



## Personal Support Workers in Health Care



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## Introduction

As a member of an inter-professional health-care team, a Personal Support Worker (PSW) provides supportive person-centered care across the lifespan to individuals and families, at various levels of health and wellbeing, in a variety of care environments including: long-term, community and/or hospital care settings.

The goal of this report is to provide information on the need for students and job seekers to be made aware of the emerging and changing skills requirements to be better prepared for employment in the PSW field.

This research report is for service providers, educators and other stakeholders on changing and emerging skills requirements for PSWs.

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This is the fifth research report in a 5-part series that explores the evolution of skills required to be successful in key employment sectors. Each sector has been identified through discussion with local economic development offices and by examining the prominent sectors in our communities. Across

Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford and London, it is clear that these five sectors play a significant role in our economy and our workforce:

- ✚ Agriculture
- ✚ Health Care
- ✚ Manufacturing
- ✚ Supply Chain
- ✚ Retail



## Personal Support Worker jobs in our Health Care Sector

Due to baby boomers approaching retirement and the Canadian population aging at a very fast rate, services of these healthcare professionals have become more vital than they have ever been.

This means high demand and strong employment growth, especially in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

According to Statistics Canada, over the five year period of 2007 to 2011, there has been a gradual increase in the number of healthcare jobs, especially PSW jobs, related to occupations in support of health services.

The Human Resource and Skills Development Canada's Occupation Projection System (COPS) states, a Personal Support Worker (PSW) is going to be in high demand over the coming years. It is also predicted that at least until 2020, there is going to be a shortage of workers in this occupation. The two most prominent reasons why this shortage is going to occur are:

- Replacement demand due to current healthcare workers retirement
- Expansion demand due to Canada's aging population



Photo Credit: Medix College

## Personal Support Worker Current and Future Trends

According to the website [www.personalsupportworkerhq.com](http://www.personalsupportworkerhq.com), Personal Support Worker jobs in Ontario are plenty and they are going to be even more in years to come. A couple of the reasons for this trend are:

1. The Government of Ontario has acknowledged, as described further in this report, how critical a role PSW's play in delivering healthcare, and
2. contributions PSWs can make to address the fiscal challenges currently faced by Ontario Healthcare System.

Ontario is the most populous province in Canada. The entire population is aging and it is aging *fast*. Seniors (age group 65 and up) are the fastest growing group.

14.4 percent of Ontario residents fall into this group according to [www.personalsupportworkerhq.com](http://www.personalsupportworkerhq.com). Due to high number of seniors that require healthcare services, Ontario's Health Care System is starting to show signs of distress.

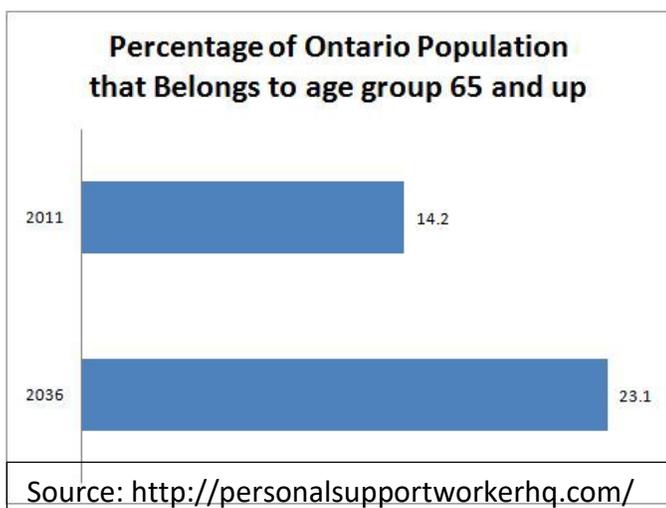
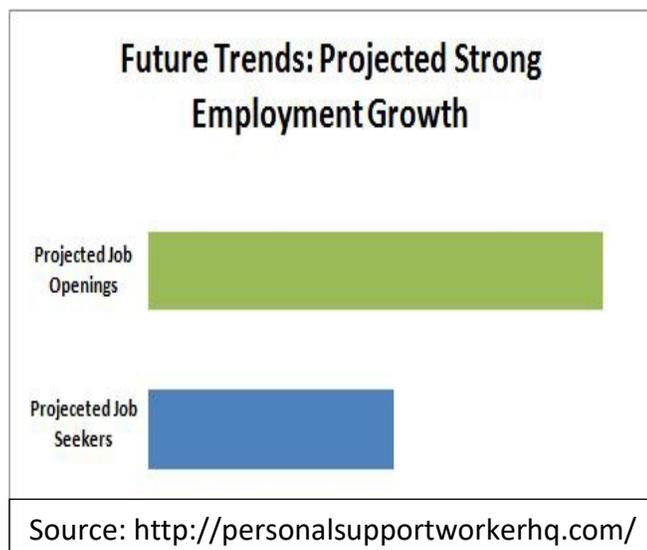
It is expected to worsen in the years and decades to come, primarily due to manifold increase in the number of seniors. A higher number of job openings coupled by fewer job seekers means that the projected employment growth for PSWs will be the strongest in the Canadian Healthcare System.

