The following is a summary of ONA’s key activities and successes since the last “The Work of the Union” update in summer 2014.
ONA launches a campaign to raise awareness of the value and role of our community care access centre (CCAC) members, who are embroiled in difficult negotiations, which includes two radio ads, frequent social media updates, letters to the editor in newspapers across the province, and a dedicated page on our website.

After two weeks of bargaining, including two days of mediation, ONA’s Nursing Homes Central Negotiating Team and the participating nursing homes reach an impasse, and arbitration follows.

Twelve hospitals agree to a single arbitration process with ONA to arbitrate employer flu vaccine policies that are unreasonable and contravene our collective agreement, which involves a lead case followed by an attempt to resolve all remaining grievances.

Eight nurse practitioners and one RN working at the Guelph Community Health Centre, who are already paid significantly less than their colleagues elsewhere in the health system, stage an information picket seeking the community’s support after they are offered zero per cent by their employer for the next three-and-a-half years.

While one of our employers tries to argue that because an Independent Assessment Committee (IAC) in its endoscopy unit had already issued recommendations, a grievance by ONA about current staffing models should be moot, an arbitrator disagrees, proving we can use both the grievance/arbitration process and the responsibility provisions in the collective agreement to challenge staffing models.

Public health nurses at the Middlesex-London Health Unit narrowly avert a strike after reaching a mediated settlement the day before the deadline.

ONA successfully argues that because advanced practice and geriatric emergency medicine nurses are engaged in a nursing capacity and must draw on their academic credentials, experience and judgment as a nurse to carry out assigned duties, they should be part of our Bargaining Unit.

With the Ebola virus ravaging West Africa, ONA’s most recent teleconnect focuses on implications for members.

During a meeting with new Labour Minister Kevin Flynn, we discuss bargaining challenges, particularly in CCACs, nursing homes, home care and public health.

An arbitrator finds it is a layoff when a hospital regular part-time nurse was consistently scheduled to her level of commitment and then had her scheduled shifts reduced below this commitment.

A significant interest award at one of our nursing homes maintains the staffing language, which the employer wanted to delete.

With the flu season upon us, our most recent long-term care teleconnect highlights influenza vaccine policies, and long-term care collective agreements and infection control protocols.

ONA wins a key interest award at a nursing home that maintains the accrual of sick days in a sick plan despite a corporate-wide strategy promising to cut them in half.

ONA continues to produce tip sheets on a variety of labour relations and other issues to assist our Local leaders and members.
Thanks to the proroguing of Parliament in 2013, the anti-union Bill C-377 comes back with a vengeance, containing none of the amendments we were successful in having the Senate make to diminish it, and we call on our members to fight back even harder.

In our submission to the legislative Standing Committee on Bill 8, Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, we state that effective and independent oversight of the health care sector should be through the existing Ontario Ombudsman.

ONA representatives meet with the Auditor General to discuss the audit of community care access centres, including the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres.

The first official meeting of Global Nurses United, comprised of leaders of nurses’ unions in 18 nations, including the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU), takes place, and ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud and First Vice-President Vicki McKenna attend.

While the government has made a number of announcements for additional home care funding, we remind them that RNs will not move into community positions without a commitment to wage, benefit and pension parity with their hospital counterparts.

Despite the blistering cold weather, ONA Board members, Local leaders, members and staff march with our friends and allies during an Ontario Health Coalition rally at Queen’s Park, demanding an end to cuts to local hospitals and increased privatization.

ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud braves the ice-bucket challenge, which has taken the internet by storm, not just to support the ALS Society of Canada, but to bring attention to the cutting of 58 RN positions, 52 of which are full-time, at St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation, which works with grassroots organizations to turn the tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa, will continue to receive support from our union, with a minimum base donation of $10,000 per year for the next three years.

ONA’s ongoing annual $7,500 sponsorship for the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, which preserves, honours and promotes the culture and history of all working people and the labour movement, will be maintained.

