

Saved my one week work
Official Opposition
K. Havelupse
March 5, 2022

BN-2022-00823

Decision/Direction Note
Department of Health and Community Services

Title: Extension of Contract for Agency Nurses in Western Health

Decision/Direction Required:

- Whether to approve Western Regional Integrated Health Authority entering into an extension of its current contract with Canadian Health Labs for the provision of agency registered nurses, including the provision of additional funding to end of fiscal 2022-23.

Background and Current Status:

- BN-2022-00309 provided an update on the steps that Western Regional Integrated Health Authority (WH) was taking to secure a contract to hire agency nurses to address registered nurse (RN) vacancies in that region.
- Western Health engaged with Canadian Health Labs (CHL) June 30, 2022, for agency RNs to relieve an emergent situation pertaining to lack of RNs. There was a ramp up period from contract signature to RNs available on the ground in September 2022.
- The current contract is for 18 RNs on the ground each day (~ 36 FTEs). Western Health has not reached this complement of agency nurses and numbers fluctuate as nurses sign on for varying lengths of contracts. Currently there are between 18 and 24 RNs on the ground in various WH acute care facilities (Western Memorial Regional Hospital (WMRH), Sir Thomas Roddick Hospital (STRH) and Dr. Charles LeGrow Health Care Centre).
- WH's current contract with CHL ends Feb 27, 2023. The agreement contains a 60-day notice clause if WH wishes to extend. Therefore, any notice of extension would have to be provided prior to December 26, 2022. Given the significant risk in losing current agency staffing on the ground and the continuing high rates of vacancies and mandatory overtime, WH requested approval to extend this contract for two and a half years, with the last six months being a wind down period with gradual departures of agency RNs.
- WH's need to extend the contract can be outlined as follows:
 - WH continues to face significant challenges with both occupancy and staffing. Current vacancies for RNs, LPNs, and PCAs coupled with high daily sick calls are driving the need at sites.
 - As of Nov 14, 2022, there are 79 RN vacancies (40 at WMRH).
 - Since Jan 2022 there have been 36 RNs who were permanent full time (PFT) who changed status to casual. This is due to a number of factors including those that retire and are re-hired or PFT staff resigning to go casual.
 - WH continues calls twice a month with leadership, unions, and frontline staff to strategize efforts pertaining to ongoing staffing challenges. All staff emails for volunteers to support continue to be sent weekly and clinical and nonclinical managers continue to be asked to volunteer to support.
 - Since July, and continuing to date, a group of regional leadership have been meeting weekly to assess staffing gaps and making decisions around deploying staff to areas of greatest need (per collective agreements). Managers with a nursing background have been mandated to work clinically to support gaps, and some clinical services have been reduced. As well, surgeries have been cancelled as a result of the occupancy and staffing challenges.

- Traditional recruitment strategies are being pursued and are providing some (minor) supports to fill the HR gaps:
- WH's HR department has been engaged with the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) students at Western Regional School of Nursing (WRSN) throughout the year. There are 46 regular stream, and accelerated students in the graduating class. They continue to meet with the students daily and to date 21 BN nursing students have been met with individually. The students have been advised that there is work at WH. 40(1)
 - 16 WRSN students have been interviewed.
 - offers are pending;
 - offered and accepted PFT position at
 - accepted PFT Float positions.
- WH has also obtained designated facility status under the Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP) 40(1)
 - WH is also participating in the upcoming mission to Bangalore, India pertaining to recruitment of nurses.
- Visits have been made to all three Nursing schools within the Province (WRSN – October 3, MUN - October 17, CNS – November 3, WRSN third year students – December 1).
- To support care in the appropriate location and to reduce demand for staff related to having overflow units open at WMRH, it was recognized that opening of some of the remaining WLTC beds had to be prioritized. A number of strategies were implemented and over the course of October, planning occurred in collaboration with LTC, patient services and HR to realize opening of some WLTC beds. During the week of November 15, 2022, 15 beds were opened. Currently there is one unit that is still unopened at WLTC.
- Casual workers have been contacted and offered permanent part time and full time positions promoting the recent RN incentives. Casuals are also offered shifts to be booked in advance.

