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Latest CIHI report introduces new findings and new challenges for nursing workforce

Ottawa, July 8, 2014 — The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is welcoming new data in *Regulated Nurses, 2013*, a report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). For the first time, the report includes data on provincial/territorial inflow and outflow among registered nurses (RNs), as well as how long it takes new grads to find work. Less than half of new graduates find full-time employment within their first year after graduation, but it takes a total of four years for new RNs to reach the average rate (58.4%) of full-time employment — potentially jeopardizing Canada’s investment in nurses.

“Nurses play an invaluable and irreplaceable role in the health of our country,” said CNA president Dr. Karima Velji. “Governments clearly understand this because they maintain significant investments in the education of RNs. Full-time positions must be there for new graduates, though, so nurses can immediately put their knowledge and skills to work for Canadians — and so the government’s investment in our profession can be fully realized.”

In addition to positions for new graduates, this CIHI report examines the provincial/territorial inflow and outflow of the nursing workforce — meaning how many nurses are registering to practise in a region versus how many are not renewing their registration in the same area. In 2013, more than 16,000 RNs or nurse practitioners (NPs) left practice in their province and more than 19,000 entered. More than 30 per cent of those who left were younger than 40. The report does not, however, explain their reasons — whether it was retirement or leaving the province, country or profession. In light of the findings on how long it takes to reach the average rate of full-time work, CNA wants a closer examination of where and why RNs are not renewing. Full-time positions are key for new RNs to successfully put their knowledge and skills into practice, successfully integrate into the profession and reach their full potential in meeting the health needs of Canadians.

Overall, the CIHI data shows that growth in the number of RNs is outpacing Canada’s population growth. CNA cautions against an over-reliance on such data, however, because it does not fully account for health-care needs that are becoming increasingly complex. Canadian census data shows that life expectancy is on the rise, as well as dementia, diabetes, chronic conditions and some cancers. Despite an aging population, nearly 1,000 fewer RNs were working in the long-term care sector in 2013 than the year prior. Furthermore, since 2009, there were approximately 2,000 fewer RNs providing direct care in community health — a worrying figure since many Canadians already lack access to primary care.

“We’re pleased to see that all regulated nursing professions — RNs, NPs, registered psychiatric nurses and licensed practical nurses — are seeing growth in their workforce populations,” said Velji. “Numbers tell just a portion of the story, though. Canada will only realize meaningful improvements in population health and system performance when its nurses are employed full time in positions that enable them to practise to their full scope of education and skills and where they can best meet the health needs of our communities.”

Report highlights include:

- The RN workforce grew by 5,107 between 2012 and 2013, an increase more than double that of any of the previous five years. Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are the only provinces to experience a loss in the number of employed RNs.
- The average age of the RN workforce remains unchanged for the past five years: 45 years.
- In 2013, more than half (58.4%) of the RN workforce was employed full-time. Less than half (46.1%) of RNs entering the workforce obtained a full-time position in their first year of graduation. In total, it takes four years after graduation to reach the average rate (58.4%) of full-time employment.
- Where RNs work was largely unchanged between 2009 and 2013: 62% in hospitals, 15.2% in the community health sector and 9.2% in the long-term care sector.
- The number of NPs licensed to practise in 2013 was 3,655. Of these, 3,477 were employed in nursing.
- More than three-quarters of NPs (77.8%) were employed full-time.
- Most NPs (39.4%) worked in hospitals in 2013, while 31.9% worked in the community sector.

CNA is the national professional voice of registered nurses in Canada. A federation of 11 provincial and territorial nursing associations and colleges representing 151,404 registered nurses, CNA advances the practice and profession of nursing to improve health outcomes and strengthen Canada's publicly funded, not-for-profit health system.

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