



Local registered nurses bring their advocacy to Queen's Park

GREATER SUDBURY, March 5, 2024 – Members of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's (RNAO) Sudbury & District Chapter travelled to Queen's Park to meet with local members of provincial parliament (MPP) about issues that matter most to the province's registered nurses (RN), nurse practitioners (NP) and nursing students. The meetings were part of RNAO's 24th annual Queen's Park Day (QPD). Local nurses added their voices to RNAO's call for the government and health organizations to address concerns around equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), and the current policies and systemic practices at play in the ongoing nursing crisis.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 75 per cent of RNs have experienced or are still experiencing burnout, with up to 69 per cent of those surveyed thinking of leaving the profession within five years. Stigma and discrimination whether it be about race, culture, language, sexual orientation, or sexual identity are significant contributing factors according to [data prepared by the RNAO](#). These issues affect all levels of the nursing profession starting with discrimination against students, lateral violence in the workforce, limited options for advancement, or blatant discrimination by patients, other staff or hospital administration resulting in staff leaving the hospital system or even quitting the profession entirely.

Dr. Paul-André Gauthier, RN, and president of the Clinical Nurse Specialist Association of Ontario (CNS-ON), asserts "It is imperative to reiterate to both health-care professionals and the public that nurses are highly skilled professionals capable of delivering exceptional care. Moreover, in settings where biases, prejudices, and stereotypes fuel discrimination, such behaviour is utterly unacceptable."

Courtney Dini, registered practical nurse, midwife and student in Laurentian University's Bachelor of Science in Nursing joined the event as a member of RNAO's Nursing Students of Ontario interest group. Dini sat down for a breakfast meeting with MPP and NDP health critic France Gélinas to discuss the importance of reducing barriers in academics and the workplace. "We discussed the need to address these issues at a fundamental level and by building better communities through education reforms that include addressing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and discrimination against 2SLGBTQI+ populations."

Dini intends to discuss and advocate for the integration of RNAO's recommendations with her peers and the university. "In order for the government's plan to increase the nursing workforce to be successful we need to get all these students to the graduate finish line. I believe that Laurentian University's School of Nursing is just one of the institutions in our community that could take the lead on these recommendations, and I look forward to sharing my experiences at QPD with anyone wanting to know more about RNAO's plan to address equity, diversity and inclusivity in nursing and health."

Harm reduction

“One of the most stigmatised populations in Canada right now are people who use substances.” said Neil Stephen, RN during a Q&A with MPPs. “The Government of Ontario seems committed to adopting the UCP policy of ‘treatment first’ which, early data shows have failed spectacularly, resulting in a [doubling](#) of emergency service calls and fatalities spiking by more than 25 per cent since it was implemented.” Regions in [Alberta](#) are now reporting higher fatality rates than the tragic figures seen in Northern Ontario over the past few years. Safe consumption sites (SCS) provide a safe place for people who use substances to access care in a safe, non-judgmental environment. In the event of an overdose, health-care professionals are already on scene to intervene and save that individual’s life and therefore do not need to activate emergency services. It is important to note that there has not been a single fatality worldwide at a SCS since the first one opened in Europe in 1986.

Stephen says he does not discount the need for more diverse, not-for-profit, government funded treatment options, but he shares:

*“Mandatory treatment **does not work** unless the individual person who uses drugs is ready for it. That is where the importance of harm reduction and safe consumption sites come in. We rebuild trust and relationships with PWUD that has been destroyed through decades of stigmatisation and discrimination by healthcare professionals, the criminal justice system, and politically motivated law makers. Through rebuilding this trust with the community, it empowers individuals to be successful when they are ready to seek out treatment or to find a healthier balance in their lives. Harm reduction is an evidence-based practice that diminishes harm to individuals by reducing the spread of harmful diseases, providing access to care, access to housing options, access to science-based education, and helping create a healthy sense of community which includes healthcare professionals that focus on the individuals’ unique wants, needs, and aspirations and not just on the substances they use. In addition to saving lives and reducing human suffering, it also has the effect of being significantly more cost effective than traditional, ‘tough on drugs’ approaches that have failed us since the start of the War on Drugs.”*

Dr. Gauthier also seized the opportunity to address his concerns regarding the insufficient funding for SCSs with Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Michael Tibollo during Thursday’s breakfast meeting. He underscored the critical importance of SCSs in reducing fatalities among individuals grappling with substance abuse, emphasizing that fostering trust is paramount in encouraging individuals to seek treatment for their addiction. Moreover, SCS have been proven to alleviate the strain on emergency departments by minimizing the frequency of visits.

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(Left to right) Neil Stephen, RN; Courtney Dini, RPN (RN Student); and MPP France Gélinas meet to discuss issues contributing to the nursing staff crisis at Queen's Park on Feb. 29, 2024. Namely, concerns around equity, diversity, and inclusion that unjustly impact Black, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ populations.



(Right to left) Dr. Paul-André Gauthier speaks with Minister Michael Tibollo to address concerns around the lack of funding for safe consumption sites in Northern Ontario.



Neil Stephen, RN asks Leader of Ontario's Green Party Mike Schreiner about how he and his party can work with the Ford government and the other opposition parties to guarantee adequate funding and support for safe consumption sites in Northern Ontario.