

Ontario Election 2007

Key Issues for Ontario's Nurse Practitioners



NURSE
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ASSOCIATION OF
ONTARIO

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An Interest Group of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario

Election 2007 – Key Issues For Ontario’s Nurse Practitioners

The Nurse Practitioners’ Association of Ontario (NPAO), an interest group of the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO), represents the professional interests of nurse practitioners, nurse practitioner students and nurses who have the education preparation and experience to work in the role in Ontario. NPAO advocates for accessible, high quality health care for Ontarians through the integration of nurse practitioners across the health care system. NPAO membership affords the benefits of advocacy services, professional support and educational opportunities.

NPAO supports the key election positions put forward by RNAO in “*Creating a Healthier Society, RNAO’s Challenge to Ontario’s Political Parties: Building Medicare’s next stage, focusing on prevention.*” (Available at www.rnao.org). NPAO is committed to action that focuses on the social determinants of health and supporting healthy Ontarians and sustains and promotes movement towards the Second Stage of Medicare. More specifically, by improving access to health services, the Second Stage of Medicare renews the focus on community care and makes nursing a priority.

Nurse practitioners across Ontario believe that continued efforts to accelerate integration via the removal of all barriers is essential to improving access to healthcare, decreasing wait times, reducing inefficiencies and improving the overall health of Ontarians. With the recent regulatory changes to establish new specialty areas of nurse practitioner practice (adult, paediatric and anaesthesia in addition to the existing primary health care specialty), all legislative, regulatory and policy barriers must be addressed to ensure successful integration and achieve the full potential of the nurse practitioner role in all practice settings and across all health care sectors.

The tenets that underlie the policy positions outlined in this document include.

- Transformation of health care is dependent on the shift towards patient centred care and a focus on maintaining and restoring health while partnering with patients in their efforts to lead meaningful and intact lives.
- High functioning, effective interprofessional partnerships increase access to quality patient care and are critical to the sustainability of Ontario’s health care system.
- Nurse practitioners play an important role in the clinical leadership and delivery of effective and efficient patient care as key members of interprofessional health care teams by supporting increased access, promoting continuity of care, facilitating transition across the health care system, leading research and incorporating evidence into practice in all patient centred programs.
- Barriers that limit the integration of health professionals or restrict the ability to fully utilize their scope of practice within the health care system must be eliminated.
- All members of interprofessional teams must be fairly and equitably compensated recognizing the unique skills, knowledge and expertise that each member brings to the team.

Promote Utilization of Full Scope of Nurse Practitioner Practice and Support Integration of the Role Across All Sectors

Nurse practitioners have practiced in Ontario for over forty years. It was only a decade ago however, that revisions to the Nursing Act were made to formally establish and regulate the nurse practitioner role. Ontario was the first province in Canada to take this bold step forward. Other provinces have followed and benefited from Ontario's experience as they developed legislation and policy to support full integration of the role and avoid the barriers that limited the integration of nurse practitioners.

Although much has been achieved by successive governments to address barriers to practice, much remains to be done. Ontario now lags behind other jurisdictions in addressing barriers that restrict nurse practitioners from working to full scope. Earlier this year, the Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner Integration Task Team reported to the Minister on strategies to address the many legislative, regulatory and policy barriers that limit the ability of nurse practitioners to provide timely, efficient, comprehensive care.

To promote utilization of full scope of nurse practitioner practice and support integration of the role across all sectors, NPAO recommends that political parties commit to the following actions:

1. Immediately release and implement the recommendations contained in the Nurse Practitioner Integration Task Team Report submitted earlier this year to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.
2. Implement recommendations of the College of Nurses of Ontario regarding Nurse Practitioner scope of practice and authority to perform additional controlled acts.
3. Review all legislation and associated regulations that restrict or limit all speciality nurse practitioners from practicing to their full scope in any health care settings, in particular the Public Hospitals Act.
4. Amend the Schedule of Benefits for Physician Services to provide fair and equitable remuneration to physician specialists for patient referrals from nurse practitioners.
5. Remove legislative and regulatory barriers in the Nursing Act and other legislation that limit nurse practitioner ability to prescribe drugs and order tests and diagnostic procedures that are essential to comprehensive patient care.
6. Implement a data collection strategy, including the necessary administrative and financial supports, that recognizes and measures the specific contributions of nurse practitioner practice, increases understanding of nurse practitioner practice patterns and supports policy decisions that result in effective utilization of nurse practitioners within the health care system.

Enhance Ontarians' Access to Health Care Services

A key priority shared among governments across Canada is to improve the public's access to health care services. The Ontario government has taken many steps including the introduction of new health professions, new models of care delivery and new funding strategies to support interprofessional teams.

