



Fight Local

YOUR GUIDE TO LOCAL ACTION

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#1

UNDERSTAND YOUR POWER

As a member of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), you know all too well the challenges we face as our provincial health-care system continues to face reckless changes, inadequate funding, and threats of increased privatization.

After all, as a nurse or health-care professional, you have first-hand experience of the serious impact bed closures, service cuts, regressive government legislation and staff shortages have on patients, residents and clients, and your own ability to provide safe quality care.

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While your union is advocating on behalf of all members at the provincial level to address these issues head-on, there is also something you can do: Get involved right where you are!

Local action is extremely effective. ONA members have proven that time and time again. By coming together and speaking with one strong voice, you have the power to effect change in your workplaces and the communities in which you live. And we strongly encourage you to understand, embrace and use that power. This handy guide contains eight proven strategies to show you how.

If you would like further information and/or support fighting a local issue after reading this guide, we are here to help. Just drop us an email at onamail@ona.org.

Together, we've got this!

Local action is our action.



#2

SPREAD THE WORD

Has your employer announced cuts at your health-care facility?
Are you ready to engage your coworkers and your community?
Let others know immediately!

Remember, speaking out means you are fulfilling your role as a patient advocate.

For action to be taken, people must be aware of what is occurring. Communicate with as many people as you can about what has happened and how it impacts them. Don't forget to inform:

- ▶ Your Bargaining Unit President.
- ▶ Your coworkers (see more on how to do this effectively in strategy #5 on page 7).
- ▶ Your Labour Relations Officer.
- ▶ Your Local Coordinator.
- ▶ Your Regional Vice-President.
- ▶ ONA's central email: onamail@ona.org.
- ▶ Your friends and family.

Tell the brutal truth.



#3

HONE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

As a nurse or health-care professional, you possess the skills needed to successfully advocate for your patients, residents and clients. You can use this natural ability to its full advantage to speak effectively:

- ▶ **Be confident:** People trust you, know you are a professional and are confident that you know the issues and their implications for care.
- ▶ **Know what you want to say – your “key takeaway messages” – in advance and stick to them:** Being focused and repeating, repeating, repeating your points ensures those messages are absorbed by those around you. The messages you use with the media and other Ontarians should be the same messages you use with politicians and others.
- ▶ **Remain optimistic:** Encourage others to join you in taking action. Everyone has a voice and should use it.

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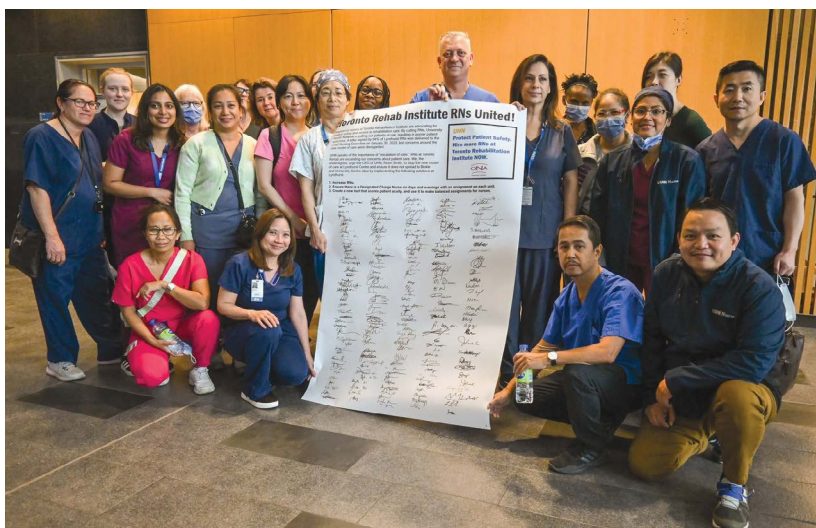
MANAGE YOUR EMPLOYER

When first told of any position elimination or other actions, it's natural to feel angry. It's OK to express this anger and disappointment.

Here are some tips for effective action and communications with the employer:

- ▶ Keep the discussion focused on the impact to nurses, other health-care workers and patients.
- ▶ Propose ways of working with your employer to find alternative plans. Can you find other savings? Do others have ideas that could solve the issue?
- ▶ Remind the employer of the College of Nurses of Ontario's requirements for providing safe patient care. Will the cuts impact your ability to meet your nursing standards? If yes,

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say so and propose alternatives. It's important to suggest alternatives that protect your role against the erosion of your work – object to reassigning your work or “giving it away” and the deskilling of your role. Consider your job security and the future of the nursing role being impacted.

