

Dear Premier Ford,

We write to request an urgent meeting with you to discuss solutions to the critical staffing crisis in our hospitals and the resulting forced closures in Emergency Rooms and Urgent Care. As widely reported in the media, staff shortages are pervasive and have led to extended wait times for emergency care and for admission and is negatively affecting the quality and safety of care.

Earlier this morning, our unions held a joint press conference to call on hospital executives to address the crisis they helped create. Ontario hospitals lack sufficient capacity. We have too few staff. Compared to OECD countries, Ontario's levels are an extreme outlier. This is a long-standing problem but has been brought to new heights by COVID, poor morale, exhaustion, and over-reliance on part-time employment. We are now at the point where understaffing is chronic and cannot maintain the system the people of Ontario expect.

We know you agree that it is not acceptable that communities like Alexandria and Wingham and Orangeville, and so many others, are living this summer without functioning and reliable emergency departments. It is not acceptable that ER waits in major urban centres are skyrocketing or that other patient services are being closed to sustain emergency operations.

As you'll see below, executives at Ontario hospitals have refused to correct for the very serious shortage of staff, which is the underlying cause of the current hospital crisis.

Vacancy Rate (FT & PT Permanent Positions)	on Mar 31, 2017*	on Mar 31, 2018*	on Mar 31, 2019*	on Mar 31, 2020*	on Mar 31, 2021*	on Oct 20, 2021**	on Mar 1, 2022**
All Hospital	5.57%	3.93%	3.70%	4.24%	5.57%	8.09%	8.84%
RN & RN-Specialty (Total)	6.89%	4.90%	4.81%	4.85%	7.50%	11.73%	12.63%
Service (Total)	6.25%	3.93%	3.81%	4.56%	6.00%	7.94%	8.35%
Registered Practical Nurse	6.75%	4.71%	4.40%	5.13%	6.89%	9.76%	10.24%
Personal Support Worker	5.53%	4.90%	4.95%	6.05%	4.67%	9.31%	9.36%
Paramedical (Total)	3.69%	2.74%	2.78%	3.33%	4.11%	5.01%	6.14%

*Annual OHA HR Benchmarking Survey

**HHR Workforce Survey conducted in October 2021 and March 2022.

As you recall the legislature in the coming weeks, we commit to work with you on immediate measures to address these staff shortages, including ideas like:

- **Reach out to the thousands of nurses, PSW, paramedical, service and other staff who are no longer working and recruit them back to work**
The College of Nurses reports over 15,000 nurses are licensed and not practicing. Many thousands of PSW and support staff have left the sector. It's time for an aggressive plan to entice these workers back into the hospital workforce.
- **Enable all staff work to their full scope of practice**
Despite significant advances in training and licensed competency for many health care professionals, they cannot contribute to their full scope of practice at the hospital. This waste of human talent could ameliorate current pressures.
- **Ban the use of nursing agency staff**
These agencies charge 2x and 3x what hospitals pay their own staff, and they bleed away resources from round the clock and weekend staffing, worsening morale and weakening the continuity of care.
- **Real wages must increase**
In any other labour market with skill shortages, wages would increase to retain and recruit. But real wages are being cut for Ontario's health care workers and this policy is leading to an exodus of staff and to demoralization. We ask you to repeal Bill 124 and work with unions and employers to bring about improvements acceptable to all parties.
- **Put in place financial incentives**
Include in your soon to be tabled post-election budget meaningful financial incentives to bolster short-term hiring efforts for all health care workers.
- **Work with unions and employers to increase the amount of full-time work.**
Over half of the CUPE and SEIU health care membership work part-time or casual. Turning these workers in to full time employees will significantly increase health care capacity and create a more tempting work environment.
- **Work with unions and employers to reduce workplace violence in healthcare**
Our research indicates that workplace violence in health care is widespread and is a significant factor discouraging healthcare retention.

We are alarmed that to date we have seen no sense of urgency from the people running Ontario's hospitals. Without a meaningful action plan, conditions will only deteriorate further.

On behalf of the combined 70,000 members we represent in Ontario hospitals, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely



Sharleen Stewart
President
SEIU Healthcare



Michael Hurley
President
OCHU/CUPE