

NOVA SCOTIA'S NURSING STRATEGY

**Summary Report
2001-2006**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department of Health acknowledges its nursing partners across the province in the success of Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy. This report outlines achievements in nursing that are made possible through the collaborative efforts of key nursing stakeholders. Those stakeholders include: district health authorities, universities and colleges, regulatory colleges, unions and nurses across the province.

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NOVA SCOTIA'S NURSING STRATEGY

Introduced in 2001, Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy was developed by the Provincial Nursing Network (PNN) in partnership with the Department of Health to address issues affecting nursing in Nova Scotia and to set a direction for recruitment, retention and a stronger, healthier nursing workforce. The Strategy was developed in response to growing concern among stakeholders, provincially and nationally, of a shortage of nurses due to an aging workforce, an aging population requiring increased nursing and health care services and an inadequate number of new graduates to address growing health care needs.

The Nursing Strategy evolved out of work undertaken by the Health Human Resources Planning Division of the Department of Health in 1999. The department consulted with nurses across Nova Scotia and established a committee to provide recommendations and strategies aimed at education and human resources that would help stabilize the nursing workforce. Building on reports such as *Nursing in Nova Scotia: Strengthening the Foundation* and the *Report of the Action Teams on Nursing*, a provincial strategy was established. It was based on four key areas including:

- support to practicing nurses
- support to student nurses
- enhanced recruitment resources
- workforce development and utilization

Since its launch five years ago, the Nursing Strategy continues to have a positive impact on the recruitment, retention and renewal of nursing throughout the province. It has accomplished this by providing coordinated approaches to orientation, continuing education, support for recruitment initiatives, appropriate workforce utilization and improved quality of work life.

By the end of 2006, approximately \$60 million will have been invested to support practicing nurses and student nurses and to create more opportunities to share information and improve skills that will lead to better patient care (Table 1).

Table 1: Funding to Support Nurses, 2001-2006

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	TOTAL
Nursing Strategy	\$5.1M	\$5.1M	\$5.2M	\$5.2M	\$5.2M	\$5.2M	\$31M
Training & Education	\$3.2M	\$3.7M	\$3.4M	\$5.6M	\$6.2M	\$6.6M	28.6M
Total	\$8.3M	\$8.8M	\$10M	\$10.2M	\$10.5M	\$11.8M	\$59.6M

Key activities include:

- funding education for more nursing students
- funding bursaries and co-operative learning experiences for nursing students
- funding to help LPNs and RNs re-enter the workforce
- helping nurses relocate to Nova Scotia
- funding to help enhance nursing practice and patient care.

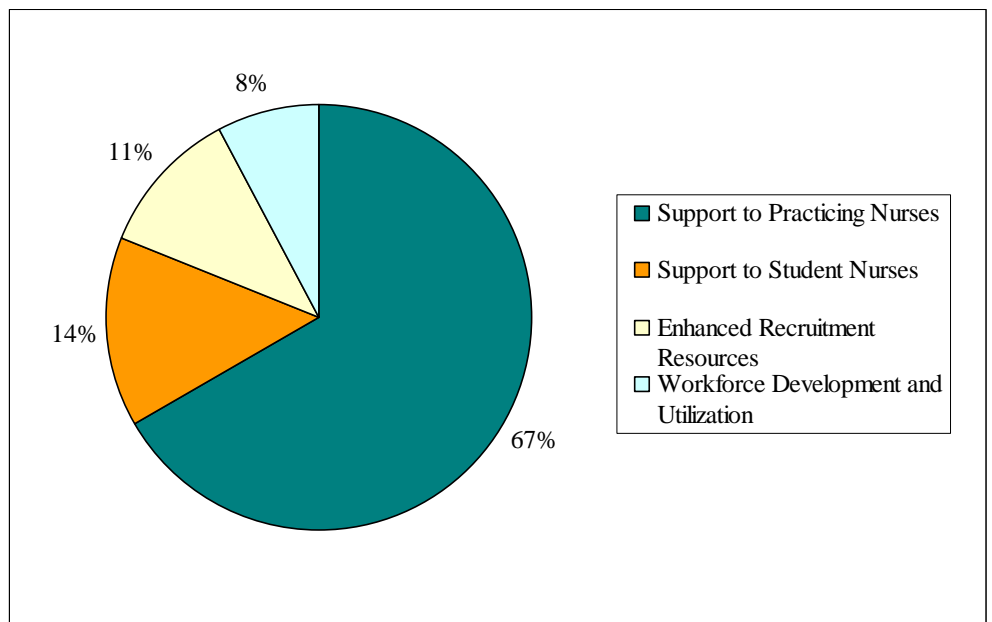
Other key activities include the development of strategies to improve:

- quality practice environments
- nursing leadership
- rural and remote nursing recruitment and retention.

Each year, close to \$5 million is allocated to the Nursing Strategy. In addition, funding is provided by the Department of Health for seat expansion to St. Francis Xavier University, Cape Breton University and the Nurse Practitioner Program at Dalhousie University.

As seen in Figure 1, the largest percentage of funding (67%) is directed toward currently practicing nurses. This funding is used to create quality employment orientation experiences and to generate access to continuing education opportunities that are essential to nursing practice and that contribute to improved workforce morale, enhanced practice environments and, above all, high quality patient care.

Figure 1: Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy - Budget Allocations



In the past five years, Nova Scotia has seen a net increase of 199 registered nurses, an increase of 130 RNs that are actively practicing nursing in Nova Scotia (Table 2). The number of licensed practical nurses has remained stable. Although these numbers appear modest, Nova Scotia has worked hard to keep its nurses and, according to the Canadian Nurses Association (2004), has among the highest ratio of nurses per population as compared to the rest of Canada (1 per 110 persons in Nova Scotia vs. 1 per 131 persons in Canada).

Table 2: RNs Registered to Practice vs. Employed in Nursing

	2000	2005	% Change
Registered to Practice	9327	9526	+2.1%
Employed in NS	8878	9008	+1.5%
% Employed in NS	95.2%	94.6%	-0.6%

The Provincial Nursing Network

The Provincial Nursing Network (PNN) is made of nurses and nursing leaders from across the province. The PNN acts as a resource and advisory body for the Department of Health’s Nursing Policy Advisor. Members of the network include employers, educators, professional regulatory colleges, unions, and practicing nurses. This diverse membership gives the network its strength and credibility to carry out its important function. A significant amount of work has been accomplished by the PNN due to its unique role and association with the Department of Health. The continued success of the Strategy and its initiatives is a direct result of the ongoing collaboration of its members and its relationships with key stakeholders in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

“Through the Provincial Nursing Network partnership, we were able to successfully address many of the recommendations made by nurses. Through Nova Scotia’s Nursing Strategy we have made a real difference in the face of nursing and health care in this province.”

Provincial Nursing Network Member

SUPPORT TO PRACTICING NURSES

ACTION:

Employment Orientation

Continuing Education

Specialty Education

Lack of resources, inadequate access to orientation and ongoing staff development programs have been identified as long-standing concerns for nurses. Recent graduates and newly hired experienced nurses are expected to begin their roles as independent practitioners with minimal or no time for orientation and integration into the workplace. As the health system becomes more complex, technology advances, patient acuity and the need for specialization increases, funding and organizational support for nursing education is essential. To keep their skills up-to-date nurses need employer support, financial assistance and professional development opportunities. In order to ensure that nurses across the province have access to relevant, accessible and cost-effective educational programs the Nursing Strategy has provided funding to support Employment Orientation, Continuing Education and Specialty Education programs.

Employment Orientation

To ensure that nurses across the province consistently receive orientation, approximately \$2 million annually has been provided to support employment orientation for nurses in district health authorities and the IWK Health Centre. This also includes nurses who work in long-term care facilities and for Home Care Nova Scotia. The Strategy has provided funding for employers to help cover orientation costs for new nurses entering the workforce or for experienced nurses changing employers or transferring to new positions within their place of employment.

Continuing Education

Retaining the current workforce is a major priority of Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy. One of the Strategy's main focuses is to support practicing nurses by giving them professional development opportunities to upgrade their skills. Continuing education and training in nursing are important quality of care and quality of work life issues. Nurses need to have the skills to provide competent care and also meet their own needs for professional satisfaction.

In response to feedback from nurses in the workforce, the Nursing Strategy has funded many opportunities for continuing education, skill development and other professional development opportunities. Over \$1.5 million per year has been used to support continuing education for nurses. The range of education activities engaged in by nurses is as wide-ranging as the diversity of nurses and their practice settings found across the province. Continuing education opportunities include: funding to pay for courses and fees for conferences, support to bring in speakers and to conduct educational in-services, seminars and workshops.

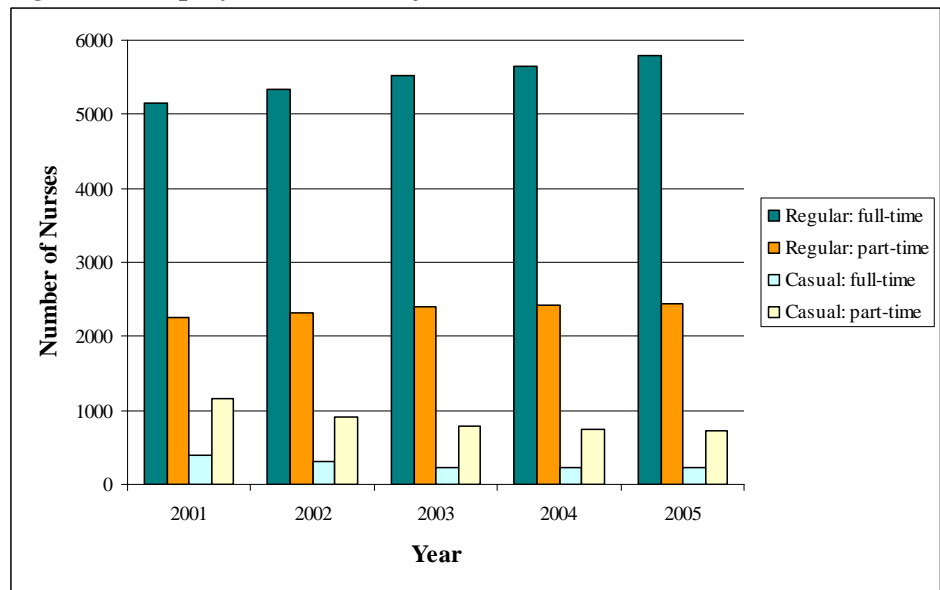
Specialty Education

Located in Halifax, the Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre (RNPDC) offers many programs through on-site and distance delivery modules. The Centre, a provincially funded program through the Department of Health, works collaboratively with district health authorities and long-term care facilities to support education for nursing staff. The Centre's specialty programs provide nurses with the knowledge and clinical foundation to improve competencies such as critical thinking, clinical practice, relationship-centred practice, leadership and professionalism.

The programs include: Critical Care, Perioperative, Emergency and Mental Health Nursing. More recent programs being offered include: Adult Medical-Surgical Nursing Program, Interprofessional Suicide Risk Assessment and Intervention, Orientation to the Canadian Health Care System and Professional Practice for Internationally Educated Health Professionals. Other programs under development include: an inter-professional program in psychosocial rehabilitation and a rural nursing program. The Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre has been successful in working with its partners to secure two Health Canada Grants: Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Patient Centred Practice (IEPCP) and Internationally Educated Health Professions (IEHP).

