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## PEI NURSES ESSENTIAL BUT UNDERVALUED

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It is frustrating to hear that the focus for Health PEI is the availability of 180 beds to treat COVID patients, and not on where they can secure the staffing needed to care for patients in these beds. Current vacancy rates and the increased hours that Registered Nurses are already working cannot sustain this surge. What is Health PEI and our government doing to address staffing issues and why are unions being excluded from service delivery discussions that will directly impact the front-line healthcare staff.

We cannot rely on the 180 beds Health PEI has available to open. Our focus should stay with the resources we do not have to open these additional beds, should we need them. This is another example of why Unions need to be included in the discussions on how Health PEI plans to open the additional 180 beds. We cannot expect our nurses to work more than what they are already being expected to do. By not including the Unions and staff in decisions it creates an unnecessary anxiety about how opening these beds will be supported.

We need to work together to implement retention and recognition strategies for our essential workers. We are two years into the pandemic with soaring nurse vacancies and they feel abandoned and undervalued.

The PEI Nurses' Union is asking that Health PEI focus on their current staff and ensure that their needs are being met. RNs are tired of hearing that they are a respected part of healthcare and in the same breath, mandated to work overtime, short staffed and have much needed leaves denied. They have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and have been subject to increased verbal and physical violence. When other Islanders can stay at home with their families and decrease exposure risks, RNs are still working on the front lines with a higher risk of exposing their families to the virus without any further recognition.

Though our nursing shortage pre-dates the pandemic, the past two years have exacerbated retention issues that have repeatedly failed to be addressed by Health PEI. Our nurses are experiencing a high-level of burnout and it could result in more nurses leaving. We need to protect the limited staffing resources that we have and although bonuses do not fix the problem, they still show that there is a value placed on the impact Covid has placed on workloads.

“September 2021, Quebec announced a \$1-billion plan to fix the province’s nursing crisis — offering nurses a bonus of between \$12,000 and \$18,000 to stay in full-time jobs, encouraging part-timers to go full-time and attracting 4,300 nurses back into the profession” - *globalnews.ca*

"February 2021, Alberta announced public and private-sector workers to receive one-time payments of \$1,200 for putting themselves at risk on the job during the COVID-19 pandemic." "They all face the threat of exposure to the virus every day that they show up at work," Jason Kenney said. – *cbc.ca*

Prince Edward Island is feeling the full effects of the outbreak this New Year and our front-line workers have yet to receive any similar type of recognition for their work at extreme burn-out levels, and now an increase danger of catching and spreading the virus.

"These aren't decisions you make in a functional health care sector," explained Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, Linda Silas. "Let's be clear: this is dangerous, and we're in this position because governments have ignored the nursing shortage for far too long."

"Nurses are at their breaking point. They feel abandoned and unsupported. Our elected leaders need to step up; our health care system depends on it." – *CFNU President, Linda Silas.*

Barbara Brookins  
*PEI Nurses' Union President*

