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Roadmap to Strengthen the Nunavut Nursing Workforce

2021-2026



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» **“Flexibility is imperative in retaining nurses for long term!”**

–nursing survey respondent

environment and have the opportunity and resources to develop their potential. Practice environments where nurses feel empowered and supported by strong nursing leadership provide quality patient care with improved outcomes, and experience improved job satisfaction resulting in lower vacancy and turnover rate.⁵

There is a business case to be made for improved nurse retention. A recent study of 53 remote Northern Territory primary care clinics in Australia found that higher nurse turnover

was associated with significantly higher hospitalisation rates and higher average health costs than lower turnover.⁶

Effectively strengthening the nursing workforce will require acceptance that real change will take time and requires collaboration among all stakeholders, including key government departments. Measurable performance-based indicators and targets will be developed for each pillar such as nurse retention rates, vacancy rates, median time to fill vacancy, orientation completion rates, etc. Quarterly reviews will be undertaken by the Nursing Leadership Advisory Committee who will oversee implementation and assess progress on the *Roadmap*.

Nurse: For the purpose of this document the term nurse refers to registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, and registered psychiatric nurse. Nurse Practitioners are referred to as NPs within this document.



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Background

The success of the Nunavut healthcare system is highly dependent on the availability and performance of nurses. This was echoed in a 2017 report by the Auditor General of Canada⁷ which stated success of the Nunavut healthcare system is highly dependent on the availability and performance of nurses.

Nurses play a crucial role in the inter-professional care team by ensuring patient safety, quality care, and optimal patient outcomes. They are often a community's first

professionals worldwide by 2030, 50% of whom will be nurses and midwives⁸;

» **“Work/life balance is very difficult in the North, health centres need to be better equipped to support staff. Fitness facility...”**

—nursing survey respondent

and main point of contact to the healthcare system. The Department of Health employs approximately 300 nurses to provide administrative support and direct nursing care in community health centres, hospitals, and long-term care facilities in its 25 communities. Nunavut nurses also make significant contributions through administration, education, policy and research.

The ability to recruit and retain a skilled, stable, culturally appropriate nursing workforce in Nunavut is critical to meeting Nunavummiut health needs, however this has become increasingly difficult for a number of reasons:

- the World Health Organization predicts a shortfall of 18 million healthcare

- Canada is projected to experience a shortage of 60,000 RNs by 2022⁹;
- many Canadian jurisdictions and other countries currently report difficulty in filling nursing vacancies;
- recruiting and retaining quality nurses is much more difficult for northern, rural, and remote communities; and greater still in Nunavut when one considers the challenges of low housing stock and high travel costs;
- while 85 percent of Nunavut's population is Inuit, the number of Inuit in nursing remains persistently low at approximately 4-5 percent of the indeterminate nursing workforce; and
- Nunavummiut have some of the highest demands for health services in Canada as a result of a number of factors such as geographical and health status challenges

Though the Department's focus is to stabilize its nursing workforce by filling vacancies with indeterminate nursing staff, there is a recognition that this takes time and that contracted agency relief/temporary nurses are still needed to provide additional resources such as during surge capacity situations, e.g. respiratory outbreaks.



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Roadmap Development

This new *Roadmap* is evidence informed and shaped by the experience and expertise of Nunavut nurses to ensure its relevance, responsiveness and sustainability.

The *Roadmap* was informed by a peer and grey literature review, as well as an environmental scan of retention and recruitment strategies used in similar rural, remote and isolated regions across Canada and around the globe. Consultations were conducted with a number of key groups including Nunavut nurses and nurse practitioners (NPs) in various settings and positions, nursing leaders (e.g. SHPs,

Directors), nursing students, Department of Health Human Resources (HR) staff, First Nations Inuit Health Branch staff at Indigenous Services Canada. The analysis and findings were then formulated into strategic pillars, initiatives and actions, and brought to Nunavut nurses themselves in the form of an online survey for their feedback. The one hundred nurses across Nunavut who responded to the survey indicated a very high level of support for the *Roadmap*. Final review was provided by the Nunavut Nursing Leadership Advisory Committee and Health HR staff.

