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## **The Personal Support Worker in Ontario 2001 – 2017: An Occupation in Crisis**

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## Abstract

### Introduction:

The purpose of this report is to examine Personal Support Worker's (PSW), educational /training enrollment and hiring trends in Ontario from 2012 to 2018. The report will identify; past and future trends, recruitment challenges, demographic developments and their impact on health care delivery in Ontario and the future sustainability of PSWs in Ontario.

### Terms of Reference

Examining or analysing data pertaining to PSWs is exasperated by the wide variety of employment bodies and varied PSW organisations that gather differing information or do not maintain data related to this industry at all. This may be largely due to the fact that the Personal Support Worker are categorized by Statistics Canada as being under the National Occupation Classification 4412 – Home support workers, housekeepers and related occupations.<sup>1</sup> Consequently this analysis will rely on measurements that categorized this field under different headings. An illustration of this can be seen in the following groupings under which the Personal Support Worker is currently tracked:

- Statistics Canada – Defines the Personal Support Work as having duties that fall under NOC classification 4412 'Home support Workers, housekeepers and related occupations' for measurement and tracking purposes
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) – Tracks the Personal Support worker as falling under 'Health and Education'
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board places the Personal Support Worker under the category of 'Assisting Occupations in support of Health Services'

This classification is admittedly necessary from a national and a provincial perspective as it serves to simplify national statistical trends for ease of empirical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada – National Occupations Classification (NOC) 2016 Version 1.0  
<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getAllExample&TVD=314243&CVD=314247&CPV=4412&CST=01012016&CLV=4&MLV=4&V=290953&VST=01012016>



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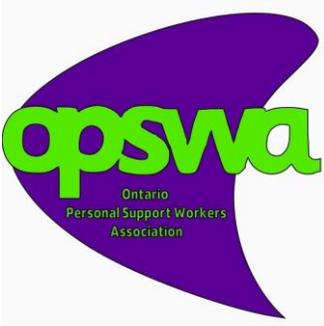
### Introduction

Since the turn of the twentieth century health care delivery in Ontario has continued to evolve and adjust to changing demographic and financial pressures and experienced measured success in meeting and accommodating these changes. Hospital wait times have been reduced and the current government has indicated a commitment to ending hallway medicine by adding 6000 beds to Ontario's health care facilities and increasing access to qualified home care, all of which are laudable goals for any government. These commitments, however positive, do not take into account the role that front line health care delivery workers play in carrying out these plans. Who will actually deliver service to these beds? Who will provide 'In-home care'? The answer is simple: fully trained Personal Support Workers (PSW) workers.

In order to discuss the role of the PSW, one must first define what roles/duties a PSW performs in supporting individuals requiring on-going health support. The Ontario Personal Support Workers Association defines the role of the PSW as "[providing] care to any person who require personal assistance with activities of daily living (ADL). They may also provide additional care as delegated by an RHP as needed and when it can be performed safely and within Provincial legislation. PSW's provide personal care and related paraprofessional services in accordance with an established plan of care. Typically involving both personal care tasks and incidental activities of daily living such as housekeeping, meal preparation, socialization and companionship."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ontariopswassociation.com/scope-of-practice>



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## Categorization of the Personal Support Worker in Ontario

In Ontario numbers relating to the PSW are difficult to obtain as data relating to this profession is limited to the OPSWA's membership roster and the enrollment numbers published by the *Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development College Enrolment Statistical Reporting system*. From this point tracking non-OPSWA PSWs becomes increasingly difficult as they are included into the following classification groups:

- Statistics Canada – Defines the Personal Support Work as having duties that fall under NOC classification 4412 'Home support Workers, housekeepers and related occupations' for measurement and tracking purposes<sup>3</sup>
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) – Tracks the Personal Support worker as falling under 'Personal Services' <sup>4</sup>
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board places the Personal Support Worker under the category of 'Assisting Occupations in support of Health Services'<sup>5</sup>

Consequently one is forced to rely on broad categorizations in order to obtain any reliable labour data once the PSW completes their training.

## The Personal Support Worker Enrollments

With few exceptions enrollment in the PSW program across the Program has declined steadily since 2016 with overall enrollment rates declining by an average of 7.9% across the Province overall.