Many of the issues that currently challenge our health care system can be resolved through increased access to Ontario's nurse practitioners. To enhance access to care in communities across the province and in a variety of sectors and practice settings, NPAO proposes that political parties adopt the following recommendations:

7. Fund a minimum of 200 new nurse practitioner positions in all four specialty areas and across all practice settings and all health sectors annually in each of the next four years.
8. Fund a minimum of eight new nurse practitioner led primary health care clinics in communities where there is demonstrated support and need for expansion of primary health care services.
9. Initiate a review of chronically vacant nurse practitioner positions to determine if proven or new and innovative strategies would support recruitment and retention of nurse practitioners to these practice settings.
10. Implement strategies to promote the recruitment and retention of nurse practitioners in rural, remote and underserved areas including special salary designations, funding relocation expenses, expansion of the Grow Your Own NP Program and financial incentives to encourage nurse practitioner students to do clinical placements in these communities.
11. Develop, in collaboration with nurse practitioners, a public education program that provides the public, physicians and other health care professionals and policy makers such as Local Health Integration Networks, with a better understanding of the role of nurse practitioners and the impact they can play in increasing access to care, reducing waiting lists, improving management of chronic diseases and implementing preventative health care programs.

Ensure an Adequate Supply of Knowledgeable and Skilled Health Human Resources Today and in the Future

The health care needs of Ontarians are increasing and changing. New and proven strategies are needed to encourage registered nurses to pursue nurse practitioner education and to retain experienced practitioners. Healthy work environments are essential to sustaining valued health professionals in any sector. Ongoing support for the education of nurse practitioners is also required to ensure an adequate supply of nurse practitioners to meet these needs. Strategies to support the development of

faculty and preceptors who contribute to the training of these valuable professionals are also needed.

To ensure an adequate of supply of knowledgeable and skilled nurse practitioners, NPAO recommends that political parties adopt the following recommendations:

12. Implement strategies that ensure that salaries for nurse practitioners remain competitive and incorporate mechanisms to support annual cost of living increases.
13. Implement flexible funding models that enable organizations to establish appropriate remuneration packages that reward and recognize nurse practitioner knowledge and expertise and provides adequate administrative support to maximize the effectiveness of the nurse practitioner.
14. Expand the 80/20 registered nursing mentorship strategy to include nurse practitioners and enable nurse practitioners aged 55 and over to have the opportunity to spend 80 per cent of their time working in the nurse practitioner role and 20 per cent on mentorship of new nurse practitioner graduates.
15. Continue to support and expand education programs to include all speciality nurse practitioners by funding the development of programs and additional seats in schools of nursing in Ontario universities.
16. Build upon the Nursing Faculty Fund by targeting tuition support for nurse practitioners pursuing PhD level preparation in order that they may continue to educate nurse practitioners for Ontario.
17. Continue to support and expand opportunities for nurse practitioner educational programs and stakeholder organizations to provide continuing education programs for nurse practitioners in all specialty areas of practice.

Foster the development of interprofessional teams focused on providing quality patient centred care and knowledge support

NPAO acknowledges the positive steps, both nationally and provincially, that have been taken to build quality interprofessional teams. We believe the continuous pursuit of excellence in this regard will ultimately have a positive impact on the health of Ontarians. This is especially true for individuals with complex needs, where the team approach to care allows patients to meet the maximal level of health and function.

To support the transformation of Ontario's health care system and promote the move towards the Second Stage of Medicare, NPAO proposes that political parties support the following recommendations.

18. Provide appropriate compensation for all members of interprofessional teams that recognizes the unique contributions of each profession.
19. Remove barriers that limit the development of effective interprofessional team practice such as the current compensation model that provides bonus payments to physicians for illness prevention and health promotion activities regardless of whether they or another member of the team (e.g., nurse practitioners or registered nurses) provide the care.
20. Provide funding to develop and implement a mentorship program, early in 2008, to support the transition from novice to expert nurse practitioner and facilitate the integration of nurse practitioners into interprofessional teams in all sectors and settings.
21. Continue to support the Quality Management Collaborative for the purpose of supporting the development of interprofessional primary health care teams by providing guidance, structure and tools to ensure their success and support the full integration and maximum utilization of nurse practitioners. Encourage and support the Quality Management Collaborative in identifying and implementing strategies to share these resources with primary health care practices other than Family Health Teams.
22. Continue to invest in interprofessional education regarding the role and scope of practice of nurse practitioners concurrently with their introduction into new settings and sectors so that they may be accessed appropriately.