

July 7, 2021

Hon. Rod Phillips
Minister of Long-Term Care
Via email: rod.phillips@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister:

Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) is the association that represents Therapeutic Recreation professionals in the province. On behalf of our 1900 members, we are writing to share the outrage our members who work in Long-Term Care (LTC) homes feel as a result of the announcement that the pandemic pay bump for PSWs is to become a permanent wage increase.

All professions working in LTC homes matter. Whether it is housekeeping, dietary, PSWs, recreation, social workers or managers, these tireless professionals show up and give their best to residents. During the pandemic they stepped out of their roles and did whatever it took to care for residents. Every day. All staff working in LTC contribute to quality care and deserve to make a fair income. This latest announcement has left our membership questioning why this government values one profession over all the others.

In the LTC sector, job titles are inconsistent and do not reflect the skills and qualifications that our members bring to the roles. To ensure you are clear about who we are talking about, we are referring to professionals whose job titles may be Activation Aide, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Recreation Therapist, Recreationist, Activation, Life Enrichment Aide, or Recreation Assistant. For the purposes of this communication, we will use the term Therapeutic Recreation professional to encompass all of the aforementioned job titles.

Qualified Therapeutic Recreation (TR) professionals have 2 – 4 years of post-secondary education, yet they do not earn a fair income to pay off their student debt let alone live a decent life. In a recent study that examined how COVID-19 impacted recreation staff, one respondent questioned why she was working in LTC when she could earn more money working at her local McDonald's?

Qualified Therapeutic Recreation professionals are trained to understand the mental, physical, psychological, spiritual, and social domains of residents with diverse and complex needs and abilities. They support quality of life outcomes through therapeutic interventions based on individual assessments and treatments which includes developing meaningful programs and providing individualized support.

Therapeutic Recreation is not about diversional therapy, activity for the sake of being busy or a distraction. In LTC homes, Therapeutic Recreation is about bringing joy and quality of life to LTC home residents. It is about maintaining each resident's sense of meaning and purpose, and their capacity for happiness, relationality, self-determination, and autonomy. LTC homes are meant to be, first and foremost, *homes*, places where residents can continue to live a good life. *Therapeutic Recreation is vital to creating an environment of living a full life, of thriving, in LTC homes.*

After all, once a resident is out of bed, dressed and had their breakfast, then what do they do with the next 12 hours? That is where the value and impact of Therapeutic Recreation is experienced by residents. Families have peace of mind knowing that their loved one is not left to languish with boredom, isolation, or loneliness, but engaged in meaningful physically, emotionally, and mentally stimulating experiences.

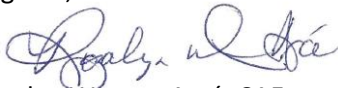
Therapeutic Recreation, when delivered by qualified professionals, enables individuals with diverse abilities to flourish, to see a life worth living, rather than merely existing. Qualified Therapeutic Recreation professionals are trained to address the increasing complex needs of all residents, no matter what their health status.

Minister, we do not believe that the PSW salary increase should be reneged, but that Therapeutic Recreation professionals and other staff deserve an equitable, permanent salary increase that recognizes their education, skills, and competencies too.

The best quality care is provided in LTC homes where the ecosystem is in balance. An imbalance can wreak havoc on residents, families, and staff. We understand that the pandemic pay and free education to PSWs is designed to assist with recruitment and retention of staff. It seems, though, that the Ministry has not considered the consequences including the lack of fairness and inequity to other LTC professionals. Retention of staff in all areas of LTC homes may soon become a problem.

We are requesting a meeting with you to discuss our concerns and to learn how your Ministry plans to address the inequities and to improve quality care. To arrange a meeting, please contact Rozalyn by phone at 289-626-8761, ext. 1 or by email at ed@trontario.org.

Regards,



Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, CAE
Executive Director



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About TRO:

Established in 1999, Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) is the only association that represents Therapeutic Recreation professionals in the province. Our membership of more than 1900 includes practitioners, educators, and students. Our mission is to lead the TR profession through growth, advocacy and innovation. We do this by offering quality membership services including professional development, information, networking, advocacy, and evidence-based research and best practices. We set the standard for excellence in the profession through our designations (R/TRO and R/TRO DIP).