With ONA Board members present, the CFNU presents its latest report, Where Policy Meets the Nursing Front Line: A Framework for Determining Appropriateness for a Safe, Sustainable Health System to Canada’s premiers at the Council of the Federation meeting, spreading the message that we must unite in opposition to the federal government’s continued erosion of health care funding to the provinces.

Also at the meeting, another CFNU-commissioned study is presented, A Roadmap to a National Drug Policy, which suggests four reforms for a national drug policy, such as improving access to drugs by including prescribed drugs in the public health care system, and ensuring equitable access to drugs by establishing a national formulary.

ONA members are encouraged to sign an action alert from the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario that demands the government put an end to so-called “medial tourism,” where international patients who are treated at Ontario hospitals pay fees, which may place them ahead of Ontarians waiting for care.

ONA continues to meet with the Staffing Alliance for Every Resident (SAFER) group, advocating for improved funding and staffing in long-term care.
The Human Rights and Equity Caucus, which kicks off the Biennial Convention week, brings together approximately 350 members – one of our highest attended ever – under the powerful theme Disability Rights are Human Rights.

Breakout sessions provide delegates in the five designated equity groups and the Friends and Allies group with an opportunity to express their experiences, focus on their issues, and develop their own strategies for addressing workplace issues.

Actress, comedian, writer and disability advocate Maysoon Zayid is a huge hit with Caucus goers, peppering her discussion on disability rights with personal experiences – and all in a very humorous, yet powerful manner.

Human Rights and Equity Team member Linda Warkentin tells the Caucus that the way to achieve a healthy work environment where all members are treated fairly is by getting more involved with ONA.

Participants in our most recent human rights and equity teleconnect discuss the evolving legal recognition of harassment and bullying as workplace hazards under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

ONA’s first Accommodation and Return to Work Guide, which provides a general overview of disability and the duty to accommodate in the context of human rights legislation as well as practical tips and strategies, is distributed to all the registrants of the Biennial Convention.

Our union gets behind a Canadian Labour Congress petition calling on the federal government to launch a public inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

ONA continues our advocacy with the Ontario Human Rights Commission on its review of the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), as we want the barriers that prevent nurses with mental health disabilities from accessing employment removed.

Currently, we have three Charter/Human Rights challenges involving ONA members, regarding the CNO postings of findings on its public register/website about disabilities, and in one case, we have been successful in having the nurse’s past history removed.

The Human Rights and Equity Team continues to highlight key issues and stories in this area in the Human Rights and Equity Bulletin and each issue of Front Lines.
Health and Safety/WSIB

■ When the Ebola virus breaks out in West Africa, ONA reacts quickly to ensure our members on the front-lines are protected by providing guidance and information to Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Dr. Eric Hoskins at his Ebola advisory table and setting up a Steering Committee to ensure leaders and staff are in the know.

■ We are successful in getting the Ministry of Labour (MOL) to conduct proactive inspections in hospitals to determine Ebola readiness, and in having the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) resurrect the provincial pandemic multi-stakeholder working group.

■ At our Biennial Convention, Minister Hoskins offers congratulations and thanks to “ONA, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) and the many nurses who stepped forward to express publicly your concerns about the level of preparation you felt was evident in our hospitals.”

■ Our Ebola information webpage is viewed more than 5,000 times and supporting documents, including our memos and MOHLTC directives and documents, downloaded more than 800 times.

■ The CFNU sends donations totaling $10,000 to fight Ebola in West Africa: $5,000 for the RN Response Network (RNRN) for front-line health care workers who are being devastated by the disease, and $5,000 for Doctors without Borders; ONA also provides a $5,000 donation to RNRN.

■ ONA applauds an order from the Ontario Labour Relations Board to heighten security for our members at the Brockville Hospital Mental Health Centre, part of the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, after the stabbing of a nurse by a patient, which could have caused serious injury or killed her.

■ ONA is pleased to see the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group go to trial, facing three charges from the MOL for failing to keep staff safe, which stemmed from an incident at the Royal Ottawa Place Recovery Program in which nurses suffered injuries due to an attack.

■ In an effort to facilitate the reporting of health and safety hazards in the workplace, ONA produces a handy pamphlet that outlines everything members need to know.

