Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy

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I. PREFACE
The Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy is the product of extensive consultation with nursing professionals, managers, and support personnel in Nunavut.

The Strategy was developed to address the long-term health care needs of Nunavut by focusing on promoting recruitment of new nursing personnel; the further education and training of currently working nurses; and the preparation of Inuit for careers in the profession. The Strategy also addresses the issue of increasing the retention of Nunavut’s active nursing workforce. The Strategy gives full recognition to the concerns of Nunavut’s Nursing Personnel, and their input and ongoing consultation are key features of it.

In consultation with the Nursing Personnel, the Department of Health and Social Services will implement the Strategy, which will be a “living document” that will evolve over the years as priorities change and new resources become available.

The Department will be relying on input from the Nursing Recruitment and Retention Committee (which represents all nursing disciplines as well as Human Resource professionals and Departmental managers) as a means of monitoring progress towards implementing the initiatives and achieving the goals outlined within the Strategy, as well as helping to recommend new initiatives as requirements change.

II. INTRODUCTION
The Government of Nunavut recognizes the critically important role nurses play in the delivery of health care services across the territory. Without the continued dedication and commitment of nurses, the quality of health care delivery in Nunavut would be seriously jeopardized. In order to support the delivery of quality health care, the Department of Health and Social Services is committed to ensuring there is a stable nursing workforce with an adequate number of nurses working in Nunavut.

The new initiatives of the Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy build upon and strengthen the programs in Health Care pioneered by the Government of Nunavut.

Studies have shown that the recruitment and retention of nurses is affected by a variety of professional and lifestyle issues, and that multidimensional strategies appear more successful than those relying on financial incentives alone. Development of a multidimensional approach is a feature of the new Strategy.

The Strategy is ongoing, with major targets for evaluation to be set for a five-year period. Annual evaluation will employ measurable performance based indicators including: increase in nursing staff retention; increase nursing ‘workforce stability’ as measured by greater median time in Nunavut postings; reduction of nursing vacancy rate; increase in skill profiles; and increase in number of Inuit in the nursing field.
III. **PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY**

The Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy incorporates recruitment and retention initiatives that are designed to:

1: Promote and support the recruitment of motivated and skilled nursing professionals for Nunavut’s communities;

2: Meet the Department’s legal 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; and

3: Increase the retention of Nunavut’s front-line nursing professionals.

The *initiatives* recommended by the Strategy and the *ongoing programs* it supports are guided by the following Principles:

1: Nursing professionals are critical components of the Department of Health and Social Services, and they are integral to the health care decision-making process;

2: Successful recruitment and retention initiatives for health care professionals must take into account, and be responsive to, the challenges specific to the personal and career needs and aspirations of nursing professionals in Nunavut;

3: Community Health Committees should play an active role in promoting wellness and encouraging Inuit to seek nursing and other public health care careers.

4: The Strategy will adhere to the Principle of Pinasuaqtavut, working to improve the health, prosperity, and self-reliance of Nunavummiut.

5: The Strategy will promote, protect, and enhance the health and well-being of all Nunavummiut, incorporating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit at all levels of service delivery and design.

IV. **MAJOR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

1: The *over-riding goal* of the Strategy is to promote recruitment and retention of personnel in the full range of the nursing profession throughout Nunavut. The *central challenges* are to attract competent and committed individuals who will make nursing in Nunavut a career and to educate and train Inuit to enter the nursing professions. Clearly, we need to move on both fronts at the same time, for both are crucial.

2: The long-term solution for addressing the *stability problem* in the Nunavut nursing professions is to educate, train, mentor, and support local Inuit for nursing careers. Local Inuit nurses would better know the languages and cultures of the communities; they would not have pressures for out migration; and they would be life-long role models for Inuit Youth. Training of Inuit nurses is a cost-effective initiative;
employing Inuit nurses would decrease the reliance on Agency Nurses and significantly increase the stability of the regional nursing workforce. Efforts to increase the participation in Inuit in the nursing workforce help meet the Government’s obligations under Article 23 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*.

3: The reliance on Agency Nurses carries a heavy financial burden; since the creation of Nunavut on April 1, 1999, the Department of Health and Social Services has had to contend with a 30-40% nursing vacancy rate, which has resulted in increased usage costs for Agency Nurses.

4: Underlying causes for low nursing recruitment and retention in general include: A rapidly aging nursing workforce; lower enrollment in nursing occupations; the high stress and demands of the nursing field.

5: There are issues specific to Nunavut. Studies show that nurses in Nunavut have many years of experience, but remote postings for younger nurses are low for the following reasons:
   a. Lack of adequate, affordable housing, suitable for a growing family;
   b. Few jobs for a spouse;
   c. Insecurity about maintaining a two-income family;
   d. Inadequate child care facilities;
   e. Salaries that are too low for a family with young children; and
   f. A belief that they will fall behind in modern techniques and harm their careers.

