

Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy

Progress Update

Nova Scotia's 14,000 nurses make essential contributions to the health and wellness of Nova Scotians every day.

Like other provinces and territories across the country, Nova Scotia faces an aging population and an aging workforce. With that in mind, and in response to growing concerns about a nursing shortage, Nova Scotia's new Nursing Strategy was launched in May 2015. Its purpose is to retain new nursing graduates and experienced nurses. It's also to ensure Nova Scotia has the right number, mix and distribution of nurses in communities and specialties where they're needed.

The strategy uses a multifaceted approach to build on the success of the past and address the challenges of today, in order to create a plan for the future. The strategy has a budget of almost \$4.7 million and four main goals:

1. Maintain the gains made through previous Nursing Strategies that resulted in adding about 2,000 more nurses to the provincial nursing workforce since 2001.
2. Address new challenges related to the changing age and experience of the nursing workforce.
 - Nearly 4,600 RNs and 1,400 LPNs will be over the age of 55 in the next five years.
 - The high number of RNs retiring right now is expected to continue until at least 2020.
 - 20% of RNs and 27% of LPNs have less than 5 years of work experience.
3. Focus on clinical specialties and geographic areas that are seeing the highest levels of retirements.
4. Remove the barriers that prevent nurses from doing the work they are educated and licensed to do.

"Discharging patients from the emergency department independently has enabled me to work to full scope and has had a positive impact on how the whole team cares for patients. Our patients don't have to wait for a doctor just so they can go home."

Nikki Kelly, NP

"The Nursing Strategy Funding has helped move education along. I think it is a great way to help individuals attend education that suits their professional interests. I have been able to take part in many educational opportunities as a result, including a Palliative Care course. I am passionate about continuing education, and hope the Nursing Strategy continues to support us to fulfill our professional goals in nursing."

Heather Veinot, LPN, Valley Regional Hospital

Our key achievements since the launch of the new Nursing Strategy in May 2015:

We invested close to \$4.7 million to help the Nova Scotia Health Authority, IWK Health Centre, and continuing care employers recruit and retain nurses through nursing orientation, new graduate support, professional development, mentorship, innovative nurse-led workplace improvement projects, and co-operative student work placements. These evidence-informed initiatives contributed to some key successes:

- Kept the number of registered nurses (RNs) stable at about 10,000, despite increased retirements, by adding more new graduates to the provincial supply. We continue to invest \$8 million every year to fund additional seats at nursing schools at

Dalhousie University, St. Francis Xavier University and Cape Breton University.

- Continued to increase the number of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) working in the province to about 4,000.
- Increased the number of nurse practitioners (NPs) working in the province.
- Retained our new graduates: 96% of our new RN graduates and 95% of our new LPN graduates are employed here in Nova Scotia one year after graduation.

Twenty-two new nursing professionals (a mix of nurse practitioners and family practice nurses) will soon be joining collaborative health care teams across the province. In September 2016, the province announced it will give Nova Scotia Health Authority an extra \$3.6 million to hire these new team members. This means 14,000 more Nova Scotians will be able to get the care they need, when they need it.

Rural-Urban Mentorship Program

Under the Nursing Strategy, we committed to fund nurses' evidence-based workplace improvement ideas. In 2015, one of those great ideas came from NSHA clinical nurse educator Suzanne MacDonald: a rural mentorship program that enabled 13 nurses from rural and urban areas to switch locations for two shifts.

Ms. MacDonald began working on the mentorship program with hopes the participants would build their skills, gain clinic exposure, and develop relationships. The ultimate goal was to help retain nurses in rural areas.

What she wasn't expecting was the teambuilding the exchange produced.

"We really felt it was important that the nurses from urban centres were exposed to the challenges we face in the rural areas, like not having the same access to resources," said Ms. MacDonald. "Nurses are feeling really empowered knowing that they are being supported by nurses in other regions. They're really feeling like we are one."

The program also allowed novice nurses just coming into the workforce to have continuous support from experienced nurses throughout their first year.

Ms. MacDonald says the exchange program helps new LPN and RN graduates working in rural areas build confidence and enhance their skills and abilities.

The program received positive evaluations, which indicated that the initiative has the potential to enhance retention of nurses in rural settings. Based on this success, the rural-urban mentorship program is being offered again in 2016-17.



