

Nurse Orientation Peer Support Program Final Report

Project Title: Evaluation of a Nursing Orientation Peer Support Program (NOPSP) in Long-Term Care (Previously called Nurse Peer Mentorship Program)

Funding Source: Registered Nurses' Foundation of Ontario

Organization: Perley Health

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Executive Summary

This final report summarizes the outcomes, evaluation findings, and sustainability efforts related to the Nursing Orientation Peer Support Program (NOPSP) (previously called Nurse Peer Mentorship Program) at Perley Health. Embracing nurse mentorship principles, the program pairs newly hired Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) with experienced nurses, called Orientation Partners, to support onboarding, transition to practice, and adapting to organizational culture within long-term care (LTC). The program is integrated as a mandatory part of onboarding for newly hired nurses at Perley Health, while being an Orientation Partner is voluntary.

Between November 2024 and May 2026, the project focused on strengthening preparation for orientation partners, evaluating participant experiences, improving operational processes, and developing resources to support sustainability and spread. As part of its growth and evolution, the program underwent a name change from its previous title "Nurse Peer Mentorship Program" to NOPSP, which also included terminology updates such as changing the term "mentors" to "orientation partners". This was to more appropriately align with language outlined in the collective agreements of nursing unions at Perley Health.

Overall findings demonstrated that the NOPSP positively contributed to new hires feeling more confident and supported in their new role, connected to the Perley Health community, and increased access to resources to support their work. Orientation partners also benefitted from participating in the program, reporting the program was a great learning experience, encouraged teamwork, and supported new hires in developing a sense of belonging (Appendix D). The formalized mentorship training, designed specifically for Orientation Partners, also contributed to increased perceived confidence and preparedness for supporting newly hired nurses.

This project resulted in the development of several resources, including content for a 4-hour Mentorship training for Orientation Partners, Just-in-Time mentorship support tools, and a field guide that is currently in its final stages of production. It has also supported knowledge dissemination through a webinar, a poster presentation and oral presentation at two conferences with the possibility of developing a peer-reviewed paper. Lastly, this project is also sparking interest within the sector as evidenced by a LTC sector partners reaching out to Perley Health to offer dissemination support for our tools and resources.

"Establishing a sense of teamwork between mentors and newly hired nurses is beneficial for navigating the daily challenges of the unit. It promotes collaboration, support, enhancing the overall work environment and patient care."

-Orientation Partner at Perley Health

2. Project Objectives

The objectives of this project were to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the NOPSP in supporting newly hired nurses in LTC.
- Strengthen program quality and sustainability through orientation partner training and operational improvements.
- Develop evaluation-informed resources and tools to support NOPSP implementation in other LTC homes.
- Disseminate the outcomes and impact of the project through knowledge translation activities.

3. Project Activities and Accomplishments

Program Evaluation

- A formal evaluation was completed between April 2024 – April 2025
- A survey was distributed via email using Survey Monkey to all orientation partners and new hires who participated in the program. The survey was voluntary and distributed after their 6-week participation.
- In total, the evaluation team received 48 survey responses. Of the 48 surveys, 21 responses were from new hires and 27 responses were from orientation partners. The evaluation team permitted orientation partners who mentored a new hire to complete the survey more than once if they continued to support new hires. Ten responses were from orientation partners who completed the survey more than once as they may have had a new perspective for each new hire they were paired with.
- Reviewing the participant demographic information provided by new hires and orientation partners, we found:
 - New hires (n = 21) most often identified as woman (90.48%), under the age of 25 (52.38%), were RPNs (100%), and worked full time (52.38%) during the day shift (71.43%). Interestingly, 80.95% of the new hires had less than 1 year of nursing experience.
 - Orientation partners (n = 27) most often identified as woman (66.67%), between the ages of 35 - 44 (37.04%) or 45 – 54 (37.04%), were RPNs (92.59%), and worked full-time (81.48%) during the day shift (70.37%). Interestingly, most orientation partners, 81.49%, had over 6 years nursing experience.
 - To our team, this demonstrated the potential value of the program as the new hires were new to the nursing profession and/or the long-term care clinical environment and may benefit from participating in a program where they would receive additional support. It also demonstrated that the staff members who were called upon to be orientation partners were well established within their nursing careers and were familiar with the organizations policies and protocols.
 - For more information on participant demographics, please review Appendix D.
- Key evaluation findings demonstrated:
 - **THE NOPSP had a positive impact on the new hires**
 - 33.33% (n = 5) of the new hires strongly agreed that they felt more confident starting in their new roles