6: Another area of concern for the nursing workforce is housing. The lack of staff housing is one of the biggest impediments to recruiting indeterminate nurses in Nunavut. The Department has estimated that it currently requires an additional ninety-seven housing units across Nunavut, of which fifty-five are related to expanded services in the new health care facilities located in Cambridge Bay, Rankin Inlet, and Iqaluit.

The Department will continue to work with the Nunavut Housing Corporation to address this critical problem and develop long-term solutions.
Other reasons for the nursing shortage in Nunavut are:

1: As Health Canada in its **Nursing Strategy for Canada – Executive Summary** by the Advisory Committee on Health Human Resources – October 2000, states:

   “Canada is experiencing a crisis in nursing. This is a view expressed across the country, both in the health system and among the general public. While there are many different perspectives on why this is and what the most promising solutions are, there is significant agreement that the current shortage of nurses is getting worse and that left unchecked, this situation will lead to a deterioration in the quality of the nation's health care system.”

2: The aging population in Canada and many other developed countries will increase the demand for nurses.

3: The nursing workforce is rapidly aging, and more nurses will be retiring within the next few years (In 2005, Canada had more Registered Nurses employed in nursing at age 50-54 than any other age group).

4: The recent **Nursing Strategy for Canada** by the Advisory Committee on Health Human Resources – October 2000 fully details the critical issues facing the nursing professions. These are even more acute in Nunavut.

5: As the Canadian population ages, shortage of people in all health professions is predicted (the number of Registered Nurses in Canada is below 1993 levels).

6: Across North America, enrollment in all types of entry-level nursing programs has been declining.

7: The nursing profession is dominated by women (95%). Women today have many more career and professional opportunities than they did just a few decades ago.

8: Because of stressful working conditions, long hours, shift work, and exposure to contagious elements, the nursing profession is perceived to be a less desirable career choice.

9: There is already an uneven distribution of nurses, and some jurisdictions in Canada are experiencing shortages now, particularly northern, remote, and rural areas.
V. ANALYSIS AND ACTION ITEMS

The Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy is designed to reduce the Government of Nunavut’s nursing vacancy rate from its historical 30-40% range to a vacancy rate of 15-20% over the next five years and to significantly increase the participation of Inuit in nursing careers. The following Action Items have been developed to help achieve those goals:

1: The Department will be undertaking a comprehensive analysis of Job Descriptions and Classifications of nurses to accurately assess the economics, effectiveness, and efficiency of our nursing workforce in relation to those in other jurisdictions in Canada.

2: Improve Human Resource Practices affecting Nurse Recruitment

Studies have shown that HR practices can have significant positive or negative effects on nurse recruitment and retention. The 2005 Nurse Recruitment and Retention Survey conducted by the Registered Nurses Association of the NWT and Nunavut also supported this contention. As a result, the Department needs to take HR policies and practices into account at all stages of the Nursing Strategy and its implementation.

Action Items:

a. The Department will assign a senior member of the nursing workforce to be responsible for coordination of Recruitment, Retention, and Training initiatives of the Strategy.

b. The Department will assign a senior member of the nursing workforce to be responsible for the thorough Orientation of new nursing personnel and assist in their adaptation to their community.

c. The Department will maintain ongoing consultation with nursing personnel regarding evolving issues affecting the provision of Community Health Care Services in Nunavut.

d. The Department will develop an aggressive campaign to recruit nurses.

e. The Department will establish a Nunavut Nursing Network to coordinate nursing initiatives and to be an advocate to the Department on nursing issues.

3: Reduce Reliance on Agency Nurses

One of the best indicators of the Strategy’s success will be a reduced reliance on Agency Nurses. And Health Services stakeholders support the principle of reducing the use of Agency Nurses.

The Department recognizes the value of restricting the use of Agency Nurses because of their high financial cost and other inequities inherent in their use.
Unfortunately, there is a shortage of nurses in the labour market, and the Department continues to have difficulties recruiting and retaining indeterminate employees. As a result, the Department will need to continue to hire nurses through recruitment agencies for the foreseeable future. Agency Nurses are hired to provide ongoing relief when staff shortages warrant their use.

Action Items:

a. The Department will collaborate with the Department of Education and Nunavut Arctic College for long-term education and training initiatives for Inuit to enhance knowledge and skills required to fully participate in nursing professions.

b. As well, all the other Action Items of the Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy have as an objective the reduced reliance on Agency Nurses.

c. The Department of Health and Social Services is developing policies to set maximum rates and expenditures for Agency Nurses and to make their costs equivalent to full-time nurses in Nunavut.

d. As well, the Department is developing policies to set working periods for Agency Nurses as a minimum of 6 weeks in one community in order to reduce travel costs.

4: Relief Nursing Pool

Relief Nursing Pools are vital to the provision of short-term staffing relief. By establishing Relief Nursing Pools in the regional centres, we can reduce costs and provide better support for our northern workforce. In Nunavut, as in most jurisdictions, the Department will continue to depend on a Relief Nursing Pool to cover staff turnover and provide flexibility when nurses are participating in training and/or professional development sessions, or when they are absent due to illness or vacation leave. Maintaining nursing staffing levels supports staff morale, occupational safety, and job satisfaction.

