



RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

Resolution #9

School Health

Submitted by:

Submitted by Marlene Slepko

On Behalf Of:

Community Health Nurses' Initiatives Group (CHNIG)

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Submitted by Marlene Slepko on behalf of Community Health Nurses' Initiatives Group (CHNIG)

WHEREAS the school is an important part of the community for children and youth and is therefore an important partner of public health nurses in their work to promote the health of this population, and

WHEREAS many school-based public health nursing services have been reduced or eliminated in several jurisdictions and school staff and parents are concerned about the loss of these health promotion and prevention services that support students, parents and teachers, and

WHEREAS a Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach has been identified as a better practice for enhancing learning and healthy development of children and youth, and public health nurses have the knowledge, skills, judgment and competencies to make significant contributions to all components of a CSH approach,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that RNAO lobby the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Minister of Health Promotion, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Children and Youth Services to support the implementation of a Comprehensive School Health approach in all schools across Ontario, and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that RNAO lobby the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Minister of Health Promotion and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure that the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines direct public health nurses and other public health staff to use a Comprehensive School Health approach in the provision of health promotion and prevention services, and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that RNAO lobby the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health Promotion to provide additional funding for public health nurses to ensure that every school in Ontario will have access to a wide range of public health nursing services.

BACKGROUND

Recent reports from the Canadian Institute for Health Information have identified the urgent and complex health and social risks that Canadian children and adolescents face today, including: injuries from accidents, violence, stress, suicide, mental health problems, smoking, unsafe sexual practices, poor nutritional habits and physical inactivity¹. This report also identifies that supportive school environments are a key influence on healthy child and adolescent development. Children and youth need support from family, friends, teachers, health professionals and community leaders to deal with the changes and choices they face.² A comprehensive and coordinated approach is urgently needed.

For over a decade, the Canadian Nurses Association has supported the need for Comprehensive School Health programs. CSH provides an opportunity for parents, teachers and youth to participate in health-related decisions and action and assists young people to make healthy life choices³. A CSH approach is particularly effective because it not only includes health education, but also ensures access to a wide range of services, a supportive social environment, a healthy physical environment and health-supporting policies and guidelines. CSH creates a supportive school environment that fosters resilience and focuses on asset development, protective factors, and social connectedness to reduce the risk of health-related problems and support the healthy growth and development of children and youth.⁴

Across Ontario, Public Health Nurses (PHNs) have been actively involved in promoting CSH but full implementation of this approach varies across the province because of different interpretations of the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines [MHPSG] and/or under-funding of school-based health promotion services. Current Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines direct public health nurses and other personnel to work with all schools and school boards to implement health promotion programming, but do not yet stipulate that a Comprehensive School Health approach should be used. Additionally, these service guidelines do not clearly articulate the role and scope of public health nurses in providing a broad range of prevention and health promotion services including individual health counseling, consultation, referral, group education, support group facilitation, advocacy, case-finding, screening, and follow-up of various health needs. This results in great variation in the quantity and quality of public health nursing services in Ontario schools. Public health/community health nurses are ideally positioned to support the work of school health committees as the committees take local action using a CSH approach. Clarification within the MHPSGs is needed to ensure that public health units allocate the necessary resources to enable capacity-building within school communities and within children and youth themselves.

Public health nurses are keen to use their expertise and their energy to make a difference in improving the health of children and youth in this province. It is critical that RNAO, in its dialogue with the various ministries responsible for the healthy growth and development of children and youth and the delivery of health promotion and prevention services, continue to advocate for universal public health nursing services in every elementary and secondary school so that every school becomes a Healthy School.

REFERENCES

- ¹Canadian Institute for Health Information. Improving the Health of Young Canadians. Ottawa, ON. Author. 2005
- ² Community Health Nurses Initiatives Group of Ontario, ANDSOOHA and RNAO. A Call to Action for Child Health. Author: June, 2005
- ³ Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition. Achieving the Vision of Healthy Schools for Ontario: Priority Areas for Action. Author: June, 2005
- ⁴ Ontario Public Health Association. Child and Youth Health: Strengthening Inter-ministerial Integration: A Position Paper of the Child and Youth Health Ad Hoc Task Group. November, 2005