

Tapping Canada's Hidden Health Care Talent Pool:

Tips And Tools To Recruit And Retain International Experience



NATIONAL NEWCOMER
NAVIGATION NETWORK

RÉSEAU NATIONAL DE
NAVIGATION POUR
NOS NOUVEAUX ARRIVANTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

National Newcomer Navigation Network (N4) is a national network for the diversity of providers who assist newcomers in navigating the complex Canadian health care and social service systems. This work was funded through a System Delivery Innovation contribution agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). N4 is gratefully hosted at and governed by CHEO.

This resource represents research regarding organizational practices in the recruitment and retention of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) in Canada. This included a scan among providers and other stakeholders, please see Appendix B for a full list. N4 would like to acknowledge their contributions particularly as this work occurred during unprecedented times; namely the health human resource (HHR) crisis and the on-going effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The health human resources (HHR) crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing Canada's health care system today. Currently, health occupations have the highest proportion of long-term vacancies. It is remarkable then, that nearly half (47%) of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) in Canada are unemployed or underemployed. In April 2022, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) expanded the mandate of National Newcomer Navigation Network (N4) to examine the inequities among newcomers in being optimally employed within health care – specifically internationally educated nurses (IENs) and internationally trained physicians (ITPs).

Canada's immigration continues to increase, and is projected to welcome more than 1.45 million newcomers from 2023 to 2025. The rise in immigration has led to the increased diversity within the mosaic of Canadians. IEHPs hold key roles in Canadian health care workforce – addressing labour market gaps and supporting employer commitments toward EDI by enhancing workforce diversity.

This report and toolkit presents findings, promising practices, and a case study from virtual meetings with Canadian health care employers from coast to coast and a variety of providers, including acute care, community health, long-term care, health authorities, and government. Additional input was achieved through lived experience consulting groups of IENs and ITPs.

Six pan-Canadian themes of barriers were found to be contributing to the challenges in recruiting and retaining IENs and ITPs:

- addressing the importance and challenge of IEHPs integration
- finding immigration, housing, and settlement support
- equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategies: the inclusion of IEHPs as an equity seeking group
- growing competition across new jurisdictions
- uniqueness of rural and remote communities
- the importance of pan-Canadian collaboration

Despite the many barriers, many promising practices were found which had potential for pan-Canadian spread among employers:

- Providing support to IEHPs in the form of **mentorship increases retention rates** as it allows IEHPs to focus on non-clinical skills such as cultural integration, learning “soft skills”, and others.
- **Provincial navigators offer support and benefits for both IEHPs and employers** because it offers a central source of reliable information.
- To ensure ethical recruitment, employers should **leverage and focus on the IEHPs in Canada** that are unemployed or underemployed.

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre (Sunnybrook) is presented as a case study for its innovative and integrated program for internationally educated nurses (IENs).

Employers expressed the need for a pan-Canadian sharing to support their work in advancing IEHP integration including co-designing and sharing of tools, resources and knowledge. This Employer Toolkit is the first step in N4's commitment to support this effort.

The companion documents to this report are the following:

- [Part of the Solution, Not the Problem: Recommendations for Welcoming Internationally Trained Physicians into Canada's Health Care Sector](#)
- [Welcoming Internationally Educated Nurses into the Canadian Health Care Sector: Recommendations for Change](#)
- [“A Missing Part of Me:” A Pan-Canadian Report on the Licensure of Internationally Educated Health Professionals](#)
- [Checklist for Recruiting, Integrating, and Retaining Internationally Educated Health Professionals \(IEHPs\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

The health human resources (HHR) crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing Canada's health care system today.¹ While the aging population was predicted to tax the health care system with increased demand and simultaneous numbers leaving the workforce, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the health care sector. Burnout, exhaustion, and feelings of demoralization among health care professionals all contribute to unprecedented health care vacancy levels. According to Statistics Canada, vacancies in health care and social assistance increased to an all-time high of 150,100 in the third quarter of 2022.² Health occupations had the highest proportion of long-term vacancies in the third quarter of 2022.³

"Employees leaving an organization is not a point of concern, but having employees leave their profession is a crisis."

