British Columbia: 27 nurses below the age of 35 left the workforce for every 100 new nurses that started in 2023, finds new MEI report

- Across Canada, 40 nurses under 35 leave the workforce for every 100 who enter it.

Montreal, October 22, 2025 – Canada is burning through its young nurses at an alarming rate as healthcare systems across the country struggle to retain them, reveals a new publication released this morning by the MEI.

“For every 100 nurses under 35 who registered to practise in the country, 40 other young nurses did not renew their registration in 2023,” said Emmanuelle B. Faubert, economist at the MEI and author of the report. “This growing exodus is worsening the shortage of health care workers and putting even more pressure on our already strained system.”

Nursing job vacancies have tripled in just five years across Canada, jumping from 13,178 in 2018 to 41,716 in 2023.

British Columbia stands out as a beacon of improvement, having cut the turnover of young nurses by 50 per cent since 2014. Nearly 93 per cent of nurses trained in the province are now registered to practise there.

“British Columbia’s pragmatic approach to hiring and flexibility shows what pays off,” says Ms. Faubert. “When nurses are given more freedom to choose where and how they work, they stay.”

Since 2022, the BC College of Nurses and Midwives has streamlined the accreditation process for internationally educated nurses by introducing a “triple-track” application that covers registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, and healthcare assistant designations.

“Flexibility is key,” notes Ms. Faubert. “Nurses are the backbone of our health care system and thus, we need to ensure that the system works for them, not against them.”

According to the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions’ 2025 survey:

- Over one third of nurses reported having worked involuntary overtime in the past six months
- Six in ten experienced some form of violence or abuse at work in the past year
- One in four show clinical signs of anxiety, depression, or burnout

The MEI researcher urges provinces to look to British Columbia's shift-swapping pools, which allow nurses to trade shifts without administrative approval, as a model to emulate.

Other promising solutions include allowing nurses greater freedom to work for private clinics, travel nurse agencies, or telehealth companies, enabling them to better manage their schedules and realize a healthier work-life balance.

"Burning through our young nurses today means having no nurses for tomorrow," says Ms. Faubert. "Protecting our healthcare system requires letting go of the government monopoly in order to offer nurses the working conditions they deserve."

You can read the Economic Note here: https://www.iedm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/economic-note-122025.pdf

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