Fig A.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada – National Occupations Classification (NOC) 2016 Version 1.0  
<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getAllExample&TVD=314243&CVD=314247&CPV=4412&CST=01012016&CLV=4&MLV=4&V=290953&VST=01012016>

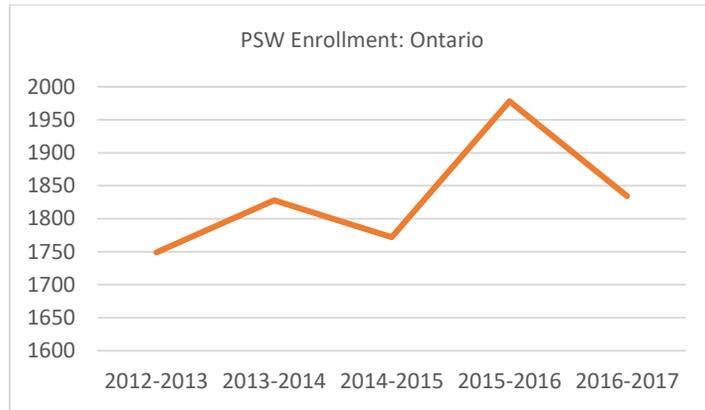
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research/help-wanted-private-sector-job-vacancies-q2-2018>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20-%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers\\_P.php](http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20-%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers_P.php) (Occupation Schedule 1)



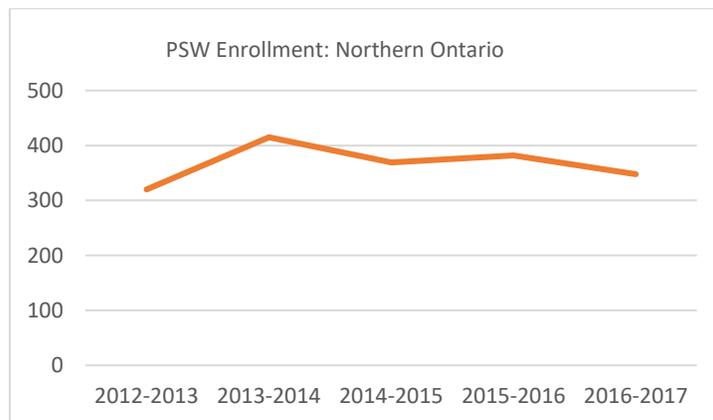
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This decline was not evenly distributed with enrollments in Northern Ontario declining by 16.1% (see FIG B) compared to The Greater Toronto Area and Western Ontario which saw a decline of 10.8% and 9.7% respectively. <sup>6</sup> Only Eastern Ontario saw enrollments in the PSW program enrollment increase by 12.9% due to the introduction of the PSW program at Loyalist College in the 2015-2016 year.

Fig B.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/data/college-enrolment>



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## Personal Support Workers: Health and Safety Challenges

In Ontario Personal Support Workers are classified by the WSIB as being employed in 'Assisting Occupations in support of Health Services' and it is here that the effects of this field can be most clearly seen. Since 2002 the leading occupations by gender for allowed lost time claims were persons working in the 'Assisting Occupations in support of Health Services'<sup>7</sup> and since 2007 this occupation became the most dangerous for women employed in this sector<sup>8</sup>.

These numbers become increasingly concerning when for the first time in 2015 this same occupation group also accounted for the greatest amount of allowed time lost by persons aged 35-39. More concerning is the fact that this was repeated again in 2017 for persons aged 35-39 and even expanded to include workers aged 40-44. Therefore according to the WSIB an Ontario worker, especially women aged 35-44 working in the 'Assisted Occupations in support of Health Services' is now the highest risk job in Ontario surpassing both manufacturing and transportation services.<sup>9</sup>

Overall persons employed in 'Assisting Occupations in support of Health Services' account for 6.3% of total provincial allowed lost hours in 2017. This may seem small however when this number is compared to a rate of 0.4% for Police Officers and Firefighters, professions generally held to be of 'high-risk', it forces one to give pause.

