRPN.

W: Working with RPNs offers new perspectives and reinforces that all voices are important. This establishes a solid foundation of understanding for issues in health care no matter which setting they practice, embrace, or wish to influence.

E: Equilibrium is an essential element in research discussion and debate. RPNs contribute important observations to the study by identifying aspects that may have been overlooked or been completely forgotten.

R: Registered Practical Nurses bring to the table a level of knowledge and skill that helps them deliver comprehensive care in various settings. Their person-focused approach is essential to research as it ensures the quality of life as part of the quality of care.

P: Professionalism is equal in importance to evidence-based and evidence-enhanced practice.

N: Nobody should consider RPNs to be “only nurses” but view them as relevant contributors, innovators and collaborators.

In 2004, I was a clinical instructor on an oncology unit and worked with an RPN named Virginia. Virginia is an amazing person and an even more incredible nurse who was able to excel in an RN-dominated environment. As a staff member of the oncology unit, her perseverance and commitment to excellent patient care opened doors for her in the oncology outpatient department. I felt privileged to collaborate with her in both settings.

Together, we submitted an abstract to WeRPN (known as RPNAO at the time) titled Maximizing RPN's Roles and Optimizing Their Engagement in Patient-Centred Care. This innovative project included surveys, needs assessment, consultations and focus groups with all stakeholders. Virginia was a role model for undergraduate nursing students, and her inquisitive mind was an asset to these students and me as an instructor.

I never hesitated to assign students under Virginia's supervision as she was experienced and knowledgeable. Her clinical judgment based on solid evidence was an added value to our clinical or research-based collaborative work. With six to seven students under my academic advisement, I required an extra pair of eyes to ensure competency and safety for nursing students beginning their educational journey.

My work with RPNs Attila and Jennifer further solidified what I had learned from involving RPNs in research. My work with both expanded my understanding of RPNs as critical thinkers and caring partners in research. No matter what the project, Attila, who is now undertaking his bachelor's in nursing, could always provide “outside the box” thinking because of his deep understanding of theory and his practical experience.

Working with Jennifer, who is in the process of completing her doctoral studies, was equally rewarding as I was fortunate to be her teacher and the external reviewer of her master's in health sciences thesis; both opportunities provided me with the benefit of first-hand knowledge, expertise and a solid commitment to excellence in healthcare.

I am pleased that WeRPN is mandated to encourage and support RPN-focused and involved research. I can echo this approach through my own experience and hope to influence others to recognize the unmatched value of RPNs in the health research continuum.

References:

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PLACE TO BEGIN

LEVERAGING THE BEGIN PROGRAM TO CHART NEW CAREER PATHS

The BEGIN program was designed to empower nurses to overcome obstacles so they can evolve their skills and contribute to improving the healthcare landscape. BEGIN provides tuition grants to students enrolled in PSW-RPN and RPN-RN programs, reducing the financial barriers to their expanding nursing careers.

Megan LaVictoire and Charmaine Joy Salazar are two nurses whose stories encapsulate resilience, determination and the power of such educational support programs.

REGISTERED PRACTICAL NURSE Megan LaVictoire's journey from public service to nursing was driven by personal tragedy. Megan's story is a testament to the transformative power of grief and her unwavering commitment to providing compassionate care.

Born into a family of Canadian military veterans, Megan initially followed in her parents' footsteps, working for the Department of National Defense in North Bay, Ontario. Her life took an unexpected turn in 2012 when her daughter was born with a rare palliative disease. Despite lacking medical training, Megan discovered she had an innate ability for caregiving, inspired by the exceptional support from healthcare professionals at Roger Neilsen House.

Following the devastating loss of her daughter in 2016, Megan channelled her grief into a newfound purpose. She decided to pursue a career as a pediatric nurse, graduating from Canadore College in 2023. Now employed as a palliative care nurse at Nipissing Serenity Hospice, Megan wanted to

pursue further education to enhance her skills and opted for the Bachelor of Nursing program at Canadore College. She applied to WeRPN's Bridging Educational Grant in Nursing (BEGIN) program to help cover the cost of her continuing education.

