

**Submission to the
Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly
Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020**

The Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN) gives a voice to the care concerns of Ontario's 45,000 Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs). Ontario's RPNs are knowledge-based health professionals who combine skill, judgment, passion and compassion. Whether working in hospitals, long-term care, mental health services, or home and community care, Ontario's RPNs are on the front lines, consistently demonstrating their commitment to providing the best possible care to their patients, residents, and clients. With over 95 per cent of RPNs working in direct practice, we bring a unique and valuable perspective and are pleased offer recommendations on ways to enhance quality and promote excellence across Ontario's home and community care and broader health care system.

Over the past several months, our association has been pleased to see the government taking steps to build a more patient centered and integrated health care system. For too long, our health care system has operated in silos and we are encouraged to see the government take steps to enhance coordination of care. We believe the creation of Ontario Health and Ontario Health Teams, the promise to address systemic challenges in our long-term care (LTC) sector and the commitment to expand scope of practice for several health care providers including RPNs will all contribute to achieving this goal. WeRPN is committed to working in partnership with the government to move these plans forward.

Building a robust home and community care system will be essential to ensure the government can achieve its broader health system transformation objectives. With many RPNs working in home and community care, we are well positioned to offer meaningful suggestions. The home and community care system is complex. As plans to transform home and community care in Ontario move forward, we encourage government to engage with organizations and stakeholders, such as WeRPN, on an ongoing basis to leverage the expertise of those on the frontlines.

Historically, the home and community care sector has been underfunded and undervalued, but with renewed government attention, we believe there is a potential to improve outcomes and the patient experience, and to help ease pressures on the acute care and long-term care sectors. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is particularly important to ensure Ontarians can receive care in their homes for as long as it is possible and appropriate to do so. After all, most Ontarians would prefer to remain at home for as long as they can.

We are pleased to offer some practical ways to enhance Ontario home and community care system and improve care delivered to clients.

Supporting Continuity of Care

To achieve the best possible health outcomes for patients, clients and residents, we need to take steps to enhance continuity of care between hospital, LTC and the community. Currently, there remains a disconnect between the care providers doing initial assessments and care planning for clients and those who are delivering care on the frontlines.

Nurses delivering care in client homes need to be better engaged in the assessment and ongoing plan of care for clients. Each client's needs and circumstances are different and dynamic. Nurses at the point of care need to have a voice in the ongoing care plans of their clients as they are best positioned to identify changes in client conditions and determine the most appropriate course of action to meet those needs in a timely manner in order to limit admissions or readmissions to hospitals. Continuity of care is critical to ensuring good care and a better patient experience. To achieve this, we must fully engage all providers on the care team and particularly those who are seeing and treating the patient most often.

Other jurisdictions, such as Australia, successfully achieve this by employing teams of rapid response nurses. When patients return home following time in hospital, their nurses will continue to provide things like wound care and IV therapy. Within hospitals, rapid response nurses will receive calls from patients, their family members or caregivers and respond by visiting the patient to determine the severity of their needs and whether they can be treated at home or hospice or need to be transported to the hospital. In addition to providing direct patient care, these nurses also act as care coordinators developing plans of care for their own patients in hospital or at home. They also collaborate with other nurses to develop plans of care for palliative patients on different hospital units. If a nurse's patient arrives to the emergency room, they are alerted and meet with the patient to ensure coordination and continuity of care.

Ontario has an opportunity to leverage a similar approach to support the needs of patients, clients, and residents across the province.

Using nurses to the full scope of their expertise

Patients get the best care at the right time when health professionals are enabled and empowered to deliver the care they are educated to offer. Health professionals working in an integrated care team and to their full scope of expertise are fundamental to patient-centered care. It also ensures we are making the best use of our precious health care dollars.

At a time when we need our health care professionals most, it is essential for government to update existing legislative and regulatory frameworks to ensure all health professionals are putting their experience and education to best use.

WeRPN applauds the government for listening to the voices of those at the front lines of care. We were extremely pleased to see the Ontario government's 2019 Budget commitment to move forward with modest changes to scope of practice for several health professions, including RPNs.

For the past several months, we have been engaged with the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), who have been tasked by the Minister of Health to bring forward regulatory amendments that would authorize RPNs to independently initiate procedures such as but not limited to irrigating, probing, debriding and packing of wounds or starting an intravenous in an emergency situation.

These changes to scope of practice for RPNs will ensure more timely access to care particularly for home and community care clients. Most of all, it will enable more clients to have their care needs safely and effectively managed at home, reducing the need for unnecessary and costly

trips to the hospital. We look forward to continuing to work with the government to ensure these regulatory changes are realized in a timely manner.

Nurses where we need them

Currently, impending shortages of certain categories of nurses and other health care professionals pose a significant threat to the future of health care in Ontario, including home and community care. While the number of Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) in Ontario continues to grow, our province is currently experiencing a shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs) and Personal Support Workers (PSWs).

Ontario has a healthy and steady supply of RPNs, providing government with a ready opportunity to address the looming shortage of RNs by supporting RPNs to career ladder to RN through educational bridging programs. A similar approach could be taken to support PSWs to career ladder to RPN. Currently, lack of opportunities for career development and growth means that Ontario loses thousands of PSWs, each and every year—health care providers that are essential to ensuring Ontarians get the care they need, when and where they need it.

Supporting front-line PSWs and RPNs to career ladder to the RPN and RN roles respectively would be an efficient and cost-effective way to grow Ontario's supply of needed health care professionals. It would help retain more professionals in the system, while more quickly increasing the number of in demand roles. With steady and robust supply of nurses and PSWs, patients will be able to access quality frontline care more easily, improving the patient experience and enabling people to remain safe and healthy at home for longer.

Building a Health Human Resource Strategy for Home and Community Care

People are at the core of our health system. Never has this been more apparent than now, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen first-hand the impact of staffing shortages on care for Ontarians, including in home and community care. But right now, we don't have a comprehensive, system-wide understanding of the people power needed to care for patients, or a plan to keep our system running efficiently while delivering excellent care.

In order to continue to build a 21st-century home and community care sector and a broader health system that responds to the needs of Ontarians, government needs to work in partnership with health stakeholders toward a comprehensive and integrated health human resources strategy. This strategy must also support improved role clarity to allow all health professionals to provide the kind of care that aligns with their knowledge, skill and judgement.

The view from the front lines is crucial to make this a success. Only by collaborating will we be able to make sure we have the right complement of health professionals to respond to the demands and challenges that we are experiencing now and as well as those that lay ahead.

WeRPN shares the government's priority to ensure patients across the province receive the best possible home and community care. We believe the ideas in this submission will move us closer to achieving that goal. We look forward to continuing to work together to prioritize home and community care and strengthen Ontario's health care system.