



ONTARIO NURSES' ASSOCIATION

# Nurses Vote

## Activist Kit – Provincial Elections 2025

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The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is the union representing 68,000 registered nurses and health-care professionals, as well as more than 18,000 nursing student affiliates, providing care in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Myth Busters</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>All-Candidates Debate Questions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Template Opinion Editorial</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Template Letter to the Editor</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Guide to Social Media</b>	<b>11</b>

## Myth Busters

### Section 1: Nurses hired

**Myth:** The Ford government has set a record for the most nurses hired.

**Fact:** For every 10 new nurses hired, six leave their job.<sup>1</sup> Nurses are leaving the health-care sector en masse to pursue other jobs or retire early, fed up with impossible working conditions. In fact, statistics from the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) show that 8,000 nurses left the sector in 2024, more than any year during the peak of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

**Quick facts:**

- Ontario has the worst registered nurse(RN)-to-population ratio in Canada. according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI).<sup>3</sup>
- The government needs to hire 25,000 net more RNs just to catch up to the national average.
- Ontario's independent Financial Accountability Office projects that there will be a province-wide shortage of 33,000 nurses and personal support workers (PSWs) by 2028.<sup>4</sup>
- 2024 was the worst year for hospital closures in Ontario and 85 per cent of closures were due to a shortage of nurses.<sup>5</sup>

### Section 2: Staffing ratios

**Myth:** It's not up to the Ontario government to legislate ratios. It's up to the hospitals to decide how to best manage their staffing needs.

**Fact:** Other provincial jurisdictions like British Columbia have implemented nurse-to-patient ratios in consultation with labour unions. The Ontario government can set minimum standards and require reporting to ensure staffing needs are met. Ratios are essential for high-quality health for Ontario residents. Ford's PCs voted down a bill put forward by the NDP which would have legislated safe staffing ratios in Ontario hospitals.

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<sup>1</sup> College of Nurses of Ontario. *Nursing Statistics Report 2024*. Pg. 8. [nursing-statistics-report-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> College of Nurses of Ontario. *Nursing Statistics Report 2024*. Pg. 8. [nursing-statistics-report-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. *Nursing in Canada, 2023, data tables*. [nursing-in-canada-2014-2023-data-tables-en.xlsx](#)

<sup>4</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. *Ontario Health Sector: Spending Plan Review*. March 8, 2023. [Financial Accountability Office of Ontario](#)

<sup>5</sup> CBC News [2024 worst year for Ontario ER closures, CBC analysis finds | CBC News](#)

### Quick facts:

- Staffing ratios improve retention and recruitment by ensuring a set number of nurses and health-care professionals are working at all times to provide patient care. This reduces burn out by making workloads more manageable.
- Sacramento, California experienced a 69 per cent decrease in nursing vacancies within four years following the implementation of ratios.<sup>6</sup>
- In Victoria, Australia, the number of employed nurses grew by more than 24 per cent with over 7,000 inactive nurses returning to the workforce after the implementation of ratios.<sup>7</sup>
- Ratios reduce instances of abuse and violence which is prevalent. Nine in 10 nurses experienced some form of abuse while at work in the last year alone.<sup>8</sup>
- Ratios improve patient outcomes. Each additional patient per nurse jeopardizes quality care, increasing the length of hospital stays and risk of mortality.<sup>9</sup>

## Section 3: Provincial funding

**Myth:** The Ford government is spending billions more on health care compared to previous governments.

**Fact:** The Ford government spends the least on health care per person in Canada. In fact, the Ford government has spent the least per person on health care every year since they were elected in 2018. This comes at a time when Ontario's population is aging and growing substantially. To ensure everyone gets the care they need and deserve, we need to elect a new government that will fully fund our public health care system.

### Quick facts:

- Health spending per person in Ontario is the lowest in Canada. Ford spends only \$4,889 per person and this is 15.5 per cent below the spending average of the other provinces.<sup>10</sup>
- Due to underfunding, primary care and home and community care workers are paid less than hospital workers.