Overall, the data shows that these initiatives have been successful in retaining nurses in Nova Scotia. The number of employed nurses is higher than it was in 2000 and significantly more nurses in Nova Scotia are employed in permanent positions than in casual positions. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Employment Status of RNs and NPs Licensed 2001-2005



SUPPORT TO STUDENT NURSES

ACTION:

Bursary Program

French Language Bursary Program

Co-operative Learning Experience Program

Nursing Strategy initiatives such as bursaries and co-operative learning experiences have provided student nurses with valuable work experience while at the same time helping them to reduce their student debt loads. These initiatives have helped integrate students into the workplace and to encourage new graduates to start their career in Nova Scotia.

Bursary Program

Initially, when the Strategy was introduced, 25 bursaries valued at \$3,000 were given to fourth-year students who agreed to work in the province for one year after graduation. Because of the huge success and high demand for these bursaries, the number of bursaries has increased to 50 and are now valued at \$4,000. In addition, five bursaries were added for students graduating from BScN accelerated programs. Many employers are also contributing to add to the total number of bursaries that are being offered to new graduates.

French Language Bursary Program

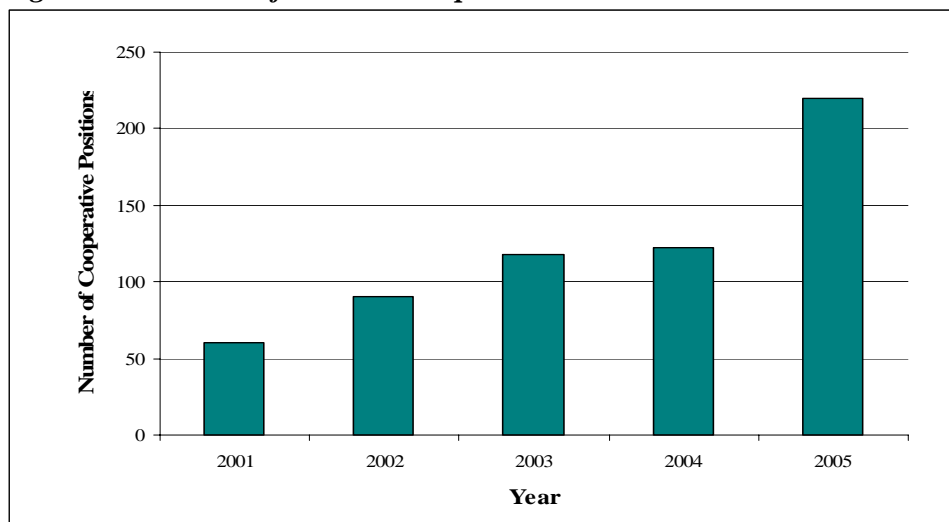
In 2005-2006, French Language Nursing Bursaries were offered to increase the number of French Speaking nurses that are recruited and retained in Nova Scotia. This new initiative was designed to build awareness among employers and nurses that French is an asset in the health field. The program has been offered to 2006 spring and fall graduates and will be evaluated in the upcoming year.

Co-operative Learning Experience Program

Co-operative learning experiences are another example of how Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy invests in opportunities that benefit future nurses and employers. The Co-operative Learning Experience Program provides students at Dalhousie, St. Francis Xavier and Cape Breton University with employment experiences between their third and fourth years of study.

Students spend their summer months working with seasoned practitioners in a clinical setting, gaining valuable experience while at the same time getting paid. This program has provided employers with an opportunity to recruit future

Figure 3: Number of Funded Cooperative Positions 2001-2005



nursing staff, thus making it especially attractive to district health authorities that have had difficulty recruiting new graduates to rural areas.

Due to the overwhelming success of the program, the number of co-operative positions sponsored by Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy has doubled from 60 in 2001 to 120 in 2003. In summer 2006, the Cooperative Learning Experience Program was fully funded by the Strategy with a focus on rural and remote areas of the province as well as long-term care settings (Figure 3).

