

Ottawa

Ontario's PSW plans include free tuition for sped-up training

Advocates say changes incomplete without better wages, working conditions

[Julie Ireton](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 25, 2021 12:00 PM EST | Last Updated: February 25, 2021



Nursing home advocates are calling for improved working conditions to make it easier to recruit and retain personal support workers. (Myriam Fimbry/Radio-Canada)

The Ontario government's [plans to bring in more personal support workers](#) (PSWs) during and eventually after the pandemic now includes having 8,200 more of them on the job this fall.

On Wednesday, Premier Doug Ford [promised to invest more than \\$115 million](#) to train PSWs in collaboration with several colleges, including Ottawa's Algonquin College.

The program will be tuition-free for 6,000 new students and will involve three months of course work, then three months of paid training in a long-term care or home care setting.

Algonquin College, for example, said it will start accepting applications in early March and the program will begin in April, which "allows participants to graduate with full credentials within six months" instead of the usual eight months.

The other 2,200 PSWs would be people already in a program who can get up to \$2,000 in financial help.

The province said this is part of its push to improve long-term care given [the gaps exposed by COVID-19](#).

Advocates say plan is incomplete

Nursing home advocates say this is welcome news, but some are also calling for improved working conditions to make it easier to recruit and retain support workers.

"This will remove a whole bunch of financial barriers for women to be able to access training ... But this is only one very small step in achieving what's actually needed," said Candace Rennick, secretary-treasurer of CUPE Ontario.

What is also needed, she said, are better working conditions in long-term care homes where staffing shortages have left workers sick and burned out.

"We need to see a comprehensive plan to address the working conditions as well, and so far we haven't seen any movement on that front," said Rennick.

She was one of the voices saying earlier this week [the province needs more than 20,000 new PSWs](#).

PSWs are also needed to help people who need support to remain in their own home.

Sue VanderBent, CEO of Home Care Ontario, agrees the new program is a good first step to deal with the needs of an aging population, but also agrees more changes are needed.



Sue VanderBent is president and CEO of Home Care Ontario, an umbrella group of agencies that provide home care. (Claude Beaudoin/CBC)

"One of the biggest issues is the wage differential of at least \$4 an hour between a PSW who works in home care versus a PSW who works in long-term care," said VanderBent.

"Government cannot improve long-term care without a similar investment for home care staff to improve wages."

Both CUPE and Home Care Ontario plan to lobby for additional reforms leading up to the provincial budget.



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