EMPLOYER FROM ATLANTIC REGION

The rise in immigration has also led to increased diversity within the mosaic of Canadians. As of 2021, 23% of Canadians were born outside our country, making this the highest proportion among the G7.⁶ As the communities of Canada increase in diversity, so do the make-up of patients within the health care system. Like many, if not all sectors, the need for the workforce to represent the community it serves was highlighted during the social justice movement of 2020 as a key element of strategic plans to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion.⁷

Thus, IEHPs hold two potential key roles when integrating into the Canadian health care workforce; addressing labour market gaps and supporting employer commitments towards EDI by enhancing workforce diversity. It is remarkable then, that nearly half (47%) of IEHPs in Canada are unemployed or underemployed.⁸

Canada has long relied on immigration to maintain our working age population and labour market needs. The Government of Canada Immigration Levels plan for 2023-2025 indicates that Canada's immigration target has been increased to welcome more than 1.45 million newcomers over the next three years. "The 2023-25 Immigration Levels plan will continue to play an important role in Canada's economic growth and recovery, from filling labour shortages and closing labour market gaps."⁴ Health care has seen immigration of internationally educated health professionals as one key element of solving the HHR crisis.⁵

1 Government of Canada. Summary Report of the Health Human Resources Symposium. 2022-11-01.

2 Statistics Canada. Job vacancies, third quarter. 2022-12-19.

3 Statistics Canada. Job vacancies, third quarter. 2022-12-19.

4 Government of Canada. Supplementary Information for the 2023-2025 Immigration Levels Plan. 2022-11-01.

5 The College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Nurses Association, and Canadian Medical Association. Health Human Resources Policy Recommendations: Summary. Briefing to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. 2022-04-14.

6 Statistics Canada. Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians. 2022-10-26. The Daily — Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians

7 Health care CAN. HHR Advisory Committee. 2023.

8 Statistics Canada. Adults with a health education but not working in health occupations. 2020-04-29.

METHODOLOGY

In April 2022, IRCC expanded N4's mandate from focusing on inequities for newcomers as patients or clients in the health and social services space, to also look at inequities for providers. N4 was asked to examine the inequities among newcomers in being optimally employed within health care, specifically those of internationally educated nurses (IENs) and internationally trained physicians (ITPs). In response, N4 leveraged its platform and tools to identify and address the key barriers encountered by those IEHPs in their pathway to licensure and joining the Canadian workforce.⁹ Employers were quickly recognized as key stakeholders at multiple points along the pathway; from pre-arrival, when contemplating immigration to Canada, all the way to retention within the workforce.

N4 leveraged its [Community of Practice](#) model which seeks to understand the current state, including the barriers and facilitators towards an equitable experience for newcomers to Canada. As part of the research phase of the work, N4 conducted a scan of current practices by holding virtual meetings with Canadian health care employers from coast to coast and from a variety of providers, including acute care, community health, long-term care, health authorities and government. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews took place between September and December of 2022. The questions and conversation topics used in these semi-structured meetings can be found in Appendix C.

Each site visit took place virtually and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Attendees were informed that the notes from the site visits would be later analyzed and used in an anonymized format in this report. No attendees chose to withdraw their consent from this process. The structure included introductions, an orientation to N4, and a facilitated discussion on the challenges, facilitators, and best or promising practices in the integration of IEHPs in our health care labour market. Notes taken by N4 staff were collated and sent to the site visit attendees for validation.

Site visit notes were entered into [nVivo](#), and N4's Research Coordinator coded the data using a deductive codebook. Some disambiguation of codes and coding choices with the primary investigator created a final qualitative analysis by key themes.

Breakdown of employer site visits:

- 5 Acute Care
- 3 Community Health
- 6 Long-Term Care
- 4 Health Authorities
- 3 Government

⁹ CHEO. Government of Canada helping connect international health professionals with jobs in their field. 2022-06-06.



