

The Importance of the Ontario Nurses' Association for Nurses and/or Health Care Professionals

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The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is a professional association and labour union representing registered nurses (RNs) and other healthcare professionals in Ontario. It plays an indispensable role in ensuring the overall success and well-being of nurses, other healthcare professionals, and the people they serve. ONA protects nurses rights, positively influences healthcare legislation, provides a unified image and voice for all nurses practicing in Ontario, and supports nurses' professional development (ONA, 2023b).

In a profession as demanding as nursing, ONA's presence is essential to fight for nurses' legal rights as workers. ONA plays an active role in protecting and upholding the rights of nurses in many ways, as they take part in bargaining negotiations to secure fair wages, benefits, and working conditions. ONA educates nurses about their rights and is an avenue for them to assert their rights within the healthcare system. This has been illustrated recently in ONA's fight against Bill 124, a wage-suppression legislation passed in 2019 that negatively impacted RNs and other healthcare workers free collective bargaining ability. ONA played a very important role in the long battle to have this Bill repealed in 2022 and continues to be essential in the fight for rights in other areas, such as safe staffing and preventing workplace violence (ONA, 2023a). This is important as nurses are at higher risk of experiencing workplace violence (Kafle et al., 2022).

With over 68,000 front-line hospital nurses and health-care professionals in Ontario, ONA provides them with a unified image and voice (ONA, 2023d). ONA brings nurses together from all kinds of settings and specialties while promoting diversity and inclusivity. They undertake legal challenges such as collective bargaining on behalf of members to negotiate fair and consistent terms and conditions of employment (ONA, 2023b). Moreover, ONA engages in advocacy towards the public and government on behalf of the members which is important to be able to distribute information and updates effectively and ensure the highest quality of patient

care. However, ONA takes an important role in assisting its members, staff, and individuals in the community in overcoming challenges stemming from racism and oppression. Through its Anti-Racism Member Advisory Team and Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Working Group, ONA works diligently to raise awareness about ongoing issues affecting marginalized communities, both within and beyond the workplace. They have created educational resources, workshops, and training sessions that address important subjects like cultural competence, unconscious bias, and systemic racism. These initiatives aim to challenge discriminatory practices and promote a more inclusive and equitable environment (ONA, 2023c).

ONA supports its members by providing a wide range of resources aimed at fostering professional growth and well-being. They offer comprehensive education initiatives for their members which include workshops and lecturettes, eLearning programs, provincial meetings, among other opportunities to facilitate ongoing development and promote knowledge sharing among nurses and other health care professionals (Featherstone & Woods, 2022, p. 32-33). Additionally, ONA offers scholarships and grants to support individuals pursuing nursing or other health-related professions, enabling them to pursue higher education (Featherstone et al., 2023, p. 26). ONA also provides members with professional resources and publications like the seasonal *Front Lines* issues. This keeps everyone up to speed with recent changes to any healthcare policies, updates on any current happenings in the world of nursing, and other important announcements (ONA, 2023e). In a dynamic and progressive field like healthcare, a solid educational foundation is essential, and having an organization like ONA that advocates for quality education and training, as well as offering its members valuable resources and guidance, is crucial.

As I head into my first year of nursing school at the University of Western Ontario, I am looking forward to becoming an ONA member at the end of my studies. I know that ONA will enable me to actively contribute to a work environment that upholds principles of fairness, equality, and safety. Conversations with my mom, an RN herself and an active participant in ONA, has provided me with valuable insight regarding the organization's positive impact on her nursing experience. I am filled with a sense of pride, security, protection, and support as I prepare to enter the nursing profession and journey of lifelong learning, knowing that ONA will be there to support me every step of the way.

## References

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