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<sup>6</sup> Research from the BC Nurses' Union. *Minimum Nurse-to-patient Ratio FAQ*. [Minimum Nurse-to-Patient Ratio FAQ | BC Nurses' Union](#)

<sup>7</sup> Research from the BC Nurses' Union. *Minimum Nurse-to-patient Ratio FAQ*. [Minimum Nurse-to-Patient Ratio FAQ | BC Nurses' Union](#)

<sup>8</sup> CFNU Member Survey Report. March 2024. Pg. 25. 65f2170954d430c73820ef18\_2024 CFNU Members Survey - Web.pdf

<sup>9</sup> Lasater, KB et al. *Evidence that reducing patient-to-nurse staffing ratios can save lives and money*. National Institute of Nursing Research. May 2021. [Evidence that Reducing Patient-to-Nurse Staffing Ratios Can Save Lives and Money | National Institute of Nursing Research](#)

<sup>10</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. *2022-23 Interprovincial Budget Comparison*. [Financial Accountability Office of Ontario](#)

- Due to underfunding, community health centres are \$2 billion behind on wages compared to hospitals and other sectors.<sup>11</sup>
- During the peak of the pandemic, the government refused to spend \$1.7 billion in dedicated health funding.<sup>12</sup>

## Section 4: Privatization

**Myth:** We need private for-profit health-care options to reduce the backlog and ensure Ontarians receive fast access to health care.

**Fact:** The reason we have backlogs in the first place is due to the lack of funding for publicly funded health care. The expansion of private, for-profit health care will not reduce long wait times because we only have one pool of nurses and health-care professionals. By pulling workers and resources out of the public system, those who cannot afford private health care will be left waiting even longer for care. In other sectors like for-profit clinics and long-term care homes, they cut corners to save costs and provide a reduced quality care.

### Quick facts:

- The Ford government introduced Bill 60 which increases for-profit clinics in Ontario.
- Shoulder surgeries in private Ontario clinics cost four times more than in the public system.<sup>13</sup>
- During the pandemic, for-profit homes had 78 per cent more resident deaths compared to non-profit homes.<sup>14</sup> Ford continues to reward for-profit homes by granting them licenses to operate.
- An Auditor General report from December 2023 found that Ford's increased use of private, for-profit nursing agencies contributed to staffing shortages at public hospitals.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eckler. *Ontario Community Health Compensation Markey Salary Review*. November 2023. [Ontario-Community-Health-Compensation-Study.pdf](#)

<sup>12</sup> Gray, Jeff. *Ontario underspent health budget by \$1.7-billion in 2022-23, watchdog says*. Globe and Mail. [Ontario underspent health budget by \\$1.7-billion in 2022-23, watchdog says - The Globe and Mail](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ontario Health Coalition. *The Ford Government's Plan to Privatize Ontario's Public Hospital Services*. September 2024. [www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/briefing-note-the-ford-governments-plan-to-privatize-ontarios-public-hospital-services/](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Ontario's for-profit nursing homes have 78% more COVID-19 deaths than non-profits, report finds](#)

<sup>15</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. December 2023. Value-for-Money Audit: Emergency Departments. [https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en23/AR\\_emergencydepts\\_en23.pdf](#)

## All-Candidates Debate Questions

As an ONA member, you have an important and valuable perspective on the consequences of an understaffed and under-funded public health-care system. Below are questions you can ask candidates that will help shed light on how their party will prioritize our workplaces, health care, and communities if they form government. If you are able, please speak about your own experience, and add local examples as you go.

