

Government of
Northwest Territories

February 23, 2023

RYLUND JOHNSON
MLA, YELLOWKNIFE NORTH**Oral Question 1319-19(2): Registered Nurses Licensing Process**

This letter is to follow up to the Oral Question you raised on February 8, 2023 regarding Registered Nurses licensing process.

The Department of Health and Social Services (Department) and the Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut (RNANTNU) have a strong and collaborative working relationship. This relationship has only strengthened over the last few years as we have worked closely to find solutions to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and health human resources challenges, as well as through work on proposed amendments to the Northwest Territories' (NWT) *Nursing Profession Act*.

As the regulatory body for nursing professionals, RNANTNU has a mandate to protect the public by ensuring that applicants are qualified and safe to practice. This process is guided by requirements set out in the *Nursing Profession Act*, including requirements for proof of identity, good character, fitness to practice, and a satisfactory reputation (ss.22(2), 23(3), and 24(2)). These requirements are met by having the applicant provide a variety of information, which may include (but is not limited to):

- Valid Government identification, including evidence of any legal name change (if applicable);
- Proof of fluency in English;
- Proof of minimum practice hours over the last 5 years;
- Satisfactory references from present and/or previous employers attesting to the applicant's nursing knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- Evidence of completing a nursing education program offered in the NWT or Nunavut, or a program recognized for registration in another province or territory;
- Proof of having successfully passed the membership examination; and
- Evidence of registration or resignation in good standing in all other jurisdictions in which the applicant is, and has ever been registered.

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To get a sense of the demand for registration with RNANTNU, in the period of October 2022 to February 2023 RNANTNU received:

- 316 applications for initial registration, virtual care registration, and reinstatement;
- 5 applications for the entry-to-practice examination; and
- 1750 renewal applications.

Gathering of the requisite information by the applicant, educational institutions, health care institutions, government agencies, and other regulatory bodies takes time, which is unfortunately out of RNANTNU's control. However, RNANTNU makes every effort to process applications as expeditiously as possible, with a standard processing time of two days following receipt of all required documents. It is important to note that the average time it takes for RNANTNU to receive all of the required documentation is approximately 24 days, but ranges from three days to 120+ days.

RNANTNU continues to make efforts to streamline the registration process. This includes:

- A new database that automates time consuming tasks for staff and the applicant. For the 2023 renewal season, this new database facilitated the renewal of over 1750 members, of which over 97% received their renewal within hours from their submission.
- Partnering with a national nursing regulatory project, NURSUS, which is a national database for the verification of nurse licensure, discipline, and practice privileges, which significantly reduces the time it takes to review jurisdictional verifications.
- Participating in a national language proficiency project that has renewed current testing methods and reduced benchmarks for success. This project is examining alternative methods to testing and pathways to expand the ways in which regulators recognize the complex nature of medical language required for nurses and is resulting in lower wait times for approval.
- An agreement with Alberta and Saskatchewan regulators for registered nurses and nurse practitioners to facilitate the registration of virtual nurses providing care to residents in the NWT.
- In collaboration with the Department and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, establishing processes to expedite the registration of Red Cross Nurses, agency nurses, and retired NWT nurses to accommodate emergency needs, such as virtual care, immunizations, and COVID-19 related activities.

The Department and RNANTNU take the responsibility of ensuring that applicants meet the entry-level competencies, standards of practice, and northern scope of practice very seriously. Due diligence in the registration process is especially important in the northern context where nursing professionals often practice more independently than nurses in the south. My office is arranging a meeting with RNANTNU to talk about national licensure. We remain committed to working together and with our southern and national counterparts to ensure the licensure process is not a barrier to labour mobility.

Thank you for your questions.



Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services

- c. Principal Secretary
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly