

The importance of the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) for Nurses and /or healthcare professionals

I chose nursing as my career, knowing that nurses are the heart of health care. I wanted to help people in need and make a difference in their lives. Nurses provide care to numerous individuals with unique conditions and illnesses. Nurses are accountable for providing physical and emotional support to these patients to help them cope positively with difficult circumstances.

I am a nursing student, and I thank ONA's relentless efforts for nursing student placements during COVID-19. Due to ONA's fight, immediate action was taken to ensure nursing students could access in-person clinical placements safely. In addition, ONA made the government learn from best practices in schools where students are completing in-person clinical placements, including the following key considerations:

- Access to PPE, including N95 respirators;
- Access to a fulsome orientation that covers rights and responsibilities in the clinical setting and when caring for highly infectious patients;
- Guaranteed sick days, as schools should not penalize students needing quarantine.
- Reassignment options for students concerned about being exposed to COVID-19 (i.e., immunocompromised students).
- An increase in financial support for nursing students adversely impacted by emergency orders and/or delayed graduations, including more Ontario Student

Assistance Program (OSAP) grants.

Since nurses are supported through ONA, nurses can hold power to encourage and give hope to individuals suffering from potentially life-changing circumstances. ONA has strong

provincial and local leadership abilities. Since ONA is a nursing and healthcare professionals' union, all of its resources are devoted to advancing and supporting the interests of registered nurses and healthcare professionals.

My dad and I are proud ONA members as ONA provides the following significant benefits to its members: Handling grievances and arbitrations, access to our top education programs, professional practice specialists, human rights and equity team, health and safety specialists, and Workplace Safety & Insurance Board experts.

ONA's bargaining priorities are Better staffing, wages and care for its members. ONA believes that by supporting a better contract for hospital nurses and health care professionals, we can help ensure all Ontarians get the care they need and deserve.

ONA played a big role when the Ontario government launched the Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission on July 29, 2020, to examine the devastation as the virus ravaged this sector. Reiterating the shortcomings in LTC ONA brought to government tables long before the pandemic hit.

ONA prepared three commendable reports for the Commission:

- COVID-19 in Long-Term Care: ONA Survey Results;
- ONA's Final Submissions and Recommendations; and Are We in This Together? □ The Voices of Ontario's Long-Term Care Nurses

In 2019, the Ontario government introduced and passed Bill 124, wage-suppression legislation negatively impacting registered nurses, nurse practitioners, healthcare professionals

and other public-sector workers. This bill limits wage increases to a maximum of one percent of total compensation for three years.

As nurses and healthcare professionals, we do our best to provide daily high-quality care to our patients, residents, and clients. Our invaluable work has never been more apparent during the pandemic and ongoing healthcare staffing crisis. ONA advocates for our equity, fairness and respect. ONA successfully struck down Bill 124 in court and had the foresight to achieve reopener clauses to seek retroactive wages.

ONA provides way more support to its members than other unions, ONA offers legal assistance, mental health support, liability insurance, insurance and benefits, scholarships and bursaries. In addition, ONA represents members in WSIB appeals and adverse decisions before the WSIB Operations and Appeals Services Divisions and before the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT).

ONA is against Bill 7 because it removes patients' fundamental right to consent, can result in worse health outcomes for vulnerable patients, and does not address the root causes of Ontario's healthcare crisis, primarily understaffing of nurses and healthcare professionals. The Ontario Nurses' Association has an experienced staff of labour relations officers, lawyers, specialists, educators and others to assist its members in achieving significant wins in their workplaces. ONA is negotiating a new contract with their employers, the Ontario Hospital Association.

I truly believe ONA works tirelessly for the rights of the Nurses and will continue to protect and stand for the well-being of Nurses and our patients.