FACT SHEET: Trends for Registered Nurses in Ontario*

This fact sheet highlights the Registered Nurse (RN) workforce trends in Ontario reported in “Stepping to Success and Sustainability. An Analysis of Ontario’s Nursing Workforce”. The full report is available online at [http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/nru](http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/nru) or [www.hhr.utoronto.ca](http://www.hhr.utoronto.ca).

The Supply of RNs in Ontario: Lowest in Canada

Historically, Ontario has always had the greatest supply of nurses in Canada. In 2001, there were 94,487 RNs in Ontario, 80,590 (85%) of whom were employed in nursing¹. Although Ontario has the largest number of nurses, in 2001 it ranked second last (below the Canadian average) in nurse to population ratio with 67.6 RNs per 10,000 population. In 2002, Ontario had the lowest RN to population ratio in the country, at 65 RNs per 10,000.

RNs Working in the System

- Between 2001 and 2002, Ontario’s rate of unemployed nurses was higher than the rest of Canada (6.1% and 2.9% respectively). In 2001, Ontario had a higher number of nurses working in non-nursing jobs than the country as a whole compared to the rest of Canada (5.7% and 2.3% respectively).
- Approximately 6% of RNs registered in Ontario do not currently work in the province, however, amongst younger RNs (those in the 20s and 30s), that number rises to 11%.
- The number of RNs not seeking work in nursing (i.e. choosing to work in non-nursing employment) rose significantly in 2001 and peaked in 2002 at 10,547.
- During the 1990s, fewer RNs migrated from other provinces or countries to Ontario which may have been related to the restructuring that was then marked by hospital closures, downsizing and greater use of other health care providers. However, in recent years, immigration of RNs has doubled.

RNs are Aging: RN Shortfall Pending

- The average age of RNs in Ontario is 44.3 years old.
- In 2002, only 2% of RNs were between the ages of 20 to 24. In 2001, RNs under 40 made up 34% of the Ontario RN workforce. Ontario has a higher percentage of RNs who are over age 55 than Canada as a whole (17% and 14% respectively).
- In an analysis of retirement and death rates, Ontario is predicted to lose 15,611 RNs by 2008, assuming they work until age 65; but if they retire at age 55, expected losses nearly double to 30,086.
- Using utilization based estimates (adjusted for acuity), it is predicted that Ontario will have a shortfall of between 11,794 and 12,897 full-time RNs in the hospital sector alone.

Education: Ontario Figures of Concern

- In 2001, Ontario was second highest (77.8%) in Canada in the number of RNs who are diploma prepared. Ontario ranks last in the proportion of baccalaureate prepared RNs employed in nursing at 20.5%.
- Ontario ranks ninth in the proportion of nurses (1.7%) who are Masters/Doctorate prepared.
- Enrolment in nursing programs increased from 571 in 1997 to 1,982 in 2001, partially due to the requirement to attain a baccalaureate degree to enter the profession by 2005 and closure of RN programs.

Employment trends:
- In 2001, 55.2% of Ontario RNs employed in nursing worked full-time, 34.9% part-time, and 9.9% casual. Over the past decade, the RN employment status has shifted dramatically, especially during most of the 1990s where the proportions of RNs working full-time declined significantly. In 2002, increases in both full-time and part-time RNs working are reflected by recent funding for full-time job opportunities.
- More RNs over the age of 40 worked full-time compared to those under 40 (60% vs 54%).
- RNs who are middle aged are more likely to work full-time until they reach age 60, when they are more likely to be retired or working part-time or casual. Moreover, full-time RN jobs in Ontario are largely occupied by mid-career nurses; 69% of RNs employed full-time are over age 40.
- In 2001, a higher participation rate from involuntary part-time workers would have generated an additional 4.7 million nursing hours (an equivalent of 2,592 full-time RN positions) to provide more direct patient care.
- In an attempt to reduce salary costs by replacing full-time nurses with part-time, casual and unregulated care providers, hospitals in effect increased annual overtime costs in excess of $171 million, with $57 million spent on overtime premium.

Casualization of the younger nursing workforce

- In 2002, 16% of 20-24 year olds and 9% of 25-29 year olds were employed casually.
- Younger RNs, especially those in their early twenties, tend to work on a part-time or casual basis or employed outside Ontario.
- 40% of nurses aged 20-24 and 37% of nurses aged 25-29 who are not working in nursing are looking for nursing jobs but cannot find adequate work or the employment that they want.

Recommendations to Address Ontario Workforce Issues for both RNs and RPNs
- Assess the population’s ongoing and future need for nursing services.
- Increase enrolment in nursing programs.
- Increase nurse participation rates (retention) and make more effective use of existing resources.
- Avoid using layoffs to deal with short-term financial problems in the health care system.
- Address workload issues and provide quality workplaces.
- Continue work on a health human resource planning framework that takes into account the link between quality work environments, the ability to recruit and retain health professionals, and population health outcomes.


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