

Local 196 SPOTLIGHT



Young Nurses Are Leaving Alberta's Healthcare System

The future of Alberta's healthcare system is facing a critical challenge—one that could have long-term implications for the stability and effectiveness of patient care: young nurses are leaving the profession in alarming numbers.

A recent report from the Montreal Economic Institute (2024) found that nearly 48% of nurses under the age of 35 in Alberta leave the profession within five years of entering the workforce. That's nearly half of a generation of caregivers walking away from a career in which they are desperately needed.

This trend is not new, but it is worsening. In 2013, the five-year attrition rate for young Alberta nurses was just under 30%. Today, it's close to 50%, and the reasons behind the increase are both well-documented and deeply concerning.

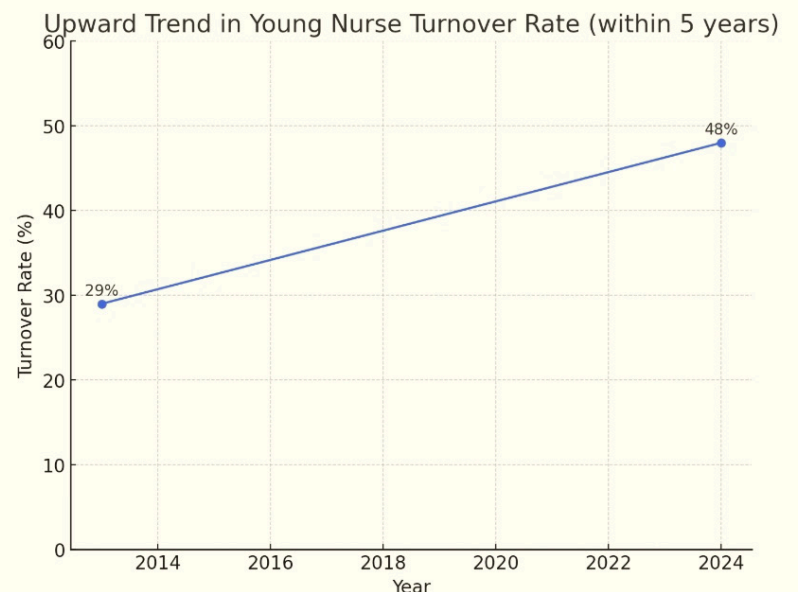
A 2024 poll by the Alberta Association of Nurses revealed that 68% of nurses are considering leaving the profession in the next five years.

Among those aged 20–30, the number jumps to 73%.



What's Driving Young Nurses Away?

- Burnout and chronic stress
- Inflexible and unpredictable schedules
- Mandatory overtime
- Feeling undervalued and unsupported
- Lack of work-life balance



What Can Be Done to Keep Young Nurses?

1. Flexible Scheduling & Control Over Shifts

One of the most common frustrations cited by young nurses is a lack of control over their own time. Allowing nurses to self-schedule or have more input in shift planning can reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction.

2. Onboarding & Mentorship Programs

New graduates often feel overwhelmed when transitioning into full-time practice. Structured mentorship and peer support programs can help reduce anxiety, build clinical confidence, and foster a sense of belonging.

3. Expand Mental Health Resources

Access to psychological support, debriefing sessions after critical incidents, and paid mental health days can significantly reduce burnout, especially for young nurses dealing with the stress of high-intensity environments.

4. Professional Development Opportunities

Offering training stipends, clear career advancement pathways, and leadership development programs can help young nurses envision a long-term future in healthcare.

5. Recognition and Inclusion

Creating a culture where young nurses are recognized for their contributions and included in decision-making can improve retention by reinforcing their value and agency in the workplace.

6. Loan Forgiveness or Incentive Programs

To help offset the financial burden of education, Alberta could consider offering targeted loan forgiveness, signing bonuses, or housing support



The high turnover among young nurses is not just a staffing issue —it's a signal of systemic strain and a warning that the next generation of healthcare workers is at risk of burnout before they ever truly begin.

If we want a strong, resilient healthcare system in Alberta, we need to invest in keeping our young nurses engaged, supported, and inspired to stay.



Alberta's newly ratified four-year collective agreement (2024–2028) includes several provisions designed to enhance nurse retention and recruitment. Key measures include:

Significant Wage Increases

Nurses will receive an immediate pay increase of up to 15%, with a total increase of approximately 20% over the term of the contract. These increases place Alberta's nurses among the highest paid in Canada, aiming to reduce job dissatisfaction and economic stress.

Graduate Nurse Hiring Program

The agreement includes a pledge to hire 1,000 new nursing graduates each year, helping to ease staffing pressures and provide a stable pathway for new nurses entering the profession.

Expanded Rural Recruitment Funding

To address rural healthcare shortages, the government will now invest \$22.5 million annually (tripling previous funding levels) in recruitment and retention efforts targeted at rural communities.

Reimbursement of Professional Fees

The contract includes full reimbursement for annual registration and liability insurance fees, a financial relief that directly benefits early-career nurses.

Presumptive WCB Coverage for Psychological Injuries

The agreement extends Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) presumptive coverage for PTSD and other psychological injuries to registered and psychiatric nurses, helping address the mental health toll of nursing work.

References

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Montreal Economic Institute. (2024, September 24). Nearly half of young Alberta nurses leave the profession within five years. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/10771891/alberta-nurses-leave-profession-report/>

More information on the new collective agreement can be also found in the April edition of the Local 196 newsletter:

Click [HERE](#)