

February 2, 2022

Hon. Anne Kang
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Room 346 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Email: AVED.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: BC's nurse shortage

Dear Minister Kang:

I write to request your leadership in undertaking the recruitment and retention strategies that are desperately required to meet your government's health-care system staffing targets. And on behalf of our more than 48,000 members, I call on you to do everything in your power to help increase the number of nursing seats in the province's post-secondary education system.

Present crisis

Our members are in crisis. Staffing levels are now so low that patient care is suffering every single day, and the over-reliance on an already fatigued resource is untenable. With so few nurses available to support the system, those working have been shouldering the unsustainable expectations for health-care delivery in the province.

We surveyed our membership in May of 2021, mid-way through the current and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, results of which have been published in our report, [*The Future of Nursing in BC: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nursing shortage in British Columbia.*](#)

Nearly 70 percent of nurses told us that staffing levels were inadequate in the three months prior to completing the survey. Fifty-one percent of nurses working in emergency departments and intensive care units said the experience of the pandemic made them more likely to leave nursing by 2023. Thirty-five percent of all nurses reported the same.

There is no doubt that BC needs more nurses – and we have for some time. Four years ago, in 2018 (the most recent year for which the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) has complete data) BC came in dead last for direct care nurses per 100,000 population in Canada.

The most recent BC Labour Market Outlook ([2019 edition](#)) notes that the province will need to hire nearly 24,000 nurses by the year 2029 to adequately staff the health-care system – a daunting number given the trajectory of our health human resources planning to date.

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic was even on our radar, the average number of total vacant nurse positions between April and September of that year was 2,238. In 2020, however, we only graduated 1,505 registered nurses into the system.

Despite the addition of these new graduates, by 2021, the average number of total vacant nurse positions during that same time period had more than doubled to 5,108 (3,995 RN/RPN, 1,185 LPNs).

Recruitment and retention

The province's ability to recruit and retain nurses is critical to improving staffing levels. Your ministry is uniquely positioned to foster the kinds of improvements necessary to give our health-care system a fighting chance. In 2018, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) reported that BC had the second-lowest average number of students enrolled in a nursing program per capita, out of all 10 provinces. In 2021, UBC's School of Nursing received 860 applications for 120 seats. Wait times to enter Douglas College's nursing program were more than a year. These statistics are simply unacceptable given the present state of our health-care system.

I am asking for an urgent commitment from you to earmark a significant amount of funding to the following priorities:

Recruitment:

- Increase the number of LPN, RN and RPN education seats in this province, to be determined in consultation with academic institutions and practice partners through a rigorous HHR planning process
- Target funding for student nurses
- Invest in educational technology to support nursing education (simulation, virtual reality, rural support)
- Expediate the process for internationally educated nurses (IENs) to be registered, and supported into practice with a standard provincial transition program

Retention:

- Develop a provincial virtual LPN-to-RN bridging program with placements hosted in the local communities
- Provide the necessary education and support to expand nurses' scope of practice
- Fund clinical mentors to provide clinical expertise to new grads and new staff, 24/7 and weekends
- Provide financial rewards and incentives to nursing preceptors /mentors

Nurses must be a part of the planning solution. BCNU is always available to assist you, as Minister of Advanced Education, fulfill the mandate provided to you by the premier, and "put people first." The above recommendations are just some of solutions that can be undertaken to confront the systemic nature of BC's nurse shortage, and I expect that you work within your budgetary authority and across ministries to support the Minister of Health in his efforts to cultivate nursing resources in our health-care system.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

BC NURSES' UNION



Aman Grewal, President

c.c. Hon. John Horgan, Premier
Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Michael McMillan, President and CEO, HEABC
Jim Gould, Interim CEO, BC Nurses' Union
Moninder Singh, Executive Lead, External Relations & Communications, BC Nurses' Union
Heather Straight, Director, Professional Practice and Advocacy, BC Nurses' Union