Although Megan faced financial challenges during her transition, with the support of the program's financial assistance, she managed to balance part-time work and family responsibilities.

"I started the program when [my son] was just over one, so it was very challenging trying to juggle full-time school while raising a son and being a wife, not to mention working part-time," Megan recalls. "It was a lot of pressure. I sometimes look back and wonder how I managed to do it. But it was definitely worth it because [my career] is just so rewarding!"

Reflecting on the program's impact, Megan expresses gratitude for the tuition reimbursements, wraparound supports and networking opportunities that facilitated her success. The BEGIN program also played a pivotal role in Megan's preparation for the RexPN exam, offering testing software and guidance.

"The BEGIN case managers really assisted me with navigating the software and preparing for that exam. It's a lot of pressure having to write a test when you don't know what's on it, but thanks to the BEGIN program, I was very well equipped and prepared going into my exam."



Megan LaVictoire, RPN

Beyond the academic aspect, the program broadened Megan's perspective on nursing, revealing the fulfilling possibilities outside traditional hospital settings.

"The BEGIN program opened my eyes to community nursing, including the palliative care hospice," she says. "I think when nurses go into a program, they're so focused on working in a hospital setting. I don't think I would have ventured out of that setting unless it was for the BEGIN program. It's really rewarding to assist families with the transition from hospital to home, and I think you get a greater reward seeing the families thrive in their community."

Passionate about her new role, Megan's career is now a tribute to her late daughter, bringing a profound sense of purpose and fulfillment to her life.

Charmaine Joy Salazar, RN, was a nurse in the Philippines and was dedicated to continuing her nursing career once she moved to Canada. Having overcome different financial challenges, she fully embraced the opportunities provided by the BEGIN program. Charmaine's determination to regain her RN status led her through diverse roles in teaching, nursing homes and health management before deciding to return to school.

Enrolling in George Brown College's bridging program, Charmaine appreciated the flexibility that allowed her to pace her studies while juggling two jobs and family responsibilities. Covering the cost of continuing education was a significant hurdle until Charmaine discovered the BEGIN program. With the program's assistance, she completed her remaining courses in one semester, graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in January 2024.

"I had an amazing experience with the program and had an incredible case manager who was very thorough and accommodating," says Charmaine. "She reached out to me on a regular basis to see if I had missing requirements and to ensure that I had submitted everything. It was such a fantastic experience! I encourage my colleagues to look into it because it really helped me."

Participating in the program not only provided financial relief but also helped Charmaine adapt to Canada's healthcare system, exposing her to new tools and resources that enabled her to enhance her skills for the workplace.

"When I was doing nursing back home, we didn't have the chance to do thorough physical assessments," she explains. "But when I was taking my bridging courses, I learned a lot of new things and had the opportunity to go out into the



Charmaine Joy Salazar, RN

community. Skin and wound resources were very limited in the Philippines, but when I did the bridging program, I was amazed at all the different kinds of dressings and interventions that are available to use. I also learned how to operate a lot of equipment that we don't have back home and use programs like PCC and POC."

BEGIN funding also allowed Charmaine to take an additional course in wound care, which helped her land her current role as Co-Director of Care/Skin Wound Lead working in the long-term care sector. She will also be temporarily taking over as Director of Care (DoC), which is a true testament to her perseverance and the transformative impact of the BEGIN program on her career trajectory.

In addition to her primary role, Charmaine generously dedicates her weekends to serving as a preceptor at CIMT College, where she imparts valuable knowledge to PSW students and encourages them to consider enrollment in the BEGIN program. Remarkably, even as she fulfills the responsibilities of her upcoming role as Director of Care (DoC), Charmaine is actively contemplating pursuing her Nurse Practitioner (NP) designation next year. Her unwavering commitment, determination and perseverance make her a true source of inspiration.



Visit begin.werpn.com for more information and details about how to apply.

QUEEN'S PARK DISPATCHES



ADVOCACY

Bill 124 – Closing the Chapter

In our last advocacy update, we were waiting to hear the outcome of the Ford government's appeal of Bill 124, the public sector wage cap legislation initially declared unconstitutional in late November 2022. In mid-February of this year, the Ontario Court of Appeals upheld the 2022 decision, leading the government to officially repeal the legislation.

WeRPN is proud to have played an important role in the advocacy campaigns against this harmful legislation, emphasizing its negative impact on RPNs across Ontario, and we are pleased to see it will be permanently repealed.

As always, we will continue to advocate on behalf of RPNs to the Ontario government to ensure the needs of our members – and our fellow health care workers across the province – are met, including appropriate wages and working environments. We continue to push for wage increases for all RPNs to address the wage compression and discrepancies across sectors that we know are impacting so many of our members.



LEGISLATION

Bill 135, Convenient Care at Home – Submission

In mid-November, we provided a submission for the government's a consultation on Bill 135, the *Convenient Care at Home Act, 2023*. The legislation, which amends the *Connecting Care Act 2019*, established Ontario Health atHome, an amalgamation of Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) into a single organization.

WeRPN's submission requested a coordinated effort that centred the voices, needs and concerns of nurses, during the transition process to ensure RPNs and the Ontarians they care for have a smooth transition from LHINs to Ontario Health atHome.

As contract processes are updated and the new agency is established, we recommended that the government consider specific actions, including implementing competitive and harmonized nursing wages (especially compensation for travel between client locations), legislated nurse-to-patient ratios, increased educational opportunities for nurses and a reduction of the overreliance on nursing agencies that has become so prevalent in our healthcare system.



BUDGET

WeRPN's 2024 Submission

Our submission to Ontario's 2024 Budget Consultation process focused on common sense solutions for solving Ontario's persisting health human resource challenges, expanding on the above priorities.

The first recommendation to government is to implement methods to retain the nurses we already have through competitive and harmonized nursing wages and an improved working environment.

Although the role of RPNs aligns more closely with that of an RN, fair and professional compensation is not keeping pace with advancements in RPNs' skills, experience and knowledge. The government of Ontario should take action to address wage compression for RPNs, increasing retention while properly reflecting RPNs' value to the health system. In addition, we need government steps to create more supportive and safe work environments if we want to ensure RPNs can be retained and new nurses can be recruited.

The second recommendation is to legislate nurse-to-patient ratios. There is ample evidence indicating the positive benefits of legislated nurse-to-patient ratios, not only for nurses but also for patients and health systems. It is critical that the Ontario government consider introducing nurse-to-patient ratios to ensure that workloads remain manageable and RPNs have the ability to provide optimal care for patients.

The third recommendation in our submission is to enhance educational opportunities for RPNs, including better access to professional development and streamlining bridging education to recognize RPN prior knowledge and experience. Together these actions could make significant strides toward mitigating staffing challenges. an increase health

Lastly, we are recommending decreasing reliance on for-profit nursing agencies. These agencies will no longer be needed once the other methods mentioned above are implemented to retain the nurses we have and encourage more to enter the sector. Further, the significant increase in costs associated with the overreliance on these agencies would be better directed to hiring more full-time nursing positions, increasing pay for the nurses already in the system and offering greater educational opportunities to ensure career advancement is available for those who want it.

RPNs know there is no solving Ontario's nursing crisis until these fundamentals of retention and recruitment are in place. We look forward to the forthcoming Budget and the government's response to our submission after we discuss it with the Minister of Health's office.

We will provide an update on any major budget pieces that affect members and the broader health sector on our website and social media channels and in the next edition of our magazine.

Thank you for being a friend.

