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Province moves to support international nurses

Amid a severe shortage of nurses in B.C., the provincial government has moved to alleviate some of the costs facing internationally trained nurses when attempting to transfer their accreditations.

Measures include the elimination of application and assessment fees, which cost more than \$3,700 upfront, as well as up to \$10,000 in bursaries for nurses needing to receive extra training.

Nurses who left the field but would like to return are also eligible for \$300 in savings on application fees and \$4,000 in travel and assessment costs.

To announce the support, Premier **David Eby** was joined at Langara College by Health Minister **Adrian Dix** and parliamentary secretaries for long-term care and accessibility **Harwinder Sandhu** and **Susie Chant**, who are both registered nurses.

"There are highly skilled and experienced nurses who want to get to work in our system now but are facing barriers preventing them from delivering services that British Columbians need," Eby told reporters. "Just as we made changes for internationally trained doctors, we need to do the same for nurses."

Many nurses wait up to three years to get accepted into the system, either due to financial difficulties or bureaucratic struggles around qualifications.

Eby said that in addition to the financial support, his government will also spend \$1.3 million to streamline the licensing process in collaboration with the BC College of Nurses and Midwives.

"We know the journey to securing a career health profession can be more challenging for those who are new to our country," **Cynthia Johansen**, CEO of the BC College of Nurses and Midwives, said at the press conference. "We want to help applicants to gain registration in the right nursing role as quickly as possible ... and without compromising public safety."

The end goal is to bring the wait time down to between four and nine months, something both Johansen and BC Nurses' Union president **Aman Grewal** said it would make a huge difference.

"If it costs \$40,000 over several years, and now the process is going to be four to nine months, that's going to be a significant difference in how much time you're spending

trying to become licensed here, as well as the money that you're now doling out which should be significant," Grewal told *BC Today* in an interview.

Sandhu, an internationally trained nurse who has worked in B.C. for two decades, said she understands the struggles nurses new to Canada face.

"A lot of people said this: 'It's really encouraging to see you doing such a good job,'" she said. "I said, 'Don't ask me how I got here. It took me several years and many tears.'"

For registered nurse **Jennie Arceno**, it meant flying her newborn baby back to the Philippines to stay with her husband after giving birth, being away for over a year and working long hours to obtain certification, and scrambling to make ends meet and secure the \$40,000 needed for assessments.

Although she has now been practising in Canada for over four years, with her husband and two sons alongside her, she doesn't want anyone else to have to go through what she did.

"I knew that I would have to study to practise nursing here, but I didn't expect to have to take several exams and pay a lot of money," she said. "I was pregnant throughout my studies and gave birth in BC Women's Hospital alone ... After my experience, I knew I wanted to make it easier and more affordable."

Progress, but more to be done

Grewal says that moving forward, the important work will be integrating new nurses into their new workplaces and making sure they have the support needed to succeed.

Amid recent [reports](#) of toxic behaviour by management at many hospitals, with employers reporting nurses to the College of Nurses and Midwives for seemingly innocuous actions, Grewal said expectations need to be realistic at a time when hospitals are struggling with staff shortages and multiple public health emergencies.

"We're already short a lot of nurses. So what should happen is that those nurses need to be supported in their practice, and there need to be realistic expectations," she said.

Board chair of Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of British Columbia **Sherri Kensall** agreed, stating that in a province already short of nurses, retention needs to be a priority.

"What we're hoping for is some more support around that," Kensall told *BC Today*.

"How do you help nurses want to stay in nursing for longer? How do we support them in the environment so that they're part of the team and part of the decision-making?"