

**REVITALIZING THE NURSING WORKFORCE  
AND  
STRENGTHENING MEDICARE**

**HIGHLIGHTS OF CNA RECOMMENDATIONS  
TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**The purpose of the CNA recommendations is, first, to set out a concrete strategy for the federal government to do its part to revitalize the nursing workforce and, second, to propose how the federal government can assert its leadership and strengthen Medicare.**

**1. REVITALIZING THE NURSING WORKFORCE**

The CNA is proposing that the federal government adopt a four-part strategy to revitalize the nursing workforce.

1. The most pressing issue is retention of those currently in the nursing workforce. The solution to this issue lies in the regulatory framework and in workplace policies. The national framework for nursing includes education, certification and licensing, as well as practice standards. CNA recommends the federal government fund:
  - technological supports needed to electronically deliver nursing education and continuing education;
  - development of electronic testing capacity for certification exams;
  - identification, updating, and dissemination of national standards of practice; and
  - training and development of nursing leaders and senior decision-makers.

**The costs of these initiatives would be \$20 million a year over the next five years to be allocated as follows:**

- \$3 million for the identification and updating of nursing practice standards;
- \$4 million for dissemination of practice standards;
- \$3 million for training and development of nursing leaders;
- \$5 million for the development of technology supports for delivering distance education; and
- \$5 million for the facilitation of certification and, in particular, specialty certification, including electronic testing and preparation.

2. Relevant to the retention of nurses, CNA recommends that the federal government assist in the improvement of working conditions, supporting employers to provide continuing education, mentoring and work-life balance policies. CNA proposes:
  - the creation of an award program to recognize employers who implement programs promoting nursing excellence.
  - CNA also proposes that the federal government invest in the expansion of the accreditation program in acute care facilities, to track and report on indicators related to working conditions.

**The costs of these initiatives are \$80 million a year over five years beginning in 2004.**

3. CNA recommends that the federal government facilitate recruitment of 20,000 new nurses by reducing tuition costs for students. In the United Kingdom, tuition costs have been eliminated. CNA believes Canada should assess adopting a similar approach. In the meantime, CNA recommends the federal government provide bursaries to nursing students to cover 50 per cent of their annual tuition costs. This investment should be coupled with a national campaign to interest people in pursuing a nursing career.

**The costs are \$21.5 million a year over the next 10 years to be allocated as follows:**

- \$20 million in the form of bursaries to cover 50 per cent of the annual cost of tuition for 2000 students; and
  - \$1.5 million to fund a recruitment and public awareness campaign.
4. CNA recommends that the federal government enhance the capacity of new undergraduate, master and PhD seats, as well as graduate fellowships.

**The funding required, based on current costs, is \$9.5 million a year over the next 10 years to be allocated as follows:**

- \$4 million to fund undergraduate seats in order to restore the number of seats to the 1990 level;
- \$4 million to fund master seats;
- \$1 million to fund PhD seats; and
- \$500 thousand to fund graduate fellowships and post-doctoral studies.

It is proposed that the new funding be allocated through direct provision of benefits to individuals by the federal government and through provision of benefits to institutions, such as schools of nursing or hospitals via a “neutral” third party.

## **2. STRENGTHENING MEDICARE THROUGH THE TAX SYSTEM**

- Revitalizing the nursing workforce is one way to strengthen Medicare.
- In this regard, CNA proposes that, where possible, the tax system be used to provide direct benefits to individuals. For example, bursaries to cover 50 per cent of the cost of tuition could be delivered to nursing students directly in the form of a refundable tax credit.
- CNA also believes the federal government should respect its commitments to extend Medicare coverage to include such benefits as those relating to home care and pharmacare. It understands the difficulty of launching new programs using the traditional mechanism of cost-sharing and is aware of the “leakage” problem associated with running cost-shared and block-funded programs side-by-side. And CNA appreciates why the federal government is reluctant to block-fund new programs in any case, given the lack accountability such programs entail. Accordingly, CNA is recommending that other mechanisms for strengthening Medicare be explored.
- In particular, CNA believes it is appropriate for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the Minister of Finance to examine the feasibility of delivering new, or supplementary, health insurance benefits directly to Canadians through the tax system. The examination should look at mechanisms that ensure that the funds allocated are spent on services linked to health and well-being. The examination should also identify the costs of the new benefits as well as the impacts on various economic groups, of implementing each mechanisms. The caveat for CNA is that any new mechanism respects the principle of universality, as well as the other four principles of the Canada Health Act.