Training and Education

In collaboration with the Department of Education, the total number of nurses being trained has increased at Dalhousie, St. Francis Xavier and Cape Breton Universities. Beginning in May 2003, 60 more training seats were added to the nursing education programs in Nova Scotia. An additional investment of \$7.1 million has resulted in 240 more nurses being trained in Nova Scotia with the first new graduates expected in 2007.

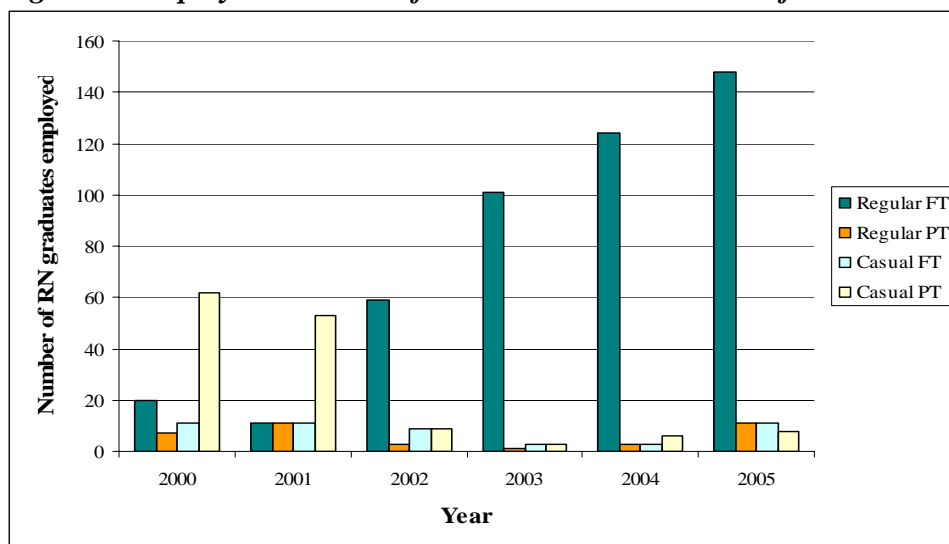
This includes:

- 25 additional seats in the joint St. Francis Xavier University and Cape Breton University nursing program;
- 25 seats in the new 20-month accelerated program at St. Francis Xavier University; and
- 10 seats in the new bridging program to help LPNs become RNs

In addition, the Department of Health provides partial funding for 15 nurse practitioner seats at Dalhousie University School of Nursing.

Overall, the number of nursing graduates (RNs and LPNs) has increased and the number of new graduates remaining in the province after graduation has improved significantly. Nova Scotia is now retaining over 80 per cent of its new graduates. Of these, nearly 90 per cent have found full-time employment in the province. In fact, since implementation of the Strategy in 2001, many graduates have secured full-time, permanent employment in Nova Scotia (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Employment Status of RN Graduates One-Year after Graduation



ENHANCED RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

ACTION:

Re-Entry Program

Relocation Allowances

Job Fairs

Communications and Marketing

*Nursing Strategy &
Recruitment Websites*

Improving the recruitment and retention of nurses was identified as a key priority by nursing stakeholders. Accordingly, nursing recruitment resources have been enhanced to support a comprehensive recruitment campaign. This includes marketing nursing opportunities in Nova Scotia, promoting the Nursing Strategy website, increasing visibility at job fairs and using other advertising venues. To date, data shows that Nova Scotia’s Nursing Strategy has been successful. The overall number of employed nurses is higher in 2005-2006 than it was in 2000-2001 and the number of nurses that have re-entered the profession and relocated to Nova Scotia has been increased significantly. This is due in large part to the increased resources used to attract nurses to re-enter nursing or relocate to our province.

