



May 14, 2021

To the Standing Committee on Social Policy:

VON submission regarding Bill 283, Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario's Health System Act, 2021

IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS IN THE HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE SECTOR

VON has pioneered home and community care for nearly 125 years. As Canada's longest-serving home and community care charity, VON is proud to serve people throughout Ontario. We provide innovative clinical, personal and social support to people who want the comfort and peace of living in their own homes and communities.

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) play a significant role in providing care across the entire health sector. VON supports government efforts to strengthen the PSW across the province. We support calls for standardized training and education and agree that facilitating growth for PSWs in the health and community services sectors is important. The establishment of a new legislative oversight framework and regulation will contribute to advancing safe care.

We acknowledge the introduction of [Bill 283, Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario's Health System Act, 2021](#) as a mechanism to build a more connected, patient-centered healthcare system and believe there is value in the oversight proposed.

Capacity and staffing challenges in health care have been a reality for years but have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The significant wage disparity for front-line workers (both PSWs and nurses) in our sector in Ontario, driven by more than a decade of home care rate stagnation, has contributed to a hollowing-out of care capacity that threatens the safe provision of home and community care. This is significant. Home and community care providers deliver upstream care that helps Ontarians remain independent and contributes significantly to quality of life. Providers also support those in frail and failing health to remain at home, where they want to be. This helps to reduce the burden on acute and long-term care institutions and ultimately contributes to significant health care savings.

Taking into account current capacity challenges is critical to strengthening safe and reliable care delivery. The consequences of getting it wrong could be a significant migration out of PSW jobs and



a further reduction in capacity of the home and community care sector, driving down safe access to care and positive patient outcomes, and increasing overall health system costs.

We submit the following for your consideration:

Consideration 1: Financial Capacity

It has been stated that registration fees would over time be expected to cover the cost of operating the Authority. PSWs today are among the lowest-paid front-line health workers, and demand for their services far outstrips supply. PSWs in the home and community care sector earn on average 19% less than their counterparts in the hospital sector and 9% less than in long-term care. They work independently in the homes of patients who often have cognitive challenges. The risk of wrongdoing or perception of wrongdoing in home settings is higher than in supervised institutional settings. Registration that protects both PSWs and patients would be particularly valuable in home and community care, and yet our PSWs are least able to afford it.

While investments in education to encourage more Ontarians into the profession are a step in the right direction, other financial levers like wage parity and wage increases must also be applied to ensure that home and community care PSWs are not left behind as a result of the legislation.

Home and community care employers also lack the capacity to cover registration costs. Direct wage enhancements provided by government to employers to pass through to PSWs – both pre- and during the pandemic – were positive for employees. Yet they came with the expectation that employers cover the cost of implementation and increased benefits, adding significant direct cost and an administrative burden to employers already considerably challenged by rate stagnation.

Consideration 2: Mandatory vs Voluntary Registration

Ensuring that a non-mandatory registration regime achieves the safety and efficacy objectives of the legislation is likely to be a challenge, and yet imposition of mandatory registration at the outset will most certainly force further losses in the PSW workforce. The risk of destabilization and further loss of capacity is high if there is not a clear, well-communicated and detailed plan that values those working in the sector today. For registration to have positive impact, it should ultimately become mandatory. A well-supported and well-communicated plan that enables current PSWs to become registered will be important.



Consideration 3: Sector and PSW Representation

It is intended that the process to establish the regulation and policies be consultative. This is positive, and we recommend that a clear consultation process be outlined early on with respect to the implementation of PSW regulation and how it directly reflects home and community care realities. Please refer to the Ontario Community Support Association's submission for further input on Authority governance.

Consideration 4: Getting the Timing Right

We strongly recommend that government prioritize PSW workforce stabilization (through measures including rate increases supporting wage improvements as well as the new PSW education initiatives) before rolling out registration.

We suggest as well that consideration be given to a staged roll-out of mandatory registration, with long-term care prioritized as it represents 56% of the PSW workforce, followed by home and community.

VON supports the province's efforts to strengthen the PSW workforce. Along with the Ontario Community Support Association, we support greater uniformity of education and training for PSWs, and regulation that will improve service quality and promote the provision of safe care. This regulation must not lead to greater capacity losses in our system, and must be established in a way that encourages entry into our sector to build and retain staff capacity.

We are very interested in working with you, to create regulations and policies that ensure that the sector thrives and that we can attract and retain health human resources to keep people at home, where they want to be.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Poirier
President and Chief Executive Officer