



HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES

What are health human resources?

This term refers to the individuals who provide health care and health services to the public. This includes a wide variety of occupations ranging from physicians and nurses to allied health professionals such as medical laboratory technicians, pharmacists, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Why are health human resources important to the renewal of the health care system?

Many communities do not have enough doctors, nurses or other health professionals to ensure that people get the care they need, when they need it. Canada requires the right number and the right mix of well-trained health professionals in order to provide Canadians in all areas of our country with timely access to quality care. Strengthening the health workforce is necessary to reduce the wait times and to carry out reforms that are needed to improve and sustain our health care system.

Health care is highly labour intensive and there are concerns about current and impending shortages of health care providers. These workers are mobile, and getting the right mix across 13 provincial and territorial jurisdictions is challenging at the best of times. Now governments have the added challenge posed by the combination of an aging population, which will require more health care services, and an aging health care workforce, where retiring professionals outnumber new graduates in many areas. Averting future health workforce shortages requires a committed and sustained effort now, given the length of time it takes to train most health professionals.

What actions are governments taking to ensure a strong health care workforce?

In the 2003 Accord on Health Care Renewal, federal, provincial and territorial governments committed to collaborate on strategies to improve Canada-wide health human resources planning, promote interdisciplinary education, improve recruitment and retention and ensure the supply of needed health providers.

The Government of Canada committed \$85 million over five years to these initiatives.

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Benefits to Canadians

- Improved access to the appropriate health care provider to meet their needs;
- Improved access to care from interprofessional teams;
- Reduced waiting times for health care;
- Averting shortages of needed health professionals.

Progress to date:

- The Government has reached agreement with the provinces and territories and key medical community stakeholders on improved processes for licensing foreign-trained physicians. On March 1, 2004, the Government announced \$4 million in funding to support these improvements, including \$3 million to assist provinces in assessing international medical graduates. These initiatives will strengthen the health care system by helping to meet Canada's need for more doctors. Similar initiatives are planned for foreign-trained nurses and other internationally educated medical graduates.
- Governments have begun work with such organizations as the Canadian College of Family Physicians on increasing recruitment and retention of health professionals, while also preparing initiatives on interprofessional education to promote collaborative care.
- The Government of Canada is working closely with provinces and territories on a nation-wide planning framework that will regularly identify health workforce issues. Addressing these issues will help to improve planning and facilitate joint decision-making on how to meet the future health needs of Canadians.
- The Government is consulting with national professional associations of doctors, nurses and other health care providers, drawing on their insights in order to renew and revitalize Canada's health care workforce. Representatives of health care regulators and educators are also collaborating with governments to help create the workforce Canada needs.

Efforts are also underway to increase the number of doctors and nurses produced by Canada's educational system. Since 1998, provincial governments have provided additional funding for more than 400 new seats at medical schools and increased positions for nursing students by 40 per cent.