

The Importance of the *Ontario Nurses' Association* for Nurses

The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), founded approximately five decades ago, has worked tirelessly to provide support and opportunities to its 68,000 members. As a professional union, ONA represents its members by handling grievances, negotiating collective agreements, employing the ONA benefits program, and much more. The members of ONA are a diverse group of nurses, health care professionals, and student affiliates. Since ONA has been in existence, it has won countless awards that celebrate its excellence in protecting these members.

Through its regular newsletters and media releases, ONA provides updates on current and ongoing events that are relevant to its members. It is evident that ONA continues to protect the rights of its members and promote work environments that provide cultural safety as well.

Over the last few years, ONA has exemplified its commitment to health care professionals by fighting to defeat the proposed Bill 124. This Bill, introduced in 2019, is wage-suppression legislation that would have limited wage increases, negatively impacting registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and other health care workers. These health care workers, as well as many others, proved to be invaluable over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through ONA's unrelenting effort to support its members, Bill 124 was ultimately struck down. This is just one of many illustrations of how the Ontario Nurses' Association is so important to registered nurses and other health care professionals.

As a nursing student who is about to enter their fourth and final year, it is reassuring to know that there is such an amazing organization that works to advocate for, and will continue to support us as we transition into the role of a registered nurse. ONA especially played a key role in nursing students' education during the height of the pandemic by ensuring the safety of students at their clinical placements, through adequate access to personal protective equipment, proper unit orientation shifts, and guaranteeing sick days without penalty. As mentioned above, this organization informs its members of key information relevant to practice. In the context of nursing students, ONA educates us about new funding from the government to assist with tuition, new programs in the hospitals such as the Nursing Graduate Guarantee Program, as well as funding for mental health supports. The Ontario Nurses Association has shown, for the last 50 years, its dedication to its members, and its commitment to fight for the rights of health care professionals in Ontario.