WHAT WE HEARD: COMMON THEMES AND SHARED CHALLENGES

A shared, national sentiment echoed across our stakeholder engagement – every corner of Canada was experiencing the HHR crisis. There was not a health profession, organization, or jurisdiction left untouched. Health care employers were faced with a depleted workforce and were grasping to understand the skills and resources needed to effectively recruit and retain staff. They shared a resounding enthusiasm to recruit and retain IEHPs, but identified many barriers to their integration in the Canadian health care workforce

Analysis of the data highlighted six main themes among the barriers:

- addressing the importance and challenge of IEHPs integration
- finding immigration, housing, and settlement support
- equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategies: the inclusion of IEHPs as an equity seeking group
- growing competition across new jurisdictions
- uniqueness of rural and remote communities
- the continued importance of pan-Canadian collaboration

ADDRESSING THE IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGE OF IEHP INTEGRATION

Employers recognized the expertise and cultural knowledge IEHPs bring to their organization. This was echoed by recent research by Andrea Baumann which emphasizes the potential of IEHPs to ease the burden of employers' labour shortages, improve capacity, and increase workforce diversity to better reflect the patient population.¹⁰ Employers acknowledged, however the challenges they face with the integration of IEHPs into the workforce. Stakeholder outreach and research highlighted the different forms of support IEHPs require from their employers as compared to other new employees. Traditional onboarding (typically an orientation week to showcase policies and protocols) does not meet all the needs of IEHPs for successful integration. Some differences are concrete and more straightforward such as knowing Canadian brand names of medications or what is covered by provincial health care coverage. The more complex orientation identified

for IEHPs were valuable “soft skills” which may differ from their countries of origin. These include understanding the nuances of communication (verbal and nonverbal), interprofessional teamwork, cultural safety for the mosaic of Canadian cultures and Indigenous communities, and more. These skills can be difficult to learn and often require assistance from the employer.

“Soft skills are often the hardest skills.”

STAKEHOLDER IN ONTARIO

Employers noted the additional time and resources necessary to support integration. As one employer indicated, “integration does not end when IEHPs are employed but continues for the months after they onboard.” Employers, especially smaller organizations or those in rural and remote communities, vocalized the lack of tools available to assist them. The context of an HHR crisis with already high demands on the existing front-line staff was also highlighted as compounding this issue.

FINDING IMMIGRATION, HOUSING, AND SETTLEMENT SUPPORT

Several employers reported the wrap around support required to successfully recruit and retain IEHPs as often beyond their scope and organization's capacity yet needed. An employer in the Atlantic Region said “the onus is increasingly more on employers” when assisting newcomers in their settlement into their new community. This can include, but is not limited to, assisting newcomers in their immigration process, finding adequate and affordable housing in their area, locating childcare services, and supporting employees' spouses in finding employment in their field. For employers, these aspects of settlement are now emerging as a prerequisite for successful recruitment and retention of staff. The human resources departments for health care organizations discussed

¹⁰ Baumann, A., Ross, D., Idriss-Wheeler, D. & Crea-Arsenio, M. (2017). Strategic practices for hiring, integrating and retaining internationally educated nurses: Employment manual. Nursing Health Services Research Unit (NHSRU), McMaster University, Hamilton, ON.

how they are unequipped for and overwhelmed by these increasing additional responsibilities. In smaller organizations, the onus can fall to one human resource individual to understand the immigration and settlement landscape. One organization emphasized the added anxiety their staff have experienced. A misunderstanding of the finite details of immigration documents and policies, simple mistakes, or missed deadlines can delay an IEHP's ability to live and work in Canada.

“We are experts in many things, but immigration and licensing are not one of them.”

