As President of the Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA), the largest provincial nurses’ union in Canada, I am thrilled that you have chosen to pursue a career in such a caring, dynamic and selfless profession as nursing. I am equally excited to welcome you as a student affiliate-member of ONA!

Since our inception in 1973, ONA has recognized that nursing students are the future of our profession and union. At our 2008 Biennial Convention, we made it official, with ONA members overwhelmingly amending our Constitution to establish this classification for Ontario members of the Canadian Nursing Students’ Association (CNSA). As a result, almost all nursing students in the province – 18,000 strong! – are automatically affiliate-members of ONA, joining alongside our 68,000 registered nurse and health-care professional members, who provide care in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry.

This student affiliate-membership has reaped enormous benefits for both students and ONA. We learn firsthand what the key issues are for the new generation of nurses, and you receive the support of a strong union to help address them. Because of that, working with nursing students to improve clinical placements, advocate for high-quality public health care, and advance our profession will continue to be a top priority for ONA.

I encourage you to turn the page to learn about the services your union provides, and get involved in any way you can!

Vicki McKenna, RN
ONA President

Just What is a Union?

That’s a question we get asked a lot by students – and with several other nursing organizations in the province providing very different services, the confusion is understandable.

Basically, a union is an organized group of workers who come together with one collective voice to negotiate the conditions of their work with the employer, such as wages, hours, benefits, and health and safety. It’s the very definition of solidarity!

Another common question from students? How can I become a member of ONA when I start my nursing career? Well, that happens automatically when you begin working at an employer where ONA is the bargaining agent. A non-unionized group may also wish to organize with ONA, and there is a clear process for that, culminating in a vote of those involved.

However our members come to us, they have access to a vast array of services for their monthly dues – democratically determined at our Biennial Conventions – from “traditional” core union work such as contract negotiations and grievance handling to services you might not immediately associate with a union, including educational offerings, financial assistance, and lobbying.

The biggest benefit of all, though, is knowing that whatever you may be faced with throughout your nursing career, you will have a highly respected and supportive union behind you.
By getting involved, you can help ensure we achieve even more successes in the future!

WHY GET INVOLVED WITH ONA?
TAKE A MINUTE TO FIND OUT!

IT’S FREE!
Because you are a nursing student not yet working in the profession, you are not charged monthly dues to take part in and access the benefits of your union. It’s completely free!

IT’S YOUR RIGHT!
As an ONA student affiliate-member, you have the right to participate in the activities of your union – and what better way to start than by attending a meeting at the Bargaining Unit, Local, regional, and/or provincial levels? You will learn so much about the work of ONA – and we would love to have you there!

Contact the ONA Regional Vice-President for your nursing school (see back page) to see how you can join in. They, along with the ONA President and First Vice-President, want to hear from you! You can also use the “Find My Bargaining Unit President” tool at ona.org/bup to search for a Bargaining Unit President (the elected leader for ONA members at a particular employer) at your clinical placement. They would like to get to know you too!

TOGETHER WE’RE STRONG, TOGETHER WE WIN!
Your issues are our issues. It’s really that simple.

That’s why the ONA Board of Directors regularly connects with nursing students. They hold teleconnects with CNSA’s official and associate delegates for each campus at least twice during the school year, and attend the CNSA’s annual Ontario-Quebec regional and national conferences, which ONA also proudly sponsors, to meet nursing students in person.

Information gleaned from those conversations is invaluable, allowing ONA to bring your concerns forward to the government and other decision makers who recognize ONA as the voice of front-line nurses in our province. For example, in partnership with the CNSA, ONA is raising student concerns over clinical placements and putting forward solutions to improve them.

Also, take the unfair three-write maximum for the controversial NCLEX entry-to-practice exam. We took that fight straight to the government on your behalf, and the limit was revoked. ONA also supported the judicial review launched by the CNSA and York Federation of Students over the government’s Student Choice Initiative, which allowed post-secondary students to opt out of essential fees for campus groups/clubs, newspapers, etc., putting the very fate of CNSA chapter schools at risk. Together, we won that battle too, with the Ontario Divisional Court striking the initiative down.

By getting involved, you can help ensure we achieve even more successes in the future to improve patient care and your experiences as a nursing student!
You have two levels of representation: From the official and associate delegates for your CNSA chapter school, and from the experienced union members on the ONA Board of Directors.

**WE ENSURE YOU’RE SAFE SO YOUR PATIENTS CAN BE TOO**

As you embark on your nursing career, we’re guessing that providing high quality patient care tops your priority list. Sadly, nurses sometimes find themselves with excessive workloads and unsafe patient care environments due to harmful employer practices and policies, which can make achieving that goal challenging.

But ONA has unique language in our collective agreement – the Professional Responsibility Clause – that gives nurses the power to protect their patients and meet their standards of practice (with the support of ONA’s professional practice specialists) when something just isn’t right. The clause is clear. It works. And you won’t find it anywhere else.

Read about ONA’s professional practice services and successes at ona.org/pp.

**NEED A (FINANCIAL) HELPING HAND?**

Post-secondary education is expensive, we know that. But ONA is here to help lessen the burden.

In fact, each year ONA provides up to 10 $1,000 scholarships and one $2,000 Reese Fallon Memorial Scholarship to nursing students. The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions also offers one Ontario scholarship through ONA. Find out about eligibility requirements and deadlines at ona.org/bursaries.

ONA is also part of the Registered Nurses’ Foundation of Ontario, a charitable organization that provides financial support for nurses and nursing students to help them further their educational studies. Check them out at RNFOO.org.

**WE WANT TO TELL YOUR STORIES!**

We know you have powerful stories about your experiences as a nursing student – plenty of them, we bet – and we want to hear about them!

Published quarterly, Front Lines is the flagship publication of our union, featuring stories about our members and student affiliate-members, news about our profession, and information about our union you won’t read elsewhere.

But we can’t publish what we don’t know. Please send your story ideas and photos to frontlines@ona.org, and you may find yourself featured! And be sure to check out our latest issues at ona.org/frontlines.

**HUMAN RIGHTS ARE YOUR RIGHTS!**

Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment. No organization believes that more than ONA.

It’s why we have a dedicated provincial Human Rights and Equity (HRE) Team made up of ONA members from five designated equity groups to represent the diversity in our union. It’s why we hold a hugely popular HRE Caucus every year to promote inclusivity. It’s why we set up a network of human rights and equity representatives who connect several times a year on hot-topic issues. It’s why we acknowledge and participate in literally dozens of HRE observances throughout the year, including Black History Month, Day of Mourning and Pride. And it’s why we invite you to commemorate these events alongside us.

Read about our strong commitment to HRE at ona.org/hre.

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**DOWNLOAD THE ONA APP TODAY!**

Access breaking ONA news, events and more. Go to the Apple Store or Google Play and search for: “Ontario Nurses’ Association.”

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Read about our strong commitment to HRE at ona.org/hre.
ONA EDUCATION IS FOR YOU TOO!

ONA provides a plethora of education workshops for personal and professional development – and the best part is they’re free!

Want to gain a better understanding of your union, develop leadership skills or learn about nurses’ rights under our collective agreements? Sign up for an ONA workshop! Want to enhance your understanding of your professional responsibility or how government legislation affects nurses’ working lives? ONA education can help with that too! Find the perfect program(s) for you on our workshop calendar at ona.org/education.

Don’t have time for a workshop? No problem! Many courses are also available online, so you can complete them where and when it’s convenient. Set up your own ONA eLearning account at elearning.ona.org and start learning today!