

April 27, 2021

To:

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P. Prime Minister of Canada	Hon. François Legault, M.N.A. Premier of Quebec Chair, Council of the Federation	Hon. Doug Ford, M.P.P. Premier of Ontario	Hon. Iain Rankin, M.L.A. Premier of Nova Scotia
Hon. Blaine Higgs, M.L.A. Premier of New Brunswick	Hon. Brian Pallister, M.L.A. Premier of Manitoba Vice-Chair, Council of the Federation	Hon. John Horgan, M.L.A. Premier of British Columbia	Hon. Dennis King, M.L.A. Premier of Prince Edward Island
Hon. Scott Moe, M.L.A. Premier of Saskatchewan	Hon. Jason Kenney, M.L.A. Premier of Alberta	Hon. Andrew Furey, M.H.A. Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador	Hon. Caroline Cochrane, M.L.A. Premier of the Northwest Territories
Hon. Sandy Silver, M.L.A. Premier of Yukon	Hon. Joe Savikataaq, M.L.A. Premier of Nunavut		

Re: Critical care nurses need our critical care

Dear First Ministers,

On behalf of the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses (CACCN), we are writing to urge your governments to accelerate action to support critical care nurses during these dire times of the COVID-19 third wave.

Critical care nurses are now on the brink of collapse in many areas across Canada. They were already in limited supply before the pandemic. Now, they are exhausted, traumatized, sad, and burnt out. They do not have much left to give. And without them, intensive care stops. It is that simple.

Some nurses are being redeployed around systems to respond to surges of COVID-19. This is a sign of how critical the situation is and, although not ideal, nurses understand they are needed to address the immediate crisis. While these measures are necessary, it is critical to be aware of how they can impact patient care and the mental health of staff. Many COVID-19 patients are so sick that they may need more than one nurse. But unfortunately, in some locations in Canada, one nurse is now caring for multiple patients.

Messaging to the public needs to be further clarified. Empty or additional beds do not necessarily mean there is room to take more patients as those beds must be combined with appropriate staffing. Messaging that reflects that notion will be helpful to adequately educate and convey to the public the seriousness of the situation.

Currently, the intensity of the care needed by patients in critical care units has stretched nurses to the breaking point and concerns about their deteriorating mental health are widespread. By their own assessment, the mental health of many nurses was already extremely precarious before the pandemic. Now, they have been pushed to or beyond the brink at work, while they go home to all the same fears and challenges as everyone else across Canada. The long-term fallouts from the pandemic will rely on an engaged and energized health workforce and how well they can respond post-pandemic is now a serious concern.

Canada's 440,000 regulated nurses have showed up from the outset. Now, 15 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses are exhausted and traumatized. Nurses are indeed resilient, but resilience implies recovery and bouncing back. Weeping in hallways and break rooms throughout their shifts after witnessing indescribable human suffering is not a sign of resilience. Nurses also have courage and stamina, but now even those are being tapped to the point where critical care teams are not going to be able to carry on.

Today, when Canada needs nurses more urgently than at any point in our history, they themselves are at risk of utter collapse. CNA and CACCN urge that your governments:

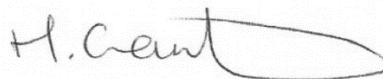
- **Work together as a federation in this crisis.** Urgent action is needed to shut borders, put in every measure to stop movement around society, shut every non-essential service, and support that by immediately providing every person with paid sick days and a basic income for their food, rent, and essential expenses so they can isolate until the emergency passes.
- **Avoid using language equating empty beds with available capacity.** Additional beds only speak to physical space, not staff and resourced capacity. More clarity to the public can help better educate those who deny the gravity of the emergency and discourage risk-taking behaviours of Canadians.
- **Deliver vaccines** to the highest risk communities of the country, essential workers – often racialized communities – and all people living in hot spots, and within groups that are most at risk.
- **Remove all regulatory barriers** preventing regulated nurses in good standing from moving across provincial and territorial borders to help fight COVID-19.
- **Facilitate the hiring of health-care workers,** put every possible benefit and bonus in place to attract and retain staff in hard-to-staff areas, and work with unions to remove all barriers to movement within organizations.
- **Mobilize mental health and crisis management teams** to do all they can to help take care of nurses and their colleagues including regular critical incident debriefing, and meaningful emotional supports accessible at the moment within the practice setting.

Canada's nearly-21,000 critical care nurses play an integral role in the fight against COVID-19 and governments need to re-double all efforts to do the right things to care for them, as they care for us all. We understand these are challenging times. If there is anything we can do to help your governments, you need only ask.

Sincerely,



Tim Guest, MBA, BScN, RN
President
Canadian Nurses Association



Mélanie Gauthier, RN., BScN, M. Int. Care N.,
CNCC(C)
President
Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses

CC: Health Ministers