



CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF NURSES UNIONS  
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE  
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES  
ET INFIRMIERS

**Standing Committee on Finance**

**Written Submission  
for the Pre-Budget Consultations  
in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

**By the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions**

***A Federal Health Care Budget***

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. That the government immediately take action on the health care workforce crisis, including ensuring appropriate staffing and health and safety protections.**
- 2. That the government accelerate the timeline for the implementation of national, public, single-payer pharmacare laid out by the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare.**
- 3. That the government provide significant new investments to overhaul Canada's approach to long-term care and home care going forward, based on enforceable principles.**
- 4. That the government ensure the future sustainability of Canada's health care system by increasing the federal share of health care funding from 22% to 35% through the Canada Health Transfer.**
- 5. That the government introduce new mental health supports and ensure that they are readily accessible to everyone in Canada.**

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) thanks the federal government for its invitation to contribute to the development of the 2022 Budget. It is our hope that our submission will help to inform the government's reflection on a healthy recovery for Canada.

As COVID-19 vaccine doses continue to roll out across the country, the 2022 Budget represents a unique opportunity for the federal government to meaningfully address the deep-rooted problems and gaps in Canada's health care system. Years of underinvestment and privatization have led to a crisis of staffing, care and funding that demands your immediate intervention.

The CFNU proposes the following recommendations for a 2022 Health Care Budget to address top priorities for frontline health care workers.

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### **Supporting nurses**

With over 100,000 vacancies reported in the health care and social assistance sector at the end of 2020 – an increase of 56 percent from the previous year – the health care workforce is at a breaking point.

In virtually every part of the country, there simply aren't enough frontline staff to fill much-needed positions, assist in critical surgeries, or provide care for vulnerable seniors. Among the nursing workforce, vacancies often remain unfilled for 90 days or more.

Nurses are staggering under the weight of intolerable workloads, rampant workplace violence and the fear of a potential lack of personal protective equipment. These conditions are having an alarming negative impact on nurses' mental and physical health and jeopardizing Canada's ability to sustain its health care system into the future.

In a national study undertaken before the pandemic, 83 percent of Canada's nurses reported that regular core health staffing levels in their workplace were insufficient to meet patient needs. The same study found that over 90 percent of nurses experienced symptoms of burnout.

Similarly, 70 percent of participants reported worsening mental health during the pandemic in a survey conducted in late 2020, *Impacts of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers: Infection Prevention and Control*.

Respondents who worked in direct contact with confirmed or presumed cases of COVID-19 and those who were subject to limits on the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) were more affected than others.

In another national pre-pandemic study, a staggering 60 percent of nurses expressed an intention to leave their jobs within the next year. Following the onset of COVID-19, Canada's nurses reported that their average weekly overtime hours increased by 78 percent, compared to the previous year.

As the pandemic unfolded, nurses faced significant new challenges due to increased risk of infection, high workloads and concerns about PPE supply, but few resources exist for health care workers to access the mental health assistance they need in these challenging times. This situation is likely contributing to the ongoing exodus of nurses out of the profession.

The federal government can support Canada's nurses by acting immediately on the following priorities that will assist our health care system in retaining frontline workers and ensuring that we are planning appropriately for the current and future needs of our population:

- Introducing a national moratorium on reducing nursing hours in all health sectors;
- Providing federal funding to immediately hire more nurses, as well as implement new retention and recruitment programs;
- Establishing a federal health workforce agency to provide enhanced data to inform appropriate and sufficient health care staffing levels;
- Reinstating the role of federal Chief Nursing Officer to advocate for and assist in coordinating effective nursing policy both in Canada and internationally;
- Establishing a federal worker safety agency to introduce guidelines, policies and strategies to protect health workers;
- Maintaining and effectively managing a national stockpile of personal protective equipment – with strengthened domestic supply chains; and
- Addressing violence against health care workers by enacting legislation with more serious penalties, and funding violence-prevention infrastructure in health care facilities across the country.

## **Pharmacare**

Significant data shows that a national, universal, public and single-payer pharmacare program would both contribute to the future well-being of people in Canada and save billions of dollars per year through the negotiating power of a single national buyer. Such a measure is especially critical at this time when so many Canadians have lost their jobs and benefits in the midst of a global pandemic.

The federal government's Dr. Eric Hoskins-led Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare provides a clear blueprint to establish this critically needed program. Sadly, however, Canada has failed to act on the findings of the Advisory Council and the modest timelines included therein.

