

CANADIAN  
**NURSES**  
ASSOCIATION



ASSOCIATION DES  
**INFIRMIÈRES ET**  
**INFIRMIERS** DU CANADA

# **A Healthy Population – Key Solutions for Economic Prosperity**

**House of Commons Standing  
Committee on Finance**

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5 mins

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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My name is Kaaren Neufeld and I am the President of the Canadian Nurses Association, representing registered nurses from across the country. Thank you for the opportunity to present nurses' solutions for maintaining the sustainability of Canada's health system, and helping to ensure that each of us can contribute fully to a productive economy.

Our analysis of our health-care system reveals that Canada **urgently** needs to invest in three immediate priorities:

- a national pharmacare strategy
- advancing health through nursing science and innovation, and
- a pan-Canadian health human resources institute

Let me address our first priority: a national pharmacare strategy.

For many Canadians, this year has been a very difficult time. Thousands of Canadians lost their jobs – and their insured drug benefits. According to a Canadian Health Coalition report, 42% of Canadian workers do not have a drug plan. That's **almost half of Canadian workers who are just one illness away from very serious financial hardship**. The Canadian Cancer Society reports that with a price tag of \$65,000, the average cost per course of treatment with newer cancer drugs exceeds the annual income of millions of Canadian households.

CNA believes prescription treatment for serious illnesses must not cripple Canadians financially. **What good is a universally accessible medical diagnosis when you can't afford the treatment?**

Some Canadians who need expensive drug therapy are not only fighting for their lives...they are fighting to keep their homes or to put food on the table.

Canada's First Ministers agreed **in 2004** that all Canadians must have access to catastrophic drug coverage. They also agreed that Canadians should have safe, effective and accessible drug coverage.<sup>1</sup> **That was five years ago.**

**Therefore, CNA recommends that the federal government fulfill their commitment to implement the *National Pharmaceuticals Strategy*.**

Now to the second priority: advancing health through nursing science and innovation.

This government knows the importance of science and innovation, as it is a priority identified in its plan *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage*.

Now, more than ever, we must find innovative, effective, fiscally responsible ways of improving the health of Canadians and the health-care system that serves us all.

Registered nurses are the largest health-care provider group in the country at more than a quarter of a million strong. We are at work in every community from Edmonton to Montreal to Cape Dorset; in every setting including hospitals, long-term care facilities, remote emergency clinics, home care and community care.

We have the strongest potential to bring about health system reform. By leading and applying research innovations, registered nurses contribute to unprecedented improvements and innovations to health service delivery, better quality care and reduced health-care costs.<sup>2</sup>

Well...more precisely, **we were** making unprecedented contributions. The funding that made this research possible has ended and, despite our best efforts to keep up the momentum, our requests for renewed research dollars have gone unanswered.

The Nursing Research Fund expired in March 2009. Renewal of this funding is urgently needed so that we can continue to innovate. I invite you to read our brief, which outlines *concrete examples* where nursing research has led to significant cost savings, reduced wait times and fewer adverse patient outcomes that lead to expensive hospital stays.

**Therefore, CNA recommends that the federal government invest \$55 million over 10 years in nursing research.**

The third priority that I would like to raise is the need for a pan-Canadian health human resources institute.

Canada will be short almost 60,000 full-time equivalent RNs by 2022.<sup>3</sup> All of us here will be 13 years older then...**and much more likely to need the care of the nurses who won't be there because we didn't plan ahead.** Our aging population will have growing health-care needs. We need to build our capacity to respond to those basic needs...not to mention the stresses that sudden health crises, such as flu pandemics, can cause to our system.

Governments acknowledged this impending crisis in the 2004 Health Accord when they committed to accelerate work on health human resources action plans and initiatives to help ensure that we have enough of the appropriate mix of health-care professionals to meet our needs. The time has come for concerted action on this issue.

**CNA recommends that the federal government invest \$10 million in an institute to promote and facilitate pan-Canadian health human resources planning.**

So, to re-cap Canadian nurses' solutions to pressing health-care priorities, we are calling for:

- a national pharmacare strategy
- advancing health through nursing science and innovation
- a pan-Canadian health human resources institute

The return on these *investments* can be calculated not only in terms of dollars and cents, but more importantly, on the leveraging effect a healthy nation has on our future prosperity.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Health Canada. (2004). *First minister's meeting on the future of health care 2004*. Available at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/delivery-prestation/fptcollab/2004-fmm-rpm/index-eng.php>

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Consortium for Nursing Research and Innovation. (2008). *Advancing health through nursing science* [Unpublished document.] Ottawa: Authors.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Nurses Association. (2009). *Tested solutions for eliminating Canada's registered nurse shortage*. Ottawa: Author.