



NURSING RESOURCE STRATEGY

for New Brunswick

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New Brunswick Nursing Resource Strategy

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Executive Summary

In New Brunswick, registered nurses (RN) and licensed practical nurses (LPN) are important health care professionals who work throughout the province to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care. RNs and LPNs work in a variety of settings including hospitals, community health centres, and nursing homes, and often times as the first point of contact for people as they access the health care system.

Registered nurses represent the largest group of health professionals employed in the New Brunswick health care system. More than 8,000 RNs (2017) help deliver much needed health care to New Brunswickers across multiple settings. Their contributions to the health care system are indispensable. The province finds itself at a crossroads where the number of nurses in the workforce is decreasing and the demand for their services keeps increasing.

New Brunswick is experiencing a critical demographic situation. The province's population is aging quicker than any other jurisdiction in Canada. For the first time in New Brunswick's history we have witnessed the death rate surpass the birth rate. As the population ages the demand for health services and long-term care will increase correspondingly.

To address this issue, the Department of Health established a Nursing Resource Strategy Steering Committee.

Problem Statement

The department is projecting a shortage of at least 130 (Health Analytics, 2017) RNs each year over the next 10 years. This means by 2028 there would be a deficit of approximately 1300 RNs in the New Brunswick health care system. The reasons include:

- An aging workforce: 41 per cent of RNs are 50 years of age or older.
- Lower enrolment in New Brunswick bachelor of nursing programs: enrolment numbers have decreased from 522 in 2011 to 325 in 2017, while attrition rates for New Brunswick nursing students are at approximately 30 per cent.
- A 4.4% per cent decrease in the number of employed RNs from 2013-2017.

The situation has the potential to be further complicated by other trends related to the RN workforce, such as:

- Low pass rate on the entry-to-practice exam: the pass rate for first time writers was the lowest in Canada for 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- Low international immigration: only eight of 31 applicants over the last four years have obtained registration as RNs.

Other factors to consider are:

- It is anticipated that the LPN workforce will remain relatively stable over the coming years; however, efforts to increase the number of LPNs who opt to bridge to the RN profession will impact the LPN workforce. As a result of this initiative and other health related policy changes, the LPN workforce also needs to be examined.
- New Brunswick has one of Canada's oldest populations and is aging at a greater rate than other jurisdictions. New Brunswick has the highest percentage of population over 65 years of age when compared to the rest of Canada (19 per cent vs. 16 per cent).
- By 2026, it is estimated that 26.3 per cent of New Brunswickers will be over the age of 65. In the same time frame, it is estimated that the province will see a 60 per cent increase in the number of people 75 years and older. As a result, an increase in the prevalence of chronic conditions and disease burden is expected. These conditions will put an enormous strain on the New Brunswick health care system.
- The most recent New Brunswick Labour Market Outlook estimates a total of 4,376 RN jobs will open over the next 10 years. Unemployment rates for RNs are currently at 1.6 per cent which is well below the industry norm of 4 per cent. In addition, relatively poor economic and workforce growth is expected at the provincial level which includes nursing.
- Nursing stakeholders and nursing students report that employers in other jurisdictions are actively recruiting New Brunswick graduates and offering them financial incentives and permanent employment. In New Brunswick, job offers to new graduates from the regional health authorities range from casual employment without benefits which may last for a period of three to five years, to full time permanent employment.

Nursing Resource Strategy Steering Committee

A Nursing Resource Strategy Steering Committee was established in December 2017 with a mandate to develop a 10-year nursing resource strategy to address the nursing shortage. The members of the committee were required to provide direction to working group members in the development of a strategy outline and a detailed action plan. Consideration was given to contributing factors related to the nursing shortage; to applying innovative approaches; and to learning from current initiatives.

The steering committee consisted of:

- Association of New Brunswick Licensed Practical Nurses
- Department of Health
- Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
- Department of Social Development
- Nurses Association of New Brunswick
- New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes
- New Brunswick Nurses Union
- Regional health authorities
- Université de Moncton
- University of New Brunswick

Three working groups, representing nine stakeholders and consisting of 28 members, reported to the steering committee. Each group considered one specific area among the following: attract to the RN profession, retain the current RN workforce and recruit RNs to the New Brunswick workforce.

Within their assigned working group (i.e. attract, retain and recruit), members suggested possible actions and discussed different approaches which have informed this strategy. Through the work of the committee, and that of the underlying working groups, a strategy outline was completed on April 30, 2018, which contained four pillars:

1. Promotion of the RN profession in New Brunswick
2. Enhancement of nursing education in New Brunswick
3. Recruitment of internationally educated nurses
4. Enhancement of RN employment and work-life balance

In the months following the strategy outline, the department completed the following engagement and consultation initiatives:

- An impact and feasibility exercise;
- A day-long critical path session featuring various stakeholders;
- Hosted a front-line nursing advisory committee with the minister in attendance; and
- A NouLAB (New Brunswick's Social and Policy Innovation Lab) exercise targeting the recruitment of internationally educated nurses.

Through these sessions, efforts were made in completing this Nursing Resource Strategy Action Plan. The committee and working group members worked to identify the critical activities needed to attain the desired results for all action items. Other relevant strategies and initiatives already underway were considered and will be leveraged to ensure maximum benefit is attained for all stakeholders.

Guiding Principles of a Nursing Resource Strategy

The following principles form the pillars of a Nursing Resources Strategy for New Brunswick.