With the need for urgency in mind, Canada's nurses hope to see the federal government rapidly accelerate its initial timeline for implementation of the following key measures:

- Fully establishing the Canadian Drug Agency in 2022 to assess prescription drugs and negotiate prices for a national formulary;
- Introducing federal legislation in 2022 that is based on negotiations with provinces and territories;
- Implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Council and launching national pharmacare in 2022 by providing universal coverage for essential medicines; and
- Introducing a comprehensive drug formulary by January 1, 2025, ahead of the original 2027 timeline, to ensure that it is fully implemented within a future government's mandate.

## Seniors' care

For years, the CFNU and allied health advocates have pressed governments for urgent action on seniors' care. Our country's march toward privatization in long-term care and home care have eroded both working conditions and the quality of care offered to residents. Health care units are currently short-staffed across the country, and without intervention, Canada will simply be unequipped to respond to the future demographic shifts brought on by our rapidly aging population.

The catastrophic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to the avoidable deaths of thousands of seniors is impossible to ignore, and it demands bold and decisive federal leadership.

Canada's approach to long-term care and home care is in desperate need of transformative change. The federal government has an opportunity to reimagine how we care for seniors by implementing the following recommendations that will help to ensure high-quality care and optimal working conditions in the future:

- Introduce federal legislation to bring long-term care into the public system and regulate it in accordance with the principles of the *Canada Health Act*;
- Establish a pan-Canadian framework of enforceable national standards for long-term care, creating conditions for provinces and territories to obtain federal funding;
- Eliminate for-profit business from the long-term care sector, with a moratorium on private-sector ownership going forward and the gradual phasing out of existing long-term care facilities from private to public (or not-for-profit) ownership;
- Require appropriate health and safety protections for workers and staffing levels, establishing a minimum of 4.5 hours of direct care per resident each day, with a minimum of 45 percent of care provided by licensed nurses and at least one Registered Nurse (RN) per shift. Where resident acuity is higher, staffing should be increased accordingly;
- Provide full-time jobs, and match wages and benefits for long-term care workers to the value of the work they perform; and
- Create a new long-term care insurance (LTI) benefit through the Canada Pension Plan and Quebec Pension Plan, which would support a continuum of services from home care to institutional long-term care, as similarly exists in Germany, Japan and the Netherlands. For those with a limited work history, an LTC benefit should be added to Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement payments.

## Federal health funding

A stable and sustainable health care system that is responsive to current and future health challenges depends on robust and reliable funding. As health care costs soar across the country, Canada Health Transfer (CHT) payments are increasingly insufficient to cover critical services.

The CFNU has advocated for a minimum increase to the CHT from the current 3 percent to 5.2 percent year-over-year to match population growth, aging, inflation and income growth. Currently, the federal government pays roughly 22 percent of the overall cost of delivering health care. Premiers are aligned in their call for an increase to the federal share of health care funding to 35 percent going forward.

Canada’s nurses believe that the federal government must commit to the future sustainability of our public health care system by boosting its share of health care spending. We urge you to:

- Fund a minimum of 35 percent of total health care costs currently covered under the CHT;
- Work with the provinces and territories to ensure that these funds are directed toward publicly administered and publicly delivered health care, with appropriate accountability mechanisms in place.

### **Mental health**

This pandemic should be a wake-up call for us in recognizing the impact of mental health challenges on individuals, families, workplaces and economies, as well as understanding that crucial mental health services are still inaccessible in many communities. Access to new supports will be increasingly essential as we experience the lingering effects of the pandemic on our collective mental health.

The CFNU echoes the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health’s (CAMIMH) call for the following actions to ensure that these services are readily available across the country:

- Work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to fund and implement sustainable evidence-based mental health services and supports to respond to the increased demand for mental health care for all Canadians.
- Increase the federal government’s cash contribution to the provinces and territories by a minimum of \$277.5 million per year to improve timely access to mental health services for everyone.
- Build on the Federal Framework on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by hosting a follow-up conference on the development of a national PTSD strategy.

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After months of grappling with the pandemic, it is clear that investing in people, in health care and in communities is the most effective way to set our country firmly on the path to a healthy recovery and prepare ourselves for the significant challenges that lie ahead.

As COVID-19 continues to deepen existing inequities in our nation, governments must remain focused on providing critical supports that will ensure better health and economic outcomes for all Canadians. Equitable investment is the surest path to a healthier and more hopeful future.

We can learn much from the lessons of the pandemic – particularly the heart-breaking experiences of so many health care workers, along with their families and communities.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions once again thanks the federal government for this opportunity to assist in the development of the 2022 Federal Budget. We hope that the substantive recommendations brought forward in this submission will inspire your government to undertake bold action to ensure Canada’s healthy recovery, and we remain committed to working together to find solutions to these challenges in the months and years ahead.