■ An accompanying infographic produced for members shows that in 2013, Ontario’s health care sector workers had the highest number of lost-time injuries related to workplace violence and exposures.

■ ONA member Lori Dupont, who was murdered on the job by an anesthesiologist, is one of the driving forces behind a landmark new survey that shows how domestic violence can spill into the workplace.

■ An inspiring new video highlighting how three of our members successfully took on health and safety issues in their workplace is unveiled to rave reviews at our Biennial Convention and is now available on our website.

■ ONA is examining our membership health and safety networks and processes and will be asking key members for input about the best ways to proceed in keeping our health and safety activists connected.

■ Our lobbying efforts are successful in convincing Ontario’s Chief Prevention Officer at the MOL to dedicate money for the Public Services Health and Safety Association to engage in a multi-year initiative to address the gap between the knowledge and evidence available in health and community care subsectors on management of workplace violence, and effective application of such knowledge that results in measurable outcomes in overall reductions in incidents.

■ Our health and safety specialists continue to be active in developing violence prevention plans at Toronto East General Hospital and Southlake Hospital, which we hope may be models for other employers to follow.

■ We support research that we hope will lead to a better understanding of the influence that workplace fatigue has on nursing and workplace injuries and what steps can be taken to prevent injury and promote occupational safety.

■ ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud briefs the MOL on the abysmal state of worker safety in our hospitals and that we have not made progress in the health sector, asking for top-down enforcement of health and safety laws in health care workplaces and orders that are driven by the precautionary principle.

■ After a thorough review of current processes and a lot of brainstorming, a number of recommendations are approved for ONA’s Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Team to improve our WSIB representation.

■ In the past two years alone, members seeking ONA’s assistance in their WSIB claims have been awarded more than $3-million in loss of earning benefits and non-economic benefits.
Local Political Action/Member Engagement

During the Canadian Health Coalition’s National Medicare Week, ONA leaders and members join members of the Board of Directors and other allies at meetings with MPs on Parliament Hill to ask that they stand up for medicare and renegotiate the expired Health Accord.

During our fall elections for the positions of the five Regional Vice-Presidents on the Board of Directors, Region 1 incumbent Pam Mancuso and Region 3 incumbent Andy Summers are re-elected, and join Region 2 Vice-President Anne Clark, Region 4 Vice-President Dianne Leclair and Region 5 Vice-President Karen Bertrand, who were all acclaimed.

During her remarks at our Biennial Convention, Ontario Health Coalition Director Natalie Mehra thanks members for working with their local health coalitions so diligently to bring about changes to our health care system.

RNs need to stand up for their patients and stand out from the crowd of health providers, which is why ONA supports the Wear White on Wednesdays campaign.

ONA makes it easy to wear white by making available ONA-branded RN apparel and many other promotional products through our brand new eStore, available at www.myunionstore.com/ona.

The Board approves the Strategic Plan and 2015 budget, which focuses heavily on membership engagement, including succession planning, both at the Local and staff levels, revitalizing our education programs to reflect members’ ever-changing needs and engaging students in the work of the union.

Members across the province are front and centre at Labour Day parades and events to bring attention to the gains all working people have enjoyed thanks to unions.

Long-term care nurses stage information pickets to protest cuts to RNs at the merged Cama Woodlands Long-Term Care Home in Burlington.

To highlight the Biennial Convention theme, I’m in. Stronger Together, ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud urges the more than 1,000 delegates to stand together as a powerful union as we continue to face challenges in our professional lives.

The solidarity and caring of our members and staff is evident at the Convention, as they collect a whopping $12,000 to support three public health nurses from the Regional Municipality of Durham, who we believe were fired for speaking out about health and safety issues and are currently engaged in arbitration.

The work of the union

Organizing Successes

RNs at the newly merged St. Joseph’s Health Care London overwhelmingly choose ONA to be their union over the Ontario Public Service Employees Union in a Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act vote, meaning we retain and gain more than 700 RNs!

We also hold two successful certification votes, welcoming nine new members from River Glen Haven in Sutton and 29 members from Shalom Village Jewish Long-Term Care in Hamilton.