EMPLOYER IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

In addition to knowledge and time as hidden costs, some employers noted incurring financial costs as a barrier to the recruitment of IEHPs. A large employer in Ontario noted they have begun absorbing legal fees incurred in the immigration process in their attempts to recruit sub-specialty ITPs to their organization. Almost all employers noted the lack of centralized navigation services offering guidance and resources to IEHPs as a key barrier. This would alleviate their need to understand and stay up-to date on the federal, provincial and local landscape including immigration routes, regulatory changes, financial incentives, and community supports, such as settlement agencies.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) STRATEGIES: INCLUSION OF IEHPs AS AN EQUITY SEEKING GROUP

The social justice movement of 2020 created an influx of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) commitment statements from organizations and renewed efforts within their human resource departments to support a workforce which reflects the composition of the community they serve. Human resource departments, however, had limited translation of their commitments into strategies to identify and measure progress in this area. Within the efforts underway, there was also a notable lack of understanding or focus on newcomers as a distinct population requiring unique support and resources, and even less so for under-employed IEHPs within their own workforce.

SETTLEMENT SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CANADA

- **IRCC Settlement Services Database** is a national database that can help newcomers in finding employment, language assessments, register for language classes, find a place to live, sign up their kids for school, and learn about community services.
- **Saint John Newcomer Centre** works towards improving cultural, social, and economic well-being of citizens and newcomers of all backgrounds to Greater Saint John, New Brunswick.
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, the **Association for New Canadians** delivers settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees.
- **Settlement.org** provides support to newcomers in housing, education, employment, and community in Ontario.
- The Government of Nova Scotia's Department of Immigration compiled a list of **settlement organizations across Nova Scotia** for newcomers in Halifax, Antigonish, and Cape Breton.
- In Manitoba, the **New Journey Housing** reduces the challenges newcomers face as they seek to attain and retain decent affordable housing in Manitoba focusing on Winnipeg.
- In British Columbia, the **B.C.'s Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services** is available in multiple languages and provides support from **housing for newcomers** and understanding **B.C.'s culture and systems**.

During the interviews, stakeholders were asked two questions that pertained to data:

- What metrics does your organization track for HHR (vacancy rates, turnover rates, etc.)?
- Does your organization track workplace diversity? If so, how many newcomers to Canada are employed at your organization?

While many employers noted metrics to track HHR (such as vacancy and turnover rates), few collected any data on the diversity of their staff, and only IENs who were benefitting from funded programs were tracked as IEHPs. The lack of accurate data impeded employer tracking of outcomes for IEHPs compared to other employees. Employers were also not able to identify EDI efforts which considered newcomer status as a unique and vulnerable portion of their workforce. This is important given Canada's context of underemployment among the 23% of our population who were born outside of Canada, on whom we are relying on for 100% of labour market growth, and on whom we are seeing as key component to solving the HHR crisis.¹¹

GROWING COMPETITION ACROSS NEW JURISDICTIONS

Employers across Canada are now experiencing competition for health care workers from new jurisdictions. Health care employers are no longer competing with their neighbouring communities or larger employers that offer incentives. In the absence of a national approach for the recruitment of health care professions, provinces are being pitted against one another in a competition to attract IEHPs.¹² In addition, as one employer indicated, a change in policy or incentive in one province has ripple effects across the country as they seek to be the province of choice.

The HHR crisis is an international crisis, impacting economies and health care systems globally. Recent analysis from Mark Britnell at KPMG has illustrated this challenging future: "We are hurtling towards a global workforce crisis in health care because of a growing and ageing population which places greater needs and demands on health at just the time when the ratio of employed workers to older people and other dependents has never been more challenging, while the millennial generation is far less inhibited about changing jobs and careers. Put simply, in we face a future where there is too much work with too few workers."¹³ This is a new barrier for employers who are now searching for ways to make their organization an attractive environment within the global market, as well as defend against international recruiters seeking Canada's workforce.

11 Statistics Canada. The Daily. Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians. 2022-10

12 Bramham, D. Canada's response to nursing shortage lacks urgency and co-ordination. Vancouver Sun. 2023-01-12.

13 Britnell, M. Human Solving the Global Workforce Crisis in Health care. 2019.

14 Subedi, R., Greenberg, T. and Roshanafshar, S. Statistics Canada. Does geography matter in mortality? An analysis of potentially avoidable mortality by remoteness index in Canada. 2019-05-19.