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has acknowledged the current problems and future challenges. It has formulated an Action Plan for Ontario's Healthcare.

Key focus of the plan is to:

- deliver the best possible healthcare while reducing costs, and
- introduce a fiscally viable healthcare workforce

To make this happen, a transformation of the current model of the health care delivery system is required. One way to make this happen is by substituting more home and community care for less acute and residential care. A majority of home support is and will be provided by PSWs.



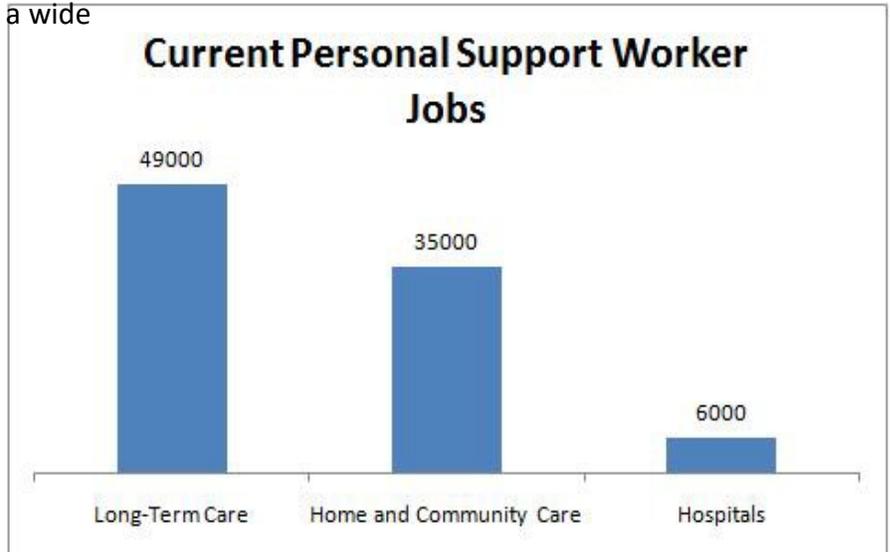
Did you know? There will be an 8.9% increase in Ontario senior's population in the next 25 years.

## Current Personal Support Worker Jobs

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care estimates there are 90,000 Personal Support Workers in Ontario, one of the *largest healthcare workforces* and a *virtual backbone* of the health care delivery system. PSW jobs are spread across healthcare providing institutions. A majority of PSWs are employed in a wide variety of facility and community based settings in the city of Toronto and its suburbs of Brampton and Mississauga.

Current Personal Support Worker Jobs are in Public healthcare settings. Current employed PSWs account for a total of two billion dollars each year.

According to the Canadian Census of 2011, the need for care workers in this category is expected to double in the next five to ten years.



Source: <http://personalsupportworkerhq.com/>

According to the website, [www.personalsupportworkerhq.com](http://www.personalsupportworkerhq.com), “**Soft Skills**” are high in demand as well. A PSW carries a tremendous amount of responsibility, both in regard to the clients to whom they provide care, and in regard to the tasks they are performing.

