

CANADIAN
NURSES
ASSOCIATION



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INFIRMIÈRES ET
INFIRMIERS DU CANADA

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Health

H1N1 Preparedness & Response

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Bonjour, mon nom est Rachel Bard and I am the chief executive officer of the Canadian Nurses Association, representing registered nurses from across the country. Thank you for the opportunity to present nurses' solutions for successfully managing the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Our analysis of the implementation of the pandemic plan to date reveals several improvements since the last public health crisis, namely SARS, but also several areas that require action.

Let me begin with the strengths.

First, we commend Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq and the chief public health officer for their regular communication with the public and health professionals. CNA appreciates the opportunities for communication with Public Health Agency officials and Canada's registered nurses appreciate how the minister has reached out to them.

Second, consultation with health professionals has been fairly extensive. CNA and other national groups have been consulted on a number of PHAC policy initiatives, including vaccine delivery guidelines and an online course for health professionals.

Third, we support PHAC's evidence-based approach to the pandemic, using data and information from around the world to inform implementation of the pandemic plan.

This is not to say there is not room for improvement. Coordination is a challenge, especially as it relates to communication. Canada's registered nurses tell us they have been getting information from multiple sources, but that it is not always consistent. They receive information from PHAC, their provincial or territorial government, their local public health unit, their employer, the media, and I could go on. While we recognize the responsibilities of various governments and other stakeholders, we need to find a way to coordinate and streamline our communication. We urge the federal government to lead this effort by ensuring consistent and timely messaging, policies and implementation. Without this, we will confuse health professionals and the public, and erode trust in our public health system and governments.

Health professionals are being inundated with information. From the very onset of this pandemic, CNA has called on the federal government to produce plain-language guidelines for health professionals that are user-friendly and easy to access. Given that health professionals may be operating under difficult conditions, it is imperative that they be able to quickly find authoritative information that focuses on essential facts. This information must be available in both paper and electronic formats in order to reach nurses and other health professionals in all corners of the country.

Our second concern is protecting the health of nurses during this pandemic. Nurses tell us that some employers have not offered fit-testing of N95 masks or the masks are not available. Imagine how the health system will fare if the largest group of health professionals – that is, nurses – falls ill and can't report to work. We need your help to ensure that Canada's nurses are protected.

Third, the electronic health record is an essential component in the real-time tracking and reporting of patient information during public health emergencies. Continued investment in e-health is critical, and we therefore urge the federal government to release the \$500 million announced in the federal budget for Infoway to continue implementation of the electronic health record.

And finally, we believe that this pandemic points to the need for better research to observe and evaluate the allocation of nursing resources. Lessons learned will inform our actions this time around and will help us improve our level of emergency preparedness and benefit all Canadians in the future.

Canada's registered nurses and CNA are ready and willing to work with governments to minimize the effects of this pandemic. Registered nurses have the skills and knowledge to play a number of key roles. In fact, CNA's provincial and territorial members have been working with their governments to expedite re-registration for recently retired nurses, so that they can be called upon to take an active role in dealing with this crisis.

Canada's registered nurses are your partners in this pandemic.
Merci.