



FEBRUARY 2026

BUDGET 2026 RECOMMENDATIONS

Nurses' Recommendations

1. Create a Nursing Student Bursary to better account for limited employment opportunities that nursing students face due to accelerated program timelines, reducing debt burden incurred during their education.
2. Work in partnership with nurses and nursing organizations to identify and reduce barriers that limit full scope of practice, enabling nurses to deliver the care they are trained to provide while improving efficiency by reducing avoidable healthcare costs.
3. Increase targeted investments in the recruitment and retention of nursing faculty and clinical training staff to meet growing enrollment demand and create the capacity necessary to educate the next generation of nurses.

About ARNM

The Association of Regulated Nurses of Manitoba (ARNM) is the professional association representing licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs), nurse practitioners (NPs), registered nurses (RNs), graduate nurses, nursing students and former registered nurses in Manitoba.

We believe in supporting and promoting nursing across all settings – practice, education, research, leadership and policy. We believe in doing what's best for our members and the health of our communities. We support nurses to be empowered health leaders across all settings to advance nursing and advocate for the public they serve. We promote and celebrate excellence in nursing.

Context

Nurses are not only the backbone of Manitobans' health and well-being, but are also critical to our province's economic stability. Nurses are highly educated, highly skilled, and increasingly specialized health care professionals who deliver complex, autonomous care across the health system. Across Manitoba nurses strengthen labour force participation, providing access to primary and preventative care. In addition to clinical care, nurses also provide health education, manage chronic diseases, and are often the first point of contact with the healthcare system when disaster strikes. For example, nurses provided frontline care during Manitoba's wildfires in the summer of 2025, supporting Manitobans when they needed it the most.

The 2025 provincial budget included key commitments that ARNM and our members have long advocated for. This included a continued focus on nurse recruitment and retention, a \$25 million increase to Manitoba Student Loans, and improved access to primary care. The provincial government has also taken positive steps to re-establish a relationship between the government and nurses and nursing associations, and this has not gone unnoticed.

While these are important steps forward, work remains to close the persistent gaps in our health-care system. Ongoing issues, such as employment dissatisfaction, have contributed to nurses' increased levels of stress and burnout. To counter this, nursing education programs are being relied upon to bring more nurses into the workforce, but it currently lacks the capacity to meet current and projected workforce needs due to the constraints of a shortage of qualified nursing educators. As a result, clinical placement capacity has been strained, limiting the number of available placements. It is essential that we support today's nurses so they can educate and mentor the next generation.

When nursing shortages persist, wait times for primary care grow¹, procedures are delayed, and workforce productivity across the economy is affected. A strong, well-supported nursing workforce is essential to building a more resilient healthcare system and a more competitive economy for Manitoba. The following recommendations outline practical steps that the provincial government can take to build on the progress achieved and strengthen our healthcare system for the health of our communities across Manitoba.

Nurses' Solutions

1. ***Create a Nursing Student Bursary to better account for limited employment opportunities that nursing students face due to accelerated program timelines, reducing debt burden incurred during their education.***

Strengthening Manitoba's nursing workforce requires sustained efforts to reduce the financial barriers associated with gaining a nursing degree. Manitoba has a responsibility to provide nursing students with comprehensive support throughout their education, ensuring they graduate ready to contribute confidently and effectively to our healthcare workforce. As the province focuses on increasing its nursing workforce to meet Manitoba's needs, it is essential that financial barriers do not deter the next generation of nurses from entering the profession.

In Fall 2022, following encouragement from Premier Stefanson's Progressive Conservative government, the University of Manitoba (UofM) amended their nursing program to run across three terms per year (fall, winter, and summer), enabling students to complete the program in 28 months as opposed to three years. UofM strongly discourages students from having full- or part-time employment while pursuing their degree. This has resulted in their nursing students being unable to hold employment for the duration of their degree — a minimum of 28 months. The UofM graduates more than half of Manitoba's nurses every year, and other nursing programs in Manitoba are considering implementing this accelerated timeline.

This decision was made to address the nursing shortage; however, due to financial barriers, some aspiring students are forced to leave the profession before they enter it due to the inability to work during their degree. Additionally, the practicum(s) that nursing students are required to complete during this period are often unpaid, again resulting in a lack of income.

A Nursing Student Bursary would also alleviate the burden of the costs associated with the transition process between education and employment. Upon graduation, in order to become a practicing nurse, candidates must register with the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba (paying both an application fee and a fee to receive a Certificate of Practice and a Certificate of Registration), take a registration exam, obtain a criminal record check, and obtain liability protection. These requirements can cost new nursing graduates up to \$1,500, and can serve as a barrier to a smooth transition into the nursing workforce in our province.