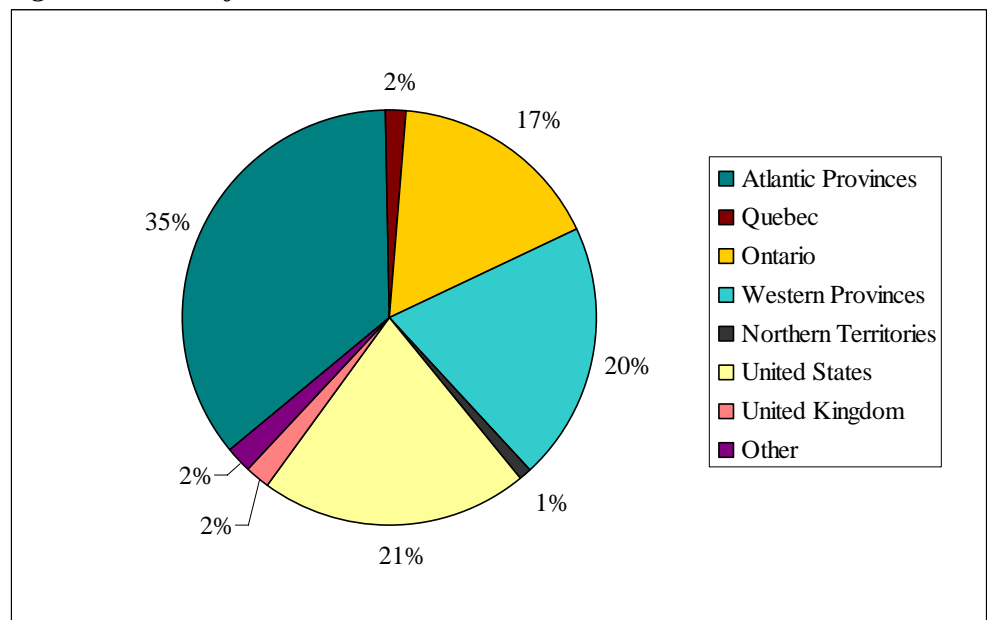
Re-Entry Program

The Nursing Strategy offers partial funding for both RNs and LPNs who wish to re-enter into practice but who may require additional support. This initiative is an important element in the overall recruitment efforts of the province. As a result of this program, since 2001, over 270 nurses have accessed funding and re-entered the workforce. Funding was also made available for licensed practical nurses wanting to upgrade their skills. Since 2002, over 300 LPNs have accessed funding for the refresher program, pharmacology and physical assessment courses.

Relocation Allowances

In order to recruit nurses from outside of Nova Scotia, the Nursing Strategy has offered financial support for those relocating to the province. In 2001, relocation allowances, valued at \$5,000 were made available to nurses wanting to move to Nova Scotia. Since then more than 500 nurses have relocated to Nova Scotia from areas including Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Alberta, and the United States (Figure 6)).

Figure 6: Areas from which RNs and LPNs have relocated to Nova Scotia



Job Fairs

In 2002, the Nursing Strategy funded several recruitment teams to attend job fairs across Canada and job fairs targeted to nursing students. The recruitment teams were made up of senior nurses and human resource representatives from various district health authorities and long-term care facilities in Nova Scotia. Having a strong profile on the national scene has helped Nova Scotia recruit over 500 nurses from outside the province in the past five years.

Each year, the Nursing Strategy hosts job fairs at Dalhousie University and St. Francis Xavier University. This provides employers with the opportunity to meet with students and prospective employees. In March 2006, the Strategy hosted a job fair for nursing students at Cape Breton University. The attendance by students and the response from employers was overwhelmingly positive.