UNIQUENESS OF RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Rural and remote communities have long-standing and unique challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals. Statistics Canada conducted an analysis that found people who live in rural communities have limited access to health care services and have worse health outcomes than their urban counterparts.¹⁴ Barriers in attracting and retaining health care professionals that are unique to rural and remote communities – such as smaller communities and physical distance from urban centres – were cited as impacting IEHPs in a heightened way.

Employers noted the link between community integration and long-term retention of health care professionals, but particularly IEHPs. Newcomers to Canada are not moving to only secure a job, but also build a life for their families. Like other employees, IEHPs desire schools for their children, places of worship, employment opportunities for spouses, and other elements which create a sense of being a part of the community. Rural and remote Canada can provide wonderful opportunities for IEHPs to live in affordable housing and within close-knit communities. However, they often lack the cultural diversity and numbers to support the infrastructures for minority languages and religions needed by some IEHPs to create a sense of belonging in their community. Strong leadership from employers and community members to foster celebration of diversity and inclusion within the community was cited as a facilitator to fostering the integration of IEHPs in rural and remote communities.

EXAMPLES OF RURAL AND REMOTE RESOURCES:

- **The New Brunswick Multicultural Council** provides coordination, training, materials, and develops common tools and resources to strengthen the quality and reach of settlement services and improve retention across rural communities.
- **Local Immigration Partnerships** exist across Canada and aim to strengthen the role of local communities in integrating and serving its newcomer population. They have resources for employers on how to develop an inclusive workplace, recruitment practices, onboarding new and diverse employees, and ways to find newcomer talent.

THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF PAN-CANADIAN APPROACH

Throughout our engagement employers discussed the lack of access to best or promising practices in the recruitment and retention of IEHPs. Despite the context previously mentioned of interprovincial competition, there was a desire to forge connections and share strategies on a pan-Canadian basis. Employers noted that an information vacuum regarding both the HHR crisis and IEHPs specifically, has exacerbated and increased the severity of the HHR crisis. Employers often find themselves searching for reliable and easily accessible information related to the pathway of IEHPs including immigration, licensing and recruitment and retention strategies. Most employers requested an ongoing pan Canadian connection to leverage learnings during the visits.

EXAMPLES OF PAN-CANADIAN ORGANIZATIONS:

- The **N4 platform** supports professionals to connect, learn and collaborate in their efforts to promote equity for newcomers accessing and experiencing health and social services. This includes strategies to promote optimal employment of newcomer service providers, including IEHPs. In addition to providing access to best and promising practices to support the optimal employment of IEHPs, N4 provides fully sponsored access to the **Saint Paul University IEHP Online Program** which is designed to provide the non-clinical skills IEHPs can be lacking to be successful in their pathway to employment.
- **Health careCAN** is the national voice of health care organizations and hospitals across Canada, delivering high-quality products and services to members in support of health system innovation and transformation. Their **Health Human Resources Advisory Committee** (HHRAC) unites health care People and Culture leaders from across Canada in a national network to provide critical advocacy and strategic direction and counsel on policy issues based on the health sector's needs. Their work includes that of IEHP integration.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYERS

In addition to the multiple barriers IEHPs to the integration of IEHPs into workplaces, many facilitators and promising practices were identified throughout our stakeholder outreach. Three categories of promising practices emerged:

- the importance of mentorship
- the benefits of provincial IEHP navigators
- creating ethical recruitment by leveraging IEHPs in Canada

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP

The recruitment process for IEHPs does not end once optimal employment is achieved. Rather, a sense of belonging and full integration into the workplace by IEHPs can take upwards of eighteen months. Mentorship was identified as a key facilitator along that journey, and linked to retention.

“The support for IEHPs does not end at employment. It needs to be continuous and include leadership opportunities, support to be more educated, etc.”

EMPLOYER IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Stakeholder outreach and research has shown that the absence of mentorship often leaves IEHPs feeling undervalued and unsatisfied. A stakeholder from Manitoba said, “If IEHPs do not receive this support, it follows a disastrous trajectory where mistakes can be made and mistrust between employees grows.”