The Retention and Recruitment Team continues to field calls from registered nurses and allied health professionals seeking the benefits that ONA membership offers, and a number of campaigns are underway.
Member Education

- The education session at the Biennial Convention, which closes out the week, is entitled What it Takes to Win and focuses on recent cases, including arbitration awards, workplace safety and insurance tribunal rulings and labour board decisions – the core work of our union.
- ONA’s Facebook page receives 50 new “likes”, and our Twitter account almost 160 new followers during our Biennial Convention week.
- ONA announces an exciting new leadership program for 2015 designed specifically to engage our members in the life of our union, which will target rank and file members with demonstrated potential for a wide breadth of future leadership roles in our union.
- For the period January 1 to December 2, 2014, 489 ONA workshops, lecturettes and teleconnects are delivered, compared to 310 education sessions for the entire 2012 calendar year.
- Our Membership Education and Events Team is developing new eLearning programs in the areas of return to work and professional responsibility workload reporting forms (hospital and homes) to assist our members on the front lines.
- Free the Children and Me to We co-founder Craig Kielburger delights delegates at the Biennial Convention with messages about inspirational leadership and creating a social movement that inspires activism, which fits right into our Biennial theme of I’m in. Stronger Together.
- Marshall Gantz, a lecturer in public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, tells Biennial Convention delegates that while nurses have been marginalized, ONA gives us hope and shows us how to unite and fight for our rights.

Professional Issues

- An Independent Assessment Committee (IAC) hearing at Humber River Hospital’s two endoscopy units has determined that RN staffing levels are inadequate, issuing 32 recommendations to improve care, including that the hospital hire one additional full-time RN at each site.
- ONA reaches a workload settlement with Kilean Nursing Lodge Home in Grimsby, which improves resident care by enhancing staffing, the model of care, education and security, thereby avoiding an IAC.
- Minutes of Settlement are signed with Niagara Health System, which will see significant staffing improvements, including the replacement of 22.5 RPNs hours with 22.5 RN hours at the St. Catharines’ site emergency department.
- The most recent professional practice teleconnect, “Administering and Receiving Vaccinations: What are Your Professional Obligations” focuses on the College of Nurses of Ontario’s practice guidelines on influenza vaccinations and practice standards on infection prevention and control, as well as the collective agreement and ONA’s health and safety strategies.
- The Nursing Week Advisory Team 2015 is named with members representing all five regions of the province, and planning meetings get underway.
- Our Medical Radiation Technologists (MRT) celebrate National MRT Week to laud their contributions to our health care system.
- “Update on Professional Issues for Nurse Practitioners” is the third teleconnect of the year for these members, providing them with an opportunity to network about professional issues and concerns they are encountering in all practice settings.
Student Affiliation

- We celebrate alongside our Canadian Nursing Students’ Association (CNSA) student affiliates during National Nursing Students’ Week, under the theme of self-care.
- ONA increases the number of our Nursing Scholarships to up to five per year, and the 2014 winners are announced, along with the Ontario recipient of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions Nursing Scholarship.
- In an extensive interview with Front Lines, CNSA Ontario Regional Director Cat Davy thanks ONA for always supporting students with any issues that arise, noting students couldn’t ask for a better support system.
- ONA is a proud sponsor of the CNSA Ontario Regional Conference in Peterborough, where Region 2 Vice-President Anne Clark assures delegates that ONA has their backs today and in the future.
- Recognizing the importance of reaching out to nursing students as soon as possible, ONA members and staff set up a table during York University’s orientation week where they discuss our exemplary services and field dozens of questions.
- ONA strongly encourages new graduates to complete a study being conducted by a research team of Canadian nurse educators to find out how well prepared they are for the realities of the workplace.
- Board members continue to participate in conference calls with CNSA leaders and campus delegates to learn about their issues firsthand so we can take them forward to the government and nursing stakeholders.

*To view “ONA Update: Summer 2014,” see the September 2014 issue of Front Lines or log onto the ONA website at www.ona.org/workoftheunion.