

January 13, 2022

Sean Casey
Chair
House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Dear Mr. Casey:

I am writing on behalf of HealthCareCAN, the national voice of Canada's hospitals, health research institutes, and healthcare organizations, following the call and subsequent announcement of a meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health on Friday, January 14, 2022, to discuss recent COVID-19 developments.

As a pan-Canadian association representing healthcare and health research organization across Canada, our members are the organizations and individuals at the frontlines of our country's COVID-19 response. They have been dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on a day-to-day basis, for nearly 22 months, and are now navigating the fifth wave of the pandemic. As such, HealthCareCAN and our members are well-placed to provide insight and recommendations on the actions that the federal government must take in the coming weeks and months to address current pandemic challenges and shore up the health system.

The primary challenge healthcare and health research organizations are facing as they navigate the fifth wave of the pandemic is, without question, the impact the pandemic has had on the health workforce, and the implications this has for health system capacity. Healthcare workers, including people working in direct care, support, and leadership roles, are exhausted after dealing with COVID-19 for nearly two years, and many are retiring early, moving to other roles in the sector, or leaving the sector entirely.

At the same time, Canada is contending with a more transmissible variant, a lack of testing capabilities, and school closures to help slow the spread of Omicron, which have required many healthcare workers to stay home, leaving fewer people to respond to increasing demand on the health system. All these factors are exacerbating the workforce shortage and mental health concerns that existed prior to the pandemic leading to the most challenging health workforce conditions experienced to date.

We need innovative short-term and long-term solutions to right the ship. Some solutions HealthCareCAN has been advocating for include:

- Leveraging immigration and international recruitment of healthcare professional to meet existing need over the short and medium term.

- Collaboration between all levels of government, regulators, and educational institutions to increase the number of Canadian-trained healthcare professionals to meet long-term needs.
- Federal government collaboration with provincial and territorial governments and healthcare organizations across the country to support, including through increased investments, the health, wellness, safety and resiliency of the healthcare workforce. This could include expanding mental health and wellness research, programs, and resources specific to healthcare workers as well as supporting the enhancement of employer-provided mental health benefits.
- Implement a pan-Canadian health workforce planning strategy with the goal of gathering workforce data and developing solutions to tackle the shortage of healthcare workers and address the factors hindering recruitment and retention. This would involve establishing a health workforce agency to enable strategic health workforce data gathering, research and planning, as well as working with provincial and territorial governments, regulators, and health sector partners to develop and implement strategies to address systemic health human resources shortages.

Adoption of the above recommendations will go a long way to help address current health workforce shortage and surge capacity concerns, while also taking a longer view to ensure Canada has the health workforce necessary to meet future demand. These are recommendations that HealthCareCAN, along with several other healthcare advocacy groups, have been calling for throughout the pandemic – and far before that.

I urge you as Chair, along with your colleagues, to consider these important issues and take immediate action to implement the solutions outlined above. Healthcare is a people business and right now our people are exhausted and facing tremendous challenges as they try to provide the high-quality healthcare people across Canada need. The federal government must be there for healthcare workers when they need them most.

I thank you for your consideration of the recommendations we have put forward. HealthCareCAN and our members remain ready to assist you in any way we can. Should the Committee wish, we would welcome the opportunity to address the members of the Standing Committee on Health.

Yours sincerely,



Paul-Émile Cloutier
President and CEO

cc: Luc Berthold, Vice-Chair, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Luc Thériault, Vice-Chair, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Don Davies, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health

Stephen Ellis, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Brendan Hanley, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Majid Jowhari, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Shelby Kramp-Neuman, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Marcus Powlowski, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Sonia Sidhu, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Adam van Koeverden, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Ryan Williams, Member, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Michael MacPherson, Clerk, House of Commons Standing Committee on Health
Martine Bouchard, Chair, HealthCareCAN Board of Directors
Steve Ashton, Co-Chair, HealthCareCAN Health Human Resources Advisory Committee
Elaine Watson, Co-Chair, HealthCareCAN Health Human Resources Advisory Committee
Jonathan Mitchell, Vice-President, Research and Policy, HealthCareCAN
Bianca Carlone, Government Relations and Policy Analyst, HealthCareCAN