



RTOERO's scholarships invest in Canada future changemakers

Toronto, May 30, 2025 – Across Canada, the next generation of changemakers is getting ready to make a positive impact on their communities. These are people like aspiring doctors, nurses, researchers and educators. This year, [RTOERO scholarships](#) are supporting 30 of them in their studies.

Since 1968, [RTOERO](#) has been a voice for teachers, school and board administrators, educational support staff and college and university faculty in their retirement. Our mission is to improve the lives of our members and seniors.

The annual scholarships serve that objective, and to date have awarded \$700,000. This year's scholarships total \$90,000.

Eligible students are enrolled in programs that lead to careers related to seniors health and well-being, education or environmental stewardship, or that reflect a strong commitment to diversity, equity and/or inclusion.

"We believe that investing in students today leads to stronger, more compassionate communities tomorrow. We're proud to support their journeys. These scholarships are part of how RTOERO gives back—not just to our members, but to society at large," says John Cappelletti, Chair, Board of Directors, RTOERO.

For nominations, RTOERO members are encouraged to recommend students in their lives, from their family or the community.

The full list of the 2025 scholarship recipients, who received \$3,000 each:

Student/nominating RTOERO district	Program	Interests/goals
Emilie Iacoe Nominated from District 3 Algoma	Masters in Nursing, Nurse Practitioner Program – Athabasca University	Emilie is completing her Nurse Practitioner studies, building on over eight years of experience as a Registered Nurse. She also has certifications in dementia care, fall prevention and aging well. Emilie is passionate about improving access to care for seniors in Sault Ste. Marie, especially those without a family doctor. She's committed to providing inclusive, culturally responsive, and community-based care. Emilie is dedicated to patient advocacy, preventative care and lifelong learning.

Elena Lionello Nominated from District 5 Cochrane, Temiskaming	BA, Social Science – McMaster University	Elena hopes for a career in law. Her aspirations are tied to the idea of creating inclusive, age-friendly communities, and advancing equity through public policy and legal advocacy across health care, pensions and long-term care. She has demonstrated strong student leadership, volunteer experience and a commitment to seeking justice. Elena has already participated in high-level educational policy discussions, including meetings with the Minister of Education.
Renee Resendes Nominated from District 7 Windsor-Essex	Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine - University of New England	Renee is combining allopathic and osteopathic care models to seek better health outcomes. Her diverse experience spans clinical oncological research, volunteer crisis response, geriatric mentorship and advocacy for arthritis care. She is passionate about providing holistic, preventive and lifestyle-focused health care. Renee hopes to be part of improving access to primary care in Canada, and to apply integrative medicine to support healthy aging.
Michael Roes Nominated from District 8 London Middlesex	MD, Schulich School of Medicine – Western University	Michael brings a strong foundation to his MD studies, holding a PhD in pathology focused on new therapeutic approaches in treatment-resistant prostate cancer. He has volunteer experience outside of clinical settings, with the Alzheimer Society and Diabetes Canada. Through that, Michael has displayed his commitment to improving senior well-being through advocacy, education and inclusive community health initiatives. He plans to continue a career integrating research and practice to develop novel therapies and deliver holistic, patient-centered care.
Sydney Austin Nominated from District 11 Waterloo Region	Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology – University of Guelph	Sydney is committed to advancing mental health and well-being across the lifespan as a clinical psychologist. She has managed research labs, contributed novel technology-based studies, and volunteered with emotional support lines for socially isolated seniors. Through each endeavour, Sydney demonstrates a dedication to mental health advocacy, inclusive care and building resilient communities for all ages. She wants to continue studying sensory and motor function research with relevance to neurodegeneration and aging.
Rukhsana Cameron-Morton	Diploma, Social Service	Rukhsana is passionate about supporting seniors in assisted living. Her personal drive is