» **“Awesome and promising
PILLARS...”**

–nursing survey respondent



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Purpose

The *Roadmap for Strengthening the Nunavut Nursing Workforce* incorporates initiatives that are designed to:

- increase the retention of Nunavut's nursing workforce;
- promote and support the recruitment of motivated and skilled nursing professionals for Nunavut's communities;
- Meet the Government of Nunavut's obligations under Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement by recruiting and training Inuit candidates for careers in nursing and other public health professions;
- Employ a representative Inuit nursing workforce in the territorial government; and
- Enable the Department of Health to deliver the Strategic Plan, and specifically the first Strategic Goal: **Competent, sufficient, stable, appropriate and well-supported health workforce.**



Principles

The *Roadmap* for Strengthening the Nunavut Nursing Workforce is guided by the following principles:

- The *Roadmap* will support and enhance the critical contribution of nursing professionals to the Nunavut health care system and the health and well-being of all Nunavummiut;
- The *Roadmap* is grounded in evidence and shaped by the experience and expertise of Nunavut's nurses (RNs, LPNs, RPNs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) in all domains (direct care, education, policy, research, and administration);
- The *Roadmap* takes into account, and is responsive to, the challenges specific to the personal and professional needs and aspirations of nursing professionals in Nunavut;
- The *Roadmap* is comprehensive, encompassing all facets of the recruitment and retention continuum to promote a stable, competent, motivated nursing workforce;
- The *Roadmap* is innovative and forward thinking, enabling the GN to be competitive in the current and future nursing labour market; and
- The *Roadmap* includes specific goals, strategies and actions with relevant metrics to measure progress and evaluate outcomes.



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Framework



The Framework contains five pillars which are aligned with the GN Department of Health mission, vision and strategic goal #1. The pillars each represent a strategic priority and are:

- Promote a stable nursing workforce
- Attract, select and engage highly skilled and motivated nurses and NPs

- Strengthen the capability of the Nunavut nursing workforce
- Create a positive, safe and healthy workplace
- Support and develop nursing leadership

Each of these priorities is further developed to include initiatives and actions which are described in more detail in the following section.



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Strategic Initiatives & Actions

1

Pillar 1: Workforce Planning and Evaluation

» STRATEGIC PRIORITY:
Promote a stable nursing workforce.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

Establish a regular, consistent proactive approach to nursing workforce planning.

ACTIONS

1. Develop and implement a standardized tool, policy and procedure for regularly identifying nursing workforce needs in communities, regions and at a territorial level, including indeterminates and relief staff (casual or agency). Assign appropriate staff to regularly complete the workforce needs tool.
2. Incorporate overlap between outgoing and incoming staff to promote continuity of care and safe handover practices.
3. Manage and support casual GN nurses and nurse practitioners.
4. Conduct standardized exit interviews and regularly review and analyze the findings.
5. Ensure that the annual territorial housing plan for nursing that provides safe, suitable, acceptable accommodations for individual nurses and those with family aligns with the nursing workforce plan and Department of Health capital plans.
6. Ensure that HHR and health system planning regularly informs the annual territorial community health centre construction/ renovation plan to accommodate potential increases in the delivery of services and nursing staff in communities.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

Reduce the time to post and fill nursing vacancies and staffing actions.

ACTIONS

1. Streamline management, human resources (HR), finance, travel and housing processes and policies to post and fill indeterminate and relief nursing vacancies.
2. Health HR to establish, monitor and report on a common set of service standards related to the hiring processes.
3. Create and manage a new comprehensive contract for agency nurses and NPs to improve the availability, timeliness, qualifications, training, and performance of agency staff.
4. Implement a new online HR Management tool to better support an efficient and timely hiring process.

Assess the appropriateness of existing models of care, nursing roles, and nurse and nurse practitioner staffing levels to meet current and forecasted community population health needs (population size, health status and service delivery).