IEHPs require unique mentorship that reflects the tools and resources they require to be successful. IEHPs often arrive in Canada with years of clinical experience, however it may have occurred in a very different cultural context from Canada’s. Supporting an orientation to the Canadian “system” and culture was identified as the highest area of need for IEHPs. This

includes the “soft-skills” previously mentioned such as understanding different technologies, the system of referrals, limits of our “universal health care”, Canadian culture, inter-professional team work and relationships, workplace culture, and understanding communication and social cues. The length of time to acquire these skills was found to be shortened through mentorship.

“It’s not what is said, but how it is said.”

EMPLOYER IN WESTERN CANADA

Our outreach highlighted that mentorship can be implemented within employers of all sizes. One employer was able to create a centralized clinical position dedicated to IEHPs. Others reached out to staff to volunteer for less formal mentoring roles with new IEHPs in their organization. These approaches eliminated a formal role and workload for frontline staff but had less accountability.

For best outcomes, an employers’ mentorship strategy should include support for the mentors, including a clear understanding of the role and a realistic expectation regarding the length and of time it requires for IEHPs to be fully integrated. Depending on the experiences and individual backgrounds of the IEHPs, mentorship length and content will vary and therefore any formal mentorship programs need to be flexible.

A facilitator to finding mentors is leveraging end of career professionals. Their depth of knowledge and experiences with mentorship align to IEHP needs and their potential interest in stepping back from frontline or bedside care. Others found that IEHPs who had successfully integrated into the health care system were keen to support those who were following.

Government funding and grants were identified as key to assisting employers in their facilitation of successful formal mentorship for IEHPs. For example, the [Supervised Practice Experience Partnership \(SPEP\)](#) program is a partnership between Ontario Health, College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), and participating employers. The program supports IENs with the opportunity to fulfill recency of practice and language proficiency requirements for licensure, and provides full-time, paid positions during that time. This program also provides employers with funding that allows them to coordinate the program and provide individualized support and training.

THE BENEFITS OF PROVINCIAL IEHP NAVIGATORS

In our stakeholder outreach, employers noted the value of professional navigators aligned to their province who assist IEHPs in their pathway to optimal employment. Employers indicated that having a central, reliable point of contact continues to be critical, and provincial navigators provide newcomers with accurate and up to date guidance on an array of subjects from competency assessments to bridging programs available in their province.

“Transferring professional credentials from one country to another is daunting and frequently requires dealing with a variety of regulatory boards, training institutions, previous employers, and other stakeholders, as part of the process. All while undertaking the complicated task of immigration procedures.”

NEW BRUNSWICK IEN NAVIGATOR SERVICE

There is not a single recipe that can be provided to overcome the challenges IEHPs face in their pathway to employment. IEHPs come from different professions whose regulatory requirements vary from province to province. Currently, IEHP’s educational country of origin greatly impacts their pathway towards licensure, regardless of what other countries they may have obtained licensure and experience. Their

RESOURCES TO ASSIST EMPLOYERS IN RECRUITING AND RETAINING IEHPs:

Support for IMGs/ITPs:

- The **Community Retention Toolkit** of Newfoundland and Labrador offers suggestions on how communities can support recruitment and retention of IEHPs.
- The **Physician Recruitment & Retention in the Atlantic Provinces** provides stakeholders recruitment and retention models for medical students.
- The **Family Physician Recruitment & Retention Toolkit** of BC best or promising practice processes, tools, and templates for recruitment, retention, and practice coverage efforts, and has dedicated resources for **IMGs/ITPs**.

