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# THE SASKATCHEWAN NURSING LABOUR MARKET

A REPORT PREPARED FOR

THE SASKATCHEWAN REGISTERED NURSES' ASSOCIATION  
THE REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES ASSOCIATION OF SASKATCHEWAN  
THE SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION OF LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This analysis of the labour market for Saskatchewan's professional nurses was prepared by Doug Elliott from QED Information Systems Inc., a Regina-based consulting firm. It was commissioned by the three professional associations – the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA), the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan (RPNAS), and the Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses (SALPN). The Saskatchewan Ministry of Health provided part of the funding for the research.

The report uses a supply and demand approach to describing the labour market for nurses in Saskatchewan. The majority of the statistics are from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) which publishes data collected from the registration forms used by the three professional associations.

There are too few nurse practitioners in Saskatchewan to enable publication of separate statistical information about them so they are combined with registered nurses in the statistics. The three groupings of nursing professionals examined in the report are therefore:

- Registered Nurses including Nurse Practitioners (RNs/NPs),
- Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs), and
- Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs).

Section 2 contains information about the number of nurses in Saskatchewan. While the number of persons registered with the professional associations is higher, the number of nurses employed in nursing positions in June 2013 was:

- 10,257 RNs/NPs (of which 157 were NPs);
- 841 RPNs; and
- 2,842 LPNs.

The statistics in this section show that LPNs are the fastest growing of the three profession. From 2006 to 2013, the number of nurses has increased by an average of:

- 2.8% per year among RNs/NPs; and
- 3.6% per year among LPNs.

The number of RPNs declined by an average of 1.2% per year over the period.

Adjusted for population, there are an above-average number of RNs/NPs in Saskatchewan. The number per 100,000 population in 2013 was:

- 925 RNs/NPs compared with the national average of 788;
- 256 LPNs compared with the national average of 266; and
- 76 RPNs compared with the western Canadian average of 48.

Section 3 looks at the supply of nurses including information about their education level and the number of new graduates.

- According to CIHI there are now approximately 400 new RN/NP graduates from Saskatchewan's post-secondary educational institutions. This is double the number in the mid-2000s.

- A Psychiatric Nursing Program was recently instituted at SIAST<sup>1</sup> and the number of graduates is expected to be 20 to 25 per year. The number of graduates from SIAST's practical nursing program averages approximately 125 per year.
- In 1998, one in five (20%) Saskatchewan RNs/NPs employed in nursing reported their highest level of nursing-related education as a degree in nursing. By 2011, the proportion was greater than 50% and by 2013, it had reached 58%. Just over three quarters of RNs/NPs received their nursing education in Saskatchewan.
- RNs/NPs who graduated less than ten years ago now outnumber those who graduated more than thirty years ago. The highest proportions of RPNs, on the other hand, are those who graduated more than twenty years ago. Among LPNs, there is a large and increasing proportion who are recent graduates.

Age distributions and the associated retention and retirement rates are important predictors of the future supply of nurses. LPNs are the youngest of the three professions; RPNs are the oldest.

- The age distribution of RNs/NPs has two clusters. One peak, with 37% of the total, is among those in their fifties and early sixties. The other, with 26% of the total, is among those 25 to 34 years of age.
- Compared with other provinces, Saskatchewan has relatively more younger RNs/NPs and relatively more older RNs/NPs. In other words, the province has relatively few in the middle age group.
- The absolute number of RNs/NPs who are retiring is increasing. Compared with approximately 150 per year from 2006 to 2010, the number of SUN members who retired in 2013 was 232. On average, they were 60 years of age.
- Compared with RNs, there are relatively few RPNs in younger age groups and relatively more in older age groups.
- Compared with RNs/NPs, there is a large proportion of LPNs who are under 35 years of age. Relatively few LPNs are 60 years of age or older.

Other supply issues such as the number of unemployed nurses and the net interprovincial flows are also examined in Section 3.

- The unemployment rates for nurses are very low. There is no large pool of unemployed nurses available in the province.
- For RNs/NPs, the interprovincial inflows and outflows are more or less in balance whereas there was a net outflow in previous years. The graduate follow-up surveys also suggest that more RNs/NPs are finding work in the province. Nevertheless, an increasing proportion of RNs/NPs were trained in other provinces or countries which indicates that the number of graduates has not been high enough to meet the demand.
- The reciprocity data from the RPNAS shows a similar pattern to the one for RNs/NPs.
- For LPNs, out-migration is quite low and has been on a downward trend. In-migration has been on an upward trend from under 50 per year in the late-1990s to more than 150 per year in 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> SIAST is now known as Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Using historical patterns of retention and retirement and a constant number of new graduates near the current level, the supply of nurses is projected over the next fifteen years under a “present-trends-continue” kind of scenario.

- The supply of RNs/NPs is projected to grow by 2.1% per year compared with 1.9% in the ten years ending in 2013.
- The supply of RPNs will be effectively constant over the next fifteen years, falling slightly to reach 765 by 2025 before starting to increase again.
- The supply of LPNs is projected to grow by 3.8% per year compared with 3.0% in the ten years ending in 2013.

Section 4 summarizes information about the demand side of the labour market equation.

- The majority of RNs/NPs still work in acute care hospitals but, over time, fewer are working in nursing homes and fewer are in management positions. There are an increasing number who work for educational institutions, governments, and associations (like the SRNA).
- The decline in RPNs is concentrated in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.
- An increasing proportion of LPNs are working in hospitals and in long-term care facilities.
- Among the three professions, RPNs are the most likely to work full-time but the proportion who do so is declining.
- Vacancy rates among health regions and the cancer agency are in the 5% to 6% range for RNs/NPs and LPNs and somewhat lower for RPNs.

Wage rates are a measure of the imbalance between supply and demand and are also useful to measure economic pressures for interprovincial migration.

- With increases well in excess of the rate of inflation, Saskatchewan’s unionized nurses have gone from having the lowest rates of pay in the four western provinces to having the highest.
- The collective agreement rates for LPNs show a similar pattern, namely that rates in Saskatchewan are higher than in the other western provinces. This is particularly true for starting rates.

There are a host of factors that affect the demand for nurses and most cannot be quantified. As one possible scenario, the report examines the relationship between supply and demand if the demand for nurses grows at 1.5% per year, approximately the same rate of increase that we expect for the population. Alternate annual growth rates of 1.0% and 2.0% are included for reference purposes.

Section 5 compares the supply projection from Section 3 with the demand scenarios in Section 4. Three different patterns were found.

- With current levels of graduations and retention rates, the supply of RNs/NPs will grow at approximately the same rate of growth as the demand so the labour market will be in a state of relative stability.
- With current levels of graduations and retention rates, the supply of RPNs will decline whereas the demand will increase, leading to a gap of more than 200 to 400 RPNs by 2025.
- With current levels of graduations and retention rates, the supply of LPNs will grow more quickly than demand, leading to an oversupply.