1. Conduct community population health needs assessments (using a standardized tool(s), staffing benchmarks and provider and community input) to determine community-specific appropriate models of care; to optimize nursing and other healthcare provider roles; to plan for nurse, NP and other healthcare provider staffing levels needed to meet current and future community needs.
2. Explore opportunities to improve nursing productivity and overall optimization of the nursing workforce (removing non-nursing tasks, etc.).
3. Explore the integration of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and NPs into various settings across Nunavut, as supported by the community health needs assessment findings.
4. Establish and implement a multiyear territorial nurse and NP staffing plan aligned with the community population health needs assessment findings to meet growing health care needs. Partner with finance, HR and housing to coordinate resources.

IV

**Evaluate the effectiveness
of the *Roadmap*.**

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

ACTIONS

1. Employ the Nursing Leadership Advisory Committee to provide oversight, leadership and monitor the progress of the *Roadmap*.
2. Establish metrics and evaluation indicators (i.e. turnover rate, retention rate, time to fill vacancies) to align with the *Roadmap*.
3. Assess the efficiency and ability of existing information systems to collect indicator data in a timely and efficient manner.
4. Optimize the functionality of existing information systems or invest in new information systems to collect indicator data in a timely and efficient manner.
5. Assign human resources to track and analyze and report on the indicator data.
6. Ensure the existence of annual workplans to support strategic priorities of the *Roadmap*.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

Increase the number of Inuit nurses and NPs.

ACTIONS

1. Partner with NAC and the Department of Education to promote nursing as a viable career option and to increase the supply of Inuit nursing graduates.
2. Promote the 1-year mentorship new graduate program with NAC Inuit nursing students.
3. Explore the development and delivery of an LPN educational program at NAC for Nunavummiut.
4. Develop new territorial summer employment positions for NAC Inuit nursing students, including standardised job descriptions and orientation
5. Develop new territorial summer employment positions for local senior high school students to generate interest in a possible health career, including standardised job descriptions and orientation.
6. Encourage communities to hire Inuit nursing students as an opportunity to provide direct experience in the healthcare field and as a means to promote future employment in Nunavut.
7. Create linkages and explore strategic opportunities with the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association.

Create a welcoming environment for all new nurse and NP hires and agency staff.

1. Develop and implement a standardized hiring and onboarding process that addresses personal, professional, environmental and social components.
2. Provide a standardized orientation and mentorship program for all new GN nurse and NP hires.
3. Identify and train mentors in each community to support the onboarding of new nurse and NP hires.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

IV

Examine HR practices, policies, and resources as it pertains to nurse recruitment and hiring.

ACTIONS

1. Dedicate human resources to provide timely, consistent, accurate information to those nurses and NPs interested in employment in Nunavut using a service-oriented, case management approach.
2. Assess the adequacy of existing Department of Health HR to fulfill all recruitment efforts.
3. Establish and monitor Department of Health HR service standards, similar to that of the Government of Nunavut HR department.

V

Establish competitive nursing salaries and benefits.

1. Ensure terms and conditions of employment for nurses and NPs are competitive and reflect:
 - geography (rural and remote)
 - their education and experience (1 yr experience = 1 step on pay scale)
 - their scope of practice professional responsibilities
 - their level of responsibility and accountability (formal leadership positions)
 - their level of accountability as autonomous health care providers, in the case of NPs.
2. Continue with retention and recruitment bonuses; revise to support long term employment and applicability to all nursing positions (including management, research, etc.)
3. Enhance ability of nurses and NPs to accrue more lieu time.
4. Create equity with housing for indeterminates and casuals.



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Pillar 3: Professional Development

» STRATEGIC PRIORITY:
 Strengthen the capability of the Nunavut nursing workforce.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

Support a culture that values learning and education.

