

# **Promising practices to support retention of the healthcare workforce in northern, rural and remote communities in Canada**

If you are looking for promising practices used in northern, rural, and remote communities in Canada to improve access to safe, high-quality, team-based primary care, then this promising practice will be of interest to you.

# Nursing Practice Council – An Approach to Engage and Retain Staff in Manitoba’s Northern Health Region

## What is the promising practice?

A key strategy to engage and retain nursing staff in Manitoba’s northern health region has been to establish a Nursing Practice Council (NPC). The Northern Regional Health Authority’s NPC was established in 2015, stemming back to recommendations made in 1995, that nurses needed a forum to collaborate with leadership to help monitor, evaluate and make recommendations pertaining to the nursing profession within the hospital setting. The NPC serves as a structured, safe environment through which nurses can report clinical concerns, incidents, issues and make recommendations to improve nursing practice without the risk of professional reprisal. Nurses with any license type are eligible participants, including Registered Nurses (RN’s); Nurse Practitioners (NP’s); Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN’s); Registered Practical Nurses (RPN’s); and Registered Psychiatric Nurses.

## Context

The Northern Regional Health Authority (NRHA) is the governing body responsible for healthcare delivery and regulation for Manitoba’s northern health region (excluding Churchill). NRHA spans nearly two-thirds of the province, covering the largest geographical area of the five health regions in Manitoba. The NRHA was formed in 2012, through the amalgamation of two Manitoba health authorities (Nor-Man and Burntwood). As a result, many policies, procedures, and guidelines including documentation varied across sites. The NPC has been (and continues to be) instrumental in standardizing policies, procedures, guidelines and practices across the NRHA.

## Key messages and components of the promising practice

- The NPC serves as a structured, safe environment through which nurses can report clinical concerns, incidents, issues and make recommendations to improve nursing practice without risk of professional reprisal.
- The goals of the NPC are:
  - To ensure the health of the patient or client by advancing the profession of nursing through the development of exceptional professional practice.
  - To model, support and maintain professional nursing practice within the northern health region.
  - To promote quality nursing care, particularly for the northern client, within a healthy workplace to ensure a positive difference in patient and community outcomes.

- To formalize the centrality of nursing within the organization and position nursing practice at the heart of the healthcare team wherever nursing is practiced within the NPC.
- With respect to governance and executive leadership, the work of the NPC is approved via a Nursing Leadership Council (NLC). The Nursing Leadership Council is chaired by an executive (the Chief Nursing Officer) and therefore, non-monetary practice changes brought forward by the NPC can be approved by the NLC.
- Nurses select its NPC membership, as representatives of the hospital's governing body.
- The NPC helped to inform a 2022 Manitoba Nurses Retention Survey asking Manitoba nurses to identify factors that have positive and negative effects on nurse retention.
- Membership of the NPC includes:
  - Co-chairs, who are practicing front-line nurses from each of the three northern areas within the health region (Flin Flon, Thompson, and the Pas).
  - Approximately 40 nurses from each of the three northern areas within the health region. The NPC is open to all nurses, and any nurse who joins is a voting member and is compensated.
  - Ex-Officio members include Allied Health Practice Council Chair, Medical Advisory Council Chair, Clinical Advisory Co-Chairs, and the Organization Staff Development Director.
- The agenda has been standardized and includes agenda items that focus on nursing recruitment and retention and associated funding and project work.
- A nursing staff member is responsible for taking meeting minutes.

### **The results: How do we know retention is improving?**

Although there has been no direct analysis to identify whether the NPC is associated with increased retention of nurses, improvement in job satisfaction and greater engagement of nurses through NPC activities may have contributed to improved retention.

Other outcomes of the NPC that are expected to have a positive impact on retention include:

- The work of the NPC has led to improved quality of care for patients (for example, the NPC played an important role in shaping and supporting infection prevention and control practices during the pandemic; and creating a new patient documentation process for the NRHA that improved safety and quality of care).
- Creates processes for front-line staff to identify and adopt evidence-based nursing practices.
- Identifies gaps and challenges in nursing practice and devises solutions and practices to resolve the challenges.
- Creates a forum for nurses to share their expertise, contribute to decision-making and increase communication and collaboration among nurses, leadership and other clinicians (for example medical and allied health professionals).

