

Spectrum Health Care Standing Committee on Health Study on Canada's Health Workforce

Spectrum Health Care is a trusted provider of home care in Ontario. We provide a diverse set of services across the province that support independence and empowerment to patients at home with complex medical conditions. We make over 75,000 weekly home visits to more than 25,000 patients every year. Today, much of our work focuses on caring for frail seniors at home.

Nine out of 10 Canadians prefer to receive care and live at home rather than in a hospital or a long-term care (LTC) home. Unfortunately, this choice is not available to many who need it most because of critical staff shortages in home care.

As in many other parts of the health system, the home care sector is experiencing a health human resources crisis. At Spectrum, we welcome the opportunity to participate in the federal government's study on Canada's health workforce. We appreciate the attention and focus the government is providing on this issue. The home care sector has been dealing with a chronic shortage of health workers for many years, and the pandemic has worsened it.

Canada has fewer home and community care caregivers than many other countries, spending less on senior home care while spending more on care inside institutional settings. Canada's per capita spending on home care and other community programs is below the international average.¹ A properly funded home care sector allows patients to receive care at home while alleviating pressures in other health care settings, such as hospitals.

Spectrum Health Care is pleased to provide three recommendations related to home care for consideration to support the human resource crisis Canada's health workforce is currently facing. Though our recommendations are within provincial jurisdiction, they will require an intergovernmental approach to arrive at a scalable and sustainable solution.

1. Expedite internationally educated nurses (IENs) certification and residency processes.

The number of nurses in the health system is decreasing due to retirement, burnout and career change. As the healthcare workforce ages at the same rate as our population, the province will continue to experience a health human resources crisis. In 2020, Ontario had the lowest nurses-per-capita ratio, with 665 registered nurses (RNs) per 100,000 people compared to the Canadian average of 814.² Forecasters estimate that Canada needs an additional 60,000 nurses to meet the country's healthcare needs in 2022.³

¹ <https://www.cdhowe.org/graphic-intelligence/canada-underinvests-community-care>

² <https://www.cihi.ca/en/registered-nurses>

³ <https://rnao.ca/news/blog/current-and-future-role-internationally-educated-nurses-iens-canada>

Internationally trained doctors or nurses now residing in Canada provide a large opportunity to close the staffing gap. There are tens of thousands of internationally trained health professionals who are skilled and ready to work⁴. However, the bureaucratic and financial hurdles to bridging their professional licenses are too great, overwhelming candidates before they can finish the designated education requirements to meeting Canadian or provincial professional standards.

In Ontario, thousands of internationally educated nurses (IENs) continue to work as unregulated health professionals—such as personal support workers (PSWs)—in various health care settings due to a delay in processing their credentials to become part of the regulatory college.⁵ In the meantime, they are paid significantly less than they would be working as a nurse. Many nurses are unable to complete the process because of these financial pressures. Tuition and application fees, as well as the average two years it takes to complete the licencing process, also contribute to this issue.

A delay in processing permanent residency is another obstacle for IENs. Even those who complete the necessary education to be regulated by the College of Nurses can experience delays in their permanent residency applications. This inhibits their ability to work in Canada and further delays experienced nurses from entering the Canadian health workforce.⁶

We recommend:

- **Additional access and financial support for physician and registered nurse bridging programs.**
- **An improved and expedited process for internationally trained nurses and physicians to receive Canadian permanent residency.**

2. Increase wages for home care workers.

To attract and retain clinical staff in the home care sector, it is important we provide competitive wages comparable to the broader health system. The current funding models don't allow the home care sector to pay its nurses the same wages they can earn in congregate settings. Although both nursing and PSW resources are constrained, the crisis is more critical and more difficult to manage for nursing, given lengthier education timelines.

From 2010 to 2020, inflation rose more than 16%. The Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) wage contracts almost kept pace, growing approximately 15% in that same period. Meanwhile, home care service rates only rose 3.8%.

Increased wages are necessary for home care workers to support themselves, especially with rising costs elsewhere, such as gas prices and overall inflation. This is especially true in rural and remote settings, where the cost of getting to and from work is increasing but wages are not.

The federal government has an opportunity to assess current funding models and how they affect the provinces and territory's ability to increase home care worker wages to mirror those in other health care settings.

⁴ <https://rnao.ca/covid19/ienaction>

⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/rnao-blasts-move-to-bring-ien-s-to-work-as-psws-ucps-1.6325172>

⁶ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8506805/internationally-educated-nurses-ready-to-work-ontario/>

We recommend:

- **The federal government ensures that provinces and territories have adequate resources to invest in the home care sector so home care workers are paid living wages necessary to increase the attraction and retention of nurses and PSWs.**
- 3. **Launch targeted campaign to promote healthcare careers to youth and increase capacity in post-secondary education system for nurses and PSWs.**

It is imperative to reach young people before they make decisions around post-secondary studies. We can inform them of the various careers in healthcare as part of a recruitment effort to increase the number of people entering this field and strengthen our future healthcare workforce.

Canada's youth needs to see healthcare as an attractive career option. Similar to the skilled trades campaign recently launched by the federal government⁷, we recommend launching a healthcare campaign to promote the sector as a "first-choice career option for young people."

To inspire more young Canadians from all backgrounds to pursue healthcare careers, a targeted campaign would help win hearts and minds. We will show young people they can contribute to improving the lives of Canadians by caring for others, whether through working as part of a health team, in acute care, or in the community.

Offering financial support could also incentivize more Canadians to consider pursuing careers in health care. This would help them complete their training and certification or to help employers support the young people they hire and train.

We recommend:

- **Launching a campaign targeted at secondary education students and arming them with information about careers in healthcare.**
- **Offering financial support to students in healthcare programs.**

Increasing the number of nurses in Canada's health workforce also relies on available capacity in Canada's nursing programs. In Ontario, a university cannot accept more students than the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funds them for. There are also shortages of nursing faculty (Ph.D. in Nursing) that can teach at the university level, as well as clinical instructors who can teach in the necessary healthcare settings.

We recommend:

- **Increasing the funding provided to colleges and universities that offer nursing and PSW education.**
- **Increasing clinical practice setting capacity and the number of clinical instructors to provide the skills training needed to graduate.**

⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/skilled-trades.html>



At Spectrum, we know home care is the lowest cost setting for treatment in the entire healthcare system. Canadians want to age and be cared for at home and require proper investments and considerations to do so. We appreciate the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Standing Committee on Health and contribute to its important study of Canada's health workforce.