



# Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

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THE NATIONAL VOICE FOR NURSES

## **A Position Statement on Nurse-Patient Ratios**

### **Preamble**

Canada is faced both with a serious nursing shortage, which will worsen over the next few years, and ongoing problems related to the retention and recruitment of nurses. The shortage is exacerbated by the many pressures within the profession related to heavy workloads, workplace injuries, high turnover rates, absenteeism, and burnout among nurses. These pressures have, in turn, led to early retirement of experienced nurses, problems related to recruitment and retention of new nurses, and concerns over patient safety.

To respond to these issues, research has found that formal Nurse-Patient Ratios are one way to address adequate nurse staffing levels, improve the quality of work-life for nurses, and enhance the quality of care for patients.

### **Position**

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) recognizes that Nurse-Patient Ratios are a means of enhancing patient safety and the well-being of nurses by addressing many ongoing problems related to heavy workloads, workplace injuries, high turnover rates, absenteeism, and burnout among nurses.

Experiences in the United States and Australia have demonstrated that the benefits of Nurse-Patient Ratios include an increase in the retention and recruitment of nurses, as well as decreased turnover and decreased absenteeism among nursing staff and increased patient safety. However, a critical success factor is that minimum Nurse-Patient staffing plans are flexible and take into account unique features of the organization, technology, staffing skills and mix, and patient acuity. Formal minimum nurse-patient ratios must also include nurses at the point of care in the decision-making process, as there are factors such as outstanding concerns regarding a ratio model's ability to account for work patterns and the layout of nursing units, as well as issues such as the complexity of care required that may not be factored into the ratio.

Based on these facts, CFNU believes that Nurse-Patient Ratios may be a solution to retention and recruitment issues currently faced by the nursing profession. However, CFNU also understands that there is a need to better understand how Nurse-Patient Ratios will work in the Canadian context.

### **Recommendation**

That a Nurse-Patient Ratio Pilot Project be conducted to test the use of mandatory Nurse-Patient Ratios as a staffing model for regions across Canada.

**Approved June 17, 2006**