The following qualities are required:

- **EMPATHY, HONESTY & FLEXIBILITY**
- **COMPASSION**
- **TRUST & HONESTY**
- **PROFESSIONAL & MOTIVATOR**
- **ADAPTABILITY**
- **PROBLEM SOLVING**
- **TEAM PLAYER & COMMUNICATION SKILLS”**

## Future of Personal Support Worker Jobs

As mentioned earlier, the Ontario Government has acknowledged the need for more PSWs and has taken steps in the right direction.

As the Healthcare Action Plan is further implemented, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care says it will be adding four million hours of community based care by PSW's over the next four years. This translates into 2080 new full time PSW Jobs in Ontario over the next few years.

## Changing and Emerging Skills

Did you know that there are PSW to Practical Nurse (PN) Bridging Programs? PSWs in Ontario, are upgrading their clinical qualifications to become a Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) as well. Job opportunities for RPNs are becoming especially prevalent as the geriatric population in Ontario is growing in size, thus demonstrating a need for qualified nursing care in acute care settings, community health agencies and long-term care facilities.

According to <http://personalsupportworkerhq.com/>, as a Registered Practical Nurse, you are entitled to job benefits such as higher pay and greater job satisfaction. Upon enrolling in a Practical Nursing (PN) program, those with a PSW certificate are usually given a credit. There are many colleges that offer Personal Support Worker to Practical Nursing bridging programs.

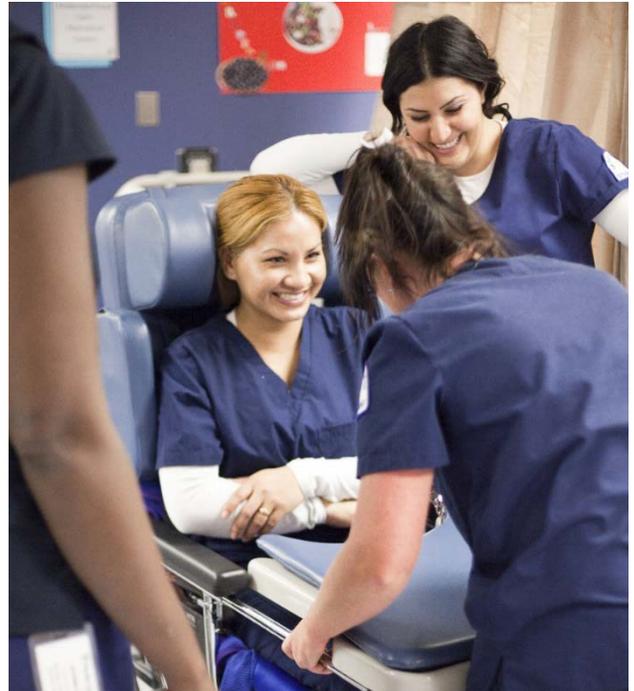


Photo Credit: MEdix College

“A bridge program is defined as a formal partnership between two post-secondary schools. It provides students with advanced standing within a program at a particular educational institution through the recognition of their academic history in a similar discipline. Bridge courses can be classified under three distinct types:

**1. Bilateral**

**2. Multilateral**

**3. Concurrent**

Bilateral and multilateral agreements are between two or more similar institutions and are typically the type that post-secondary schools offer with respect to PSW to RPN bridge programs," <http://personalsupportworkerhq.com/>.

Additional certifications are welcomed by employers such as the following:

- Developmental Support Worker Certificate
- Social Service Worker Certificate
- Non Crisis Intervention Certificate
- Palliative Care Certificate
- Diabetic Care Certificate
- Epilepsy Care Certificate
- Fall Prevention Certificate

Schools in the Elgin Middlesex Oxford area that offer these opportunities:

- Fanshawe College– London, St. Thomas, Woodstock campuses
- Westervelt College, triOS College, Medix School, TVDSB - Adult, Alternative & Continuing Education

## Wages

According to Statistics Canada's Labour force survey, the following are the wages of a PSW in Ontario :

**Low: \$11.40 per hour**

**Median: \$14.00 per hour**

**High: \$20.00 per hour**

In general, Hospitals are the highest paying followed by City owned Long-Term Care homes.