The Crucial Role of Workplace
Friendships in Nursing



IN THE dynamic and high-pressure world of healthcare, nurses serve as a vital link, tirelessly delivering skilled health interventions to those requiring assistance. Their crucial role within healthcare teams includes remaining at their patients' bedside and offering continuous care to people navigating the stress and fear associated with experiencing health issues. This daily responsibility extends to interacting with concerned family members and their patients' loved ones as well. Meanwhile, nurses are acutely aware that the demands on them often exceed their capacity, making it challenging to provide the optimal level of care they aspire to deliver.

According to our 2023 survey of RPNs, 92 per cent say their workload has increased over the last few years, and nearly 7 in 10 nurses surveyed do not feel they have the time and resources available to provide adequate care to their patients.

Besides being highly knowledgeable and skilled in their profession, nurses must also bring compassion, resilience,

and empathy to the table as they provide continuing care. Sustaining these emotions over a long period is as exhausting as the physical demands of the job. It only makes sense that a fellow nurse in the next room providing similar care and interventions will be the best person to truly comprehend what you are going through shift after shift.

Friendships among nurses can create a network of understanding and encouragement, often unspoken, fostering an atmosphere where challenges are faced collectively. The emotional toll of the job becomes more manageable when shared with individuals who are also experiencing the unique stresses and triumphs inherent in nursing.

The demanding nature of nursing can lead to moral distress, impacting both physical and mental well-being. According to our 2023 survey, 87 percent of nurses who experience moral distress are faced with knowing patients deserve more but are unable to offer it. Shockingly, most

“

I work in LTC in Toronto. I met my best friend, Bella, when we were working together as staff development coordinators. We are both RPNs and during a conversation about maintaining confidentiality, we realized her mother was one of my preceptors 15 years earlier! She is my rock, my person to bounce ideas off, and such an incredible listening ear.

BRIE, RPN

nurses (78 per cent surveyed) have experienced a breaking point related to their job in the past year, and 89 per cent say their mental health is suffering due to workplace conditions.

Although they will not solve the broader system issues, workplace friendships buffer against some of these negative effects. The camaraderie and shared experiences among friends at work can alleviate stress and provide a source of emotional support. Happy nurses can help create happy patients. They are also less likely to leave the profession or look for a new job.

Another benefit to having workplace friendships is the impact this can have on effective teamwork. Friendships among nurses will enhance collaboration and communication, creating a seamless flow of information within the healthcare team. When nurses share a bond beyond professional duties, communication becomes more open and honest. This, in turn, leads to improved patient outcomes as the team functions cohesively, drawing on the strengths of each member and covering each other when demands are high.

Building a Resilient Nursing Community: Nurses and nursing leaders can help foster these important bonds in the following ways:

Promote community-building activities both inside and outside the work environment. Whether a physical activity, creative endeavour, or even volunteering, getting out of the office with your colleagues can lead to a better understanding of each other and be an important step in forging those workplace relationships.

Develop a “Buddy System.” In the US military, there is a program called “Battle Buddies,” where soldiers are assigned a buddy with the expectation that they will help

each other through difficult situations and stop self-isolation from happening when things become challenging. This facilitated arrangement can lead to deeper friendships and understanding with colleagues while building the reality that someone at work will always have your back.

Use onboarding as a tool to help staff establish relationships right from the beginning. Managers and HR can work with staff to facilitate situations where new orientees have opportunities to meet every staff member on the unit.

Implement a Mentoring Program – Similar to the buddy program, pairing an experienced nurse with a new nurse will help create a structure for check-ins and ways to connect and form bonds between staff. WeRPN offers career-building initiatives to support RPNs in the workplace, including a Mentorship-Match Program and RPN Connect. This hub brings together RPNs to collaborate and contribute ideas to enhance nursing innovation and excellence in professional practice.

Have a New Staff display on a bulletin board or in a virtual environment like the staff portal to help everyone get to know the new faces.

