**THE NURSE PRACTITIONER**

A Strategy for Healthcare System Improvement

**Nurse Practitioners** (NPs) can be better utilized to improve healthcare system efficiency, access and quality. NPs contribute to better care for individuals, better health for populations and lower healthcare costs.

**BACKGROUND**

- NPs are registered nurses who are licensed in all provinces and territories to autonomously diagnose, prescribe medications, order and interpret diagnostic tests, and perform specific clinical procedures.

- NPs focus on health promotion, disease prevention and acute and chronic illness management.

- NPs provide services to patients across the lifespan, families, groups and communities.

- NPs have existed in Canada for over 40 years. They work collaboratively within interprofessional teams in primary healthcare, long-term care and acute care settings.

**KEY MESSAGES**

**Better Care for Individuals**

- NPs increase access to high quality care in primary healthcare clinics, reduce wait times in emergency departments and increase timeliness of care in nursing homes.

- In the community, NPs promote wellness by providing preventive care, treating minor acute illness, and managing chronic diseases.

- In hospitals, NPs enhance continuity of care for seriously ill and complex care patients.

- NPs coordinate patient treatment and initiate appropriate and timely consultation or referral when the problem exceeds their scope of practice or expertise.

**Better Health for Populations**

- The presence of NPs in a variety of healthcare service delivery models is associated with high-quality disease management for chronic but stable conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure and improved patient outcomes.

- NPs increase access to primary healthcare for vulnerable isolated groups, people living in rural and remote regions, and Aboriginal Peoples.

- NPs in acute care improve the health outcomes of high risk patient populations in units such as neonatology, cardiology, neurosurgery, and intensive care.

**Lower Costs**

- In the community, NPs reduce costs in the care of general practice patients and specific patient populations such as those with diabetes, eczema, and those who live in rural areas.

- In hospitals, NPs improve patient readiness for discharge which leads to shorter length of stay and fewer re-admissions.

- In long-term care, NPs provide timely assessment, diagnosis and treatment for acute and episodic conditions and injuries which reduces avoidable transfers of residents to the emergency department.