



**Registered
Nurses'
Union**

Newfoundland & Labrador

Via Email and Mail

December 15, 2023

Honourable Siobhan Coady
Minister of Finance
Budget 2024
Department of Finance
Main Floor, East Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Coady:

Budget 2024 Formal Submission – Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland & Labrador

I am pleased to share a formal submission to the Department of Finance outlining our recommendations for the provincial government as it seeks input into the 2024 Budget. These represent the priorities we believe the government must address to further stabilize and strengthen the nursing workforce while also safeguarding and improving access to public health care for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Background

The Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland & Labrador (RNU) represents over 5,800 frontline Registered Nurses (RN) and Nurse Practitioners (NP). We are proud to advocate for our members and to promote the nursing profession provincially. We also advocate for a high quality, publicly funded healthcare system that meets the needs of our patients throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

4 in 10 nurses are either intending to retire, leave their jobs, or leave the nursing profession entirely. ¹ Registered nurses are regularly being asked or mandated to work unsafe hours. According to WorkplaceNL, a registered nurse was hurt every two days in 2022 with a claim cost of \$.4.7M - a number that accounts only for those injuries that are reported, accepted, and paid by WorkplaceNL.

Nursing, despite the unprecedented challenges we have faced over the last few years, is still a desirable and honourable profession. Government has a responsibility to help recruit new registered nurses. There are achievable solutions to making the nursing profession more attractive and accessible.

Building off our recent collective bargaining work, RNU is looking to the provincial government to demonstrate urgent leadership to further stabilize and strengthen the nursing workforce.

¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2023) Taking the pulse: A snapshot of Canadian health care.

We are also looking to the government to stop the erosion of our public healthcare system. Now is not the time to invest in private companies. The failures revealed by COVID-19 serve as one of many cautionary tales. It's time to invest more in public healthcare and public health care workers.

Budget 2024 presents government with a critical opportunity to build on recent investments in our public healthcare system with focused and strategic supports that address the key concerns of the nursing profession and improves access to primary health care for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Our recommendations for the 2024 provincial budget, included in this package, are integral to providing stability and strength to publicly funded, publicly delivered healthcare.

Sincerely,



Yvette Coffey, RN
President
Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland and Labrador

Recommendation #1: Provide safe hours of work regulations

The reliance on excessive overtime to address staff shortages predates the pandemic, but it has worsened since. According to a national survey, 40% of nurses work overtime at least once a week.²

In Newfoundland and Labrador, registered nurses are regularly expected to work shifts of 16 to 24 hours. Research shows that excess hours of continuous work impact nurse fatigue. Fatigue has been shown to have effects like those from alcohol intoxication³ and poses long-term health effects on individuals.⁴ Long work hours have also been linked to work-related injury in nurses, contributing to nurse absenteeism, and costing our healthcare system millions of dollars.

The Nursing Think Tank facilitated by EngageNL in 2022 also identified key concerns around the amount of overtime being done by nurses. Its report determined that there must be a reduction or elimination of mandatory overtime.

Furthermore, evidence demonstrates the link between fatigue and safety incidents in health care.⁵ Canadian data shows the rate of hospital harm has gone up from pre-pandemic rates. In 2021-22, one in 17 hospital stays involved at least one harmful event.⁶ Patients should receive safe care.

There are existing regulations on safe hours of work for employees in male-dominated safety-sensitive industries such as aviation and transport. In the interest of public safety, these types of safeguards must be implemented for registered nurses.

Recommendation #2: Address workplace violence and injury

For years governments have seen and realized the value of improving safety in the workplace. Often in response to increased injury in various fields such as manufacturing and processing, governments have initiated safety councils.

Workplace NL statistics show staggering levels of injury within the Healthcare and Social Services industry. In 2022, 4.4 workers were injured every workday and \$44M was accrued in claim costs.

There is a demonstrated need for a Health Sector Safety Council. The Nursing Think Tank noted this need.

² CFNU Member Survey, Summary Report, January 2022, https://nursesunions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Viewpoints_Survey_Results_2022_January_EN_FINAL-1.pdf

³ Caruso, C. C., Baldwin, C. M., Berger, A., Chasens, E. R., Edmonson, J. C., Gobel, B. H., ... & Tucker, S. (2019). Policy brief: Nurse fatigue, sleep, and health, and ensuring patient and public safety. *Nursing outlook*, 67(5), 615-619.

