

## **Investing in Front-Line Health Care – An Issue Report from Working Families Manitoba**

In recent decades, health care has been revolutionized by high-tech equipment and breakthrough medicines. Even with these advances however, health care is still fundamentally about people taking care of people. Patients don't benefit from specialized equipment and new drugs if there are not enough nurses, doctors, health care aides and other caregivers to run the machines, administer the medicines, and generally provide care. Front-line caregivers remain the heart of our health care system.

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Manitobans are all too familiar with what happens when cuts are made to front-line health care. In the 1990s, nurses and health care aides were laid off and the number of doctors in the province declined year after year. Health care training programs were slashed and it took years and millions of dollars before Manitoba could once again start graduating enough skilled caregivers to significantly increase the numbers of health practitioners at the bedside of Manitoba patients. Patients and their families suffered.

Since then, much progress has been made in training and hiring front-line health caregivers:

- Since the number of active, practising nurses in Manitoba bottomed out in 1999, there has been a net increase of 3,026 nurses;<sup>i</sup>
- There has been a net increase in the number of doctors practising in Manitoba every year since 1999 after several years of annual decreases<sup>ii</sup>;
- The number of filled health care aide positions in Manitoba has grown every year since 2000, for a total increase of 1,696 health care aides<sup>iii</sup>;
- Allied health care professionals caring for Manitoba patients have also grown. For example, between 2001-2008, Manitoba saw increases in occupational therapists (+19%), physiotherapists (+32%), laboratory technologists (+7%), radiation technologists (+12%), respiratory therapists (+27%), midwives (+58%), etc.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite this progress, major challenges remain for the future of our health care system:

- Manitoba's population is growing faster than it has in decades<sup>v</sup> and will increase demand for health care services<sup>vi</sup>.
- With an aging population, the growing number of seniors will increase the average seriousness of patient health problems, "requiring increased nursing to patient ratios."<sup>vii</sup>
- 42% of Manitoba nurses are over 50 years of age - a higher proportion than in the rest of Canada.<sup>viii</sup> As a result, more than 1,300 Manitoba nurses are expected to retire over the next five years.<sup>ix</sup>

These facts mean that continued progress on health care in Manitoba will require training, hiring and retaining more front-line caregivers. That's why the Working Families Manitoba campaign wants **all** political parties to commit to policies that will ensure more nurses, health care aides and other front-line caregivers for Manitoba patients. Before the provincial election, ask the parties if they will commit to:

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- expanded training programs for front-line caregivers like nurses, health care aides, allied health professionals and doctors;
- expanding incentives for new graduates to work in Manitoba's health care system (eg. conditional grant programs that help newly graduated nurses and doctors pay for their education in exchange for a commitment to work in Manitoba);
- more continuing education opportunities to help caregivers upgrade their skills and encourage them to stay in the workforce;
- strengthening health and safety protections that address the risks to health care workers (egs. measures to reduce violence in the workplace and to ensure adequate protective equipment);
- ensuring that wages and benefits for health care workers are competitive with other Canadian provinces;
- implementing staffing guidelines that prevent excess workloads and safeguard patient safety;
- rejecting for-profit health care because it takes nurses and other caregivers away from the public, not-for-profit health care system; and
- strengthening and protecting our public health care system to ensure health care is there for us all when we need it.

## Sources:

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<sup>i</sup> Data from Annual Reports of the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba and College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba, as compiled by: Province of Manitoba, *Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply – 2010* (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/nurses/docs/mnlms10.pdf>).

<sup>ii</sup> College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, *Physician Resource Statistics*.

<sup>iii</sup> Province of Manitoba, *Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply – 2010* (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/nurses/docs/mnlms10.pdf>).

<sup>iv</sup> Percentages calculated from: Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Canada's Health Care Providers – 2008 Provincial Profiles: A Look at 24 Health Occupations* ([http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/provincial\\_profiles\\_2010\\_e.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/provincial_profiles_2010_e.pdf)).

<sup>v</sup> Data from Statistics Canada, as presented by Province of Manitoba:  
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2011/06/2011-06-22-100700-11819.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Province of Manitoba, *Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply – 2010* (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/nurses/docs/mnlms10.pdf>).

<sup>vii</sup> Province of Manitoba, *Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply – 2010* (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/nurses/docs/mnlms10.pdf>). See also: Conrad Ferguson and Morneau Sobeco, *Workforce Management Objective C – Phased Retirement (Enablers and Barriers) and Other Programs for the Retention of Older Health Care Workers* ([http://www.cna-nurses.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/Retention\\_Older\\_Health\\_Care\\_Workers\\_e.pdf](http://www.cna-nurses.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/Retention_Older_Health_Care_Workers_e.pdf)).

<sup>viii</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Regulated Nurses: Canadian Trends, 2005 to 2009* ([http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/nursing\\_report\\_2005-2009\\_en.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/nursing_report_2005-2009_en.pdf)).

<sup>ix</sup> Province of Manitoba, *Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply – 2010* (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/nurses/docs/mnlms10.pdf>).