**Budget 2023 Formal Submission – Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions**

Building on the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) pre-budget submission to the Standing Committee on Finance, submitted in October 2022, we are pleased to share a formal submission to the Department of Finance, outlining key initiatives Canada’s nurses are looking to the government to include in Budget 2023. Our proposals are focused on the need for urgent action in the face of dire nursing shortages that are plaguing health systems across the country. Facing stressful and even unsafe workplaces, and forced to work double or triple shifts, more nurses are being driven from the profession they love.

The stakes are high for both patients and our economy. Health workers account for more than 10% of Canada’s workforce and make up around 8% of our country’s total GDP. Nurses form the largest group of regulated health professionals and are responsible for most of the direct care provided in Canada. Building a sustainable public health care system is critical to building a resilient economy.

Today our public health care system is on the brink of collapse. Coordinated action from all levels of government is needed to improve patient care and support frontline workers hanging on by a thread. This must include increased federal health support to the provinces and territories, backed by clear accountability for delivering better care to patients, and creating safe and sustainable workplaces for nurses and other health professionals.

We are recommending federal investments in nurse retention and return measures, including a Nurse Retention Fund designed to support provincial and territorial governments, health care employers and unions in implementing urgent evidence-based initiatives to sustain our nursing workforce and make sure quality public health care is there for generations to come.

*Nurse Retention Fund to scale up proven retention programs in health care workplaces*

Working directly with nurses’ unions and employers, targeted federal funding could urgently address the central issues driving many recent nursing graduates out of our health care system and engage experienced nurses in more appropriate initiatives to better retain them.

Measures could include scaling up proven new graduate initiatives and mentorship programs to help younger nurses build up the skills and competencies required to succeed in such a challenging work environment as they start their careers.

This would also mean more experienced nurses – struggling after years of working short-staffed and considering an early retirement – could be given less physically and psychologically demanding roles as mentors coaching new or less experienced nurses as they enter the workforce or transition between units.

*Tax measures to retain and return nurses to the workforce*

Nurses are not only being forced to work extra shifts and involuntary overtime, but some also end up having to pay more in taxes as a result, further harming morale. Nurses should not be left with a higher tax bill when taking on additional work as required of them, and when receiving incentives while working through unparalleled challenges on the front lines.

Canada’s nurses are proposing a targeted two-year tax benefit designed to entice nurses on the cusp of leaving the profession or retiring early to remain in the profession, while providing a new motivation for those already retired to return to the nursing workforce.

Retired nurses are concerned the income they would receive if they return to work would bump them into a higher tax bracket and reduce their other entitlements, greatly diminishing the financial benefits of rejoining the workforce. We also hear from frontline nurses, including those working in hard-to-recruit areas, that they are paying higher taxes because of extensive overtime or other incentives they receive.

In the face of an unprecedented exodus of nurses from the profession, the federal government must act to ensure nurses are not being forced to pay more because of the extra work they are being called on to perform for public safety. A tax measure, such as deducting mandatory overtime and other financial incentives from nurses’ income tax, could help tip the scales for frontline nurses on the verge of throwing in the towel, while helping entice departed nurses back into the workforce. As with other emergency professionals such as first responders, tax benefits ought to be granted to nurses.

*Tailored mental health supports for nurses experiencing severe psychological symptoms:*

Building off the co-design work the CFNU engaged in through Wellness Together Canada to tailor mental health programs to nurses’ needs and experiences, an opportunity to further develop resources to meet the needs of nurses experiencing more severe psychological symptoms is available. The highly successful internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy program for public safety personnel, PSPNET, can be tailored for nurses, and similarly to PSPNET, piloted in one or two provinces before being spread to other jurisdictions through joint provincial and federal contributions.

The program addresses many of the barriers nurses experience in accessing mental health supports, and relies on proven methods to help clients improve their well-being by identifying and managing unhelpful thought patterns and behaviours. Such an initiative would be an effective complement to funding initiatives aimed at improving working conditions and fostering a safe and healthy work environment for nurses and all health care workers in Budget 2023.

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*The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions is Canada’s largest nurses’ organization, representing Canada’s frontline nurses in every sector of health care – from home care, LTC, community and acute care, including nursing students – and advocating on key health priorities and federal engagement in the future of public health care.*