

FAIR PAY FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Q&A: Premier Ford and Pandemic Pay

On July 5, Premier Doug Ford informally announced that the pandemic pay for personal support workers (PSWs) scheduled to end in August will be made permanent. Despite this statement, the government has made no official proposal or announcement on a permanent wage increase.

[President Jerry Dias issued a letter on July 15 to address Premier Ford's recent comments.](#)

Q: Has Unifor supported pandemic pay for health care workers?

A: Unifor was the first union in Ontario to make a public demand for Pandemic Pay on April 17, 2020, with the launch of a video and [online petition](#). The union has been steadfast in its position that any worker subject to the Emergency Orders should receive pandemic pay.

Q: When did the government introduce pandemic pay and who was it for?

A: The government first introduced temporary pandemic pay on April 25, 2020. The provision provided \$4 per hour for 16 weeks, with monthly lump sum payments of \$250 for four months. The temporary pandemic pay was provided to an estimated 350,000 workers in hospitals, long-term care homes, retirement homes, home and community care, various social services, and correctional facilities. When the details were initially released, Unifor asserted that certain health care workers were excluded from this temporary pandemic pay and called on the government to clarify and expand the list of eligible workers. In response, the government clarified that the pay would apply to respiratory therapists, mental health and addictions workers in hospitals and congregate care settings, public health nurses, and paramedics.

Q: What happened after the 16-week temporary pay expired?

A: On October 1, 2020, the government introduced pandemic pay for six months for PSWs, providing either \$2 per hour (working in hospitals) or \$3 per hour (working in long-term care, home and community care, social services). The government has subsequently

extended the pandemic pay, which is set to expire on August 23, 2021 for an estimated 158,000 workers.

Q: Does the pandemic pay include other workers aside from PSWs?

A: No. While PSWs deserve the pandemic pay, the government has excluded so many front-line workers who have been carrying Ontario through the pandemic. These include non-PSW workers in long-term care and hospitals. Despite providing care to seniors – who have clearly been vulnerable during the pandemic – no workers in retirement homes are receiving the pandemic pay. First responders like paramedics and other frontline EMS workers are also not receiving any pandemic pay.

RESPECT, PROTECT, PAY

Workers in long-term care homes have carried the heavy burden of working through code red outbreaks, dealing with the trauma associated with death and suffering, working long hours with few days off, and many other challenges that have come with working in a risky and fast-changing environment. Workers in all classifications have stepped up to the call and without their dedication to residents, the results would have been far worse.

Hospital workers have also stepped up in a big way throughout the pandemic. Workers were redeployed to retirement and LTC homes in crisis, and many spent weeks away from their families, self-isolating to protect them. Meanwhile, pandemic pay was provided to only one classification of workers while the remainder have been unfairly and arbitrarily covered by Bill 124.

Workers in retirement homes have also faced challenging conditions, putting their health at risk while caring for vulnerable seniors. The retirement home sector was excluded altogether from provincial pandemic pay provisions. While largely unregulated, retirement homes include a large population of vulnerable seniors who are simply waiting for a bed

in a long-term care home and they need and deserve qualified caregivers.

Our health care system will remain in crisis for some time, even as we recover from the pandemic. Long-term care and retirement homes continue to be severely short-staffed and have increasingly relied on costly staffing agencies to fill the gaps. Meanwhile, hospitals will be dealing with a back log of patients and procedures for years. As the province recovers from the pandemic, many health care workers will strongly consider leaving the sector altogether without better support.

OUR DEMANDS

1. Repeal Bill 124

Bill 124 placed a cap of 1% total annual compensation for a three-year period for a large number of health care workers. Despite all of the sacrifices they have made throughout the pandemic, workers in hospitals, non-profit long-term care homes, and Ornge air ambulance have had their compensation capped due to Bill 124. This legislation is an insult to health care workers and has created greater disparity in the system.

2. Expand pandemic pay beyond PSWs

While the pandemic pay for PSWs (\$2.00 or \$3.00/hour depending on the workplace) was welcome when it was introduced on October 1, 2020 (and subsequently extended until August 23, 2021), many of our COVID heroes remain excluded. Many frontline workers continue to risk exposure and do not qualify to receive pandemic pay, despite the fact that the province has access to billions in [unallocated pandemic relief funds](#).

The government should provide the following measures:

- Pandemic pay should include all frontline workers in long-term care homes.
- Pandemic pay should include all retirement home workers.
- Pandemic pay should include all frontline workers in group homes and congregate care settings.
- Pandemic pay should include all frontline hospital workers (including nurses, porters, cleaners and laundry workers, rehab workers, therapists, technicians and technologists, clerical workers and any others with patient contact).
- Pandemic pay should include all paramedics and other frontline EMS workers.
- The expansion to pandemic pay should be retroactive to the October 1, 2020 announcement.

3. Permanent pay raises for frontline health care workers

The pay raise to PSWs should absolutely be made permanent, but it cannot stop there. We need to balance this with the contributions of all other health care workers. Compensation and addressing staff retention must include a thorough examination of the wage disparities among the various sub sectors of our health care system.

Frontline health care workers continue to keep this province afloat during the pandemic and will continue to provide essential support services as the province recovers. Without permanent improvements, workers will continue to be overworked and underpaid, and the challenges in attracting and retaining workers in the sector will continue.

TAKE ACTION!

1. [Sign the petition now!](#) Tell the Premier and Ministers to do the right thing and demand that health care workers be supported.

2. Phone the Premier and Ministers directly:

Ontario Premier Doug Ford

Premier's Office: 416-325-1941

Constituency Office: 416-745-2859

Minister of Health Christine Elliott

Ministry Office: 416-327-4300

Constituency Office: 905-853-9889

Minister of Long-Term Care, Rod Phillips

Ministry Office: 416-325-0145

Constituency Office: 905-427-2060

Minister of Finance, Peter Bethlenfalvy

Ministry Office: 416-327-2333

Constituency Office: 905-509-0336

