

Ontario Community Health Compensation Market Salary Review

MEMBER ADVOCACY RESOURCES

Objective

Based on the key findings of the Ontario Community Health Compensation Market Salary Review report, our member organizations are seeking to increase the Ontario government's awareness of the pay equity gap between the community health sector and other health care and broader public sector organizations, such as hospitals and educational institutions. Our goal is to mobilize the government to invest in the community health sector to reduce the wage gap and support staff recruitment and retention.

To ensure you are supported in potential interactions with MPPs, politicians, ministers, or government staff, we have prepared an overview of the report, key messages, as well as key facts that you can use to help advance our advocacy efforts.

Overview of the report

The Ontario Community Health Compensation Market Salary Review presents the findings and recommendations coming from a study of the market compensation of benchmark jobs in the community health sector. The study aims to review the market compensation of 79 benchmark jobs that are common across various community health organizations, and to develop a common salary structure based on the market median. The study also analyzed the compensation trends, challenges, and gaps in the community health sector, and compared the recommended rates with the Ministry of Health funded rates.

The report provides data from various sources, such as surveys, collective agreements, and public data, and offers guidelines for implementing the provincial grid and addressing the compensation issues.

The main findings of the report are:

- The community health sector is facing significant staffing challenges, such as high turnover, low compensation increases, rural location needs, and lack of growth opportunities.
- The compensation of the benchmark jobs in the community health sector is lagging relative to the market median and the broader public sector, and the Ministry of Health funded rates are significantly below the market rates.
- The study developed an updated salary grid based on the market median and the previous structure and provided guidelines for implementing the provincial grid and addressing the compensation issues.

The report is intended to help community health organizations to attract, retain, and motivate their employees, and to ensure fair and equitable compensation practices.

The Ontario Community Health survey was a collaborative effort by ten provincial associations to provide insightful data for primary care and community care providers.



Key messages



- Ontario's community health sector is facing a health human resources crisis caused by the growing wage gap between community health care workers and health care workers in other areas and sectors.
- Urgent action is required to close the wage gap.
- A strong health care system relies on a strong community health sector which requires a strong community health care workforce.
- Ontario's community health workers include nurses working in primary care, addiction and social workers working in mental health organizations, PSWs working in long-term care and much more.
- Many of these workers are currently paid less compared to their counterparts working in schools or hospitals, and often make far less than the recommended rates even set in 2017, due to limited increases in government funding.
- Despite the rising cost of living and a competitive health care job market, staff in the community health sector experienced an average actual salary increase of 1.53% in 2023 (with some roles projecting a 0% increase), notably lower than the 11% increase awarded to nurses in hospitals and the 8% increase for emergency medical services – leading to a further widening in the wage gap
- As a result, the community health sector is losing its workers to other sectors and the ability to recruit and retain health workers is becoming increasingly difficult.
- According to our research based off the input from hundreds of community health organizations, 94% of community health organizations identified compensation as the single biggest challenge for recruitment and retention.
- Ontario's community health sector is in crisis, and immediate government intervention is needed to close the wage gap, address critical staffing shortages, and ensure the continued stability of our health care system.
- The government has expressed its commitment to addressing the HHR crisis and enhancing access to services for Ontarians.
- Without action, we risk severe consequences including diminished access to essential services in the community, increased strain on hospitals and emergency departments, increased health care costs, and compromised health outcomes for countless individuals and their families.

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Top facts from the report



- **The average vacancy rate sits at 8% among organizations involved in the survey**, reflecting the level of unfilled positions within these organizations. This can be compared to the national average vacancy rate, which was **4%** in the second quarter of 2023. The average turnover rate is **17%** among organizations who responded to the survey.
- Organizations are having the **most challenges recruiting** the following roles: Nurses, Personal Support Workers, Psychotherapists, Mental Health Counsellors, Social Workers, Addiction Workers, Housing Support Workers, Child and Youth Workers, Occupational Therapists, finance staff, and administrative staff.
- A substantial **64% of organizations** involved in the survey **were limited in the compensation they offered to staff** as a result of Bill 124, illustrating the widespread impact of this legislation on salaries within these organizations.
- Despite the high inflation rate and a difficult job market, **the forecasted compensation changes for 2023 is only 1%**, indicating a challenge for staff to maintain their financial wellbeing.
- Among the organizations surveyed, **35% rely on agency staff**, with a significant pay variance between regular staff and agency staff of 30%.
- The percentage of **sites considered high risk is 32%** due to the complex and often demanding conditions faced by the organizations involved, including serving patients with complex health care needs, geographic challenges due to rural and remote work sites, and safety concerns.

Questions and Answers



What is the solution to fix the pay equity gap in the community health sector?

The government needs to recognize the wage gap disproportionately impacting the community health sector and take action to address it urgently, before things get worse. The government needs to increase the funding and support for the community health sector and ensure fair and equitable compensation for community health workers. This would help the sector to retain its staff, improve its services, and contribute to the health and well-being of Ontarians.

What are the benefits of closing the pay equity gap for the community health sector and the health care system as a whole?

Closing the pay equity gap would help the community health sector to:

- Solve the staff shortage and keep the health care system stable and strong.
- Retain existing staff to reduce pressure on an already-strained community health sector.
- Provide better and more consistent care for the people who need it.
- Improve the health and well-being of individuals and their families.
- Save money and resources by using less hospitals and emergency rooms.

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What is the total gap between community health workers and other health workers in Ontario?

The gap, while significant, varies depending on the specific role in community health. Staff in the community health sector experienced an average salary increase of 1.53% in 2023 (with some roles projecting a 0% increase), notably lower than the 11% increase awarded to nurses in hospitals and the 8% increase for emergency medical services – leading to a further widening in the wage gap.

Many workers in the community health sector are currently paid less compared to their counterparts working in schools or hospitals, and often make far less than the recommended rates even set in 2017, due to limited increases in government funding.

For example:

- Social workers currently make 6.5% less than the recommended 2017 rate, and 30.1% less than the recommended 2023 rate.
- Community health planners currently make 17.3% less than the recommended 2017 rate, and 30% less than the recommended 2023 rate.
- Nurse practitioners currently make 14.4% less than the recommended 2017 rate, and 16.8% less than the recommended 2023 rate.
- Psychologists currently make 13.4% less than the recommended 2017 rate, and 15.5% less than the recommended 2023 rate.

These are just a few examples of a sector where most workers are making far below the recommended rates set in 2017 and 2023.

What are the main factors that caused the gap between community health workers and other health workers in Ontario, and how has the gap increased over time?

The gap between community health workers and other health workers in Ontario was caused by several factors, including lack of investment and funding into the community health sector, legislative compensation restraints imposed by Bill 124, but also due to increased wages for workers in other sectors of health care. For example, staff in the community health sector experienced an average actual salary increase of 1.53% in 2023 (with some roles projecting a 0% increase). This is compared to the 11% increase awarded to nurses in hospitals and the 8% increase for emergency medical services – leading to a further widening in the wage gap.

Why is investing in community health important for our system?

Investing in community health is important for our system because community health workers provide essential and accessible care for a diverse range of health needs for most Ontarians. They help to prevent, manage, and treat various health issues, such as chronic diseases, mental health, substance use, and social determinants of health. They also help to reduce the pressure and cost on other parts of the health system, such as hospitals and emergency departments, by providing care in the community and at home. We know the data shows that by investing in community health, the system can improve the quality and continuity of care for Ontarians and ensure the stability and sustainability of the health care system.