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**SASKATCHEWAN UNION OF NURSES AND GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN
PARTNER TO RETAIN AND RECRUIT NURSES**

Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) President Rosalee Longmoore and Health Minister Don McMorris signed a partnership agreement today committing to work together to solve Saskatchewan's shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs). This is the first agreement of its kind in Canada.

The comprehensive nursing recruitment and retention strategy outlined in the innovative agreement acknowledges that there is an urgent need to stabilize and rebuild the nursing workforce in Saskatchewan to ensure the health care system can deliver high quality, timely and accessible health services.

The agreement sets out a framework for SUN and the Ministry to work with health regions, using dedicated funding to hire 800 registered nurses with annual targets set out for achieving this goal over the next four years. The parties are calling upon the talents of Dr. Marlene Smadu to facilitate development of a more detailed action plan to implement the strategy and to refine the initiatives in collaboration with all associated parties. Dr. Smadu is the Associate Dean for the College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan and currently serves as the President of the Canadian Nurses Association and Co-Chair of the Provincial Nursing Committee. She has also served as Assistant Deputy Minister and Principal Nursing Advisor at Saskatchewan Health.

SUN and the Ministry say the key element in the agreement is the public accountability dictated by the combination of the specific hiring targets and the funding formula that provides a direct incentive for health regions to meet the annual targets. Regional retention and recruitment initiatives will be jointly funded by health regions and the Ministry, with the level of funding directly proportional to the number of vacancies.

"This is yet another promise that this government is going to keep," McMorris said. "Nursing vacancies have been climbing for years and it's time to take serious steps to deal with this crisis. It's time for specific hiring targets, and incentives and financial support to health regions to meet those targets. We need to reach out to experienced nurses and new graduates and say, we value you and we need you to stay in Saskatchewan to help ensure quality care for Saskatchewan people."

The agreement also commits SUN and the Ministry to find ways to keep senior nurses in the workplace longer, improve nurse/patient ratios, increase the use of nurse practitioners, establish a mechanism to make it easier for LPNs to become RNs, focus on prevention and promote wellness by using Registered Nurses in new roles, increase training seats, ensure new graduates are offered full time permanent employment, expand professional development and conduct patient exit surveys.

The agreement also acknowledges the need for an enhanced collective bargaining mandate for SUN/SAHO negotiations which recognizes the special nursing retention and recruitment challenges that Saskatchewan faces, and permit RHAs to offer competitive salaries, benefits, and innovative retention and recruitment initiatives, which will permit Saskatchewan to compete effectively with provinces that attract Saskatchewan nurses.

"The speed, the scope, and the level of accountability delivered in this agreement was a welcome surprise, an enormous relief, and the best possible news for nurses and the public," Longmoore said. "This agreement represents the light at the end of the tunnel for nurses in Saskatchewan. This partnership lays the foundation for a more positive and collaborative relationship with the government and health regions. These targets can only be achieved if we all work together and remember that collectively our mission is a stable, sustainable health care system that provides Saskatchewan people with safe, high quality health services."

"This collaborative partnership represents a significant opportunity to address issues critical to the sustainability of the health care system and advancement of health," Dr. Smadu said. "Nursing represents the largest segment of the health care workforce, and a vibrant nursing workforce is foundational to a vibrant health care system. Nurses have a key role to play in identifying challenges and providing solutions, as exemplified by this agreement."

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