Engaging Health Leaders in Canada's HHR Crisis

National Conversation Topic Summary

Topic

What role may health leaders play to retain the current health human resource (HHR) workforce and prepare for the influx of a new and younger workforce, so that the health system is sustainable, and the HHR workforce is engaged, empowered, and retained.

The Problem

Health Canada's Health Human Resources Symposium, 2022, summarized the HHR crisis:

"The health human resources (HHR) crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing Canada's healthcare system today. Domestically and globally, health workforces today are facing unprecedented challenges – including a dwindling supply of healthcare workers, low retention, and workplace conditions that place undue pressure on workers. These challenges have been further exacerbated by COVID-19, where high patient workloads, resource scarcity, and fear for personal safety have led to unprecedented levels of burnout, absences, and turnover."
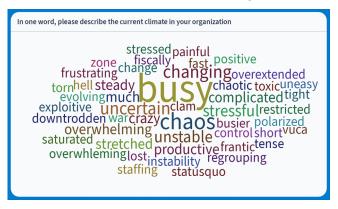
Health Canada, 2022, Introduction

The 2022 Health Human Resources Symposium identified five key challenges, with opportunities for action.

Recruitment for future needs	Health system usage trends and an aging population are **increasing demand for care**, particularly in long-term care and home care settings, where the total cost of care is estimated to rise from $29.7 billion in 2019, to $58.5 billion in 2031. Presently, the World Health Organization projects a **shortage of 15 million healthcare workers by 2030**, increasing demand for talent globally.

Retention of Healthcare Workers	A 2021 survey by the RNAO found that 15.6% of nurses shared that they were **likely to leave nursing for a new occupation post-pandemic,** and a similar Canadian study found that **50% of PSWs leave the healthcare sector** after less than 5 years.
Workforce Mental Health and Well- Being	Multiple Canadian studies, including a study conducted by the Ontario Science Advisory Table, indicated that **severe emotional exhaustion in Canadian healthcare workers has increased** to 60% by mid-2021 (up from an estimated 30-40% in mid-2020).
Data to Support Effective Workforce Planning & Management	Canada **falls behind OECD comparators such as the US, UK, and Australia** on the robustness of health workforce data, as well as the availability of said data to support workforce planning.
Productivity and Models of Care	OECD estimates that **79% of nurses and 76% of physicians perform tasks that they are overqualified for,** providing an opportunity to examine task suitability. Canada's **traditional approach to care delivery** has led to unintended consequences – including limitations to workforce productivity, and workers not being optimized to the top of their scope.

At the CCHL Strategic Alliance webinar, held on April 18th, 2024, 200+ participants were asked to describe, in one word, the current climate of their organization:

At the CCHL National Conference, during Part Two of the 2024 National Conversation, on June 3rd, 2024, 150+ participants were also asked, in one word, to describe the current climate of their organization:

With these responses, it is apparent that the current climate in healthcare organizations in Canada are primarily challenging, with 'busy' and 'overwhelmed' representing most of the responses. It was encouraging to note positive responses in the second word cloud ('hopeful', 'evolving') optimistically an indication and consequence of the actions of many to address the challenges facing healthcare.

The Federal Government's Standing Committee on Health made 20 recommendations in their March 2023 report Addressing Canada's Health Workforce Crisis, indicating the need for the Government of Canada to partner with provincial and territorial governments, as well as organizations, to implement the recommendations. The 20 recommendations may be categorized into four general themes:

1. **Policies** that address the requirements for internationally educated healthcare professionals and credential mobility to improve access to jobs in a timely manner.
2. **Training and Education** that increase the capacity of education programs and accelerate integration into practice.
3. **Funding** that goes directly to the front line and to organizations.
4. **Recruitment and Retention Strategies** that encompass psychological safety, cultural safety, workload management, and scopes of practice.