- 46.67% (n = 7) of the new hires strongly agreed to feeling supported as a new team member
- **The NOPSP program is perceived as valuable by nurses:**
 - 77.50% (n = 31) of participants agreed that the NOPSP should remain a mandatory requirement for new hires at Perley Health
 - 77.78% (n = 28) of participants agreed that six weeks was an appropriate length of time for NOPSP
- **The survey data demonstrated the pairing ranged widely in the number of times they connected with each other and for how long.** The evaluation team emphasized that orientation partners and new hires should aim to connect once a week over the course of six weeks. The number of connections made by pairings over the allotted six weeks program ranged from zero to over seven times.
 - Five participants indicated they did not connect even once in the allotted six weeks program
 - Nine participants indicated they connected more than 7 times over the same period.
 - Most participants indicated that connections lasted 6 - 10 minutes. To our team, this demonstrated interactions may be brief and did not require excessive amounts of time from the orientation partners.
 - Participants connected most often in-person, followed by email and over the phone.
- The evaluation team received feedback regarding challenges orientation partners and new hires experienced over the course of the program.
 - New hires noted they experienced difficulty finding time to meet (n = 6) difficulty communicating with the mentor (n = 2), meeting as scheduled (n = 2), and more of a commitment than expected (n = 1)
 - Orientation partners highlighted additional challenges including: difficulty finding time to meet (n = 14), ineffective mentoring pair (n = 5), difficulty communicating with the new hire (n = 4), more of a commitment than expected (n = 3), meeting as scheduled (n = 2), not feeling prepared enough (n = 2), feeling uncomfortable with the new hire (n = 1), excessive time and energy commitment (n = 1), overdependence on the orientation partner (n = 1).
- Testimonials from both new hires and orientation partners demonstrate the positive perceptions they had on the program.

"It was a great idea that Perley came up with the idea of having a mentorship program for the new hires. It definitely helped me to build confidence while I was working alone."- New Hire

Program Delivery and Improvement

- The NOPSP continued to be implemented and sustained throughout the project period.
- Newly hired nurses meeting eligibility criteria were paired with trained nurse orientation partners. New casual nurses were not included in the NOPSP because of the inconsistency of their shifts over a six-week period.
- Initially, follow-up check-ins with orientation partners and new hires occurred only as needed but was eventually established to occur at a 2-week checkpoint.
- Following the evaluation process, the following operational enhancements were implemented during the project:
 - **Permit exceptions to mandatory program:** Orientation partners and new hires noted that there should be exceptions to those who participate in the program including staff members who were re-hired to work within the organization and students who previously completed placements within the organization. This was primarily because they already understood the culture of the organization, felt connected to the community, and knew where to find resources. These individuals were always still given the option to participate, if they wanted to.
 - **Establish an initial check-in process:** Some participants noted that their pair did not respond to email or did not reach out for support. To promote participation, a 2-week check-in post pairing was completed for all participants. This supported increased communication for pairings.
 - **Ensure voluntary participation or orientation mentors:** Ensuring orientation partners participation in the program was voluntary supported a more positive experience for the new hire and orientation partner. Our team made an effort to ensure the orientation partners participated in a voluntary capacity, however, in some instances, pending the unit and shift time, the project team had to request participation from team members
 - **Pair new hires with orientation partners already working on their unit:** Both the orientation partner and new hire reported feedback that it was better when pairings were on the same unit and shift time. In some instances, based on availability of orientation mentors, the project team did have to pair staff who didn't work on the same unit but there was a focus on proximity. This made it easier for them to connect with each other.
 - **Educate orientation partners:** The facilitator, along with some orientation partners, perceived gaps in their skillset when addressing challenges that came up in their role, such as what to do when the new hire they supported had no questions or verbalized that they did not need any support. The project team recognized a need for tailored training to the role of orientation partner and resources to reinforce specific policies or procedures.
 - **Enhance communications and expectations about NOPSP to new hires:** To further address challenges with new hires reluctance to participate in the program, the project team integrated clearer communication on the NOPSP

program and established expectations to participate as part of official onboarding.

Mentor Training and Resource Development

- A total of 20 orientation partners attended a 4 hour, specialized mentorship training, specifically designed for Orientation Partners, in either July or December 2025.
- The training was developed by the project team in collaboration with Orientation Partners and presented as a blended learning model of collaborative, didactic, and experiential approaches.
- The Orientation Partner training rooted in best practices, nursing mentorship, and real-world experience, focusing on:
 - Concepts of Effective Peer Support
 - Communication Strategies
 - Fostering Resilience
 - Creating a Safe Learning Environment
 - Adapting Mentorship Approach
- Attendees were asked to evaluate the training via Survey Monkey at the end of the session.
 - 80% of attendees indicated they were very satisfied with the training
 - 60% of attendees indicated the training exceeded expectations
 - Participants self-reported increased levels of knowledge across all learning objectives after the training, compared to before.
- To ensure consistency of training across all current and future training facilitators, a facilitator's guide was created as a resource, outlining all the training material and activity instructions.
- Attendees to this training became Perley Health's confirmed pool of Orientation Partners.