ACTIONS

1. Develop a territorial professional development/ continuing education framework.
2. Conduct an annual survey of nurses' and NP's professional development/continuing education interests and needs.
3. Raise awareness of available educational leave and Professional Development Initiative.
4. Provide a mix of in person, virtual, simulation, and online professional development/education through partnerships with NAC, professional nursing associations, training organizations, academic institutions, etc.
5. Explore opportunities to reimburse long serving casuals for continuing education.
6. Enhance cultural competency training for nursing.
7. Host annual regional or territorial SHP conference(s).
8. Institute a territorial professional development/ continuing education learning platform and tracking system.
9. Assign a nurse educator to each region to support the ongoing professional development/continuing education.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

|| **Expect and encourage good performance.**

ACTIONS

1. Develop standardized evaluation and competency assessment tools.
2. Conduct annual performance reviews/appraisals for all indeterminates, casual and agency nurses and NPs.
3. Ensure the existence of annual learning plans for all indeterminates and casual nurses and NPs.
4. Encourage SHPs, Managers and Directors to provide regular informal feedback and recognition to their staff.
5. Explore means for managers to recognize exemplar performance.

||| **Implement a nurse residency program.**

1. Continue with the 1-year nurse mentorship program for new graduates of NAC and explore options for a Return in Service agreement.
2. Further develop the curriculum such that the 1-year residency program will have structured learning opportunities and objectives.
3. Expand the paid 1-year nurse residency program for new graduates to be Canada wide. Develop program criteria, and application and selection tools, processes and structures to support the 1-year nurse residency program for new graduates of other Canadian universities..



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Pillar 4: Professional Practice Environment

» **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**
Create a positive, safe and healthy work place.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

ACTIONS

Create flexible work arrangements.

1. Create flexible part time fly in/out job share positions in select communities. The time frame for each rotation to vary from 4 weeks to 3 months based on criteria.
2. Explore the possibility of extended hours and staggered nursing shifts in community health centres (CHCs).
3. Create unique staffing models for hard to recruit communities.
4. Explore options for a nurse deployment team.
5. Evaluate existing staffing models to determine their fit with workforce expectations and workload demands.

Provide professional resources to support nurses and NPs to work to their optimal scope of practice.

1. Ensure that the nursing manual is kept up to date and is well communicated to staff in community health centres.
2. Establish a process to ensure that safety and security risks are identified and addressed in a timely manner.
3. Provide resources that promote a healthy work life balance for nurses (i.e. fitness equipment, access to Internet, telehealth, critical incident debriefing)
4. Clearly outline nursing roles and responsibilities for all nursing positions.



PILLAR **4** PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

5. Provide resources/support/coaching to enhance inter and intraprofessional collaboration.
6. Promote frequent visits by nursing management/ leadership to communities to provide visible professional support.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE



Recognize nursing excellence.

ACTIONS

1. Establish an annual nursing excellence awards program and event.
2. Foster a culture of informal recognition among nursing management and nursing peers.



Support new nursing hires.

1. Adopt a case management approach to new hires (indeterminates and casuals) for the first 6 months that begins at hiring and onboarding and continues with follow up on a number of financial, social, professional, environmental and administrative elements to promote retention and job satisfaction.



5

Pillar 5: Leadership

» **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**
 Support and develop nursing leadership.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

ACTIONS

Develop a nursing leadership strategy.

1. Establish a professional leadership competency framework for clinical and nonclinical positions.
2. Analyze current compensation packages for nurses and NPs working in supervisory, managerial or director roles and explore appropriate packages which support effective succession planning.

Identify and develop future nurse/NP leaders.

1. Establish an annual process for identification of nurses and NPs with leadership interest and potential.
2. Provide formal nursing leadership development training.
3. Develop and implement a planned approach to formal nursing leadership succession.

Support SHPs, Managers and Directors.

1. Develop and deliver an orientation and mentorship program for SHPs, Managers and Directors.
2. Provide ongoing leadership development opportunities for SHPs, Managers and Directors.
3. Establish a mentorship program for SHPs, Managers and Directors.



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