The first year of the Nursing Strategy

The Nursing Strategy is grounded in evidence and shaped by the experience of over 500 nurses from across the province. When we met with nurses, shared the evidence and asked them to share their knowledge, they offered us a number of suggestions.

Nurses told us...	And this is what the Nursing Strategy did...
New nurses need to be more ready to practice in today's complex health care environments	Starting in September 2016, Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University and St. Francis Xavier University began implementing modified nursing curricula that are more similar in structure and content and reflect new and emerging teaching methods. Greater use of simulation learning, concentrated clinical experiences and a 13 week final clinical practicum are key components of the changes. Together, these are expected to support new nurses to transition more easily to practice.
LPNs want fair recognition of their education and work experience if they decide to enter the BScN programs at Nova Scotia universities	We are funding up to \$20,000 to support St. Francis Xavier University and Cape Breton University to develop bridging courses for LPNs who want to work toward a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Bridging courses will start in January 2017 at St. Francis Xavier University, and 2018 at CBU.
New nurses need support transitioning from school to the workforce	The new Nursing Strategy invested \$1.4 million this year to support workplace orientation for the large numbers of new graduates entering the workforce. Educators and employers are also working together more closely to make the transition from nursing student to employed nurse smoother for new graduates.
New nurses will stay in Nova Scotia if they get permanent, full time jobs	<p>96 per cent of our new RN graduates and 95 per cent of our new LPN graduates are employed here in Nova Scotia one year after graduation.</p> <p>Nova Scotia employs 62.2 per cent of its RNs in full time positions compared to 60.8 per cent of Canadian RNs. In Nova Scotia, 55.7 per cent of LPNs have full time positions compared to 48.4 per cent in Canada.</p>

	<p>The universities are making it easier for employers to hire new RNs by graduating them sooner (accelerated BScN programs) and more often throughout the year (staggered admission and graduation times).</p> <p>To maintain a steady supply of LPNs across Nova Scotia, we've brought LPN employers and educators together to ensure new LPN graduates are available in the communities that need them.</p> <p>We provided over \$200,000 to the Internationally Educated Nurse Assessment and Bridging Program to support new immigrant nurses on the pathway to licensure in Nova Scotia. More than 90 per cent of the graduates of this program pass the RN entry to practice exam during their first writing.</p>
<p>Experienced nurses are happy that large numbers of new nurses are replenishing the workforce, but struggle to find time to mentor them</p>	<p>The Nursing Strategy included funding for experienced nurses to spend dedicated time mentoring new nurses. For example, an extra RN was made available to mentor new graduates when they worked in some of the province's critical care units.</p>
<p>Nurses want to continuously advance their knowledge</p>	<p>We invested \$1.2 million this year to support professional development for nurses in targeted areas like injury prevention, clinical leadership, team development, and improving practice environments.</p> <p>Government also continues to fund the Registered Nurse Professional Development Centre, which increased the number of specialty programs it offered to prepare nurses to work in areas like operating rooms, emergency departments and critical care units.</p>
<p>Nurses want to work in healthy, quality practice environments</p>	<p>We introduced a \$250,000 Innovation Fund to help nurses who had innovative ideas to improve their workplaces and recruit into difficult-to-fill positions. These included rural/urban nurse exchanges across the province and travelling emergency simulation learning for health care teams. Another project introduced a Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Program to reduce musculoskeletal injuries at a demonstration site at St Martha's Hospital. More work like this is scheduled for the coming year. Altogether the Nursing Strategy funded more than 40 projects.</p>
<p>They could be doing more to meet the health needs of Nova Scotians and are frustrated with the barriers they face</p>	<p>We changed the regulations under the Hospitals Act to enable nurse practitioners to discharge patients from hospitals, and enable RNs to assess, treat and release some patients in emergency rooms and collaborative emergency centres.</p>
<p>It doesn't feel like the workforce is stable in some clinical specialties and rural settings</p>	<p>We spent \$1.2 million on 176 co-operative work placements for 3rd year RN students to increase the likelihood that new graduates will remain in Nova Scotia, especially in areas of greatest health human resource need like long term care and mental health and addictions, and in rural settings.</p> <p>We also prioritized placements for Aboriginal and African Canadian students.</p> <p>Students' pay was increased this year from \$15.75/hour to \$17.95/hour.</p>

Neil's Harbour, Cheticamp and Baddeck Interprofessional Simulation Project

In August 2015, nurses and paramedics did trauma training together using mobile simulation equipment. The end goal: to better learn what each other can offer, and enhance the care they offer to patients every day.

