

199 Quetico Ave.  
Oshawa, ON L1J 1E9

Tel: (416) 367-3313  
E-mail: [admin@opha.on.ca](mailto:admin@opha.on.ca)  
[www.opha.on.ca](http://www.opha.on.ca)

**President**

Lisa Demaline  
E-mail: [president@opha.on.ca](mailto:president@opha.on.ca)

**Executive Director**

Pegeen Walsh  
E-mail: [pwalsh@opha.on.ca](mailto:pwalsh@opha.on.ca)

**Constituent Societies**

OPHNL – Ontario Public Health  
Nursing Leaders

Alliance for Healthier Canadians

Association of Supervisors of  
Public Health Inspectors of Ontario

Canadian Institute of Public Health  
Inspectors (Ontario Branch)

Community Health Nurses'  
Initiatives Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario

Ontario Association of Public  
Health Dentistry

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health

Association of Public Health  
Epidemiologists

Ontario Society of Physical Activity  
Promoters in Public Health

*Charitable Registration  
Number 11924 8771 RR0001*

The Honourable Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building, Room 281  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

February 24, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

**RE: Provision of Paid Sick Leave**

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is writing to urge your government to reconsider its position on the provision of legislatively mandated paid sick leave as a measure to protect people and save lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workplaces account for 29% of COVID-19 outbreaks in Ontario<sup>i</sup>. The emergence of new variants of COVID-19 reiterates the need for more robust prevention measures in workplaces. One of those measures will be guaranteed paid sick days for workers showing symptoms of COVID-19. Without the guarantee of payment, there will be increased presenteeism putting other workers at high risk of contracting the virus. In the long run, this will impede businesses' continuity, increase the spread of COVID-19 and destabilize the economy. As the province prepares to reopen, various business owners have called on the provincial government to pass Bill 239, Stay Home If You Are Sick Act to help keep workplaces, employees, and communities safe and support businesses.

COVID-19 continues to expose the inequities that exist in the labour market and our communities. Low-wage workers, racialized populations, essential workers, and those who cannot work remotely from home are highly exposed to contracting the virus. For example, 52% of Toronto's population is racialized, and racialized people account for 83% of COVID-19 cases in the city and its northwest area.<sup>ii</sup>

These more vulnerable population groups also experiencing a more significant adverse economic impact from the pandemic. All too often, such groups have to make the uneasy decision between income security and staying home to contain the virus. Provision of paid sick days will help these types of employees decide to stay home and follow public health directives without worrying about how they meet their various financial obligations.

OPHA appreciates your government's concerns about duplication with the federal government's temporary income support for COVID-related sick leave, as well as the costs of such a program. Unfortunately, the federal sickness benefit program has many limitations. Workers must forgo income while they apply and wait to be approved, and the rate of reimbursement can be less than the minimum wage. The program does not cover shorter leave for employees to get tested or stay home to see if other symptoms develop. Unfortunately, payment under this program can take several weeks to be received.

While paid sick leave for workers comes at a financial cost, it is more economical than the average costs of hospitalization, disruption to business, and the impact on people's health. Evidence shows that the average cost of bed in an intensive care unit in Canada is \$3,592 per day<sup>iii</sup>, while it could cost as little as \$114 per day to provide paid sick leave to employees. The lack of paid sick days is a threat to public health and the economy. Having paid sick days is essential to flattening the COVID-19 curve and beyond as the province prepares for economic recovery.

We urge your government to step in to deliver a provincially mandated paid sick leave policy and permanently include it in the Employment Standards Act (ESA) beyond COVID-19. The permanent inclusion of this policy in the ESA would also be an important step to preparing the province for future infectious disease outbreaks, influenza, or the next pandemic threat. Legislated paid sick days would allow workers to receive full and uninterrupted income replacement, which is a primary concern for low-wage workers and those in precarious employment. Such a policy would ensure that paid sick days are universally accessible to all Ontarians, especially those who are most vulnerable, racialized, and low-wage earners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh  
Executive Director  
Ontario Public Health Association

CC: The Honourable Monte McNaughton Minister of Labour  
The Honourable Christine Elliott Minister of Health

***More about the Ontario Public Health Association:***

*OPHA is a member-based, not-for-profit charitable organization that has been advancing the public health agenda since 1949. OPHA provides leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthens the impact of those who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. OPHA does this through a variety of means including influencing public policy, capacity building, research, and knowledge exchange. Our membership represents many disciplines from across multiple sectors. OPHA is also home to Nutrition Connections (formerly the Nutrition Resource Centre) which advances nutrition knowledge and collaboration*

## References

<sup>i</sup> Marotta, S. (2020, December 17). The paid sick days conundrum: Pandemic revives debate over who should foot the bill. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-canadian-businesses-lobby-for-paid-sick-days-as-covid-19-rips-through/>

<sup>ii</sup> Allen, K., Yang, J., Mendleson, R., & Bailey, A. (2020, August 02). Lockdown worked for the rich, but not for the poor. The untold story of how COVID-19 spread across Toronto, in 7 graphics. Retrieved February 16, 2021, from [https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/08/02/lockdown-worked-for-the-rich-but-not-for-the-poor-the-untold-story-of-how-covid-19-spread-across-toronto-in-7-graphics.html?fbclid=IwAR1vOLcXKWru2Y\\_vcnkMn9\\_bCq9xue2i\\_OtJGDJ82UUNMo7r2Tyt9ZlwPUU](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/08/02/lockdown-worked-for-the-rich-but-not-for-the-poor-the-untold-story-of-how-covid-19-spread-across-toronto-in-7-graphics.html?fbclid=IwAR1vOLcXKWru2Y_vcnkMn9_bCq9xue2i_OtJGDJ82UUNMo7r2Tyt9ZlwPUU)

<sup>iii</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. Care in Canadian ICUs. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2016.