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Ottawa hospital workers protest exclusion from pandemic pay

Taylor Blewett

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Upwards of 100 healthcare workers (physiotherapists, X-ray techs and dozens of other classifications within Allied Health Professionals) protested being left out of pandemic pay outside The Ottawa Hospital's General campus Tuesday. JULIE OLIVER / Postmedia

But many more remain ineligible for the pay boost, and that's what drove Linda Powers, a physiotherapist at The Ottawa Hospital's Civic campus, to organize Tuesday's rally.

"I think really it's turned into a bit of a shenanigan, they really should never have started it in the first place, to be honest. They obviously didn't do their research," said Powers, of the province's approach to pandemic pay among hospital workers.

While nurses, attendant care workers, auxiliary staff such as porters and laundry workers and more will receive the temporary wage bump, those who won't include hospital social workers, dieticians and physiotherapists such as Powers.



OTTAWA – JUNE 2, 2020 – Upwards of 100 healthcare workers (physiotherapists, X-ray techs and dozens of other classifications within Allied Health Professionals) protested being left out of pandemic pay outside The Ottawa Hospital's General campus Tuesday. JULIE OLIVER/Postmedia

For her, it's not about the money – Powers said it's a matter of equitable treatment and recognizing all of those who are potentially exposed to the virus in their workplace.

“You either include everybody, or you just cancel the whole darn thing,” she said. “We don't need the extra money. I think long-term care needs it and I think the community needs it. I say cancel the whole thing for hospitals, we're getting paid, we're doing our job.”

At a Monday press conference, Ontario Health Minister Christine Elliott was asked about the workers who interact with COVID-19 patients but continue to be left out by the pandemic pay eligibility criteria. “We did our very best to include all of the people working on the front lines of patients with COVID-19 in hospitals, long-term care homes and home and community care,” said Elliott. “If we missed people, that wasn't done deliberately. But a decision did need to be made, because the pandemic pay needs to get out to people.”

The money is expected to start flowing to workers within the next week, according to Elliott. It will be retroactive to April 24 and last until Aug. 13.



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TRENDING

A group of several hundred health-care professionals, including physiotherapists, pharmacy technicians and sonographers, rallied outside The Ottawa Hospital Tuesday to protest what they see as the unequal application of the province's pandemic pay initiative.

"We go into ICU, we deal with COVID-19 patients who are on ventilators," said Christine Methot, an X-ray technologist at the Montfort Hospital whose job is among those not eligible for the temporary wage top-up, an extra \$4 hourly plus the potential for additional lump-sum payments.



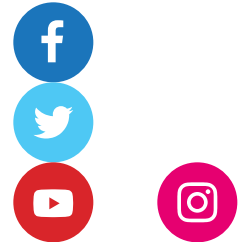
"It's just unfathomable that some professions who are behind Plexiglas – and I'm not taking away from them and their job, they totally deserve it too – but they're behind Plexiglas and have no direct contact (and they) are receiving pandemic pay now," said Methot.

The list of eligible workers in health care, long-term care, retirement homes, corrections, and social services workplaces is longer than it was when the province first announced the program in late April, with certain professions – paramedics, respiratory therapists, and more – having successfully made the case that they, too, should be included.

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