



May 27, 2024

via email only

<p>TO: Sheryl Yakeleya, Dehcho Julian Morse, Frame Lake Kate Reid, Great Slave Hon. R.J. Simpson, Hay River North Hon. Vince McKay, Hay River South Denny Rodgers, Inuvik Boot Lake Hon. Lesa Semmler, Inuvik Twin Lakes Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Kam Lake George Nerysoo, Mackenzie Delta Jane Weyallon Armstrong, Monfwi</p>	<p>Hon. Shane Thompson, Nahendeh Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Nunakput Kieron Testart, Range Lake Daniel McNeely, Sahtu Hon. Jay Macdonald, Thebacha Richard Edjericon, Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh Robert Hawkins, Yellowknife Centre Shauna Morgan, Yellowknife North Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Yellowknife South</p>
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Dear Members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly,**Re: The Use of Agency Nurses in NWT Healthcare**

As UNW members who work at Stanton Territorial Hospital, we want to provide some clarity on why the use of agency workers is a true threat to our healthcare system:

1. **Evidence shows agency nurses create inconsistent care, workforce instability, and less community connection, all for radically higher costs.** Transient workers do not build important and lasting relationships, their perks poach and demoralize permanent staff, and their costs leave little money for hiring and training permanent workers.
2. **Few agency nurses possess the diversity of qualifications and professional development required to make a difference in a small territorial hospital.** Agency nurses only work in one department per contract, putting even more pressure on resident nurses to fill in unexpected gaps as they arise, leading to a less skilled and less cohesive healthcare team over time.
3. **Use of agency nurses will eliminate locums and increase expenses.** While locum nurses (casual GNWT employees on short-term contracts) are not ideal replacements for resident nurses, many have ties to the NWT and have built relationships with hospital staff and patients. They won't sign GNWT contracts that offer half the pay and privileges of agencies.
4. **Agency nurses enjoy premium wages and paid expenses, as well as shift and travel flexibility that is denied to GNWT employees.** With twice the hourly pay, free meals, travel, housing, and flexible scheduling, it's not hard to see how for-profit agencies use our tax dollars to attract nurses. This gap in incentives and investment is a slap in the face to taxpayers and resident healthcare workers.
5. **The continued disrespect from NTHSSA means we are losing dedicated and experienced healthcare workers.** If staffing trends continue, we will not have enough experienced professionals to train, mentor, and develop the next generation, and patients will soon suffer the effects of a less skilled, less cohesive, and more unstable healthcare system.

As public service workers and residents of the Northwest Territories, we can see that the GNWT has zero interest in truly fostering and incentivizing a permanent northern healthcare workforce.

Here's what we observe:

- Senior management has a long-standing legacy of undermining our healthcare system through inconsistent leadership and misguided decisions, and their refusal to work with union members to proactively implement obvious solutions to fixable problems.
- Contracting out healthcare responsibilities is a convenience and reward for ineffective managers, at the expense of taxpayers, as they get to avoid the work needed to uproot toxic work environments causing most of the recruitment and retention issues in healthcare.
- The continued use of for-profit agencies throws open the door to privatizing other parts of NWT healthcare, and it makes a mockery of the Premier's and Minister of Health's pledge to deliver innovative healthcare solutions and culturally safe care.
- Healthcare workers across professions and services are undervalued and disrespected, and replacing us with a transient workforce reinforces that attitude. We feel overworked and burnt out, but we carry on out of a desire to protect the safety of our patients and coworkers.

We will never abandon our patients, or any person requiring our care. We feel the GNWT is happy to take advantage of this loyalty. Without change, the GNWT will continue to violate our collective agreement whenever it suits them, even if it means running our healthcare system into the ground.

We call on our representatives in the Legislative Assembly to support our demand that the GNWT carry out an extensive workplace assessment on the impacts of the use of agency nurses at Stanton Territorial Hospital, and that the full results of that assessment be made available to MLAs, the UNW, and all Stanton employees. While we believe this should be done in all NWT hospitals and health centres, we can only speak for our members at Stanton.

Respectfully,

The Members of UNW Local 11  
at Stanton Territorial Hospital