



October 19, 2022

Sent via e-mail

The Honourable Merrilee Fullerton
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
438 University Avenue, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Re: Critical Role of Nurses and Nursing Shortages in Developmental Service Agencies

Ministers Fullerton and Jones:

As physicians working in the Developmental Service sector, supporting children and adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) we are writing to voice our concerns and ask your help to address the critical need for nursing resources.

We provide care to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, many of whom also have complex medical needs. This population requires a team-based approach to care, which relies heavily on the support of Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs). We see a devastating nursing shortage within this sector which is affecting the well-being of persons with IDD. As a result, we have a crisis within the sector, placing many at risk. Urgent action is essential to support the nursing staff in this sector, reduce risk and to prevent further burden to acute care.

A number of developmental services organizations provide care to individuals also having complex medical needs. Sunbeam Community and Developmental Services (Waterloo Region), Ongwanada (Kingston), Surrey Place and Participation House Markham (GTA) and others support medically fragile / technologically dependent (MFTD) individuals with IDD. Historically, such organizations have provided a full range of services, including acute care in the home or in congregate setting (versus emergency departments or hospital) as well as palliative care services. It is nursing staff working with physicians and multi-disciplinary teams, which enable right-place right-time services.

Our current nurse shortage is seriously affecting our ability to offer services to those we support. We are transferring individuals to emergency departments via ambulance with greater regularity. This results in higher hospital admissions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities when they could be cared for where they live. There is nothing more terrifying for them than to be displaced from their home and from the people who know their needs.

A great deal of community and hospital resources are consumed with transfers. Similarly, the pandemic has magnified complications of prolonged hospital stays.



We have countless examples of times in which developmental services organizations have been able to provide exceptional care to persons in their congregate living setting homes, avoid transfers, emergency room visits and admissions to hospital. However, with the current nursing staffing crisis across healthcare and developmental services sectors we may no longer be able to keep individuals in their homes. The default response is now to transfer to hospital.

A recent study of more than 60,000 adults with IDD living in Ontario showed significant health care issues; these patients are twice as likely to revisit the ER within 30 days, three times as likely to be readmitted to hospital and six times as likely to have a prolonged hospitalization in an alternate level of care bed (ALC). Adults with IDD, especially those with complex physical and mental health issues living in congregate care, are at high risk of contracting and suffering serious illness from COVID or ending up hospitalized for other reasons because their care destabilizes from staffing shortages brought about by the pandemic.

The factors that predispose adults with IDD to poor health outcomes are myriad and the nurses who work in Developmental Services group homes are absolutely critical to pick up on atypical often individually unique signs of serious acute illness, and to expertly manage complex chronic conditions in order to keep patients at home and out of hospital.

We are committed to providing the physician services and supports necessary. But, if the level of funding, rates of pay, incentives and other supports are not sufficient in the developmental services sector to attract, recruit, retain and develop nurses then physicians will not be able to adequately support developmental services organizations.

Our Ask

To help support our sector and improve nursing resources, we ask that:

- Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) working in developmental services be eligible for the \$3 permanent wage enhancement, given the hands-on, front line nature of the care and supports provided by nurses in this sector and the significant current wage compression issues that now exist between RPN's and Direct Support Professionals in our sector;
- Exclude MCCSS-funded organization from *Bill 124*;
- Provide sufficient operating funds to support the financial costs associated with competitive compensation packages for registered nursing staff; and,
- Include developmental service nurses in all provincial government nursing related recruitment, retention incentives, and programs (such as, but not limited to: the Bridging Educational Grant In Nursing (BEGIN) Program, which is currently only available to HCC and LTC sector nurses).

Change is required immediately to offer the persons supported in the developmental services sector the best person-centred care possible, while reducing the burdens and pressures currently experienced in acute care settings.



We welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss our suggestions and other solutions to continue delivering the necessary health needs to those living with developmental disabilities. Please contact Brian Swainson, Chief Executive Officer at Sunbeam to help coordinate a meeting, by emailing: b.swainson@sunbeamcommunity.ca

Yours respectfully,

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Dr. Ullanda Niel
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- Cc: Rupert Gordon, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Strategic Policy Division
- Karen Glass, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Services Division
- Dr. Karima Velji, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief of Nursing and Professional Practice
Ministry of Health
- Michelle Brooks, Chair, Provincial Network on Developmental Services
- Shelley Brillinger, Chief Executive Officer, Participation House Markham
- Terri Hewett, Chief Executive Officer, Surrey Place
- Alastair Lamb, Chief Executive Officer, Ongwanada
- Brian Swainson, Chief Executive Officer, Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services
and Chair, Great Lakes Society for Developmental Services of Ontario
- Dr. Rose Zacharias, President, Ontario Medical Association
- Dr. Doris Grinspun, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario