

**PRESS RELEASE:
Ontario Medical Students Call to
Legislate Paid Sick Leave**

Monday April 12, 2021



Written by the OMSA Political Advocacy Committee

58% of workers living in Canada do not have access to paid sick leave.¹ Since labour policy is provincially regulated, paid sick leave legislation differs across the provinces. Currently, paid sick leave is only legislated in Quebec (two days per year), in PEI (one day after five years with the same employer), and for federally-regulated workers (three days per year).² In Ontario, where there are no provincially regulated sick days, individual workplace policies dictate access to paid sick leave.

In 2017, the Ontario Liberal government passed the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act (Bill 148).³ This Bill afforded Ontario employees the right to two paid sick days and eight additional unpaid emergency leave days each calendar year. It also precluded employers from requiring a sick note from a health care provider for approval of personal emergency leave. Medical professionals, labour rights advocates, and workers viewed this legislative change as a step towards improving precarious and unsafe workplace practices. However, the Ford government repealed Bill 148 in 2018. Ontario workers are currently not afforded any paid sick days and are only guaranteed three unpaid days for personal illness, injury or medical emergency.²

Literature consistently shows that paid sick leave is critical to decreasing the spread of infectious disease. Paid sick leave also encourages faster recovery and prevents progression to serious illness.⁴ From the perspective of employers, workplaces that institute paid sick leave have been shown to benefit from lower job turnover rates, lower recruitment costs, lower rates of absenteeism, and higher levels of productivity.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted the importance of paid sick leave and exposed the disproportionate effects of workplace policies on structurally marginalized populations: a recent report showed that 49% of COVID-19 cases in Toronto occurred in lower-income neighbourhoods.¹ A disproportionate number of low-income workers are also racialized or migrant workers, many of whom live in multigenerational homes.⁶ This poses a clear barrier to self-isolation and increases the community spread of workplace-contracted COVID-19. These factors culminated in the highly publicized COVID-19 outbreak at Brampton's Amazon warehouse and have also resulted in many other preventable deaths.^{7,8} Instituting paid sick leave would dramatically reduce the duration and severity of the pandemic. This would be critical to minimizing economic damage, dampening the burden on the healthcare system, and ensuring the right to health to all Ontarians.

The Ontario Medical Students Association (OMSA) recognizes the clear need for accessible, universal, and adequate paid sick leave. In line with recommendations from the Decent Work and Health Network, **OMSA calls on the provincial government to legislate 7 paid sick days, with an additional 14 during public health emergencies, and an end to mandated sick notes.** This paid sick leave program must also be made permanent so that workers continue to be protected beyond the pandemic.²

Sincerely,



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