## Vacancy Rates

Consequently, it is no surprise that the corresponding vacancy rate continues to grow. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business Private Sector Job Vacancies report, the vacancy rate in the Personal Services Field rose from 3.4% in 2017 to 4.8% in 2018. It also must be stressed that according to these same numbers the vacancy rate for workers employed in this profession have the highest vacancy rate in any field across Canada.

## Analysis

This leads one to ask what is driving these results, a look at the aforementioned numbers and trends seems to reflect a cycle that is rooted in a critical professional recognition-gap that such a high-risk profession would normally receive.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, this professional recognition-gap seems to be

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20-%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers\\_P.php](http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20-%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers_P.php) (Occupation Schedule 1)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



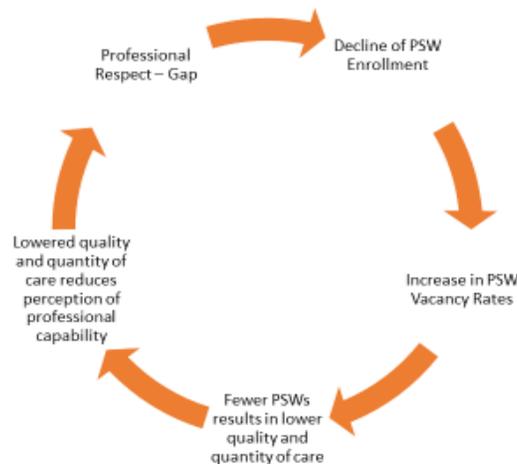
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translating into a cycle of continuing enrollment declines, a corresponding increase in the vacancy rate which in turn places additional stress on a shrinking workforce which in turn leads to an increase in workplace injuries, which, when married to an absence of professional recognition forces the continuance of this cycle (See Fig. C)

As this cycle progresses and the population of Ontario continues to rise, it can be safely assumed that the population of Ontario will see a sharp rise in the growth of a shadow health care economy and with that the corresponding reduction of the provincial tax base while placing additional pressures on the provinces justice system.

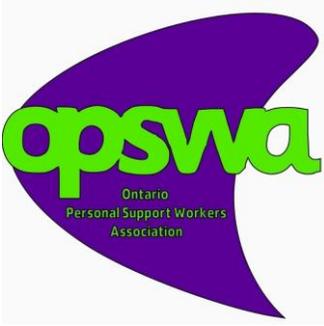
Fig C.



## Conclusion

Based on these findings the following conclusion may be drawn:

- Lack of professional recognition that the Personal Support Worker suffer is the key catalyst creating the current cyclical staffing crisis in the Personal Support Worker profession.
- Lack of consistent job/labour definitions adds to the confusion of the duties carried out by PSWs.
- Risk to the Health and Safety of the PSW and clients is escalating each year



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- The ability to respond to changes in this field will be challenging until governments allow PSW to self-regulate under their current professional association.
- Failure to redress this situation will see this cyclical staffing crisis continue and worsen
- Long term failure to regulate or administrate PSW will result in a growth of a 'shadow health industry' dependant on unqualified workers, which negatively impact reporting of taxable income and consequently government revenues generation. This will place a further burden on the Ontario taxpayer.

As the Province of Ontario prepares to provide care to its aging population it may be prudent to expand its scope of professional recognition to include the Personal Support Worker (i.e. self-regulation), as such an action would undoubtedly begin to reverse this unfortunate cycle with no financial impact to the taxpayers of Ontario.

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<sup>i</sup>Schedule 1 of the WSIB was selected for comparison over Schedule 2 as it reflected the findings of 66% of registered employers in Ontario



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### Cited Works

- 1.) Statistics Canada – National Occupations Classification (NOC) 2016 Version 1.0  
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- 2.) <https://www.ontariopswassociation.com/scope-of-practice>
- 3.) <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research/help-wanted-private-sector-job-vacancies-q2-2018>
- 4.) <https://www.ontario.ca/data/college-enrolment>
- 5.) [http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers\\_P.php](http://www.wsibstatistics.ca/S1/Open%20Data%20Downloads%20%20WSIB%20By%20The%20Numbers_P.php)