- Provides an opportunity for nurses to develop leadership and clinical skills, which can support professional growth and career development.

The NPC also helped inform a 2022 Manitoba Nurses Retention Survey asking Manitoba nurses to identify factors that encouraged nurses to remain, and factors that had an impact on a decision to leave a current nursing position. The survey ran from December 2, 2021, to December 22, 2021; 207 responses were received from a total of 398 potential respondents (52 percent response rate) within the NHR. The survey results are helping to inform a provincial recruitment and retention strategy, which the NPC will help advise and action.

Example survey questions and top responses included:

- “Given the current situation in healthcare what factors encourage you to remain in your position as a nurse?”
  - the location I work at is convenient for me (80.5 percent)
  - my knowledge is valued by team members (74.3 percent)
  - my relationships with other clinicians (74 percent)
  - ongoing education helps me feel confident in my job (72.5 percent)
  - I feel respected by my colleagues (72.1 percent)
  - my schedule works for me (71.8 percent)
  - my knowledge and skill set are fully utilized (69.6 percent)
  - the team environment is collaborative (67.7 percent)
- “Which of the following factors might have an impact on a decision to leave your current job?”
  - not enough staff per shift to care for patients (70.3 percent)
  - amount of overtime is excessive (57.0 percent)
  - physical workspace is not appropriate (49.1 percent)
  - my rotation does not meet my needs (44.9 percent)
  - I do not feel ongoing education and training is sufficient for the role (43.9 percent)
  - I do not feel supported in my role (42.1 percent)

## What do the staff think?

- “Nursing practice council (NPC) was developed in hopes that nurse's voices would be heard and collectively have a say in safe client care. Being a part of NPC allows me a forum where I have input and influence. I feel NPC is a privilege.”
- “NPC has allowed me to meet nurses from other areas and places within our region and I learn from everyone that sits at the table. NPC not only helps create connections with other nurses, it keeps me up-to-date with changes within our region.”
- “NPC is now more important than ever as challenges in healthcare are not going away, and those challenges will affect northern health and northern nursing for years and years

to come. NPC are nursing leaders that motivate me to persevere in a climate that sometimes feels overwhelming and hopeless.”

- “NPC influences retention for nurses as safe client care and mutual respect among team members will always keep nurses coming to work.”
- “I am an experienced nurse and long-time employee of the NHR. When an organization has experienced nurses who stay and grow within the organization, you ultimately deliver better patient care, optimize patient safety and collaboratively have better patient outcomes. Our NHR provides a rewarding environment for nurses to work in and delivers prospects to our nursing community to be active participants with opportunities to grow and be heard which ... [results in] greater career satisfaction. It is gratifying to be able to have a voice in patient care delivery, patient safety and how we, as a committee, a community and a region, can support the growth and development of our daily nursing practice and advance our patients’ safety.”

### Example key success factors

<b>Front-line nurse engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front-line nurses from throughout the region are members of the NPC.</li> <li>• Nurses have a safe environment to report issues, concerns and incidents.</li> <li>• Front-line nurses are engaged in the promotion and advancement of nursing practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Engaged leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership participation allows for good communication among nurses at all levels of the organization.</li> <li>• The Executive Leadership Council, the health authority’s governing body, includes a nurse representative.</li> <li>• Nursing and other leaders jointly problem-solve with front-line nurses. Those leaders also support decisions that are made by the NPC. This leads to increased autonomy and accountability of the nursing profession.</li> </ul>
<b>Nurses have a key role in decision-making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front-line nursing staff are a key part of the decision-making on nursing practice issues.</li> <li>• Front-line nurses raise, discuss and problem solve clinical and other (for example culture) issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Regular meetings and a structured agenda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment and retention are standing agenda items.</li> <li>• Regular meetings help to ensure nursing practice and other issues are addressed in a timely manner.</li> </ul>

### Next Steps

NPC will continue to:

- Meet regularly and iterate the NPC activities to improve its function.

- Address the clinical and other issues raised by front-line nurses.
- Discuss and make recommendations on recruitment and retention.
- Identify and support opportunities to advance nursing practice within the organization.
- Work towards cultural safety and to combat racism in all patient encounters in accordance with our regional anti-racism strategy.

### **For more information**

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