Manitoba must ensure that nursing students are supported throughout their entire education, so that they can enter our workforce with the tools they need to succeed. Reducing financial barriers will expand access to the profession to talented individuals who might otherwise not enter due to economic constraints.

2. *Work in partnership with nurses and nursing organizations to identify and reduce barriers that limit full scope of practice, enabling nurses to deliver the care they are trained to provide while improving efficiency by reducing avoidable healthcare costs.*

Nursing is a regulated profession. Nurses are Canada's largest regulated group of health-care professionals in the country, with over 400,000 regulated nurses practicing in 2024.² As a member of a regulated profession, nurses have passed standardized education programs, criminal record checks and obtained licensure that enables use of the protected titles of registered nurse, registered psychiatric nurse and licensed practical nurse. Nurses are subject to rigorous regulatory oversight and undergo extensive training to be licenced. Consequently, nurses should be empowered to practice to the full extent of their education and scope of practice to maximize their contribution to patient care and system efficiency.

Nurses play a critical role in delivering primary and preventative care, yet many are not permitted to work to their full scope of practice. Canada's Nursing Retention Toolkit recommends reducing barriers that exist that do not allow nurses to practice within their full scope.³ The recommendation outlines that this "may increase feelings of belonging and allow nurses to stay in their organization or community while still gaining career growth opportunities."⁴ To do this, the toolkit emphasizes the importance of meaningfully involving nurses, nursing leaders and executives, and nursing faculty when implementing changes to scope of practice.⁵ More work is needed to ensure that nurses' voices are consistently consulted in high-level decision-making surrounding nurses' legal scope of practice.

Nurses are primary care providers whose knowledge and skills continue to be under-utilized in meeting the needs of Manitobans without consistent access to a primary care provider. They are a vital partner to the provincial government, as their front-line expertise is essential to designing practical, effective solutions that address system-wide challenges. ARNM has long advocated for the inclusion of nurses at all levels of the health-care decision-making process, and we are encouraged to see this principle reflected in various initiatives the provincial government has undertaken over the past year.

ARNM emphasizes the importance of balancing a rigorous licensing process with the need to remove unnecessary barriers so that qualified professionals can begin practicing without delay and work within their full scope of practice. Allowing nurses to work to their full scope of practice will address labour shortages, reduce wait times, and improve access to primary care, especially in rural and underserved communities. ARNM remains committed to working with government to create solutions rooted in the experiences and insights of nurses across Manitoba. Together, we can create a more sustainable, supportive, and effective health-care system.

3. *The provincial government should increase education capacity by making targeted investments in nursing faculty and clinical training infrastructure, recognizing that current enrollment levels are constrained by shortages of qualified educators and available clinical placements.*

The Manitoba government has taken the initial steps to increase access to nursing education, specifically with announcements in Budget 2025 that include additional seats at institutions across the province. However, to ensure that those seats are filled and these institutions can deliver quality education to those seeking to enter the nursing workforce, additional investment is needed to increase clinical supervision capacity. This would relieve pressure currently placed on front-line nurses who also work in education settings, expand clinical placement opportunities, and enable nursing programs to grow in alignment with Manitoba's workforce needs.

Mid and late career nurses play a critical role in the education and support of new graduates, providing essential mentorship and training. However, as many nurses leave the profession altogether, shortages of qualified faculty are limiting clinical placement opportunities, resulting in constraints on nursing programs' intake capacity. In Manitoba, several post-secondary institutions and colleges face persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining nursing faculty, limiting their ability to keep pace with enrolment demand. This contributes to long-term workforce shortages, as Manitobans interested in becoming nurses are unable to access the education and clinical training needed to enter the profession.

Data released in October 2025 found that Manitoba was losing more nurses per year than the Canadian average, increasing the strain on education facilities.⁶ While nursing job vacancies increased steadily in 2023, the highest increase in vacancies the country was reported in Manitoba.⁷ From 2014 to 2023, the rise in turnover increased by 127 per cent.⁸ While the easing of interprovincial labour mobility restrictions is helping to reduce vacancy rates, sustained investments into the recruitment and retention of nursing educators is essential. As the provincial government continues to address workforce shortages, sustained support must be given to nursing education institutions to keep up with current and projected enrollment rates.

In addition to facilitating the increase in the number of new nursing students, this would also allow internationally educated nurses to enter the workforce in a more timely and efficient manner. Many internationally educated nurses are required to complete additional coursework and clinical placement hours to meet provincial licensing requirements before they can practice in Manitoba. ARNM recognizes the importance of maintaining a rigorous licensing process while also removing unnecessary barriers that delay qualified professionals from entering the system. By increasing the number of nursing educators, internationally educated nurses can meet necessary requirements without unnecessary delay, while upholding high standards of care and patient safety.



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