Communications and Marketing

Recruiting nurses to Nova Scotia means promoting our job opportunities in a highly competitive market. Funding from the Strategy has been used to develop recruitment materials including: brochures, promotional materials, recruitment websites, a display unit and advertising in student handbooks and career magazines. The recruitment teams, made up of representatives from across the province, distributed these materials to students and prospective employees attending the major job fairs each year. Job fairs have included visits to Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. The Strategy has also hosted numerous job fairs for students and Nova Scotia employers at St. Francis Xavier, Dalhousie, and Cape Breton University.

Nursing Strategy & Recruitment Websites

To consolidate the Nursing Strategy information in a single location and to make it accessible to nurses and employers a website was created and can be accessed at: www.gov.ns.ca/health/nursing/. The website allows all Nova Scotians access to up-to-date quality information. The website also provides links to nursing organizations, education programs and Nova Scotia's recruitment websites. The site was designed to make it easier for nurses and other visitors to navigate through and become more familiar with the Strategy.

The Strategy website provides accountability to the people of Nova Scotia. The site allows the public to see what is happening with the Nursing Strategy and how funding is being used.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION

In developing the Nursing Strategy, it was recognized that although recruiting nurses into the health care system will resolve some of the work life issues experienced by nurses, there are other issues related to the practice environment that must be addressed. Work environments that support nurses in providing quality nursing care means healthier patient outcomes and a healthy, vibrant nursing workforce.

Following the release of the Canadian Nursing Advisory Committee (CNAC) report in 2002, Nova Scotia's Provincial Nursing Network identified three recommendations as priority areas for implementation: *leadership development, optimum scope of practice, and rural and remote nursing recruitment and retention*. Other activities included under the Workforce Development and Utilization strategy are the *Practice Environment Collaboration Program (PECP)* and the *Nursing Grants Program*.

ACTION:

Leadership Development

RN/LPN Scopes of Practice

Rural & Remote Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Practice Environment Collaboration Program

Nursing Grants Program

Leadership Development

Leadership development was identified as one of nursing's top priorities. To support this, the Nursing Strategy has sponsored a number of strategies that would enhance nursing leadership across the province. This included a leadership conference for nurses in Nova Scotia. The conference received such a positive response from nurses across the province in its first year that it is now held on an annual basis. Each year, the conference focuses on relevant and current issues in nursing. The conference also provides nurses with a unique opportunity to network with other nurses in the province.

Recognizing that leadership development for nurses is critical to the success of our health care system, the Leadership Development for Professional Practice Working Group was established in 2004 to set a direction for nursing leadership development in Nova Scotia. In May 2006, the working group released its final report entitled *Nursing Leadership Development in Nova Scotia – A Report of the Leadership Development for Professional Practice Working Group*. The report and its recommendations provide nurses and nurse managers with a valuable tool to self-assess and develop their leadership skills and competencies.

RN/LPN Scopes of Practice

In order to meet the needs of the health system, there has been much discussion, provincially and nationally, for the need to optimize both RNs and LPNs ability to work to full scope of practice. The Colleges of Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses of Nova Scotia have conducted joint scope of practice workshops across the province which have contributed significantly to a better understanding of each professions scope of practice. In 2002, new RN and LPN Acts were passed which set the stage for further revisions to both Acts in 2006. The changes to the Acts, specifically to the definitions of nursing practice, will lead to positive changes in scope of practice and scope of employment.

Rural & Remote Recruitment and Retention Strategy

The recruitment and retention of nurses to rural and remote communities was identified as a main priority under the Nursing Strategy. In 2003-04, the Provincial Nursing Network appointed a provincial steering team to develop recommendations that would enhance the sustainability of the rural nursing workforce. In May 2004, the Provincial Nursing Network released its final report entitled *Rural and Remote Nursing – Recruitment and Retention in Nova Scotia*.

In 2005-06, work began on the recommendations and in May 2006, the *2006 Status Report* as well as an *Implementation and Action Plan* was released by the steering team. As a result, new opportunities to promote, support and enhance nursing in these areas are being explored. This also includes the development of a continuing education program in rural nursing available in May 2007 through the Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre and the expansion of the Cooperative Learning Experience Program to long-term care facilities and rural communities. A monitoring committee has been established to review progress on actions to meet the recommendations.