Support for IENs:

- **McMaster University Employer’s Guide** assists employers in hiring IENs which includes resources on hiring, recruitment, entry and orientation, succeeding in the workplace, culture and language, mentorship, helping IENs adjust, and more.
- The **Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) Career Pathway at Sunnybrook** outlines their innovative pathway, showing how IENs can start their careers in health care and transition into registered nursing positions, both RN and RPN positions.
- **CARE Centre** provides IENs in Ontario with one-on-one case management, language and communication skills, exam preparation, professional development, mentoring and networking to be successful in the nursing profession.
- **Manitoba Health care Providers Network** has a step-by-step process to assist IENs in becoming registered nurses.
- **HIRE IEHPs** is an online repository of educational resources for health professionals and employers.

family and financial situation will also impact what additional support they may need to achieve credential recognition and licensure. During the HHR crisis, every province has implemented different strategies to decrease barriers to immigration, credential recognition and licensure. Thus, every IEHP has a unique circumstance to which individualized navigational support should be aligned.

Many employers reported being contacted by IEHPs seeking navigational support on the pathway to optimal employment. Having awareness of the navigational supports available to IENs was therefore also important to employers.

“To be successful, we need to understand all the dynamics within this diverse group and how to best support them.”

EMPLOYER FROM A LARGE HOSPITAL IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

The Government of New Brunswick has taken important steps in recent years to recognize and address the complexities of the pathway to employment for IEHPs. In the spring of 2019, New Brunswick’s Department of Health began the IENs Navigation Service, which was expanded to become the IEHPs Navigation Service in 2022. The unit includes the array of expertise required to support IEHPs along the pathway including immigration program officers, regulatory liaison consultants, and settlement consultants. Prior to the implementation of the units, “there had been five IENs who had gained licensure in the province of New Brunswick in the previous three years.”¹⁵ Currently, the IEN Navigation Service works with approximately 400 candidates per year. The benefits of providing a centralized navigation service – at no cost to newcomers or employers – has solidified itself as a promising practice in New Brunswick’s HHR strategy.

N4’s ITP and IEN Lived Experience Consulting Groups validated that timely centralized, reliable navigation services prevents highly skilled IEHPs from working survival jobs. They can also steer IEHPs away from

expensive programs targeted which they mistakenly believe will increase their odds of licensure, creating unnecessary financial burdens and delays to optimal employment.

“The biggest barrier is the time it takes for IEHPs to keep pushing, from beginning to end. If there’s no one to help or reach out, they’ll get discouraged.”

AN EMPLOYER IN EASTERN ONTARIO

PROVINCIAL NAVIGATORS AND IEHP SETTLEMENT SUPPORT ACROSS CANADA

- The Province of New Brunswick has made it a priority to attract, support and retain valuable health-care professionals through the [IEN Navigation Services](#) and [IEHP Navigation Service](#), both of which provide customized, client-centred assistance at no cost to the candidate.
- [The Access Centre at HealthForce Ontario](#) is the centralized point of access for all IEHPs in Ontario seeking information and advice about the licensing process and alternative career options.
- [The Recruitment and Retention Secretariat](#) of Prince Edward Island provides health human resource planning and undertakes recruitment and retention efforts to meet the current and future needs for physicians, nurses and allied health professionals.
- [Alberta International Medical Graduates Association](#) (AIMGA) is a non-profit organization that supports IMGs as they complete the professional requirements in order to integrate into the Canadian health care system.

15 Parker, R. Navigation the IEN Process: The New Brunswick Model. Webinar. National Newcomer Navigation Network. 2022-11-02.

ETHICAL RECRUITMENT BY LEVERAGING IEHPS IN CANADA

The unprecedented internationally competitive labour market has meant that employers are no longer finding themselves competing across neighbouring communities or with larger employers, but rather across provinces and internationally. "In recent years, Canada has watched a significant number of health professionals move to the United States in search of more money, better jobs or different opportunities."¹⁶ Some Canadian employers have followed suit by creating international recruitment strategies that include trips to India, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, and other jurisdictions.

While feeling forced into an international recruitment arena, employers also expressed ethical concerns of "poaching" individuals from developing countries. This is what Labonte et al. have characterized as a "brain drain" of health professionals from the developing to the developed world – the loss of highly educated professionals (doctors, nurses, scientists, engineers, etc.) – to Canada over the past decade.¹⁷

BEST PRACTICE FOR ETHICAL RECRUITMENT:

- The World Health Organization Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel seeks to strengthen the understanding and ethical management of international health personal recruitment.

