



June 4, 2021

To: The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA)
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6
Canada

HUMA@parl.gc.ca
via email

Re: The Impacts of COVID-19 and Worker Shortages on Seniors Living in Care

Dear Honourable Members,

On behalf of the BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the significant impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our seniors population. As the leading voice for non-government long-term care providers in British Columbia, BCCPA is well positioned to identify the tragic impacts that COVID-19 has had on seniors, and where the opportunities for further investment lie. This examination is critically important as we seek to protect our elders living in long-term care.

It is estimated that 69%-81% of all COVID-19 related deaths in Canada were among seniors living in care.^{i,ii} The Canadian Armed Forces—brought in to support long-term care homes in Quebec and Ontario—reported that while older adults were dying of coronavirus, others were dying from a lack of basic care.ⁱⁱⁱ

While many complex historical and systemic factors contributed to this disaster, underpinning it all is a persistent and acute health human resource (HHR) crisis. Chronic staffing shortages in Canada's long-term care sector were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as many essential workers walked off the job for fear of contracting the virus or bringing it home to their families. Responding to this staffing emergency, the federal government brought in the Canadian Armed Forces, chiefly to facilities in Quebec and Ontario where the basic needs of seniors were not being met.

With the media spotlight on the long-term care sector, the federal government has made several critical investments in the sector, while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdiction over seniors' care provision. While these announcements by the federal government have been welcomed by the sector, further investment is required in order to protect Canadian seniors, particularly as the HHR shortage is only expected to become more acute with rapid population aging.

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In this vein, BCCPA has identified five federal human resources announcements with the potential for further, long-term development, in consultation with the seniors' care and living sector:

1) **Personal Protective Equipment**

Access to PPE was a critical gap in the early weeks and months of the pandemic. The federal government stepped in to help supply PPE to health care organizations through their P/T governments. These efforts initially prioritized acute care hospitals at the expense of organizations caring for vulnerable seniors, including long-term care homes, assisted living residences and home health organizations. Lack of PPE in seniors' care settings contributed significantly to outbreaks, and ultimately to the tragic death toll that COVID-19 has had on our seniors' population.

2) **Temporary Pandemic Pay**

On May 7, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a \$4 billion fund to boost the pay of essential workers.^{iv} BCCPA applauds the intention to recognize the value and dedication of our essential workers. However, the implementation of the policy by provincial jurisdictions was flawed and inequitable. In BC, for example, the only continuing care workers who were eligible were those in the publicly subsidized sector; no workers in the private care sector were eligible, despite the fact that these workers faced the same public health risks, and care for the same clinically vulnerable population. While well-intentioned, this initiative inadvertently created a two-tier system among workers.

3) **Personal Support Worker (PSW) / Health Care Aide (HCA) Interns**

On December 20, 2020, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion announced \$23.2 million in funding for Colleges and Institutes Canada to develop and implement an accelerated online program to train approximately 4,000 new personal support worker interns^v (known as health care aides in British Columbia). These investments are an important recognition of the need for additional staff in long-term care. Unfortunately, due to varying education standards for unregulated personal support workers across Canada, several provinces are unable to participate in this program. For example, B.C. is not able to take part or benefit from these investments in health human resources, as the training developed by the Federal government does not meet the standards set by the provincial government. Future training programs must acknowledge that the minimum educational requirements for unregulated care workers varies by jurisdiction.

4) **Credential Recognition for International Nurses**

On May 12, 2021, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, announced over \$2.3 million for three projects to support nurses to have their credentials recognized within Canada sooner.^{vi} These announcements seek to address the critical shortage of nurses within Canada. In addition to these projects, there is an opportunity to improve Canada's credential recognition process for internationally-educated nurses, which is currently

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bureaucratic, time consuming, costly and largely decentralized.^{vii} A Canada-wide approach to credential recognition for nurses is needed, rather than 13 provincial and territorial processes.

5) Temporary Pathway to Permanent Residency

On April 14, 2021, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced a new pathway to permanent residence for over 90,000 essential workers and international graduates who are actively contributing to Canada's economy, including 20,000 applications for temporary workers in health care. The pathway encourages essential workers, who possess the skills and experience we need to fight the pandemic and accelerate our economic recovery, to put down roots in Canada. This is a critical step in the right direction, and one that must be followed by a fully-realized immigration strategy that makes Canada a destination of choice for health care professionals. The temporary pathway announced by the government is a laudable interim measure, but more must be done to address the demand for workers created by Canada's aging population on a long-term basis.

6) Redesign of National Occupational Code (NOC) 2021

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has announced that they are making changes to the National Occupational Code (NOC) classifications, by introducing a new categorization representing the degree of Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities (TEER) required for an occupation.^{viii} BCCPA welcomes these changes, as the new TEER system acknowledges that PSWS, with their education and training, are skilled workers. BCCPA recommends that these changes be fast tracked and put into implementation by IRCC, as any delay could potentially exacerbate the sector's recruitment challenges.

I welcome the opportunity to engage further on the issues outlined in this letter. Should you have any questions regarding this issue, I would be happy to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Terry Lake
CEO, BCCPA and EngAge BC

About BC Care Providers Association & EngAge BC

Established in 1977, BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) is the leading voice for B.C.'s continuing care sector. Our growing membership base includes over 425 long-term care, assisted living, and commercial members from across British Columbia. Through its operating arm EngAge BC the organization represents independent living and home health service providers.

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END NOTES

ⁱ Canadian Institute for Health Information. The Impact of COVID-19 on Long-Term Care in Canada: Focus on the First 6 Months. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2021.

ⁱⁱ National Institute on Ageing. (2021). The NIA's Recommended 'Titanium Ring' for Protecting Older Canadians in Long-Term Care and Congregate Living Settings. Toronto, ON: National Institute on Ageing Guidance Document.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carter, Adam. Military report reveals what sector has long known: Ontario's nursing homes are in trouble. Toronto, ON. CBC. May 27, 2020.

^{iv} <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/05/07/prime-minister-announces-agreements-boost-wages-essential-workers>

^v <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/12/government-of-canada-announces-funding-to-train-4000-personal-support-worker-interns-support-sector.html>

^{vi} [Government of Canada helps internationally trained nurses get their foreign credentials recognized and find quality jobs \(newswire.ca\)](#)

^{vii} Jeans, Mary Ellen et al. (2005). Navigating to Become a Nurse in Canada: Assessment of International Nurse Applicants: Final Report. Ottawa, Ontario. Canadian Nurses Association. May 2005.

^{viii} Statistics Canada (2020). Notice of Release – Redesign of the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2021. Employment and Social Development Canada. 2020-11-05.

[Notice of Release – Redesign of the National Occupational Classification \(NOC\) 2021 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

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