In the dynamic landscape of healthcare, the role of friendships in the workplace for nurses cannot be understated. These bonds not only provide emotional support but also contribute to reducing the physical impacts of stress while preventing burnout and enhancing collaboration and professional growth.

As nurses continue to face the unique challenges of their profession, fostering and nurturing workplace friendships is a powerful strategy for building a resilient, connected, and thriving nursing community. Through these friendships, the true strength and compassion of nursing professionals shine, creating a positive ripple effect that extends beyond the workplace and into the lives of those they care for.

“

My work bestie Leeann and I keep our home care colleagues ready to rock and roll on the road. We choose a “huddle jam” (song) every morning to add to our play list and start our day off with a smile and a good beat!

SHARON, RPN

Liability insurance: the best defence

NAVIGATING the dynamic and challenging nursing profession involves contending with diverse obstacles inherent to in-patient care. Safeguarding one's professional standing is paramount, given the potential for malpractice claims. WeRPN distinguishes itself by offering Professional Liability Protection (PLP) insurance that transcends conventional coverage, presenting a comprehensive solution.

Aligned with the College of Nurses of Ontario's directive mandating PLP coverage for eligible nurses, WeRPN's PLP insurance shields nurses from malpractice claims arising from actual or alleged errors, omissions, or negligence in their practice. Beyond this, the coverage extends to provide financial compensation to the public affected by any malpractice or negligence attributed to a nurse.

Norma Tomlin, RPN and Director of Professional Practice at WeRPN has seen too many examples firsthand of nurses who find themselves in a legal entanglement with the College of Nurses over allegation of misconduct. "If someone is not a member or has let their membership lapse, they are not insured and have no legal protection. Our team provides practice support but beyond that, all we can do is offer them with a list of attorneys to explore and retain out of their own pocket. These are some of the hardest calls we receive in the department."

A noteworthy feature of WeRPN's PLP insurance is the incorporation of legal expense coverage, an element not mandated by the CNO but recognized by WeRPN as indispensable. This financial support aids nurses accused of malpractice or negligence, assisting them in meeting the legal expenses associated with their defence – an added layer of protection not universally found in professional liability insurance programs.

"Any nurse practicing without professional liability insurance right now could be at risk" according to Norma. "Most of the nurses who call, never thought they would find themselves receiving a letter from the College of Nurses and face what could be a costly and stressful situation with very little support." On average, a minor complaint can result in around \$8,000 in legal fees expenses. For many RPNs this is an enormous financial burden and not feasible, leaving the nurse to try defend the allegation on their own. "Nurses believe they will be covered by their employer's

insurance, and don't realize that the allegations can often come from the employer themselves. Additionally, when they leave an organization any coverage they would have had with that previous employer no longer exists."

WeRPN's commitment to exceeding norms is evident in extending coverage to various scenarios where nurses might require legal support. Whether summoned to a legally constituted tribunal in Ontario or needed as a witness under the Regulated Health Professional Act (1991), our PLP insurance stands as a safety net. This coverage is particularly crucial in incidents related to nursing and offers support to practitioners facing complaints under the Regulated Health Professions Act.

In addition to basic legal expense coverage, WeRPN provides a legal expense extension. This extension ensures that nurses can access competent and confidential legal advice when required – an added layer of support not mandated by CNO by-laws, setting WeRPN's PLP insurance apart.

A valuable inclusion is the Criminal Defense Expense Reimbursement Extension. In cases where a nurse is legally proven innocent, this extension reimburses criminal defence expenses, underscoring WeRPN's dedication to comprehensive protection.

WeRPN's PLP insurance supports nurses facing allegations of professional misconduct, offering legal counsel for responding to complaints from the College of Nurses of Ontario. This additional layer of protection ensures ongoing legal assistance throughout the process. According to Norma, "this is a very stressful situation for the nurses, with many worries about the process and how it may impact their practice. The professional practice team at WeRPN takes the time to guide members, direct them to the insurance brokerage for legal assessment and support them with practice resources that aim to enhancing their practice in order to provide safe, high quality care for those they serve".