Practice Environment Collaboration Program

The Practice Environment Collaboration Program (PECP™) is an innovative program through which RNs, LPNs and their employers work together to create healthy work environments. Funding from Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy was used to secure licensing for the program from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNANO) so that the PECP model could be used in Nova Scotia. In partnership with the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (CRNNS), the PECP is now a key component of the Nursing Strategy.

The PECP program has been embraced by 13 agencies in the province, 12 of which have just completed the quality practice setting survey, a survey that assesses what needs to be changed in each agency's practice environment. Nurses say that PECP is helping to create a more positive work environment and that it is helping nurses to identify their professional development needs.

Nursing Grants Program

In 2003-04 the Nursing Strategy awarded \$200 thousand in nursing grants to help nurses undertake 22 projects to enhance nursing practice to improve quality of work life and to promote innovation and creativity in the workplace. These projects were implemented and evaluated in 2004-05 and received an overwhelmingly positive response from nurses.

The Nursing Grants were awarded to a variety of nursing applicants working across a number of diverse settings. Overall, the initiative was well received and the projects have been successfully implemented, some with further implications for nursing policy and practice.

MOVING FORWARD.....

Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy has made significant contributions to improving support for nurses across the province while supporting high quality patient care and providing a successful framework for other provincial health care strategies.

On the horizon are several new initiatives that have been developed in partnership with our federal and provincial partners. These include:

- **Health Human Resources (HHR) Planning** - work with the Atlantic Simulation model and other relevant tools and reports including the *Retirement & Retention of Late Career Nurses in Nova Scotia* report.
- **Health Sciences Placement Network (HSPnet)** - A pilot project using HSPnet software to provide a systematic way to schedule clinical placements for trainees and students throughout the province.
- **Internationally Educated Health Professionals (IEHP)** - Nova Scotia is working to increase its capacity for IEHPs in the province and is leading an Atlantic regional collaborative effort aimed at reducing barriers to practice for IEHPs. This work is linked to the Provincial Immigration Strategy.
- **Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Patient-Centred Practice (IECPCP)** – Part of the Pan-Canadian HHR Strategy that helps to facilitate and support the active participation of several health care disciplines and professions involved in patient-centred practice.
- **Rural Nursing** - New opportunities to promote, support and enhance nursing in rural and remote communities including the development of a continuing education program in rural nursing available May 2007. There is a recognized need to support rural nurses in the province, particularly new graduates.

Despite these initiatives, new research identifies a number of needs that have not yet been met. We have heard consistently from nurses and stakeholders about the need for improved data, research and health human resources planning. Findings reported in *Toward 2020: Visions for Nursing* released by the Canadian Nurses Association (2006) and the *Nursing Environments: Knowledge to Action (NEKTA)* study which was conducted in Atlantic Canada, point to major challenges that require attention. There is global concern surrounding access to health services, quality of care and issues with working conditions for nurses such as workload, scheduling, rates of overtime and workplace health and safety.

Moving forward, human resources and working conditions will continue to be an issue. The changing environments and healthcare needs of Nova Scotians require nurses who are prepared, skilled and knowledgeable in

acute and non-acute care settings. Specialty education for nurses to meet the increasing needs for critical care, emergency care and operating rooms in Nova Scotia will be essential. Consequently, attracting and retaining nurses is vital. It is essential to create and build on existing partnerships and collaborate with organizations and stakeholders to provide a shared leadership for the future.

Although the current Strategy has been successful, it is imperative that we address the issues facing our nurses. Attracting and retaining the appropriate number of nurses with the necessary skills is critical. To this end, the Nova Scotia Department of Health remains committed to ensuring a healthy, vibrant nursing community to meet the health care needs of all Nova Scotians.

