

October 7th, 2021

The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street, Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) congratulates you again on your party's victory in the 2021 federal election. In advance of the next Speech from the Throne, we are writing to you with **recommendations as you plan for your government's priorities during the 44th Parliament**.

As you know, CNA is the national and global professional voice of Canadian nursing and represents all categories of nurses across all 13 provinces and territories. CNA was encouraged by your recent statement on September 28, where you highlighted that your next government's top priority remains finishing the fight against COVID-19. We were also encouraged by your commitments on climate change and child-care. However, to help all people living in Canada move forward past the pandemic, CNA urges you to keep health care among the top priorities for your next government. **Canada can only finish the fight against COVID-19 if we have a well-functioning health system and health workforce.**

1. Rebuild Canada's health workforce

Even before COVID-19, the health workforce was over-stretched and the health system was in crisis due to health worker shortages. With the pandemic, these problems have been greatly exacerbated. Excessive workloads and understaffing have pushed nurses and health workers past the breaking point. The results of lack of supports and increasing stress levels have forced nurses to retire early, switch to part-time, or leave their jobs altogether. **Care is always dependent on health workers. Without them, there is simply no health care.**

In the first quarter of 2021, the health care and social assistance sector saw the largest year-over-year increase (39%) in job vacancies than any other sector, led by hospitals and nursing.¹ This has already forced many hospitals across Canada to close beds and scale back emergency services, directly affecting people in Canada who are seeking care. These shortages are, in part, a direct result of lack of appropriate workforce planning.

Health workers represent more than 10% of all employed Canadians and 8% of GDP.² However, workforce planning is taking place without basic and detailed data on the growing gap between supply and demand for health professionals. This means that decisions are being made in the dark.

CNA was encouraged by your party's commitment during the election to hire 7,500 doctors and nurses. However, a national, holistic, coordinated approach to health workforce planning with strong federal leadership is urgently needed to ensure that the supply, mix and distribution of those 7,500 workers, along with the rest of the health workforce, is aligned with population needs.

Recommendation: Invest in a renewed pan-Canadian health human resources strategy that addresses critical staffing shortages and data gaps and improves workforce mobility and planning. This should include the creation of a dedicated health workforce agency to enhance data infrastructure and analytics.

2. Shore up long-term care (LTC) in Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic has unmasked and exacerbated many long-standing, wide-spread health-care system gaps for older adults. Nearly 1 in 3 of Canada's LTC homes experienced a COVID-19 outbreak³ and, by June 2021, cases in LTC homes accounted for 59% of deaths in Canada.⁴ **LTC reform needs to be near the top of the federal government's agenda.**

The tragic outcomes in LTC are in part a result of decades of neglect of the sector.⁵ Staff levels have been reduced while the workforce mix and training have not evolved to align with the complex needs of seniors. In addition, many homes are old and not designed for modern infection prevention and control practices. Canada needs a cohesive, pan-Canadian approach to long-term care that guarantees quality of care, no matter where it is delivered.

CNA appreciates your party's recent commitments to invest in long-term care and develop national standards. However, significant investments in the order of dozens of billions in the LTC sector will be needed over the next decades. The cost of care in nursing and private homes will more than triple, growing from \$22 billion in 2019 to \$71 billion annually in 2050.⁶ Also, there will be a need for an additional 199,000 LTC beds by 2035, at an estimated cost of \$64 billion to build and operating costs of \$130 billion through 2035.⁷ More recently, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that \$13.7 billion each year is needed to improve LTC.⁸

Recommendation: Introduce, in 2022, a Safe Long-term Care Act, to ensure standards of care are upheld across the country while providing \$30 billion over 10 years tied to meeting these standards.

3. Continue to fight anti-racism in the health system

CNA was encouraged with your government's leadership and initiative in convening national roundtables following the tragic, racist incident with Joyce Echaquan in Quebec in 2020, as well as funding announced in Budget 2021. CNA participated in the roundtable discussions convened by your ministers in 2021 and is supportive of the continued dialogue and national collaboration to address systemic racism in the health system. For its part, CNA has placed the fight against systemic racism at the core of its priorities and is organizing a National Summit on Systemic Racism in Nursing and Health Care and has released earlier this year a [Nursing Declaration against Anti-Indigenous Racism in Nursing and Health Care](#).

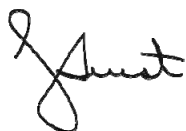
Racism is an important determinant of health, contributing to unacceptable health and social inequities. Although there have been steps taken to improve the proportion of racialized people in the health workforce, Canada still has far to go to achieve representation and inclusivity across all roles and levels of leadership. **More diversity is needed in Canada's health workforce to improve future health outcomes for everyone.** Diversity in the health workforce will help ensure culturally appropriate care to patients, families, and communities.

In [CNA's 2022 pre-budget submission](#), we put forward recommendations on how we believe your government can further address racism in health care such as creating an equity and diversity in nursing fund for nursing students and developing an online continuing education portal that will provide training and resources for health workers in culturally appropriate care.

Recommendation: Fully implement Joyce's principle, increase the diversity of the health workforce, and enhance anti-racist and cultural competency training for health workers.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity of meeting with your team to discuss how we can work together on shared priorities. Should your office have any questions, please contact CNA's Government Relations Lead, Lucas Veiga, at lveiga@cna-aiic.ca or 613-237-2159.

Sincerely,



Tim Guest, M.B.A., B.Sc.N., RN
President

CC.:

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
Ian Shugart, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet

Endnotes

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210622/dq210622a-eng.htm>

² https://www.hhr-rhs.ca/images/HHR_Infographic-Final_ENFR.pdf

³ 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.

⁴ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c2fa7b03917eed9b5a436d8/t/60e30d0744de9852f7538107/1625492748278/AftertheShot_0704+%281%29.pdf

⁵ https://rsc-src.ca/sites/default/files/LTC%20PB%20%2B%20ES_EN_0.pdf

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c2fa7b03917eed9b5a436d8/t/5dbadf6ce6598c340ee6978f/1572527988847/The+Future+Cost+of+LongTerm+Care+in+Canada.pdf>

⁷ https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/ef5c0508-3d06-45f4-b7f3-b06babc3578/9228_Meeting%20the%20Demand%20for%20Long-Term%20Care%20Beds_RPT.pdf

⁸ <https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news-releases--communiqués-de-presse/COM-2122-019--137-billion-each-year-for-improving-long-term-care--137-milliards-de-dollars-par-an-pour-améliorer-les-soins-de-long>