- ▶ Ensure that your Bargaining Unit President and Labour Relations Officer are notified of the issue immediately (see page 3).
- ▶ Going to the media is not the first step. Explore every option first for resolving the issue.
- ▶ Plan to take action to inform your coworkers, Bargaining Unit, community and the media of the issue. There are many types of collective action that you and your coworkers can take, including petitions, rallies and information pickets. You want to make sure your action is suitable to put pressure on the decision-maker. First, you need a plan to win. Contact your Bargaining Unit President for support.

*Settling is not an option.
For we are at stake.*



#5

ENGAGE YOUR COWORKERS

The first step to engaging your coworkers is to identify the problem they are trying to solve. Everyone cares about something at work. Everyone wants respect. Everyone wants to go to work and know they are providing the care their patients, residents and clients need.

It's likely your coworkers are feeling as if nothing can change. They don't know that anything can be done. **It's not apathy.** Figure out what your coworkers care about and what, if anything, is holding them back. Respond to it.

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The second step is to determine if the problem is a good organizing issue. A good organizing issue is:

- ▶ **Widely felt:** Many of your coworkers share a common problem or are affected.
- ▶ **Deeply felt:** Many of your coworkers care enough about it to do something.
- ▶ **Winnable:** Any issue is winnable, but you need to match your solution – what you want to see changed – with the power you



have to win it, or by building more power. How many coworkers want to do something, how strongly do they feel about it and what actions are they are willing to take?

Organizing your coworkers is not the work of one person alone. You need a team. Do you have the formal and informal/organic workplace leaders onside? You need a team that can reach every coworker through one-on-one in-person organizing conversations. These conversations help you determine what your coworkers care about and if they are willing to take action to win. To win, you need high participation of your coworkers taking actions together to put pressure on the decision-maker.

- **Union and solidarity-building:** Using your power of numbers to win means attracting coworkers who have never been involved. You need solidarity between all groups of your coworkers. You and your coworkers may not win the changes you want on your first try. Organizing helps you build a stronger union structure, trust and relationships between your coworkers, with more leaders emerging. It makes you stronger as a collective and helps you figure out what it will take to win the next time.



#6

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

You are not isolated individuals at your workplaces, but integral parts of broader communities. Engaging these communities is crucial for building power and achieving your goals. It builds solidarity between those who access care and those who provide it – you! Through conversations and finding shared values, you are forming a strong base of support to fight for better public health care.

WHO IS YOUR COMMUNITY?

Friends, family, neighbours, patient advocacy groups, schools, religious groups, clubs, associations, etc.

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WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TOGETHER?

- ▶ Amplifying your message on social media.
- ▶ Sending letters to the editor.
- ▶ Signing petitions.



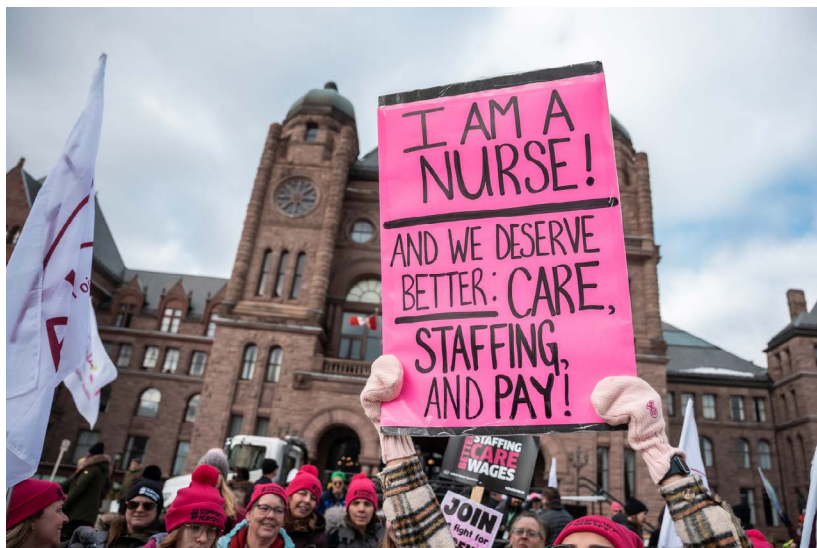
- ▶ Contacting local elected representatives.
- ▶ Organizing a rally/information picket.
- ▶ Hosting an open forum.

HOW DO YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS?

