

## New Wage Increase Helps Ontario's Overworked PSWs

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Workers providing personal support services will soon see a significant increase in wages in Ontario, with the provincial government planning to raise wages on a permanent basis. The Toronto Star reports that Premier Doug Ford announced a permanent \$3 per hour wage increase, saying that “for years, they were ignored...underpaid, and overworked.” (1)

According to sources, the long-term care and community care sectors will retain increases of \$3 per hour and public hospitals will keep a \$2 raise per hour. Prior to the increase, the base wage for personal support workers in Ontario is \$16.50 per hour. (1)

The announcement is timely. About 80,000 long-term care residents in Ontario are served by Personal Support Workers (PSWs). However, across the province working conditions in long-term care facilities and homes have been deteriorating, causing low morale among staff and worsening living conditions for residents.

### Impact of low wages for PSWs

Low wages are not the only stressor on the job for PSWs. With PSWs being dissatisfied with their pay, patients are less likely to obtain the services they need. CBC reports that some PSWs are paid only for time spent with clients. Neither travel time nor contacting clients each day to let them know they are on their way is compensated - which can add several hours a day of unpaid work. (2)

PSWs in provinces like Saskatchewan, where the government delivers home care, make about \$7 more per hour under the collective agreement with the union.

"What the corporations are doing is placing the burden of care on these poorly paid workers," commented health researcher Daly. (2)

The shortage of PSWs places more burden on nursing staff, volunteers, and family members. A lack of staff at long-term care facilities leaves insufficient time to provide even basic levels of care to residents. Even when staff members are dedicated and compassionate, shortages will mean baths are skipped, care is rushed, toileting is neglected, and residents feel they are burdens on their caregivers.

PSWs who act as independent contractors and senior care operators risk facing lawsuits for negative outcomes with their patients if quality of care is compromised. These are just a few of the risk factors associated with staffing issues:

- In short-staffed long-term care facilities, poor living and working conditions contribute to PSWs' negative reputation in the public eye.
- A lack of pay, poor working conditions, and a high management turnover combined with an increase in acuity of patients compromise the care and safety of PSWs and residents.
- Ministry of Health data indicate that care levels have fallen to their lowest level in a decade, despite increases in resident acuity. So, PSWs are dealing with a cohort of patients whose needs are becoming more serious and complex.

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*Content is current as of the date of broadcast and is subject to change without notice.*

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Sources:

1. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/03/15/ontario-to-table-legislation-making-psw-wage-increase-permanent-government-source.html>
2. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/home-care-support-private-companies-1.6387911>