According to a press release from the Ministry of Finance, Improving Home and Community Care for Ontario Seniors, “Wages for PSWs in the publicly-funded home and community care sector will be increased by \$1.50 per hour retroactive to April 1, 2014, and are intended to increase another \$1.50 per hour on April 1, 2015, and a further \$1.00 on April 1, 2016. The minimum wage for these personal support workers will also be set at \$14.00 per hour in 2014-15 and rise to \$16.50 on this same timeline.”

The government’s PSW Workforce Stabilization Strategy had several objectives.

- According to the Minister of Finance, once implemented, the policy would serve to develop and sustain more permanent jobs for PSWs in addition to the pay raise. The goal was to help facilitate the strengthening of sector leadership throughout the profession and assist recent graduates in finding work through various on-the-job training programs.
- The government’s new strategy was also geared towards identifying the challenges and barriers that have influenced the recruitment and retention of PSWs. It was also sought to ascertain how workers could become more “*engaged*” in healthcare professional teams with the goal of improving the care provided.

Overall, the plan was not only developed to address the low wages of PSWs but was also intended to create more jobs for the future in keeping with the province’s Action Plan for Health Care.

The plan itself is expected to cost the government 50 million in 2014-2015, and rise to 130 million in the year 2016-2017 with it being *fully* implemented in the year 2018.

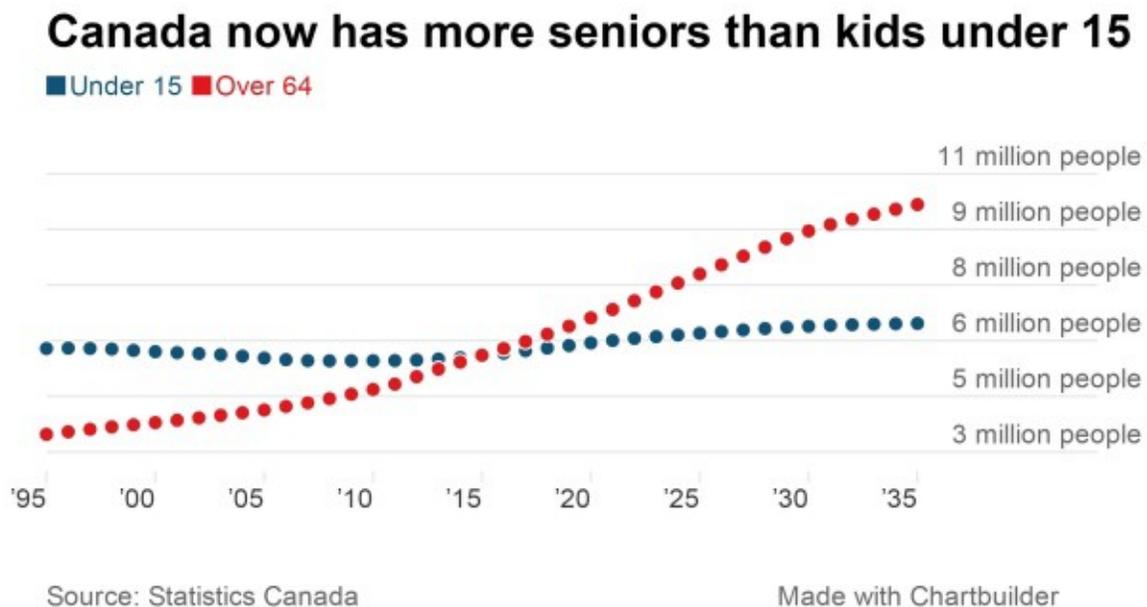
**“Our Government is committed to making the investments necessary to make Ontario one of the best places in the world to live and work. Personal support workers play a critical role in our society and we need to ensure that they are treated fairly for the important work that they do so that we can retain our best caregivers,”** Charles Sousa, Ontario’s Minister of Finance.

According to the Ministry, the funds for the new law will be garnered as a result of savings that will be incurred though chronically ill and elderly patients being moved from \$1000 per day hospital beds back into their own homes.

While there have been improvements in the regulation and monitoring of Ontario PSWs, the most *significant change* pertains to recent developments regarding policies governing their salaries. The Health Ministry has recently taken the reigns in the issue by announcing a minimum wage increase of \$4 per hour for PSWs working within the home care sector.