A PDF of the mentorship training slides are included in **Appendix A**. The trainer's facilitator guide is in **Appendix B**.

Knowledge Translation and Dissemination

Knowledge translation activities completed through the project included:

- Poster presentation at the BPSO International Summit hosted by the Registered Nurses Association in September 2025. A screenshot is included in **Appendix C**.
- Oral Presentation at the AdvantAge National Convention in Toronto, Ontario, in April 2026. A PDF version of the presentation is included in **Appendix D**.
- 1 hour webinar hosted by Perley Health Centre of Excellence in Frailty-Informed Care™ on May 29, 2026. To view the webinar, please visit <https://www.perleyhealth.ca/webinar-series>
- In the final stages of development, the project team is writing a field guide/resource package to support spread and implementation. It will include all the resources and tools

that were created as part of the project, additional insights, and practical tips for building an effective NOPSP in long-term care. A sneak peak of the cover can be found in **Appendix E**.

Future dissemination plans may include:

- Writing and submitting an article to a peer reviewed journal.
- Collaborating with leading LTC sector partners to support dissemination of the new tools and resources.

4. Outcomes and Impact

The final evaluation findings suggest the NOPSP had a positive impact on participants and the organization. Reported outcomes included:

- Improved onboarding and transition experiences for newly hired nurses.
- Testimonials highlighting increased feelings of support, belonging, and confidence among newly hired nurses.
- Enhanced leadership development and professional growth opportunities for orientation partner.
- Strengthened culture of collaboration, learning, and peer support perceived within nursing teams.
- Increased orientation partner preparedness and confidence following formal mentorship training.
- Improved sustainability of the mentorship program through operational refinements and resource development.

Additional organizational impacts identified included:

- **Nursing Retention:** The NOPSP program was one part of a greater organization hiring and retention plan at Perley Health which occurred from 2023 to present. Though formal retention numbers could not be calculated or correlated directly to NOPSP, it is interesting to note that at the start of this project there were 36 empty nursing positions that the home struggled to fill. Currently, there are **no vacant full-time or part-time nursing positions available**, as the roles have been consistently filled for over half a year.



"It is incredibly beneficial to learn how Perley operates, and sets you up for success better than if you just did a few buddy shifts in my opinion" -New Hire Perley Health

5. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Several challenges were encountered during implementation and evaluation of the NOPSP, including:

- **Union language:** Due to premium pay requirements related to the word “mentor” within the collective agreements of both nursing unions at Perley Health, the formal term “mentor” could not be used within the program, even though the role was not clearly defined outside the outlined accountabilities associated with the premium pay. Thus the program was rebranded as NOPSP and “mentor” roles were changed to “orientation partner”. This was also required for program sustainability in order to keep the program cost neutral to the organization.
- **Organization restructure:** During late 2025 organization restructuring occurred at Perley Health. Though the NOPSP program was not directly impacted, project team member portfolios changed resulting in a delay in some project activities and deliverables.

Lessons learned throughout the project included:

- The importance of leadership support and protected time for mentorship activities.
- The value of structured mentorship training and clearly defined orientation partner and new hire expectations.
- The value of being less prescriptive on how, when, and where pairings connect with each other.
- Routine connections, even as short as 10 minutes, can improve the onboarding experience for new hires.
- The importance of ongoing program evaluation and feedback mechanisms to support continuous improvement.

6. Sustainability and Future Directions

Perley Health plans to sustain the NOPSP through:

- Continued integration of the program into formal onboarding processes.
- Ongoing orientation partner training and recruitment efforts.
- Continued use and refinement of mentorship resources and tools.
- Embedding evaluation and quality improvement processes into routine operations.

Future directions may include:

- Potential expansion of the program to additional nursing roles or interdisciplinary team members.
- Sharing resources and learnings with other LTC organizations.

7. Budget

The cost of project activities remained within the budget proposed in the original NIA application. See a full breakdown of the project budget in **Appendix F**.

8. Conclusion

The NOPSP evaluation demonstrated that structured peer support and mentorship program can positively support newly hired nurses transitioning into long-term care practice. Through mentorship training, operational improvements, evaluation activities, and resource development, the project strengthened both the quality and sustainability of the program at Perley Health with promising potential to impact other LTC homes as well.

This project contributed to a supportive learning culture and provided meaningful professional development opportunities for both new hires and orientation partners. The tools, resources, and lessons learned through this initiative may also support implementation and spread of similar mentorship programs across the LTC sector.

The project team at Perley Health would like to thank the generous donors at the Registered Nurses Foundation of Ontario for supporting this meaningful project. Funding from the Nursing Innovator Award allowed Perley Health innovative idea of the NOPSP to realize its potential with opportunity for future growth and potential for positive impact in the LTC sector.

“I see the mentor-mentee relationship developing into a lifelong connection”

-New Hire Perley Health

Appendices are provided as separate supplementary attachments.