Analysis:

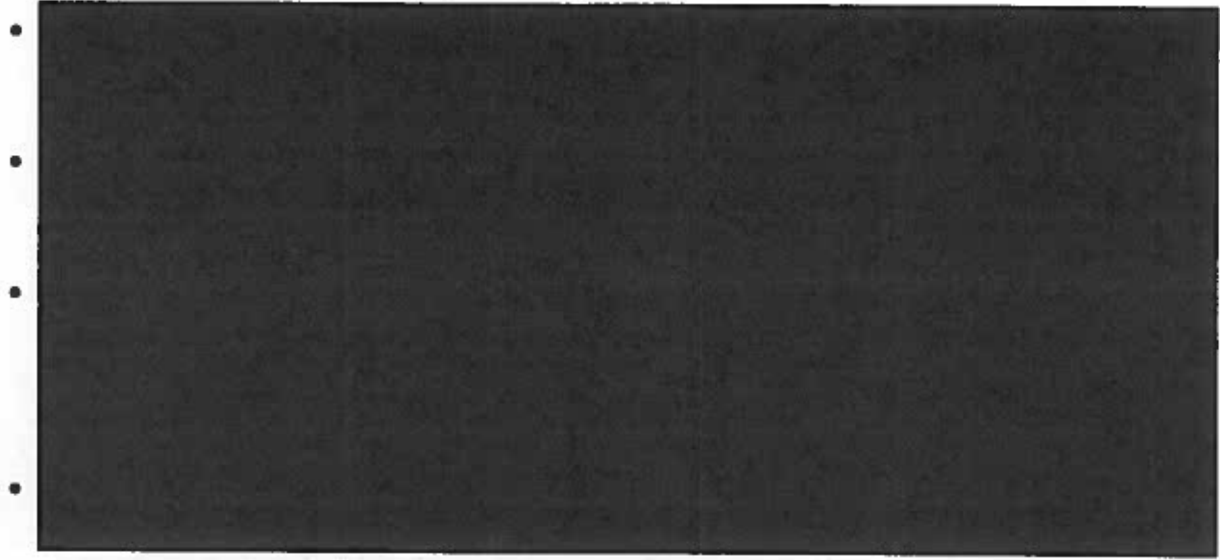
- The regional health authorities, including WH, have not been able to recruit enough RNs to cover normal attrition and forecast that the vacancy problem will continue for at least the foreseeable future. Even with the potential for meeting international recruitment goals there will still be significant HR gaps. Therefore, a continued need to back fill vacant positions with these agency resources will remain.

• [Redacted]

29(1)(a)