Nurses play a significant role in the provision of high quality care in an efficient, patient-centric health care system. They are assisted in reaching their full potential in the following ways:

- **Nursing roles and leadership:** Nurses practise to optimum scope within their particular employment setting. Nursing roles are clearly defined, with interrelationships, responsibilities and accountabilities of one to another being clearly articulated in the current health-care context. Nurses have the necessary tools and supports to carry out their responsibilities.
- **Nursing Education:** Nursing education begins with enrolment in a nursing program and continues throughout the career of the nurse, ranging from clinical placements to workplace readiness, to continuing education to preceptoring and knowledge transfer. Nurses require continuing education and support to integrate into the workplace and participate effectively in quality patient care. This includes staying current with evolving knowledge, best practices and associated technology.
- **Nursing Human Resources:** There is a need to maintain an adequate supply of nurses in all sectors (education, clinical, etc.). Nurses work in settings that are appropriate to their skills. Skill mix is based on the needs of clients. Nurses are supported as the health care system evolves (e.g. as focus shifts from acute to primary care). Internationally educated nurses who meet the criteria for RN and LPN registration in New Brunswick are included in employment opportunities in the province.
- **Communication:** A variety of modalities are used to send consistent messages about employment opportunities, professional nursing practice, etc. Students understand the job search process. Nurses participate on committees related to nursing practice, delivery of quality patient care, etc.

Review Process

In order to inform the working groups, research was undertaken, including a review of current academic research; a survey from across Canada looking at nursing strategies (jurisdictional review); financial incentives; and other health care reform efforts currently underway in other jurisdictions.

In an effort to capture the voice of the student, several focus groups were conducted targeting third- and fourth-year students from the Université de Moncton and the University of New Brunswick. These meetings took place throughout the spring of 2018 on several campuses.

Also, an audit of initiatives already underway in the regional health authorities, New Brunswick nursing homes and within the Government of New Brunswick was conducted.

While it is vital to ensure an ample supply of qualified nurses is available to take care of New Brunswick's aging population, the strategy would be incomplete if it overlooked the role nurses play in helping the general New Brunswick population maintain and improve its overall wellness. In doing so, nurses help reduce the immediate demand for acute and long-term care in New Brunswick.

It is important to identify links and areas of overlap that may serve to strengthen the reach and effectiveness of these initiatives. This Nursing Resource Strategy will support these initiatives and assist in resolving the nursing resource issue in the province by eliminating the gap between supply and demand.

This strategy is intended to develop new actions and when warranted to help support current initiatives; it is not meant to replace any current initiative or duplicate ongoing efforts. In addition, further analysis will be undertaken to identify which actions may be applied to the LPN workforce in New Brunswick.

Measuring the Impact of the Plan

A progress update of the Nursing Resource Strategy will be issued every two years and will include an evaluation component. Key performance indicators will be used to monitor the progress of implemented actions (see appendix A).

Appendix A: Action Items

1. Promotion of the RN profession in New Brunswick

- 1.1 Develop promotional packages to attract students to New Brunswick universities and RNs to the New Brunswick workforce.
- 1.2 Create opportunities to introduce New Brunswick high school students to health professions (i.e. course curriculum, co-op opportunities).
- 1.3 Examine current career planning activities in schools to further promote health professions.
- 1.4 Provide career planning to university students attempting to change faculties mid-stream (i.e. promote nursing as an option).

2. Enhancement of nursing education in New Brunswick

- 2.1 Enhance curricular innovation within New Brunswick bachelor of nursing programs (i.e. increased flexibility in program delivery, staggered graduation dates, include specialty streams within the program).
- 2.2 Address inconsistencies between the number of seats, the decrease in program admissions and any waiting lists to access the University of New Brunswick or Université de Moncton programs.
- 2.3 Promote and deliver the licensed practical nurse (LPN) to bachelor of nursing program.
- 2.4 Collaborate with stakeholders to improve processes related to the entry-to-practice exam.
- 2.5 Streamline current agreements between universities, regional health authorities and unions to facilitate the recruitment of faculty, clinical instructors and preceptors.
- 2.6 Consider financial incentives including: education contracts with a return on service; grants to fourth-year nursing students during their preceptorship clinical placement; and a loan forgiveness program over three years in exchange for employment in New Brunswick.

3. Recruitment of Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs)

- 3.1 Actively recruit internationally educated nurses as part of New Brunswick's immigration efforts (i.e. include nursing in an upcoming immigration mission).
- 3.2 Identify countries with nursing education programs with similar nursing professional standards, competencies, and credentials to partner with and to target immigration efforts (i.e. increasing the odds of meeting New Brunswick registration requirements).
- 3.3 Examine current registration requirements of internationally educated nurses to identify any barriers, areas for improvement or efficiencies.
- 3.4 Increase efficiency of the IENs application process for registration in New Brunswick (i.e. initial application, competency assessment, educational bridging program, entry-to-practice exam, etc.).
- 3.5 Establish a program to welcome newcomers including options to work in the health-care sector during the application process and to allow for a positive integration into the workforce.

4. Enhancement of RN Employment and Work-life Balance

- 4.1 Develop and implement a program to allow experienced RNs to stay in the workforce while providing mentorship to new hires as part of their responsibilities (i.e. new hires receive structured support for a minimum of one year).
- 4.2 Establish a career planning program within regional health authorities to develop five year plans with new hires and to counsel RNs who are looking for a new career path.
- 4.3 Examine the nurse manager role for possible areas of improvement and provide additional education and support to RNs in these positions.
- 4.4 Increase support to RNs by exploring the potential for innovative opportunities relative to: approaches to scheduling, continuing education, and supporting requests to specialize in other areas of nursing (i.e. rural, urban, other unit).
- 4.5 Create process to offer permanent employment (i.e. full-time and part-time) to New Brunswick graduates and RNs recruited from other provinces or countries.
- 4.6 Consider financial incentives including: signing bonuses in exchange for a three year return on service for rural areas (i.e. hard-to-fill positions); and a summer employment program in the health sector for students (i.e. SEED program).