Nominated from District 11 Waterloo Region	Worker – Conestoga College	rooted in lived experience, leading to deep empathy for those experiencing isolation. Rukhsana has hands-on training and placement experience, and is committed to helping people navigate the challenges of aging with the spirit of inclusion.
Jordan King Nominated from District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand	MBA – University of Fredericton	Jordan is pursuing her MBA in Health Innovation and Leadership with the goal of improving long-term care, hospital operations, and community health initiatives. She's focused on advancing integrated care models, and optimizing hospital and long-term care operations. Jordan also wants to contribute to age-friendly environments that promote autonomy, dignity and well-being. Inspired by personal experiences and grounded in evidence-based approaches, Jordan is committed to advancing sustainable, inclusive health care systems that support aging populations.
Erin Lou Nominated from District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand	BSc, Medical Sciences – Western University	Erin is a Medical Sciences student driven by a passion for inclusive, person-centred health care. She combines her passions for health care and innovation across her volunteer and research endeavours, as well as her career aspirations. She has been involved in health care navigation training, therapeutic music programs and AI models to improve chronic illness management. Erin aims to be a physician specializing in geriatric and inclusive care, and to help advance health care accessibility and equity.
Hannah Mechelse Nominated from District 14 Niagara	MSc, Applied Health Sciences – Brock University	Hannah is committed to transforming long-term care through innovation and inclusion. Her thesis research explores how immersive digital experiences can reduce isolation, foster autonomy and promote cognitive well-being among older adults. She is a member of Canadian Association on Gerontology, and also brings lived experience, empathy and a systems-level perspective to improving long-term care environments. Set to pursue a PhD in Public Health Sciences at the University of Waterloo, Hannah is driven to shape the future of care, equity and education for older adults.
Alessia Nigro Nominated from District 15 Halton	BSc, Human Kinetics – University of Guelph	Alessia's academic pivot from a business program to Human Kinetics was motivated by personal caregiving experiences in her family and community (as a retirement home

		volunteer). She aspires to design inclusive, evidence-based programs that support mobility, independence and quality of life for seniors. Her vision reflects a deep commitment to wellness, community connections, and active and empowered aging.
Mary Calleja Nominated from District 16 City of Toronto	BSc, Biochemistry – Queen's University	With an academic foundation in human biochemistry, combined with a commitment to health equity, Mary aims to contribute to the development of inclusive, cutting-edge treatments for age-related diseases. She has served on the Queen's Biomedical Innovation Team, and plans to pursue postgraduate studies in Medical Biophysics and eventually become a physician-researcher. Through her experiences with volunteering, student mentorship and science outreach, Mary has shown her commitment to building healthier, more connected communities.
Karli Chalmers Nominated from District 16 City of Toronto	MSc, Health & Rehabilitation Sciences – Western University	Karli is conducting impactful research on care transitions and medical complexity in long term care settings. She has demonstrated unwavering commitment to improving care for older adults through her academic, advocacy and volunteer endeavours. She has developed and led aquafit programs for seniors and helped with entertainment at a seniors residence. Karli holds a clear vision for a more responsive, inclusive health care system that better serves Canada's aging population.
Naomi Ibama Nominated from District 16 City of Toronto	BSc, Nursing – Ontario Tech University	Naomi is building a nursing career dedicated to advancing the well-being of seniors. She has had experience as a personal support worker and clinical placements focused on geriatric health. Naomi's volunteer and leadership experiences highlight her commitment to inclusion and advocacy. She wants to work in high-intensity hospital settings such as the ICU, emergency department or operating room. Her long-term goal is to become a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, specializing in anesthesia pain management for seniors.
William Loizides Nominated from District 16 City of Toronto	Master of Architecture – Carleton University	Studying architecture has enabled William to combine his creativity with a sense of purpose. Across his studies, mentorship and work experiences, William champions thoughtful design that promotes dignity, safety and community for older adults. He's inspired by

