

we're not tolerating it'...I believe a change can come."

Over the last several years, RNAO has done plenty of work at both the national and provincial levels to add nurses' voices to that call. In August, members responded to an action alert calling on Ottawa to introduce a national poverty plan, and during last fall's federal election, Executive Director Doris Grinspun participated in a town hall meeting on poverty and health care at Ryerson University. The association has been vocal about the need to push ahead the province's poverty reduction plans and is part of the *25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction. Creating a Healthier Society*, the document that laid out Ontario nurses' expectations of political parties during the last provincial election, called for basic income supports for individuals, including: immediate increases to minimum wage and social assistance rates that reflect the actual cost of living; and a substantive increase in affordable housing. RNAO provided a formal submission to the cabinet committee that developed the new strategy, pointing out the irrefutable link between economic status and health. And, throughout 2008, nurses participated in RNAO's advocacy work to urge the premier to take decisive action despite the economic downturn.

Grinspun says a recession is no reason for the province to claim it can't afford to address poverty. Rather, it's exactly the time to act. "We welcome the \$2 billion allocated for social housing in the recent federal budget, but the requirement to secure matching funds from provinces and already cash-strapped municipalities will limit the benefit for those who urgently need a roof over their heads," she explains. "RNAO also decries that the budget left thousands of unemployed without access to Employment Insurance, while providing tax cuts that don't benefit those in greatest need."

RNAO will be watching the upcoming provincial budget closely, and will urge Premier McGuinty to put much-needed dollars into Ontario's poverty reduction strategy. "The Premier has the opportunity to show real leadership on this issue," Grinspun says. "He can define his time in office by taking bold action to make a difference for thousands of Ontarians."

Carine Gallagher agrees. Last July, the nursing professor in Thunder Bay attended a town hall meeting on poverty, organized

Documentary filmmakers tell the stories of families facing poverty

Two new documentaries are exploring the struggles of several Canadian families coping with poverty, and the solutions they need to find adequate housing and food. RNAO has provided expertise and financial support to both.



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Home Safe, produced by Sky Works Charitable Foundation, follows children and families in Calgary, Sault Ste. Marie, Hamilton, and Toronto as they cope with the hardships and stigma associated with homelessness. RNAO member Cathy Crowe is lending her years of experience as a street nurse to the project as its executive producer. While the films based in Ontario cities are still in progress, the first instalment, which examines the affordable housing crisis in Calgary, was released last fall. For more information about the project, visit www.skyworksfoundation.org.

Poor No More, hosted by actress and comedienne Mary Walsh, introduces viewers to Canadians who have lost their jobs because of factory closings, or who have worked years for companies that offer little pay and no benefits. The film also examines how other countries such as Ireland and Sweden have taken strides to address poverty and have improved the lives of people living within their borders. For more information, visit www.poornomore.ca. **RN**

ABOVE: Rowan and Delilah, two of the kids featured in the Sky Works documentary, *Home Safe Calgary*.

by the Ontario NDP. She listened as single parents, the disabled and elderly shared their stories and asked the government to address the hardships they face every day. Now that the economy is sliding, and mills in the area's pulp and paper industry are laying off staff or closing, Gallagher wonders how many people she met at that meeting are finding it even harder to afford the basics, despite any government promises.

"It's very sad that we have poverty in this country. The meeting pointed out so many things that need to be addressed in the social system," Gallagher says. **RN**

JILL SCARROW IS STAFF WRITER AT RNAO.