⁴ Caruso, C. C. (2014). Negative impacts of shiftwork and long work hours. *Rehabilitation nursing*, 39(1), 16-25.

⁵ Lo, W.-Y., Chiou, S.-T., Huang, N., & Chien, L.-Y. (2016). Long work hours and chronic insomnia are associated with needlestick and sharps injuries among hospital nurses in Taiwan: A national survey. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 64, 130-136.

⁶ Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2022). *Patient harm in Canadian hospitals? It does happen.*

While we are disappointed that government would not agree to the creation of a Health Sector Safety Council during our recent collective agreement negotiations, we appreciate the government signaling it was open to the development of a council.

We are calling on the government to invest in the implementation of a new Health Sector Safety Council that will, among other things, provide safety guidance, training, tools, materials, programs, and other supports designed to improve workplace safety.

Violence has long been a problem that registered nurses and other healthcare professionals face, yet little has been done to address this. A healthcare worker was injured by violence every 2.7 days in 2022. Assaults and violent acts injury rate in our sector is 3.9 times higher than the provincial rate.⁷ Only 37% of registered nurses feel safe at work. We cannot keep delaying dealing with this danger.

We are also calling on the government to invest in upgrading healthcare infrastructure to protect healthcare workers and to fund training for violence prevention programs. This includes such things as, but not limited to, devices linked to security, personal alarms, security de-escalation training, flagging of patients with a history of violence, public awareness programs designed to educate patients, etc.

Recommendation #3: Improve access to primary health care

The Health Accord for NL⁸ noted in its blueprint that NPs must be enabled to provide all the primary care within their scope of practice, and to provide on-call services as required.

It also recommends centralizing patient intake with NP-led rapid access clinics to expand ambulatory access to cardiac care, including heart failure. These clinics should allow NPs to work at the full scope of their practice.

Action 9 of the Accord recommended the development and implementation of a formal Provincial Frail Elderly program to address the needs of our aging population. It calls for 60 geriatric-educated NPs who will be distributed across regional centres and community teams. We call on the government to make this a priority in the upcoming budget.

We call on government to develop a funding model that allows for the creation of NP-led clinics in rural and remote areas of our province.

Recommendation #4: Eliminate private nursing agencies

Over the last year, the government has spent more than \$18M on private agency nurses in comparison to just over \$4M on RNs and NPs already employed in the public healthcare system.

This redirecting of precious healthcare dollars away from the public healthcare system and into the pockets of private companies is irresponsible and unsustainable.

⁷ [Health Care and Social Services - Industry Fact Sheets 2022 \(workplacenc.ca\)](https://workplacenc.ca/site/uploads/2023/05/Health-Care-Social-Services-2022.pdf) - <https://workplacenc.ca/site/uploads/2023/05/Health-Care-Social-Services-2022.pdf>

⁸ Health Accord of Newfoundland and Labrador: <https://www.healthaccordnl.ca/final-reports/>

Relying on private agencies does not make things better. As a matter of fact, it typically results in compromised quality of care as a private company measures its success in cutting costs and corners. A public healthcare system, in contrast, measures its success in the outcomes of its patients.

To ensure public dollars are spent efficiently and in support of registered nurses loyal to their public employer, RNU calls on the government to implement caps on the number of hours available to private agency nurses and on their salary.

Recommendation #5: Eliminate clinical internship fees for Nursing students

Many male-dominated professions, such as engineering, pay students for their internships. The rationale is these students are bringing value to the workplace. We agree students bring value to their workplaces.

Yet, nursing students, traditionally female-dominated, are expected to pay the employer for the opportunity to complete a clinical internship. This is unfair. The practice is archaic. It places unnecessary financial stress on students. It also represents a barrier to recruiting people to the nursing profession.⁹

We are calling on the government to bring nursing internships in line with other professions and to eliminate fees for clinical internships. It's time to pay nursing students for the work they provide to our public healthcare system.

We also call on government to do more to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion by applying a Gender-based Analysis Plus¹⁰ lens to all its decisions, initiatives, programs, and investments.

⁹ Head, Jenna, (2023, July 17). *Could paid work terms help solve the Newfoundland and Labrador nursing shortage? Full-time unpaid clinical placements are a deal-breaker for some: nurse*, The Telegram. <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/could-paid-work-terms-help-solve-the-newfoundland-and-labrador-nursing-shortage-100874225/>

¹⁰ Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus), Government of Canada, <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus.html>