## Why this pay hike?

Before discussing the new wage increase itself, it is important to understand some of the factors that led to the government's decision to develop it. One of the most significant reasons cited for the pay hike was the fact that the work PSWs perform is an *extremely crucial* element with respect to patient care. As you can see in the graph below, the population throughout Canada is aging rapidly.



If trends continue, Statistics Canada estimates seniors outnumbering children in the next 20 years. The technological advancements in medicine have allowed those with various disabilities and illnesses to live longer. There is, as a result, a corresponding increase in the number of individuals requiring care, specifically in their homes. A higher number of convalescent and palliative care patients are also causing a rise in the need for PSWs within the private home care sector. These factors have resulted in a higher demand for professionals who are able to provide hands-on services related to Assisted Daily Living (ADL) tasks.

Another reason cited for the pay hike was the fact that PSWs were earning significantly less than other healthcare professionals.

According to [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com), Registered Nurses (RNs) in the London area earn an average of

**“PSWs are critical in assisting seniors and people with complex care needs to lead independent and healthy lives,”** Deb Matthews former Ontario Minister of Health and Long Term Care.

\$40,000 - \$60,000 per year and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) receive approximately \$23 per hour or \$38,000 - \$60,000 per year.

Those who are classified as “caregivers”, “health care aides” and “nurse’s aides” earned an average of just **\$20,000 to \$24,000**, **\$24,000 to \$30,000** and **\$26,000 to \$30,000 per year** respectively. As you can see, the disparity between the pay of PSWs and other health care workers is quite significant.

The final factor cited as a reason for the creation of the new policy was the significant amount of tasks and duties that PSWs were required to perform which were not commensurate to the compensation they received for it. As a personal support worker, tasks would include assisting patients in virtually every daily living task they cannot perform themselves.

There is a possibility that PSWs are responsible for paying either all or a significant amount of the expenses related to commuting to and from patients’ homes. This means they have had to pay for gas and vehicle maintenance, regardless of the wage received. Hence the commonly held view was that workers were not being fairly and equitably compensated for the significant, varied, financially costly and often physically demanding tasks they performed.

## Salary by Area and Province

In the years leading up to the wage increase, the province’s 34,000 PSWs (those working in the community) were receiving on average a little over the minimum wage level of **\$12.50 per hour**. The rate was established in 2006 by the government as an attempt to stabilize the services provided by Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) and was never changed. This was despite the fact that there were amendments made to minimum wage levels in general job categories.

As a result, the wages of Ontario’s PSWs remained relatively low. They did not reflect the work that PSWs performed or their importance within the province’s healthcare sphere in general. Moreover, wages earned by PSWs in other parts of Canada were frequently higher than those residing in Ontario during that time.



