



# VIOLENCE IN HEALTH CARE:

*causes and solutions*

CFNU

CANADIAN  
FEDERATION  
OF NURSES  
UNIONS

# WE ARE CANADA'S NURSES.

We represent close to 200,000 frontline care providers and nursing students working in hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health care and our homes. We speak to all levels of government, other health care stakeholders and the public about evidence-based policy options to improve patient care, working conditions and our public health care system.



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# IT'S A PRESSURE COOKER OUT THERE.

Over the past two decades, nurses have experienced an increase in violence in their workplaces. They go to work every day knowing that they may be verbally or physically abused. Nurses are being punched, kicked, spat on and sworn at.

It's a pressure cooker out there for frontline nurses. Higher patient populations mean workloads are on the rise and the quality of care is declining. As the nurse staffing shortage deepens and patient acuity increases, weak security protocols fail to offer adequate protection.

Violence is a symptom of an unhealthy work environment.

We need a drastic change in the culture of our health care workplace from one that responds to violence after it occurs to one that prevents it.

All health care workers should have a right to work in safe workplaces, free from all forms of violence, bullying, harassment and abuse, whatever the form and whatever the source. For this change to happen, all of us need to work together – governments, employers, unions and nurses.

# CANADA AT A GLANCE

The number of violence-related lost-time injuries for frontline health care workers across Canada rose by close to 66% between 2006 and 2015. That's triple the rate experienced by police and correctional officers combined.<sup>1</sup>

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

There are on average 26 attacks on nurses each month.<sup>2</sup> Violent incidents in health care workplaces increased by 52% between 2014 and 2018.<sup>3</sup>

## ALBERTA

In 2018, almost 18% of nurses reported having experienced physical violence over their last five shifts.<sup>4</sup>

## SASKATCHEWAN

Nurses account for the third-largest number of violence-related lost-time injuries – more than police and security guards.<sup>5</sup>

## MANITOBA

Violence-related claims filed by nurses have increased by 311% in five years.<sup>6</sup> In the ER, 30% of nurses are physically assaulted once per week.<sup>7</sup>

## ONTARIO

In 2016, 25,300 workdays were lost to violence. Violence-related lost-time injuries in the health care sector have risen by 27% over four years.<sup>8</sup>

A faint, dark map of the Atlantic provinces of Canada (Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador) serves as a background for the text.

## QUEBEC

Though health care workers account for only about 10% of the workforce, they represent 61% of accepted violence-related claims.<sup>9</sup>

## NEW BRUNSWICK

Code Whites (attacks on health care workers) have increased by 95% in five years in one health authority, with 2,000 incidents in 2018-2019 provincewide.<sup>10</sup>

## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

More than half of nurses (53%) have experienced workplace violence; in 93% of cases, patients, clients and residents are responsible.<sup>11</sup>

## NOVA SCOTIA

In 2015, 86% of nurses reported experiencing physical violence from residents and their relatives in long-term care facilities.<sup>12</sup>

## NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

In 2018, the health care sector represented 85% of all violence-related injury claims accepted in the province.<sup>13</sup>

## **SHE HAD A RESTRAINING ORDER**

In 2018, nurse Lori Chaffey talked about the 2012 shooting of her co-worker Stephanie Chaisson in a rural clinic. Chaffey was in the washroom when Chaisson was shot and killed by her estranged husband. Chaisson and Chaffey were the only personnel in the clinic that day.

**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

## **IT WAS HER SCREAMS THAT SUMMONED HELP**

In 2018, a nurse was assaulted in a Dartmouth forensic hospital. The nurse – who was 33-weeks pregnant – was punched and kicked. Her security alarm was being held together with masking tape.

**NOVA SCOTIA**

## **PUNCHED IN THE HEAD**

In 2018, a patient in a PEI hospital assaulted a staff member who opened the door to her room. The worker was punched in the head five or six times. The patient had a history of violent behaviour and had previously assaulted another resident in her group home.

**PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

## **“I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO DIE”**

In 2019, a nurse was attacked by a patient's husband. He punched her in the face and continued beating her for more than 11 minutes. She suffered a black eye, fractured nose and a brain contusion. Three months later, another nurse was attacked at the same hospital.

**NEW BRUNSWICK**

## **SHE GASPED FOR AIR**

In September 2018, a patient lunged at a nurse at a Montreal hospital. He clamped his hands around her neck, choking her. The nurse, fearing for her life, poked the patient in the eyes; then, he bit her. This was the second near-strangulation of a nurse in the hospital in a little over a year.

**QUEBEC**

## **NURSE, SECURITY GUARD IN SERIOUS CONDITION**

In January 2019, a nurse at a GTA hospital was struck in the face by a patient. She suffered a skull fracture and a brain bleed. A security guard was also struck in the head, resulting in an orbital bone break. It took police an hour to arrive at the hospital.

**ONTARIO**

# HIGH ON METH

A nurse in a Winnipeg hospital emergency room was attacked in an unprovoked meth-related incident in September 2018. This was the third time in a recent period nurses had experienced violence at the hands of patients experiencing methamphetamine psychosis.

## MANITOBA

# BEATEN WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE

In March 2018, photos of a registered nurse in Saskatoon who had been assaulted began circulating online. The man had been brutally attacked by a patient while on the job, leaving him bruised and beaten.

## SASKATCHEWAN

# HE SLAMMED HER HEAD AGAINST THE DOOR

In June 2018, a Calgary man in psychiatric care became agitated and grabbed his nurse from behind, forcing her into a patient bathroom. He proceeded to slam her head repeatedly against the door and punched her in the face.

## ALBERTA

# SEVERE FACIAL INJURIES

In 2018, a nurse at a B.C. psychiatric facility was assaulted by a patient in the hospital; she suffered severe cuts on her face. Another nurse had recently suffered a concussion after being sucker-punched by a patient.

**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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# THERE'S A PATH FORWARD.

These are the recommendations that Canada's nurses delivered to the Commons health committee:

- A comprehensive national study into health human resources planning;
- Targeted funding to enhance protections for health care workers through violence-prevention infrastructure and programs, with joint health and safety committees, labour unions and community police included as essential partners;
- The federal government must apply best practices around violence prevention in federally regulated health care settings to lead by example;
- Legislate national minimum security training standards for health care environments;
- Establish protocols to address and investigate workplace violence incidents when they do occur;
- Enact Bill C-434 to ensure that an assault against a health care worker is treated as seriously under the Criminal Code as one committed against a police officer or transit worker. Promote the use of the Westray Law among Crown prosecutors in appropriate cases involving violence against health care workers;
- Funding for the Canadian Institute for Health Information to collect and report on facility-level workplace violence-related data.

## IT'S TIME FOR THE PROVINCES TO DO THEIR PART.

