

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.

Roadmap to Strengthen the Nunavut Nursing Workforce

What is the promising practice?

A key strategy to promote retention of the health workforce in Nunavut has been to engage staff from across the territory to identify retention challenges and solutions and develop a workplan with associated strategic priorities and actions.

Key Messages and components of the promising practice

- The ability to recruit and retain a skilled, stable, culturally appropriate nursing workforce in Nunavut is critical to meeting the health needs of the residents of Nunavut. (Nunavut residents are also referred to as Nunavummiut.)
- It was essential to develop a plan to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce in close collaboration with staff from across the territory who could best identify challenges, solutions and a long-term strategy to help retain and better support the workforce. The plan to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce was informed by both research and extensive engagement with staff, namely:
 - Successes and challenges from the previous Nunavut Nursing Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2007).
 - Peer and grey literature review.
 - Environmental scan of retention and recruitment strategies used in similar rural, remote and isolated regions across Canada and the globe.
 - Consultations with staff and other key stakeholder groups including but not limited to:
 - Nunavut nurses and nurse practitioners (NPs) in various settings and positions
 - Nunavut nursing leaders (for example supervisor of health programs, directors)
 - Nunavut Arctic College nursing students
 - Government of Nunavut (GN) department of Health Human Resources (HR) staff
 - First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) staff at Indigenous Services Canada
- Results of the research and engagement were analyzed and the findings were formulated into a draft plan to strengthen the nursing workforce, with strategic pillars and priorities, initiatives and actions. The draft plan was brought back to Nunavut nurses in the form of an online survey for their feedback. The 100 Nunavut nurses who responded to the survey indicated a very high level of support for the roadmap. The roadmap was

then finalized by the Nunavut Nursing Leadership Advisory Committee (NLAC) and Health HR staff.

- The roadmap considers and is responsive to the challenges specific to the personal and professional needs and aspirations of nursing professionals in Nunavut.
- The roadmap includes specific goals, strategies and actions with relevant metrics to measure progress and evaluate outcomes.
- To develop a year one work plan, the NLAC:
 - participated in a brainstorming session to identify existing related projects or initiatives
 - identified possible additional priority projects or initiatives and their leads for each of the actions
 - completed a prioritization and feasibility exercise
 - outlined a project management approach and tools to be used for all new projects under the roadmap
 - allocated time on their monthly agenda for year one individual project status reporting
 - allocated time on their agenda for quarterly review of the overall status of all year one projects, initiatives and evaluation dashboard

Context

Nurses form the largest part of Nunavut's health workforce. Approximately 300 nurses (registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, licensed practical nurses and NPs) provide management and direct nursing care in community health centres, hospitals, and long term care facilities in Nunavut's 25 fly-in only communities. The ability to recruit and retain a skilled, stable and culturally appropriate nursing workforce in Nunavut is critical to meeting Nunavummiut health needs. However, the ability to do so has become increasingly difficult given the global and national nursing shortage combined with Nunavut's remoteness, limited availability of housing, extreme weather conditions, etc. That is why it is essential to develop a plan to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce for years to come.

Results: The roadmap to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce

The Roadmap to Strengthen the Nunavut Nursing Workforce (2021 to 2026) provides visual and detailed information about the framework for the roadmap and its associated actions. As outlined in the action plans found in the report, Table 1 and 2 demonstrate how the roadmap is:

- Grounded by the GN department of Health mission, vision and strategic goal to have a competent, sufficient, stable, appropriate and well-supported health workforce.
- Driven by strategic pillars that represent strategic priorities.
- Associated with a number of strategic initiatives and associated actions that will work to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce.

Table 1: Mission, vision, strategic goals and strategic pillars that provide the basis for the roadmap to strengthen the Nunavut nursing workforce.

Mission: Through collaboration, innovation, and integration of Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit, we will provide excellent healthcare services that empower Nunavummiut to live healthy lives				
Vision: Healthy Nunavummiut (Nunavut citizens)				
Strategic goal 1: Competent, sufficient, stable, appropriate and well-supported health workforce				
Strategic pillar 1: workforce planning and evaluation Supports strategic priority to promote a stable nursing workforce.	Strategic Pillar 2: recruitment Supports strategic priority to attract, select and engage highly skilled and motivated nurses and nurse practitioners.	Strategic pillar 3: professional development Supports strategic priority to strengthen the capacity of the Nunavut nursing workforce.	Strategic pillar 4: professional practice environment Supports strategic priority to create a positive, safe and healthy workplace.	Strategic pillar 5: leadership Supports strategic priority to support and develop nursing leadership.

