

Ministry of Health
General Pandemic Pay
Questions And Answers

A. General Program Information

1) Why are we providing pandemic pay?

The COVID-19 outbreak is causing staffing pressures for health service providers, particularly among frontline health care workers. Pandemic pay encourages essential staff to continue working and helps to attract prospective employees to the health sector to maintain safe staffing levels across the system.

Temporary pandemic pay is aimed at helping frontline staff who are experiencing severe challenges and are at heightened risk during the COVID-19 outbreak.

It is a targeted program designed to support employees who work in congregate care settings or primarily with vulnerable populations, where maintaining physical distancing is difficult or not possible.

The goals of this temporary pandemic pay are to:

- provide additional support and relief to frontline workers
- encourage staff to continue working and attract prospective employees
- help maintain safe staffing levels and the operation of critical frontline services

2) Who is eligible to receive pandemic pay?

For information on eligible workers and workplaces, please see the following website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/eligible-workplaces-and-workers-pandemic-pay>.

For further information to assist you in determining if you are eligible, please consult your employer. Eligible employers should consult the funding agreements provided by the ministry to determine their eligible workforce.

3) How many health care workers will receive this pandemic pay?

From the overall total of 375,000 workers across Ontario that will receive pandemic pay, this will include over 225,000 workers in the health sector.

B. Financials and Payment Information

4) How much will eligible workers receive?

Workers will receive temporary pandemic pay of \$4/hour on top of their regular wages. In addition, the government will be providing monthly lump sum payments of \$250 for four months to eligible frontline workers who work over 100 hours per month. The pandemic pay will be effective for 16 weeks, from April 24, 2020 until August 13, 2020.

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Lower income workers will benefit the most from pandemic pay. The \$4/hour top up and available \$250 monthly lump sums represent larger percentage increases for lower-income workers such as PSWs.

5) How will workers receive their payment and when?

Staff will receive pandemic pay directly from their employer. We are working with employers to provide them with the funding needed to pay their eligible workers. Funding will be provided to employers in June and expect that eligible workers will begin to receive their pandemic pay soon afterwards. Accountability mechanisms will be built into the transfer payments to employers to ensure this money flows to workers.

6) Will pandemic pay continue after the 16 weeks? Why not?

Pandemic pay supports retaining our health workforce across all sectors of the health system during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is temporary and does not affect base salaries. The pandemic pay will be effective for 16 weeks, from April 24, 2020 until August 13, 2020. Payments for eligible hours of work during this time frame may be made after August 13, until all eligible employees have received their full pay.

7) How will government ensure that funding flows to eligible workers?

For the purposes of program evaluation and audit, the ministry will seek and retain assurances that funds have been disbursed as permitted by transfer payment agreements.

Where funding is disbursed directly to the worker's employer (e.g. municipalities, transfer payment organization), an attestation directly from the employer will be secured

Where funding is disbursed through a delivery agent (e.g. regional LHINs), a written attestation by an authorized representative (e.g. CEO or Board Chair) on behalf of the delivery agencies/employers will be secured

Attestations may include submitting evidence of eligibility such as a worker's title, hours worked, work location, etc. or, in the case of funding through delivery agents, retention of records that could be used for auditing and controllership purposes.

C. Eligibility Information

8) The government has passed several emergency orders to allow workers to be redeployed (e.g., from hospitals or home care to LTC). Will they receive pandemic pay? What about agency workers?

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All staff redeployed to an eligible position in an eligible sector may receive the \$4 premium and lump sum.

- **Staff redeployed from one eligible workplace to another** (e.g. home care worker redeployed to hospital) will be paid by the **home employer**. The home employer will charge the ministry through existing payment arrangements.
- **Staff member redeployed from an ineligible employer to an eligible employer** (e.g. Family Health Team to hospital) will be paid by the **home employer**. Funds will be paid to the receiving employer who will provide funds to the home employer, under agreement.
- **Staff member redeployed from School Board/university/other BPS sector to an eligible employer** will be paid by the **home employer**. The home employer will charge the government.
- **Contracted agency staff to an eligible workplace** (e.g. agency staff providing services in hospital) will be paid by the agency. Funds will be paid to the receiving employer who will provide funds to the home employer through an agreement between the agency and the recipient employer.

9) How were the eligible workers selected?

All health care workers are valued and important to our efforts to fight COVID-19. We recognize that there are many frontline heroes that are not captured by the initiative. However, there is a limit to the amount of funding provided by the federal government through our agreement.

Temporary pandemic pay is aimed at helping frontline staff who are experiencing severe challenges and are at heightened risk during the COVID-19 outbreak. It is a targeted program designed to support employees who work in congregate care settings or primarily with vulnerable populations, where maintaining physical distancing is difficult or not possible.

10) At one point we understood that the government was considering expanding the scope of the program. Why did you choose not to expand eligibility?

After careful consideration, the government is not expanding the pandemic pay program beyond those already deemed eligible. Over 375,000 of Ontario's frontline workers will receive pandemic pay, of which 225,000 are funded by the Ministry of Health. It is the largest of its kind in the country and is unprecedented in the province's history. As the Premier has said, unfortunately, the resources that we have agreed to with the federal government can only go so far.

11) Midwives and other allied health providers such as therapy workers, MRI/MRTs/X-ray technicians are not included. Primary health care clinics

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such as family health teams and community health centres are not eligible workplaces. Why?