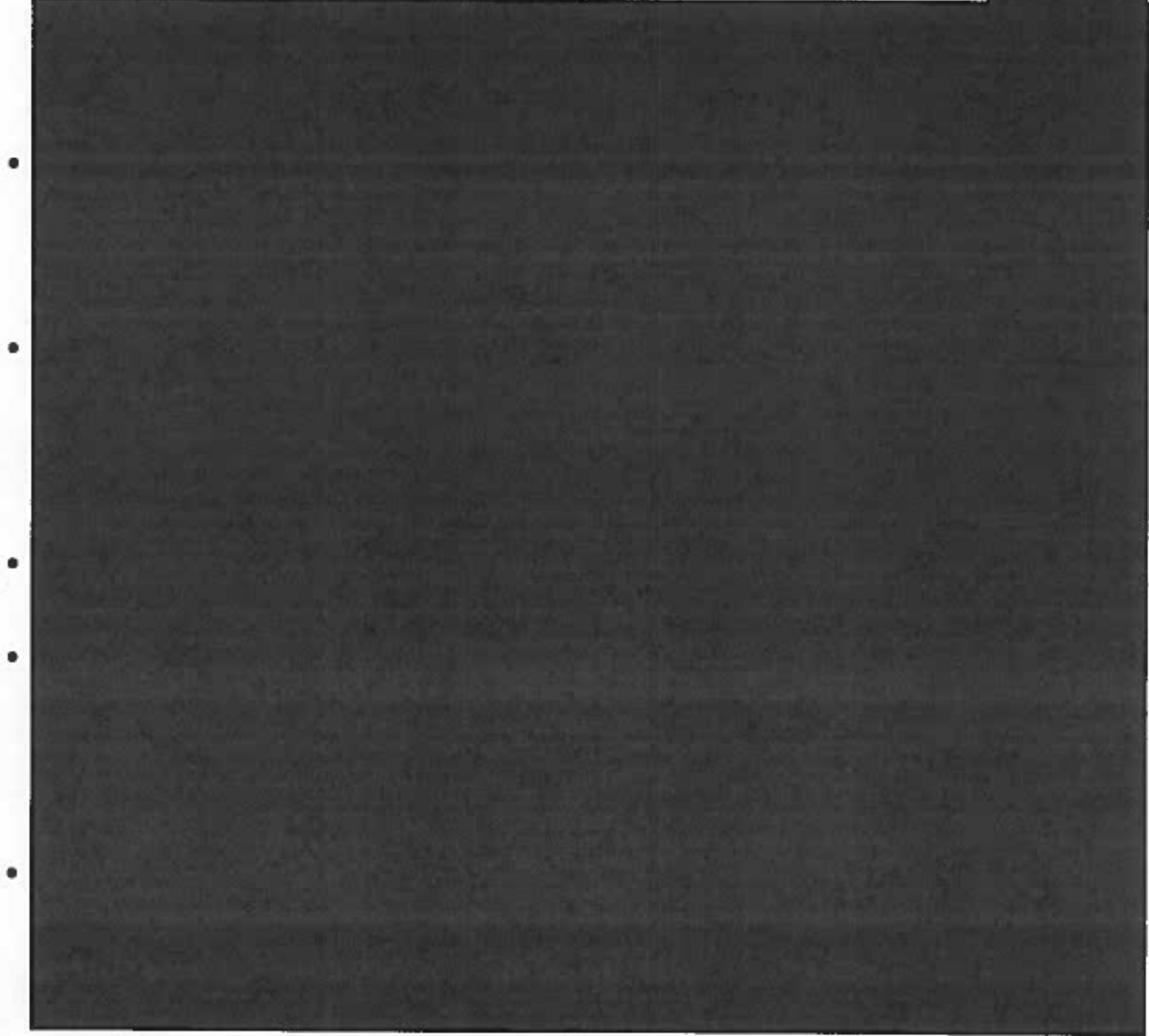
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29(1)(a)
35(1)(c)



29(1)(a)
35(1)(g)

- WH is hopeful that the supply of RNs will increase through initiatives such as the recruitment mission to India, as well as through the hiring of recent nursing graduates.



29(1)(a)

- The Registered Nurses' Union of Newfoundland and Labrador (RNUNL) were consulted when the Agreement was first put in place and are currently tolerating the arrangement as it provides increased flexibility and better work life balance for its members. The RNUNL was initially advised that this would be a short term initiative so it will be necessary for WH officials to engage with RNUNL and discuss the plans to extend the arrangement.

Alternatives:

Alternative 1: Approve WH extending its agreement with CHL for agency RNs, including the provision of funding to the end of fiscal year 2022-23. (Recommended)



29(1)(a)

Alternative 2: Do not approve WH extending its agreement with CHL for agency RNs, including the provision of funding to the end of fiscal year 2022-23. (Not Recommended)



29(1)(a)

Prepared/Approved by: D. Coffin/J. Herritt/A. McKenna
Ministerial Approval: Received from Hon. Tom Osborne

December 19, 2022