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Nova Scotia: 60 out of every 100 new nurses are leaving the profession before turning 35, finds new MEI report

- Across Canada, 40 young nurses left the profession for every 100 who entered it in 2022.

Montreal, September 24, 2024 – Canadian health care systems struggle to hold on to their young nurses, reveals a publication released this morning by the Montreal Economic Institute.

“For every 100 nurses we train in the country, 40 are leaving the profession before their 35th birthday,” states Renaud Brossard, vice president of Communications at the MEI. “This exodus of young nurses has been worsening for the past decade, contributing to our health care woes.”

By 2030, Canada is expected to suffer a shortage of [117,600 nurses](#).

The MEI’s study shows that for every 100 Canadian nurses who started working in the field in 2022, 40 nurses below the age of 35 quit. This figure is up 25 per cent from 2013.

Nova Scotia ranked ninth, with 60.4 young nurses leaving for every 100 entering in 2022. This is 42 per cent higher than in 2013.

The province of British Columbia saw the biggest drop in the number of young nurses seeking greener pastures, going from 46.3 for every 100 new entrants, down to 31.5 over the course of the last decade.

“Nova Scotians shouldn’t have to settle for a healthcare system that burns out more than half of the new nurses that join it,” added Mr. Brossard. “For many young nurses, staffing agencies are their last remaining hope to stay in nursing. Moves to phase these out without addressing what made them leave the public system in the first-place risk making even more of them leave the trade altogether.”

Last December, the government of Nova Scotia announced [plans](#) to limit agency personnel’s ability to work in the province to 180 days per year. It also announced it would ban Nova Scotia-trained nurses from working in such agencies in their first year following graduation.

Throughout Canada, nurses below the age of 35 are more likely to leave their current job (or leave the profession altogether) than remain where they are, according to a recent [survey](#) from the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

Some of the most commonly cited concerns were a lack of control over their work schedules, including mandatory overtime and a lack of shift flexibility as principal sources of workplace stress.

Nurses who expressed a desire to quit their current position were also more likely to express interest in working for an independent nursing agency.

For those desiring better working conditions with more flexibility and better pay, independent agencies are considered a preferable alternative and often a final step before leaving nursing altogether.

“It’s understandable why governments would want to reduce their reliance on nursing agencies, given their costs, but that shouldn’t be done at the expense of patient treatment,” notes Mr. Brossard. “If governments want to reduce their reliance on independent staff, they need to work on giving young nurses more flexibility to make working for the healthcare system attractive to them once more.”

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The MEI is an independent public policy think tank with offices in Montreal and Calgary. Through its publications, media appearances, and advisory services to policymakers, the MEI stimulates public policy debate and reforms based on sound economics and entrepreneurship.

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Interview requests

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