*Photo Credit: Medix College*

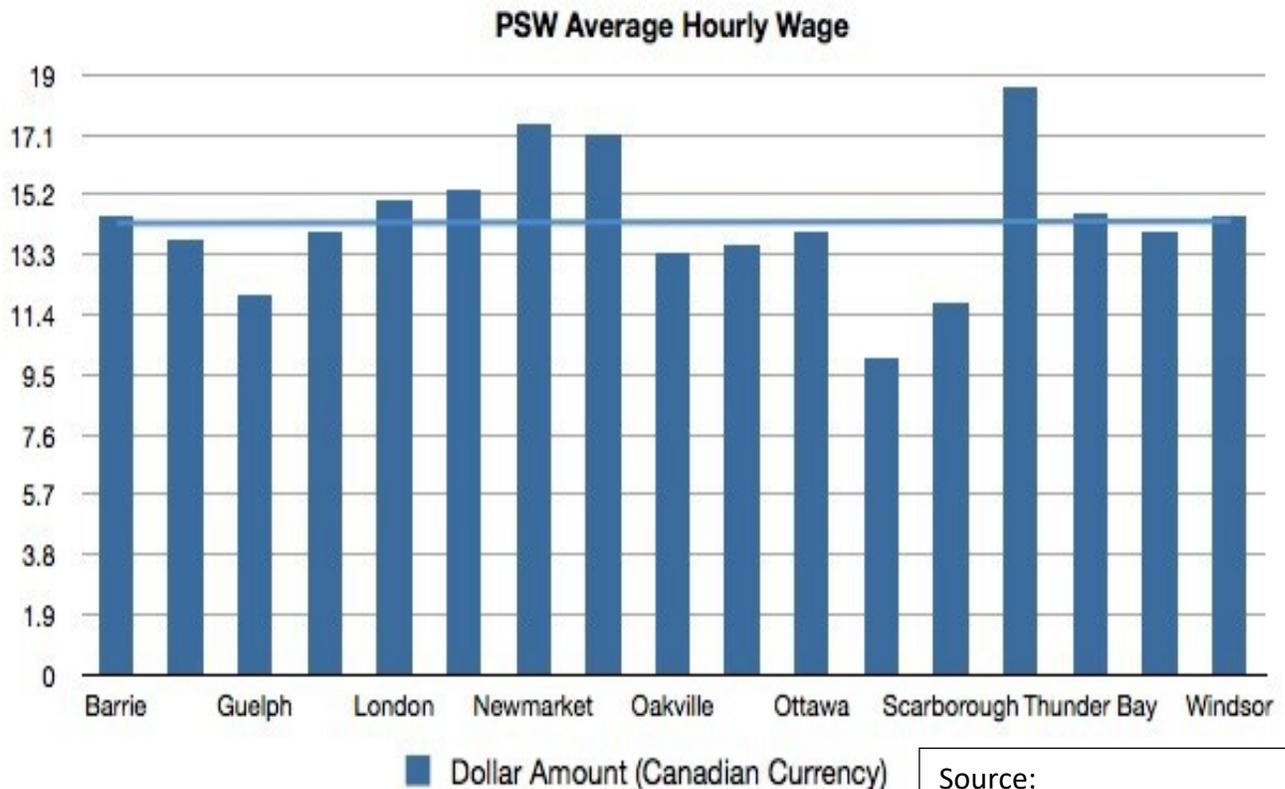
As illustrated in the bar graph below, PSWs in Guelph earned an average of approximately \$11.50 per hour whereas those in Ottawa received approximately \$14 hourly.

In addition, Newmarket PSWs were paid an average of almost \$17.00 per hour.

Overall the average national yearly income for PSWs is \$31 000. However, workers in cities in Ontario such as Thunder Bay received 1% below the above mentioned average and Kitchener and Cambridge PSWs were given 4% less respectively.

**“The failure to draw more men into these jobs is a missed opportunity. As boomers age, a more gender-balanced work force will better serve the increasingly diverse demographic of seniors requiring care. For young men with less education, unemployment rates have risen and wages have fallen – they need to look beyond disappearing manufacturing jobs for work,”**  
 Erin Anderssen, The Globe and Mail 2017.

It is therefore apparent that PSWs in several cities within Ontario were receiving wages that were lower than the national average and that there was a clear disparity between the pay they received compared to that of workers in other provinces.



Source:  
<http://personalsupportworkerhq>

# AVERAGE PSW SALARY IN ONTARIO



For facility based care through  
Employment Agencies:

🕒 **\$14/hr**

For Home/Residential Care  
through employment agencies:

🕒 **\$15/hr**



Independent/Private Long-Term  
Care homes (Nursing homes)

🕒 **\$19/hr**

City owned Long-Term Care  
homes (Nursing homes)

🕒 **\$22/hr**



Hospitals:

🕒 **\$23/hr**

For more details visit  
[www.personalsupportworkerhq.com/psw-salary](http://www.personalsupportworkerhq.com/psw-salary)

## Sources

Improving Home and Community Care for Ontario Seniors. Ministry of Finance (April 29, 2014).  
<https://news.ontario.ca/mof/en/2014/04/improving-home-and-community-care-for-ontario-seniors.html>

Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care.

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/ecfa/healthy\\_change/](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/ecfa/healthy_change/)

Personal Support Worker jobs: <http://personalsupportworkerhq.com/>

Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) in London, Ontario Salary:

[http://www.payscale.com/research/CA/Job=Registered\\_Nurse\\_\(RN\)/Hourly\\_Rate](http://www.payscale.com/research/CA/Job=Registered_Nurse_(RN)/Hourly_Rate)

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