

10 facts about the staffing crisis

in BC's seniors living, wellness and care sector

1. A Growing Industry

The seniors care, living and wellness sector is experiencing growth due to the aging population, resulting in increased demand for care and support services. The second fastest growing sector in the province, the 'nursing and residential care' sector will grow at 2.1% annually over the next decade to 2033, adding nearly 30,000 jobs.

Source: Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills (2023). *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2023 Edition*. Victoria, Government of British Columbia.

2. Workforce Shortages

Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated pre-existing worker shortages in the seniors care and living sector. Worker vacancy rates doubled during the pandemic and have remained high even as society recovers from the crisis.

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0326-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by industry sector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality

3. Diverse Career Opportunities

The seniors care, living and wellness sector offers a range of career opportunities beyond direct caregiving. Roles include nursing, personal care, companionship, administration, social work, physical therapy, culinary arts and more. This diversity allows individuals to find a career path that aligns with their skills and interests.

Priority professions include Health Care Assistants, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, and more

Source: Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills (2023). *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2023 Edition*. Victoria, Government of British Columbia.

4. Agency Staffing

The surge in healthcare staffing agencies, offering higher wages and flexibility, exacerbates the crisis by luring nurses and care aides from stable positions. This revolving door of caregivers compromises consistent support for residents, intensifying the challenges of the healthcare staffing shortage.

5. Wage Equalization

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of British Columbia has taken significant steps to strengthen and equalize wages across the care sector. This ensures that workers are compensated fairly and makes the profession more attractive to potential candidates.

Source: Ministry of Health (2022). *Province continues funding fair wages for long-term-care, assisted-living staff.* Victoria. Government of British Columbia.

6. Retention Challenges

The seniors care sector often faces high turnover rates among its staff. Factors such as high workloads, physically demanding work, and emotional stress can lead to burnout and contribute to a revolving door of employees, making it a challenge to maintain a stable and experienced workforce. However, these factors are not immutable -- Canadian research demonstrates that improvements in staffing, time and resources are associated with reduced turnover among care workers.

Source: Chamberlain, S. A., Hoben, M., Squires, J. E., & Estabrooks, C. A. (2016). Individual and organizational predictors of health care aide job satisfaction in long term care. *BMC Health Services Research*, 16(1), 1-9.

7. Investments in Education & Training

Recognizing the need for skilled workers, there is a growing focus on strengthening education programs for healthcare careers and increasing low-barrier training opportunities.

The government of British Columbia has invested in increasing nursing education seats and is providing free healthcare assistant training across the province. This will ensure a robust health human workforce and makes training more accessible to equity-deserving groups.

Source: Ministry of Health (2022). *B.C.'s Health Human Resource Strategy: Putting People First*. Victoria, Government of British Columbia.

8. Complex Regulatory Environment

Internationally educated healthcare professionals face daunting challenges with getting their credentials recognized in Canada. The process to transfer their education and experience is costly, time-consuming and bureaucratic, often hindering their ability to contribute to the healthcare workforce.

Recognizing these challenges, the government of British Columbia has introduced new legislation to remove barriers to credential recognition and made significant financial investments to streamline the process for internationally educated nurses.

Source: Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills (2023, October 23). *New credential legislation will get more people working in chosen fields quicker*. Victoria, Government of British Columbia.

9. Rewarding Careers

According to Canadian research, seniors care workers have a high sense of job efficacy—the sense that their work is meaningful and has a purpose, but feel that their contributions are underappreciated and often not recognized.

BCCPA launched the “BC Care Awards” in 2013 to recognize the valuable contributions of that frontline workers make every day to the older adults that they care for.

Source: Estabrooks, Carole et al (2015). Who is Looking After Mom and Dad? Unregulated Workers in Canadian Long-Term Care Homes.

10. Competition with Other Industries

The senior care, living, and wellness sector competes with other industries, such as retail, hospitality and early childhood education, for the same pool of potential employees.

Industries offering higher wages, better benefits, and more attractive working conditions can draw potential workers away from the long-term care sector, exacerbating the existing shortages.

Source: Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills (2023). *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2023 Edition*. Victoria, Government of British Columbia.