In order to reduce costs and improve efficiency, the Department will establish a Relief Nursing Pool in the regional centres of Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, and Cambridge Bay; these nurses would then be available as required to support staff vacancies in the communities.

Action Items:

a. The Department will create 12 additional nursing positions – 4 in Iqaluit, 4 in Rankin Inlet, and 4 in Cambridge Bay.

b. The Department will possess the flexibility to deploy nurses among Nunavut communities based upon Health Care needs and the interest of individual nurses. This initiative will reduce the cost for Agency Nurses and will improve morale and motivation within the nursing workforce.
The following are selected background items that support the Front-Line Nursing Service Allowance:

- The effect of workload and overtime on nurses’ health means that in any given week, more than 13,000 Registered Nurses — 7.4% of all Registered Nurses — are absent from work because of injury, illness, burnout or disability (CLBC, 2002).

- According to Canada’s Labour Force Survey, that rate of absenteeism is 80% higher than the Canadian average (8.1% for nurses, compared with a 4.5% average among 47 other occupational groups).

- Over the course of a year, more than 16 million nursing hours are lost to injury and illness – the equivalent of almost 9,000 full-time nursing positions.

- The 2005 National Survey of the Work and Health of Nurses reported that nearly 3 in 10 nurses reported that they had been physically assaulted by a patient in the previous year. Half of nurses in long-term care facilities reported physical assault, as did 30% of those employed in hospitals.

- Emotional abuse from patients was even more commonly reported; 44% of nurses said that they had experienced emotional abuse from a patient.

- There is much anecdotal evidence that nurses in Nunavut experience similar or higher levels of violence.
5: ACCOMMODATION ISSUES
As is the case for all Nunavummiut, housing remains a critical issue. In the particular case of nurses, there is a lack of parity in providing accommodation support among nurses offering similar functions. The Government of Nunavut is currently reviewing its staff housing policy.

6: Professional Development
As part of its ongoing commitment to professional development, the Department will continue to provide nurses in Nunavut with increased opportunities for professional development, education, and training.

7: Increased Support for Nursing Students
The Nunavut Nursing Program and the Health Career Access Year are funded by the Government of Nunavut and delivered through Nunavut Arctic College. The Nursing Program offers a Bachelor of Science in Nursing through a partnership with Dalhousie University. The program first commenced in 2002. It is four years in length and is designed to prepare nurses to respond to the health care needs of the people of Nunavut. The curriculum emphasizes awareness and respect for Inuit culture and prepares nurses to be leaders in the Nunavut health care system.

Since its inception, 13 Registered Nurses have graduated from the Program, including 7 Nunavut Land Claim Beneficiaries. Overall, the Department anticipates a total of 29 Registered Nurses will graduate from the program over the next four years.

The Department will provide additional funding to Nunavut Arctic College to offer a pre-enrollment foundation year (math and science) in the communities of Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet. The foundation year will increasing the number of students who can enroll and succeed in both the nursing and teacher education programs that are offered by the College. In addition, the Department will provide the College with funding to provide Inuit students who are enrolled in the Nursing Program with tutors.

Action Items:
The Government of Nunavut will invest additional funds over a five-year period with the goal of increasing the number of Nunavummiut (with a priority for Inuit) in the nursing professions. This Initiative serves two critical objectives – reducing the reliance on costly Agency Nurses and helping to establish a stable, well-trained nursing workforce of Nunavummiut. This initiative will be undertaken in cooperation with the Department of Education and Nunavut Arctic College.

a. In order to increase the number of students who have the math and science qualifications to enroll in Nursing and Teacher Education, **Foundation Studies** will be offered in Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet. An estimated 15 students will enroll in this Program from each community.
b. Support will be provided for a Nursing Program in Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay equivalent to what is being offered in Iqaluit. It is estimated that 15 students in each of these communities would make use of the Nursing Program, which will be established in Year II.

c. Tutoring Support will continue be provided for nursing students. Individualize tutoring will significantly help to reduce student dropout rates prior to graduation and increase success within the Nursing courses.

d. All Nursing Program graduates will be guaranteed employment by the Department of Health and Social Services.

e. The Department will continue to provide support for trainees for professional positions by assisting to prepare for their Final Examinations.

8: Nursing Preparation Program in High Schools
In order to better prepare Inuit students for careers in the nursing professions, the high schools in Nunavut should explore the inclusion of courses and general content that focuses on the basic knowledge and skills required for successful participation in nursing. This initiative will be undertaken in cooperation with the Department of Education.

9: The Government of Nunavut fully respects the collective bargaining process. The compensation and benefits package for Nunavut nurses is subject to negotiation with the Nunavut Employees Union and will be resolved through the collective bargaining process.

VI. ONGOING INITIATIVES
The Department will continue with its successful ongoing initiatives to promote and support the education and training of Nunavummiut for nursing professions.