Cindy MacQuarrie, interprofessional practice coordinator, Nova Scotia Health Authority, along with Lynn Poirier, a registered nurse from the Buchanan Memorial Community Health Center and EHS paramedic Ryan Brown, started off with two trial simulations for eight staff.

"Learning with each other leads to learning about each other," said Ms. MacQuarrie. "I was able to work collectively with the team and provoke some really critical conversations about what it is we do."

They saw a chance to improve care by helping nurses and paramedics learn to work together, especially in a remote area where there aren't as many specialists and teamwork is crucial.

After the success of the pilot, the group successfully ran the simulation project again with 38 staff, thanks to an innovation grant from the Nursing Strategy.

"We're very remote, and have unique considerations. There was a need to build the team here. The biggest thing I've noticed is how the team has strengthened," said Poirier. "I'm really proud of what they do ...I've seen it working and how positive it is."



Co-op Program

As a nursing student, Tanas Sylliboy didn't picture himself working in critical care before his co-op placement in intensive care at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital.

"It was a really intimidating field," said Sylliboy, now a registered nurse. "The thought of it kind of scared me, but my professors encouraged me and from day one I fell in love with it."

The hands-on experience built his confidence and skills. "It really opened my eyes to how important the nurse's role is in order to better a patient's outcome. You gain different tips and tricks from your mentors. Your assessment skills become more fine-tuned."

Sylliboy, along with one of his classmates, Terrance Bernard, were the first aboriginal men to graduate from Cape Breton University's nursing program in May 2015. The Eskasoni native says he was inspired to go into nursing after he interviewed doctors and nurses for a grade 12 biology assignment on First Nations health and diet.

"After my first and second year I knew...this is what I want to do for the rest of my life."



Eastern Zone Home Support Nursing Leadership Program

Helen Marsh knows firsthand that supporting employees, ensuring their safety, and building relationships with patients and families isn't as easy as it might sound.

"There are some different challenges in this work. We're not attached to the hospital, we're not part of the acute care system. You can feel isolated at times," said Ms. Marsh, executive director of New Waterford Home Care.

Marsh knew other nurse leaders who work alone in rural settings would be dealing with similar challenges. Communication with staff, colleagues and patients and their families is most often done through email or phone.

In March 2016, the Nursing Strategy's Innovation Fund provided 12 nurse leaders in home care the chance to meet in Port Hawkesbury and Sydney, to design a leadership program to help LPNs and RNs in their sector improve their leadership skills.

Three workshops were attended by 15 home care supervisors – both LPNs and RNs – from across Cape Breton. "The sessions focused on improving how employees provide care to patients and their families, strengthening teamwork, and leadership techniques targeted for our workplace," said participant Debbie Tighe, LPN.

The Provincial Nursing Network

The Department of Health and Wellness wants to recognize the contributions of the Provincial Nursing Network (PNN) in developing the Nursing Strategy. PNN is made up of nurses from across the province. It acts as a resource and advisory body for the Department of Health and Wellness. Members of the network include practicing nurses, employers,

educators, professional regulatory colleges, and unions. This diverse membership gives the network its strength and credibility to carry out its important function. The continued success of the Strategy and its initiatives is a direct result of the ongoing collaboration of its members and its relationships with key stakeholders in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

Work to do

Throughout the development of the new Nursing Strategy, nurses told us leadership is critical, and courage is required to implement the actions needed to maintain stability in the workforce. Every action in the Nursing Strategy is rooted in evidence and in the experience and expertise of nurses themselves.

Together, we have accomplished a great deal, but we know there is still work to be done, especially in some rural areas and clinical specialties.

The multifaceted nursing strategy represents a thoughtful plan to continue to recruit and retain nurses in Nova Scotia. With the help of the Provincial Nursing Network, we will continue to closely monitor nursing workforce trends, evaluate issues, and make adjustments as needed. Together we will ensure Nova Scotia has the right number, mix and distribution of nurses to care for our citizens now and into the future.