We understand concerns regarding coverage and value all health care workers, including allied health care workers and those in community settings. After careful consideration, the government is not expanding the pandemic pay program beyond those already deemed eligible. Over 375,000 of Ontario's frontline workers will receive pandemic pay, of which 225,000 are funded by the Ministry of Health. It is the largest of its kind in the country and is unprecedented in the province's history. As the Premier has said, unfortunately, the resources that we have agreed to with the federal government can only go so far, and aims to assist those who regularly and consistently face exposure risks.

12) How do we treat positions that are filled by employees who are RNs or other registered professional that is considered eligible? For example, some of these staff may be in allied health roles.

A worker would be considered eligible/ineligible based on the role/position the individual is filling at the eligible workplace, not their professional designation. For example, if an individual registered as an RN was working in a hospital as a dietitian, for which they were also registered, this individual would not receive pandemic pay, as dietitians are not eligible and even though they were also registered as an RN.

13) If staff resign/retire, are retro payments required for the period they were working?

If an eligible worker met all the criteria for an already completed period of Pandemic Pay, but has since retired or resigned, that worker should be reimbursed the amount of pandemic pay earned for the eligible hours worked, subject to the terms of their employment and any applicable collective agreements.

14) Will employers have flexibility to determine the eligibility of their workforce for pandemic pay, and may pandemic pay be expanded?

The Emergency Order passed on May 29, 2020 prohibits all employers, among other entities, from expanding eligibility for temporary pandemic pay.

Consequently, funding provided by the government to employers for temporary pandemic pay **must** be disbursed in accordance with the government's eligibility framework for temporary pandemic pay.

Employers will **not** be permitted to use Ontario government funds **of any kind** for the purpose of making other forms of COVID-19-related payments to employees who are

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otherwise ineligible for the government's own program for temporary pandemic pay. This includes (but is not limited to) any funds previously allocated to an employer for other programs; base funding allocation for operations or services delivery etc.

15) Can ministries provide additional funding to offset additional labour costs including increased wages for managers who are impacted by salary compression resulting from temporary pandemic pay program?

Ontario's pandemic pay program has been designed with criteria focused on frontline roles working in congregate settings and/ or with vulnerable populations where the risk of infection is greatest. Managers typically have different responsibilities from frontline staff in these settings and therefore managers are not included in the Pandemic Pay program.

Ministries will not provide additional resources specifically for this purpose, however it may be that there may be other expenditures **entirely unrelated to pandemic pay** which are designed to support costs incurred to ensure that programs continue to be delivered safely, effectively and without disruption and which are permissible under certain TP agreements.

16) Are privately funded agency workers eligible for pandemic pay, for example private nurses hired to provide home care services?

Pandemic pay is intended for publicly funded front-line workers. Privately contracted individuals are not eligible to receive this increase.

17) The temporary pandemic pay program is designed to support eligible full- and part-time employees and does not apply to management. What is the definition of management?

Employers are responsible for confirming what positions are management as defined by their organization. An example of management may be an employee who is responsible for overseeing and directing other employees.

18) Are manager positions eligible for temporary pandemic pay?

No. Manager positions are not eligible for temporary pandemic pay.

19) Are supervisory positions eligible for temporary pandemic pay?

Manager positions are not eligible for temporary pandemic pay. If a supervisor position is not responsible for other employees, they may be eligible for pandemic pay if they are working in an eligible role in an eligible workplace. Employers are responsible for

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determining formal supervisory and reporting roles and are reminded that they may not expand the scope of pandemic pay.

20) Are individuals in management positions who are re-deployed to act in front-line positions eligible for temporary pandemic pay? (including both re-deployment between organizations and re-deployment within organizations)

No. Manager positions are not eligible for temporary pandemic pay.

21) I am a front-line worker, but my position is not eligible. Why?

Over 225,000 of Ontario's frontline health sector workers will receive pandemic pay. It is the largest of its kind in the country and is unprecedented in the province's history. As the Premier has said, unfortunately, the resources that we have agreed to with the federal government can only go so far. After careful consideration, the government is not expanding the pandemic pay program beyond those already deemed eligible.

Employees with eligibility concerns are encouraged to connect with their employers to determine their eligibility status and consult the public website for more information:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/eligible-workplaces-and-workers-pandemic-pay>.

D. Program and Implementation Details

22) What is meant by “direct” and “indirect” eligible hours?

- Eligible workers can seek temporary pandemic pay for both
 - time spent directly delivering care to patients; and
 - time spent doing other work required to directly support care delivery such as travel between home care client visits, documentation.
- Temporary pandemic pay is not available for administrative costs that are not related to publicly funded service delivery, such as:
 - supervision or management tasks performed by ineligible workers;
 - recruiting new staff; and
 - overhead.

23) What is meant by “client facing?”

Client facing reception/administrative workers would be those positions that are having direct, in-person patient interaction **onsite** at the workplace. Any virtual care, telework or remote work hours/positions would be ineligible for pandemic pay, as these are

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neither direct, in-person patient interaction, nor would they be occurring onsite at the eligible workplace.

24) How does pandemic pay impact provisions in the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act (PSPSFGA), 2019?

The government has issued a Regulation under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, 1990*, to temporarily suspend certain provisions of the PSPSFGA and replace them with different provisions to support frontline employees.

This temporary regulation reflects the extraordinary challenges posed by COVID-19 and does not reflect a long-term change in the government's position on public sector compensation or on the PSPSFGA.

For additional information, please refer to O. Reg. 195/20: Order under subsection 7.1 (2) of the act - treatment of temporary COVID-19 related payments to employees:

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/200195>