		universal design principles and the importance of intergenerational connections. William aspires to improve quality of life through the design of accessible and engaging spaces, and to be an advocate for more senior-conscious planning in architecture.
Matthew Knox Nominated from District 17 Simcoe County	Master of Social Work – Western University	Matthew is pursuing his MSW with the goal of providing trauma-informed care. He hopes to make recovery journeys more supported, dignified and human. He has undergraduate degrees in Political Science and Social Work, and has worked as a clinical therapist in children's mental health. Matthew brings lived experience and clinical training together to support others navigating health crises. Outside of clinical practice, he seeks to champion meaningful system change and improved caregiver support systems for stroke survivors. His work is grounded in compassion, equity and advocacy.
Amanda Spadafora Nominated from District 17 Simcoe County	Bachelor of Education – University of British Columbia	Amanda is training to become a high school art teacher through UBC's Rural and Remote Teacher Education Program. Inspired by her time teaching ESL internationally, she is passionate about overcoming barriers to connection. Amanda is committed to using art to enrich lives, reduce isolation, boost self-expression and foster belonging.
Jamie Asselin Nominated from District 21 Renfrew	BSc, Biomedical Science – University of Guelph	Jamie is studying Biomedical Science with the aim of improving health outcomes through innovative research, community leadership and inclusive advocacy. Her research into cutting-edge cancer treatment reflects a commitment to enhancing quality of life and efficacy of treatment. By bridging research with community-centred values, she aims to make a lasting impact on the well-being of seniors. Jamie's passion for representation, education and collaboration reflects a commitment to equity and empowerment in both science and society.
Kayla Pierroz-Wong Nominated from District 23 North York	Social and Product Design – Carleton University	Kayla brings a blend of creativity, technical skill and empathy to the field of industrial design. Through international placements and community-based volunteerism, she has contributed to the design of prosthetics, rehabilitation tools and medical devices. These prioritize mobility, dignity and independence for older adults. She aspires to break traditional

		barriers to care and make 3D printed prosthetics and rehabilitation tools more accessible across Canada.
Matthew Portugese Nominated from District 23 North York	BSc, Applied Studies in Kinesiology – University of Ottawa	Matthew's pursuits in Kinesiology are driven by a passion for empowering seniors via exercise science. As a volunteer research assistant, he has studied extreme heat and seniors health. Matthew is committed to helping older adults maintain strength, independence and quality of life through clinical exercise and preventative care. Combining academic training and his experiences as a personal and karate trainer, Matthew brings a proactive, evidence-based approach to aging.
Michael Kailan Nominated from District 24 Scarborough and East York	Bachelor of Health Science – Queen's University	As a future physiotherapist, Michael aspires to design tailored rehabilitation strategies that prioritize dignity, connection and well-being for aging populations. His holistic approach to well-being – emotional, physical and mental – combines scientific knowledge with compassion. Michael is driven to support older adults in leading active, engaged lives. Through volunteer and community projects, he has already delivered programs that promote mobility and cognitive wellness within his community.
Kaleigh Johnson Martin Nominated from District 27 Ottawa- Carleton	Master of Marine Management – Dalhousie University	Kaleigh is looking to develop sustainable strategies to protect natural environments, and ensure they remain accessible and healing spaces for generations to come. She has led environmental clubs from elementary school through university, and volunteered with Ottawa Riverkeeper and River Cleanup. Her work reflects a commitment to equity, leadership and environmental stewardship, building a future where healthy marine and wetland ecosystems and human well-being are interwoven.
Hil Smith Nominated from District 27 Ottawa- Carleton	BScN, Nursing – Trent University	Hil's path has been shaped by a deep commitment to service, lived experience and a desire to improve systems of health care. Previously, Hil worked in the film/TV industry, and shifted into nursing studies out of a desire to be part of inclusive, patient-centered care that respects dignity and diversity. Hil has volunteered at a hospice, and has clinical training in geriatric care, chronic disease management and mental health. Ultimately, Hil aims to promote improvements that benefit Canada's aging population.

