

Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of BC

February 22, 2024

2024 BC Budget Strong Health Vision Falls Short on Nursing

VICTORIA – The just released 2024-25 BC Budget focuses largely on government’s ongoing priority to strengthen health care. Steady investments of \$6 billion over a three-year period in new health and mental health funding was specifically noted. Additionally, capital investments in health care infrastructure, along with targeted investment in cancer care, seniors care, mental health and substance use, and in vitro fertilization services were noted as priorities. Health care services continue to be the largest portion of funding allocation at roughly 37% of total expenditures.

Budget 2024 also includes directed funding for self-determined project funding for First Nations, as well as a new approach to property related self-determination through Modern Treaty Nations. In addition, \$24 million over four years will be invested in road maintenance specifically for First Nations relying on forest service roads for primary access. Nursing knows that access to communities means access to care and NNPBC applauds the explicit investment in both infrastructure for First Nations and timely enablers of self-determination for Indigenous People.

Budget 2024 also recognizes that significant retirement within the health workforce and specifically nursing at a time of increased demand. NNPBC appreciates this recognition but with no specific allocation of funds to recruit and retain there is a missed opportunity to invest in nursing, BC’s largest health workforce. While infrastructure development is welcome, without active priority on retaining and recruiting nurses, this new infrastructure is unlikely to be adequately staffed to support the needs of the communities. Moreover, Budget 2024 misses an opportunity to consider the contributions of nurse practitioners (NPs) to primary care, consistently omitting NPs and nurses as primary care providers in the language used in expenditures line items such as those outlined in the Medical Services Plan (MSP).

Also absent from a nursing perspective:

- Budget 2024 has a strong focus on affordability and health care, it is a miss to include nursing as merely an example of a population that may benefit from investment in rental housing. Reducing nursing to a demographic receiving services diminishes their vital contributions to a sustained and functioning system.
- Any childcare infrastructure and rebate programs specific to a gendered health workforce.
- Targeted home buying programs and rental rebates to enable housing in communities where nurses provide care.
- Reduction in student loan debt for all nursing designations, including RNs pursuing graduate training to transition to NP practice.
- No investments in quality practice environments.
- No post-secondary funding targeted to paid practicum placements for nursing students.
- Additional support for nurses interested in bridging programs (LPN, RN, RPN).
- No mention of funding to develop and support nursing faculty who educate future nurses and Internationally Educated Nurses.
- No specialty nursing training pathways for health care areas of high demand.
- No capital investment in nursing training facilities, including new builds, and modernizing existing learning spaces.

“While NNPBC appreciates investments and expenditures in health and directed funding to support self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, Budget 2024 falls short in specific investments into nursing, the largest group of health providers in BC. Nurses are the bedrock of health care and yet only mentioned twice in Budget 2024. Clearly more needs to be done to recognize that without nurses, there is no health care. NNPBC will continue to advocate for effective recruitment and retention strategies on behalf of the profession” said Sherri Kensall, NNPBC Board Chair.

From the perspective of the social determinants of health, NNPBC notes a diverse range of investment in this area including:

- Supportive housing investments in Victoria, Vancouver, Hope, and Maple Ridge.

- Increased investment in the Classroom Enhancement Fund to connect kindergarten to grade 12 students to special education, psychology, and counsellors.
- New Provincial Outreach Teams providing screening and literacy supports.
- Scaling autism and complex health supports.
- Investment in active transportation grants for communities.
- Investments in HandyDART infrastructure in Victoria.
- Increased investment in income and disability assistance, including the Senior's Supplement, Bus Pass and Transportation Supplement, and other supports.
- Climate action and climate emergency investments including grant and rebate programs for clean transportation programs, heat pump rebates, public electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and \$3 million to support youth involvement in climate action.

Bernice Budz, NNPBC CEO notes; "As nursing professionals we are glad to see a continued investment in health care and in the social determinants of health despite the economic realities during which this budget is presented. It remains a missed opportunity to not invest in leadership, training and supports for nurses in support of quality practice environments. Nursing remains excluded from critical tables that would ensure direct nursing input into these important supports. These missed opportunities ultimately hurt the people of BC who rely on and deserve exceptional care when it comes to their health and mental health."

NNPBC will continue to partner and collaborate with the BC Ministry of Health and the BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to address our concerns and to ensure that nursing led solutions focus heavily on future initiatives and plans.

-30-

For inquiries, please contact Alix Arndt, Chief Operating Office at aarndt@nnpbc.com.