With WeRPN's Professional Liability Protection, nurses are never alone. Our commitment to providing a robust and reliable solution for Ontario nurses transcends CNO requirements, exemplifying our dedication to the well-being and protection of nursing professionals who continually go beyond within the healthcare system.



Nominations for the WeRPN Board of Directors

Dear WeRPN Member:

WeRPN is seeking nominations for members of the association's Board of Directors. We are currently recruiting members to represent Regions 2, 4, 6 and Member-at-Large for 2-year term 2024-2026 and Region 7 for 1-year term 2024-2026. All terms to begin in October 2024. In accordance with association by-laws, to be eligible, a nominee shall:

- have maintained a Membership in the Association for minimum of two consecutive years preceding his or her nomination;
- meet the requirements for directors in the Act;
- be a member in good standing, of the College of Nurses of Ontario

Board members will be elected from the pool of nominees through votes cast in advance of the WeRPN Annual General Meeting (AGM) on October 24, 2024.

Completed nominations forms are due no later than **Monday, July 15, 2024.**

Nominating a Candidate

To nominate someone for the WeRPN board, the nominator must be a current member of WeRPN. The nominator must reside or work in same region(s) of the nominee, with the exception of Member-at-Large, in which case the nominator must reside or work in Ontario. Nominators are required to complete and submit the nomination form, along with a brief biography of the nominee.

Commitment Required of Directors

Board members must commit to a two year term and expected to attend Board meetings that take place five times per year. Board members may also be expected to chair a committee and prepare reports and recommendations for board discussion.

Bylaws

1.0 Division Into Regions

1. The Association shall be divided into seven (7) regions, with each region representing the geographic areas covered by two Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs).

Currently, there are four regions — region 2, 4, 6, and 7 that are up for election for the board of directors of WeRPN, plus Member-at-Large.

WeRPN Region	LHIN Numbers	LHIN Names	Term Years
2	3&5	Waterloo, Wellington & Central West	2
4	7&8	Toronto Central & Central	2
6	9&12	Central East & North Simcoe Muskoka	2
7	13&14	North East & North West	1
Member-at-Large			2

1.02 Qualification for Directors

1. Each Director shall:
 - a) Have maintained a Membership in the Association for a minimum of two consecutive years preceding his or her nomination;
 - b) Meet the requirements for directors in the Act;
 - c) Be a member in good standing of the College of Nurses of Ontario

1.03 Election of Directors

1. Directors shall be elected for a two-year term at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Association members.

The role of the Board of Directors is to represent the member in issues of Governance for the Association.

Competencies include but are not limited to:

- Working with people;
- Consensus-building;
- Conflict resolution;
- Teamwork;
- Leadership and motivation;
- Ambassadorship;
- Ethical conduct and conflict of interest;
- Knowledge of today's nursing environment; and
- Engagement.

Please Print Form Details

Nomination Form for WeRPN Board of Directors Regions 2, 4, 6, 7 and Member-at-Large

Nominee's Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____ Phone _____ Fax _____

WeRPN Region _____

WeRPN Reg # _____ College of Nurses # _____

E-mail Address _____

Signature of Nominee _____

Nominator's Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____ Phone _____ Fax _____

WeRPN Region _____

WeRPN Reg # _____ College of Nurses # _____

E-mail Address _____

Signature of Nominator _____

MAIL: Send to WeRPN, 5025 Orbitor Dr, Bldg 5, Suite 200, Mississauga, ON L4W 4Y5

EMAIL: Complete and email online form available in the **member's section** at **WeRPN.com** and send to to kflores@werpn.com by July 15, 2024.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Kristel Flores

E kflores@werpn.com

T 905.602.4664

TF 1.877.602.4664, ext. 234



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official insurance partners, belairdirect.**

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