Table 2: Strategic pillars (and the associated strategic priorities) and associated strategic initiatives are in place to achieve the goals of the roadmap; the number of associated actions for each strategic initiative is in referenced in Table 1, with further detail in the linked report.

Pillar	Strategic Initiative
1. Workforce planning and evaluation Supports strategic priority to promote a stable nursing workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a regular, consistent proactive approach to workforce planning (six associated actions). Reduce the time to post and fill nursing vacancies (four associated actions). Assess the appropriateness of existing models of care, nursing roles and nurse practitioner staffing levels to meet current and forecasted community population health needs (population size, health status and service delivery) (four associated actions). Evaluate the effectiveness of the roadmap (six associated actions).
2. Recruitment Supports strategic priority to attract, select and engage highly skilled and motivated nurses and nurse practitioners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance nursing recruitment efforts (six associated actions). Increase the number of Inuit nurses and NPs (seven associated actions). Create a welcoming environment for all new nurse and NP hires and agency staff (three associated actions). Examine HR practices, policies, and resources as it pertains to nurse recruitment and hiring (three associated actions). Establish competitive nursing salaries and benefits (four associated actions).
3. Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support a culture that values learning and education (nine associated actions).

Pillar	Strategic Initiative
Supports strategic priority to strengthen the capacity of the Nunavut nursing workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect and encourage good performance (five associated actions). • Implement a nurse residency program (three associated actions).
4. Professional practice environment Supports strategic priority to create a positive, safe and healthy workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create flexible work arrangements (five associated actions) • Provide professional resources to support nurses and NPs to work to their optimal scope of practice (six associated actions). • Recognize nursing excellence (two associated actions). • Support new nursing hires (one associated action).
5. Leadership Supports strategic priority to support and develop nursing leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a nursing leadership strategy (two associated actions). • Identify and develop future nurse and NP leaders (three associated actions). • Support senior health professionals, managers and directors (three associated actions).

What do the staff think?

- “I think the supportive actions are an excellent idea. Flexibility is imperative in retaining nurses for long term!”
- “Support in your workplace is the key to happy and productive employees if you are able to voice your concerns and feel someone is listening and doing something, that boosts morale.”
- “Work-life balance is very difficult in the north; health centres need to be better equipped to support staff.”
- “Supportive education is important.”
- “It would be nice to see benefits and more bonuses for full-time indeterminate nurses so there is more appeal to stay and provide a consistent and regular service for the community.”
- “Support job-share positions.”

Key Success Factors

- Health leadership supporting initiative as a priority.
- High level of engagement of nurses themselves from across the territory.
- Shared decision-making on the guiding principles, pillars, priorities, initiatives and actions.

- Evidence-informed – learnings from other remote areas of Canada and the world.

What were the major challenges?

- Staying informed of all new projects and initiatives that may relate to the roadmap.
- Maintaining roadmap implementation momentum amidst ongoing nurse staffing challenges, COVID-19, etc.
- Modifying information systems to capture evaluation indicator data.
- Regular reporting of evaluation data.

Next Steps:

- Publish a roadmap year one progress report.
- Prepare year two workplan.
- Continue to enhance data collection on evaluation indicator.

Measuring progress (how do we know retention is improving?)

A comprehensive evaluation framework was developed, comprised of structural, process and outcome indicators for each roadmap pillar. A feasibility study of collecting quality data for each indicator was also conducted. In some cases, enhancements or revisions to information systems or new data collection was required. Other indicators remain a work in progress. Based on the specific indicator, data is collected monthly, quarterly, biannually or annually.

A preliminary dashboard has been created and is presented quarterly at NLAC, which has oversight responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the roadmap's progress and its impact on achieving its goals.

Retention specific indicators include:

- Annual indeterminate turnover rate by nurse position.
- Annual casual turnover rate by nurse position.
- Six-month new hire retention rate.
- One-, two- and three-year new hire retention rates.

For more information

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