



Fact Sheet

The dedication shown by our Aboriginal nurses is second to none. They are the cornerstone of our community healthcare systems that is currently confronted with difficulties, problems and opportunities. While the total number of Aboriginal Registered Nurses (RNs) in Canada is currently unknown, there is evidence to support the challenges and issues confronting the mainstream nursing system are mirrored and/or are worse within the Aboriginal nursing context.

What are we confronted with?

Current national data indicates that there will be a **78,000 nursing shortfall by 2011** and will **increase to 113,000 by 2016**¹. We can safely assume that the mainstream projected shortfall encompasses the Aboriginal nurse population.

Contributing to this projected shortfall Stewart et al. indicates in their 2006 national study of Aboriginal Registered Nurses in Rural and Remote Canada, the average age of **Aboriginal nurses is 41.5 years**, and accounts for 46% of the total Aboriginal nurses in their study². On average nurses retire at 56 years³, leaving a 14.5 years buffer zone before we can expect about half of our Aboriginal nurses to enter into retirement. Despite the fact that the average age of Aboriginal nurses is 3.1 years younger than their non-Aboriginal counterparts⁴ what remains unclear is their attrition rate. In other words, researchers, policy makers and government officials have little understanding about the factors that are eroding the Aboriginal nursing population before active retirement. If not addressed systematically, a significant loss of Aboriginal nurses will occur. Thus, researching Aboriginal retention issues needs to remain a priority focus in order to produce evidence-informed strategies to positively address the forthcoming nursing crisis.

The Future of Aboriginal Nursing

Compounding the issue of an aging Aboriginal nursing workforce is an insufficient amount of seats in nursing education programs to meet the rising health care demand⁵. Although the number of Aboriginal nursing students in Canada has **increased from 237 to 737 within the past 5 years**⁶ a more intensive effort is needed to compensate for the projected shortfall of Aboriginal nurses in the coming years. For example, of the 59 nursing schools that participated in a recent environmental scan, **only 8 schools reported having an Aboriginal specific access/bridging/transition program in 2007** to accommodate potential Aboriginal nursing students⁷. The same scan reports, schools that implemented Aboriginal specific entry programs also produced the desired effects of an increase in Aboriginal student enrollment⁸. **It is a firm belief of A.N.A.C. that increasing the number of Aboriginal nurses can and will result in increasing the overall health status of our Aboriginal communities.**

The A.N.A.C. Involvement

To minimize the impact of the projected nursing shortage the A.N.A.C. is leveraging its resources to secure additional funding to implement nurse professional development programs, to identify promising strategies addressing recruitment of Aboriginal nursing students and to collect data from its membership to track trends and patterns in attrition rates. Finding practical solutions will be critical when presenting ideas and strategies to policy makers and government officials. The A.N.A.C. remains committed to participating and producing health research, influencing policy and being a leader in the Aboriginal health nursing field by engaging in activities related to recruitment and retention, membership support, consultation, research and education.

For more information, please visit the A.N.A.C. website at www.anac.on.ca or by telephone at (613) 724-4677 Toll free (866) 724-3049.

¹ Ryten E. (2002). Planning for the Future: Nursing Health Resources Projections. Canadian Nurses Association. From http://can-aiic.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publication/Planning_for_the_Future_June_2002_e.pdf

² Stewart, N.J. et al. (2006). Aboriginal nurses in rural and remote Canada: Results from a national study. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, College of Nursing.

³ Wortsman, A. (2007). Creating Positive Solutions in the Workplace: Time to Work Together, Pg. 7. March 2007. Ottawa, ON.

⁴ Stewart, N.J. et al. (2006). Aboriginal nurses in rural and remote Canada: Results from a national study. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, College of Nursing

⁵ Our Health, Our Future: Creating Quality Workplaces for Canadian Nurses. (2002). Health Canada. Retrieve at http://www.hc.sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/nurs-infirm/2002-cnac-cccsi-final/cnac-cccsi5_e.html

⁶ Gregory, D. (2007). Against the Odds: an Update on Aboriginal Nursing in Canada. Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative Meeting, attended September 18, 2007 Ottawa, Canada.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid