



CANADIAN
FEDERATION
OF NURSES
UNIONS

WWW.NURSESUNIONS.CA
INFO@NURSESUNIONS.CA

2841 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
OTTAWA, ONTARIO K1V 8X7
CANADA

T 613-526-4661
F 613-526-1023

1-800-321-9821

January 29, 2018

Bill Casey, MP
Chair of the Standing Committee on Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
By e-mail: Bill.Casey@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Casey,

Please receive my best wishes for the New Year 2018!

As the federal representative for nearly 200,000 nurses and nursing students, I write today to bring your attention to the pressing and growing issue of violence in Canada's health care system. Every day nurses and other health care workers are spat at, punched, threatened, stabbed and sometimes worse. Sadly, violence in health care is nothing new; however, the rapid rate of increase in violent incidents is.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) believes firmly that patient safety means staff safety. We cannot have a quality health care system without a safe workplace. In other words, violence prevention is synonymous with better patient care.

This issue is broad, affecting diverse health care sectors across all geographies in Canada. Just last year 68% of nurses and personal support workers in Ontario reported experiencing violence on the job.ⁱ Meanwhile, WorksafeBC reported a 50% increase in the injury rate due to violence suffered by health care workers between 2006 and 2015.ⁱⁱ Incidents of workplace violence against frontline health care workers are higher than the combined total for police officers and firefighters,ⁱⁱⁱ and it's costing us. Retention of trained personnel is a growing challenge, with two thirds of Canadian nurses considering leaving their jobs due to abuse.^{iv} Rates of absenteeism among nurses (9%), well above the Canadian average, are costing Canada close to a billion dollars per year.^v Worse still, disturbing and horrifying stories sow seeds of public mistrust in the health care system upon which we all depend.

Research shows that Canadian long-term care workers are six times more likely to experience daily physical violence than their Scandinavian colleagues.^{vi} The silver lining in this otherwise grim statistic is that we in Canada can do better – much better! And in some places we do. Already, some pioneering hospitals have developed innovative violence-prevention programs that have begun to produce positive results. However, the CFNU believes that a national issue of this kind requires a national response. Canadians have a right to quality health care across the country – that should include a safe hospital and nursing home.

With health care workers clamouring for better protections, the CFNU hosted a National Roundtable on Violence on January 17-18, 2018. Labour representatives for nurses, personal support workers, personal care attendants and other support staff from across the country identified an uneven landscape of protections from violence, with major and persistent gaps. Participants unanimously agreed that federal leadership in this area is needed to help close these gaps and raise standards.

I am therefore asking you, Mr. Casey, as the Chair of the Commons Health Committee, to raise the issue of violence in health care with your committee colleagues. With more than 500,000 health care, hospital and long-term care workers across Canada serving millions of patients each day, this issue is vital to our health care system and to our country. We believe it deserves the attention of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.

To begin this conversation, I wish to request a meeting with you in the upcoming weeks to share information and discuss ways to spur federal leadership on violence prevention in health care. Enclosed, you will find the CFNU factsheet as well as our 2016 report on violence, entitled *Enough Is Enough*.

To follow up, please contact my Government and External Relations Officer, Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan, at sebastian@nursesunions.ca or 613-513-7754. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Linda Silas, President
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

ⁱ <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/11/05/violence-against-health-care-workers-out-of-control-survey-finds.html>
ⁱⁱ <https://globalnews.ca/content/3293577/violence-against-nurses-on-the-rise-in-british-columbia/>
ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/10/31/workplace-violence-makes-nursing-one-of-canadas-most-dangerous-professions.html>
^{iv} https://nursesunions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CFNU_Enough-is-Enough_June1_FINALlow.pdf
^v https://nursesunions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CFNU_Enough-is-Enough_June1_FINALlow.pdf
^{vi} <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22204839>