- ▶ Share your personal experiences and the challenges you face as a nurse and health-care professional.
- ▶ Ask what their experiences are with the health-care system.
- ▶ Ask how they think cuts in health care will affect them and their loved ones.
- ▶ Discuss the interconnectedness of workplace issues, personal well-being, and broader social concerns. Identify common concerns and interests.
- ▶ Share your vision of how coming together to take action on these issues will achieve better public health care! Ask if they agree.
- ▶ Ask them what their vision looks like.
- ▶ Ask them if they would like to work together on a plan for change.

We find strength in each other.





As you have read throughout this guide, you have a powerful voice and ability to advance change.

Communicating with your local elected representative can be an effective way to build support for your issues and priorities. You can influence change by following these proven tips for success!

MAKING CONTACT

- ▶ Determine which order of government to meet with based on who has jurisdiction over your issue. Most of the time we meet with the Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) as they are responsible for the management and delivery of health care.
- ▶ Find your representative and their contact information. You can find your MPP by going to <https://www.ola.org/en/members> and entering your address. You will also find your MPP's office phone number, email and address listed.



MEETING FACE-TO-FACE

- ▶ The best way to ensure your elected official understands the issue and its impact is to meet with them face-to-face. To set up a meeting, send an email and explain who you are and why you're requesting a meeting. You should specify a timeframe for when you want to meet. This encourages the official to respond to your request more quickly. Phone the office to confirm your email was received. Make a follow-up phone call after 48 hours if you do not receive a timely response.
- ▶ Prepare for the meeting. Reach out to an ONA Government and External Relations Specialist for support at onamail@ona.org. Compile background information on the elected official. Have a prep meeting with the individuals you are advocating with and assign roles and talking points so everyone plays a part.





- ▶ During the meeting, explain your issue clearly and present a defined “ask.” Speak as a front-line nurse or health-care professional, not as a representative of your workplace. Do not get sidetracked by the elected official or staff who are in attendance. Stick to the issues at hand.

AFTER THE MEETING AND BEYOND

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- ▶ Make time for a debrief to recap how the meeting went. Share meeting notes with your team members. Send a follow-up email to the elected official thanking them for their time and restating any commitments they agreed to.
- ▶ Remember that victories often don’t happen overnight. Elected representatives can be slow to implement change, but meeting with them makes a difference. We fight until we win!

*Governments. Administrators.
The nurses and health-care
professionals are coming.*



Engaging with the media can be fun and there is a formula for doing so effectively. Talking to reporters is a powerful way to educate and influence the community and decision-makers. Before speaking with the media, ensure that you:

- ▶ Refer media inquiries to media@ona.org. The Provincial President is the official spokesperson for all media, based on ONA policy.
- ▶ Anyone speaking to the media other than the President, including Local Coordinators or Bargaining Unit Presidents, needs approval.
- ▶ Have developed your key messages – the top three or four points you want to get across.
- ▶ Make these key messages brief and high-level, i.e., “cuts to staffing and beds will harm patients.”



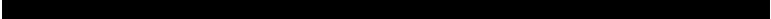
- ▶ Approach your key messages from your position as a patient advocate; what is the impact on those who will read/see/hear your key messages?
- ▶ Use plain language (avoid acronyms, medical terminology) that is easily understood by anyone not working in health care.
- ▶ Ensure you have a designated spokesperson before approaching the media about a story.

CONTACTING THE MEDIA

There are several ways:

- ▶ Phone or email your local media assignment editor to “pitch” your story – let them know who you are, summarize the issue and provide brief, relevant details of your story.
- ▶ Send a media release or media advisory (email media@ona.org for help) to summarize the issue/event. Ensure there is a contact person/contact information included for follow-up.
- ▶ If sending a media advisory regarding an upcoming rally or event, ensure all the relevant information is included – time, location and purpose (the who, what, when and where).

INTERVIEW TIPS

- ▶ Stick to your key messages and remember who you are talking to – not the reporter, but the listeners/viewers/readers.
 - ▶ Try to anticipate the questions you’ll be asked and think through how you will answer them (i.e., focus on your key messages).
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#8

- ▶ Be truthful, and if you don't know the answer to a question, say so.
- ▶ Remain focused on the issue and your key messages.
- ▶ Don't mention employer names or assign blame.
- ▶ Nothing is "off the record" with the media. Don't be tempted to say anything that will damage your credibility or get you into trouble with your employer.
- ▶ Remember, you can always steer the conversation to your key messages with phrases such as, "what the real issue is..., " etc.
- ▶ Contact media@ona.org for coaching and additional media tips.





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ONTARIO NURSES' ASSOCIATION

85 Grenville Street, Toronto, ON M5S 3A2

Telephone: 416-964-8833 • Toll-Free: 1-800-387-5580

onamail@ona.org

ona.org