### 1: Safe staffing ratios

For years, Ontario has had the worst registered nurse-to-population ratio in Canada. Due to the shortage of nurses and health-care professionals, emergency departments are being closed. In 2024, emergency departments were closed for more hours than ever before. **Does your party support legislated staffing ratios that set the maximum number of patients per nurse?**

### 2: Nurse retention

In 2024, nearly 8,000 nurses left the sector. That's more than any year during the peak of the pandemic. Nurses are leaving because they are dealing with unreasonable workloads and cannot provide the care patients/residents/clients need and deserve. **What policies do you support to improve nurse retention?**

### 3: Wage harmonization

Currently, those who work in primary, home and community care, who are primarily women and workers of colour, earn considerably less than those who work in hospitals. This is fundamentally unfair and it contributes to high turnover in these sectors. A recent market salary review showed that the community health sector alone is \$2 billion behind on wages compared to hospitals and other sectors. **Will your party commit to funding wage harmonization across all health sectors?**

### 4: For-profit long-term care

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a humanitarian crisis in the long-term care sector and put a spotlight on the horrendous living condition in for-profit long-term care homes. For-profit homes put shareholder profits over resident care by paying their staff low wages and cutting corners on care. During the pandemic, for-profit homes had 78 per cent more resident deaths compared to non-profit homes. **Will you commit to removing the profits from long-term care and phasing out for-profit homes?**

## 5: Public health

Public health nurses play a vital work in promoting and protecting our communities. During the pandemic, public health nurses played a crucial part in contact tracing, infection control, and the vaccination roll-out. Beyond COVID-19, public health nurses specialize in many areas and support programs about sexual health, family planning and care, the ongoing opioid crisis, and more. However, the Ford government's cuts to public health have weakened our ability to provide high-quality services. The pandemic has only heightened these issues by making us do more with less resources. **Will your party increase funding to public health units to allow for fair and competitive wages, preserve existing public health positions and prevent layoffs.**

## 6: Home care nurses

Home care nurses provide essential health care to seniors and other individuals so they can stay in their home. Home care nurses work on their own. In some parts of the province, they drive an hour or two between clients in areas without cellphone service. If a client becomes violent or abusive, there is no one there to help. **What will you do to make it safer for the nurses who work in home care?**

## 7: Intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is an epidemic in Ontario. As a women-dominated profession, nurses and health-care professionals can be victims and survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). We know that the workplace is one of the most dangerous places for workers experiencing IPV because it is a predictable place where abusers can locate their ex-partners. **What solutions will do you support to better protect workers who are experiencing IPV?**

## Template Opinion Editorial

**Contact your local newspaper and ask to submit the following opinion editorial. You can sign off with your name and position but leave out information that may identify your specific workplace.**

Most Ontarians have personally experienced the crisis in our public health-care system.

Maybe you have waited hours in an emergency department or had to drive hours away because your local hospital is closed. Maybe you don't have a family doctor and can't access primary care at a family health team, community health centre or nurse practitioner clinic. Maybe your loved one can't get the home care services they need or the public health unit services you rely on have been cut. Maybe your loved one living in a nursing home is not getting the hours of care they need.

These stories – which impact every Ontarian – are all connected and are all preventable.

For seven years, Doug Ford's Conservatives have dismantled our public health-care system piece by piece. By underfunding, understaffing and selling it off they've stayed true to their privatization playbook: defund, deny, deflect.

Look no further than our hospitals: they are consistently overcrowded. When they're open, some emergency department patients are being treated in makeshift areas. Ford promised to end hallway health care, but instead he made it the norm, with patients waiting endless hours before being admitted.

Instead of listening to solutions from nurses and health-care professionals, the Ford Conservatives withheld \$1 billion per year of health-care funding and funneled public taxpayer dollars into private, for-profit care. This has resulted in extremely understaffed hospitals, long wait times, service cuts and delays in care.

In turn, nurses and health-care professionals are dealing with crushing workloads and many are leaving their jobs in frustration because there aren't enough of them to provide the care patients deserve. In fact, an independent report found that Ontario needs to immediately hire more than 25,000 nurses to simply catch up to the national average number of nurses per capita.