Christina DeFranco Nominated from District 34 York Region	MA, Counselling Psychology – Yorkville University	Christina is studying a Masters in Counselling Psychology, building on a decade of leading inclusive programs that address social isolation, physical decline and mental health challenges. Her commitment to education, community outreach and lifelong wellness is reflected in her charity events, public workshops and tailored support for seniors. That includes teaching adapted yoga to older adults, and delivering virtual yoga and support sessions for seniors during the COVID lockdowns. She aims to develop psychoeducational resources focused on wellness, and improve accessibility in wellness programming.
Oliver Vien Nominated from District 34 York Region	BSc, Architectural Science – Toronto Metropolitan University	Oliver is passionate about creating inclusive, accessible and sustainable spaces. He has experience in construction to understand the hand-on aspect of building design. As an architect, he wants to build a future where public spaces foster community connection and well-being, empowering physical and emotional well-being.
Olivia McCracken Nominated from District 39 Peel	MD – Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences	Olivia is studying Medicine in Dublin, Ireland, driven by a passion for helping others. Her program is focused on personalized and evidence-based care. She plans to return to Canada for her residency. Olivia is committed to advancing senior care in through approaches that prioritize both physical health and overall well-being.
Ethan Parikh Nominated from District 39 Peel	MD – Temerty Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto	Ethan brings an extensive record of community service, leadership and advocacy to his medical studies. His wide-ranging volunteerism reflects a deep commitment to inclusion, equity and well-being. He aspires to specialize in healthy aging and chronic disease management. Ethan hopes to create compassionate, person-centered health care spaces – ones that empower individuals across all ages and backgrounds to lead healthier, more connected lives.
Colleen Adlam Nominated from District 40 Brant	BSc, Animal Biology – University of Guelph	Colleen is pursuing a degree in Animal Biology and aspires to enter veterinary medicine, driven by a deep understanding of the emotional and physical benefits pets bring throughout the lifecycle. Her commitment to providing empathetic, high-quality care stems from personal experience and a strong belief in the

		human–animal bond. It’s something that she feels adds to emotional resilience. By supporting both pets and their owners, Colleen hopes to contribute meaningfully to community well-being, compassionate care, and healthier and more connected lives.
Cruz Fisher Nominated from District 42 Mainland British Columbia	BSc, Nursing – University of British Columbia Okanagan	Cruz is driven to improve care for older adults experiencing mental health challenges and addictions. His academic and volunteer efforts reflect a commitment to community-based care, inclusion and advocacy. He’s dedicated to building strong, compassionate relationships across cultural and other traditional barriers to care. Cruz aims to be part of improving access to essential, preventative health services. He also wants to complete a Masters in Counseling to provide psychosocial and emotional support to seniors
Jadin Sjoquist Nominated from District 42 Mainland British Columbia	BSc, Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education – University of Victoria	Jadin’s recovery from a sports injury inspired both his personal resilience and a drive to help others regain independence. Through volunteer work in neurological rehab and youth athletic therapy, he has demonstrated leadership, compassion and a drive to elevate the standard of care. That’s particularly true for aging populations seeking independence and dignity in health. Jadin’s goal is to become a doctor with a focus on preventive and rehabilitative care for aging populations. He brings a compassionate, evidence-informed approach to supporting functional wellness throughout the lifecycle.
Kathryn Culliton Nominated from District 43 Nipissing	MD – NOSM University	Kathryn’s passion lays at the intersection of engineering and health care, bringing a blend of technical expertise and human-centered care to the medical field. From research on osteoarthritis to hands-on hospice volunteering, she has shown a consistent dedication to improving the lives of aging populations. Kathryn is embarking on her journey as an orthopedic surgeon, and is committed to restoring mobility, reducing pain and preserving independence for seniors.

[RTOERO](#) is a bilingual trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey for the broader education community. With 86,000+ members in 51 districts across Canada, we are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education retirees. We welcome members who work in or are retired from the early

years, schools and school boards, post-secondary and any other capacity in education.
We believe in a better future, together!

-30-

RTOERO media contact:

Danielle Norris, Director of Marketing and Communications, dnorris@rtoero.ca, 416-962-9463, ext. 224