It feels like an endless cycle, but our health-care system doesn't have to be this way. We can – and should – demand better health care.

Nurses and health-care professionals know that the next provincial government must implement safe staffing in all sectors, fully fund our public health care and stop private, for-profit care.



Research and experience from jurisdictions who have implemented similar solutions paint a clear picture: better wages, staffing ratios and publicly delivered care improve the quality of care, reduce the likelihood of patient complications and even death, and improve staff retention rates.

Many people across the province might not feel motivated to vote, because it can be hard to imagine things ever changing. But nurses and health-care professionals know the answers are painfully simple. We know patients, residents and clients can get the timely and high-quality care they need and deserve.

The Ford Conservatives have shown us that they cannot be trusted with our health-care system. For seven years they've failed us, selling it off in pieces to their rich buddies.

But if we want things to change, we can't sit at home and hope. We need to get informed about party platforms and vote for a government that will protect and improve our public health care for generations to come.

## Template Letter to the Editor

Contact your local newspaper and submit the following letter to the editor. You can sign off with your name but leave out information that may identify your specific workplace.

DATE, Letter to the Editor, NEWSPAPER NAME

To the Editor:

Re: Demand better health care

As a (INSERT POSITION HERE), I devote my career to advocating for and caring for my patients.

Safe staffing in all sectors of health care – from hospitals to long-term care, public health, clinics, home and community care – improves the quality of care, reduces the likelihood of patients/residents/clients experiencing complications and even death, and improves the retention rate of staff, helping alleviate the shortage of nurses and health-care professionals that has closed emergency departments, delayed surgeries and negatively impacted Ontario health-care facilities.

That is why other jurisdictions such as British Columbia and many U.S. states have made safe staffing ratios part of their health-care system. Safe staffing ratios are a win-win-win: more nurses mean better patient outcomes, fewer complications, higher staff retention rates and less cost to taxpayers.

In Ontario, our government has been in power for almost seven years and has done the polar opposite of achieving safe staffing levels. In fact, the measures introduced by the Ford Conservatives have resulted in the province's nursing shortage worsening.

The situation could be vastly improved by introducing wage parity across all sectors of health care and putting safe staffing levels in place. Yet Premier Ford seems determined to permanently break our publicly funded, publicly delivered health-care system by withholding billions in funding, supporting private corporations delivering more health care at a higher cost to taxpayers, and passing policies that drive nurses and health-care professionals out of the profession.

As the upcoming early – and expensive – election day approaches, I ask everyone to advocate for themselves – by voting for a candidate that will ensure safe staffing levels, fully fund our public health-care system and stop for-profit care from bankrupting the system.

Demand better health care. Our lives may depend on it.

NAME, ADDRESS, CONTACT INFO (email/phone)

## Guide to Social Media

### How to Use Social Media to Have Your Voice Heard in this Election

1. Check out <https://ona.org/vote> to learn more about what nurses and health-care professionals are fighting for in the upcoming election so you can share to your own social media profiles.
2. When posting to social media, use the hashtag #NursesVote to draw attention to the issues that matter to you! You can also include #onpoli to have your voice heard in the conversation about the future of our province. When possible, you can also include hashtags like #onlab, #onhealth, or #DemandBetterHealthCare to further increase visibility of your post.
3. Post about the election or share the Nurses Vote election shareables on whichever social media platform you prefer to spread the word. A variety of shareables are available to download at <https://ona.org/vote>.
4. Whether you use the Nurses Vote **Activist Kit** and attend election events like local candidates' debates, or you are phone banking or canvassing with other members, post about your experience using #NursesVote and remember to tag **@ontarionurses** on Facebook and X/Twitter **or** **@ontario.nurses** on Instagram!
5. Share selfies of yourself with your "I'm Voting For:" sign (available to print from [ona.org/vote](https://ona.org/vote)), or outside of the voting area (like beside the Elections Ontario sign) using #NursesVote to tell your followers that you have voted in the Ontario election!