In addition to creating further gaps in countries of origin, given that less than half of IEHPs are optimally employed, in Canada, neither country is fully benefiting from this recruitment. As well, IEHPs report great emotional and financial consequences, having moved their families under the false assumption, sometimes based upon information from international recruiters, they would be easily employed within their field given Canada's well known HHR crisis. If recruiting internationally, employers have a duty to provide accurate and up-to-date information to IEHPs to support informed decision-making. During our consultation with those with lived experience, IEHPs stated they felt "lured" into immigrating to Canada, and "If I had known, I wouldn't have come."

A more ethically sound strategy focuses on leveraging IEHPs who have already immigrated to Canada where the "brain waste" is estimated at \$12 billion annually because

16 McIntosh, T., Torgerson, R., Klassen, N. The Ethical Recruitment of Internationally Educated Health Professionals: Lessons from Abroad and Options for Canada. Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. 2007-01
17 Ibid.

18 El-Assal K. Canada's 2018–2020 Immigration plan is a step in the right direction, but let's focus on the key issue. 2022-06-29.

of employment challenges.¹⁸ Employers noted the need to acknowledge and mitigate a conflict of interest in solving underemployment within their own organization. For example, the shortage that many sectors are experiencing in personal support workers and health care aides can disincentive the level of support and encouragement they might otherwise offer IENs to become a licensed RPN or RN.

A southern Ontario hospital discussed their innovative, local recruitment strategy that has become a promising practice. By posting posters on staff bulletin boards, they discovered sixteen IENs currently working for their organization but in non-clinical roles, such as health aides, environmental services, and food services. After self-identifying to their human resources department, they were provided virtual information sessions on the pathway to licensure and how the employer could support them. They have since implemented a process to ask candidates for any position about any international health care education. They also post public advertisements within their communities asking IENs who are interested in learning the pathway to licensure to connect with their HR Department. The employer noted the positive retention rates they've experienced from this approach as it has fostered a relationship and trust between IEHPs and their organization.

TOOLS TO ASSIST EMPLOYERS IN RETAINING NEWCOMERS:

- The Government of Saskatchewan has a list of resources on Retaining Newcomer Employees that assists employers integrating newcomers into the workplace.
- The Immigrant Employment Council of BC has a Retaining Immigrant Talent tip-sheet that provides ideas, skills and resources to retain immigrant talent.
- The Immigrant & Refugee Services Association PEI offers workshops for employers on topics ranging from the benefits of inclusion to the retention of newcomers.
- At Health Force Ontario, the Access Centre for IEHPs provides programs and services to help IEHPs integrate into the Ontario health care system with the primary goal of helping them become trained, licensed, and employed in their profession or an alternative career.
- Anti-Racism at Work created The Employer Playbook: Strategies for Immigrant Inclusion that provides easy-to-implement strategies that support efforts to recruit, add diverse perspectives and foster an inclusive environment.

CASE STUDY:

SUNNYBROOK HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre (Sunnybrook) is an example of an employer that has incorporated the promising practices noted above into a single, innovative, integrated program. Sunnybrook's Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) Career Pathway provides a holistic and collaborative approach to support IENs to re-enter careers in health care and transition into registered nursing positions, both RN and RPN. This case study outlines Sunnybrook's IEN Career Pathway, how it leverages promising practices to achieve successful results, and key takeaways for an employer's recruitment and retention strategy.

SUNNYBROOK'S IEN CAREER PATHWAY

Sunnybrook is located in Toronto, Ontario and is one of Canada's largest academic hospitals. The [Sunnybrook's IEN Career Pathway](#) facilitates IENs to optimize the use of their skills and experiences in the Canadian workforce. The pathway further helps IENs transition successfully along a career continuum from various unregulated hospital roles (observer, patient support provider, etc.) through expanded clinical extern positions.¹⁹ An essential component of the Pathway is the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership (SPEP), a novel strategy implemented in partnership

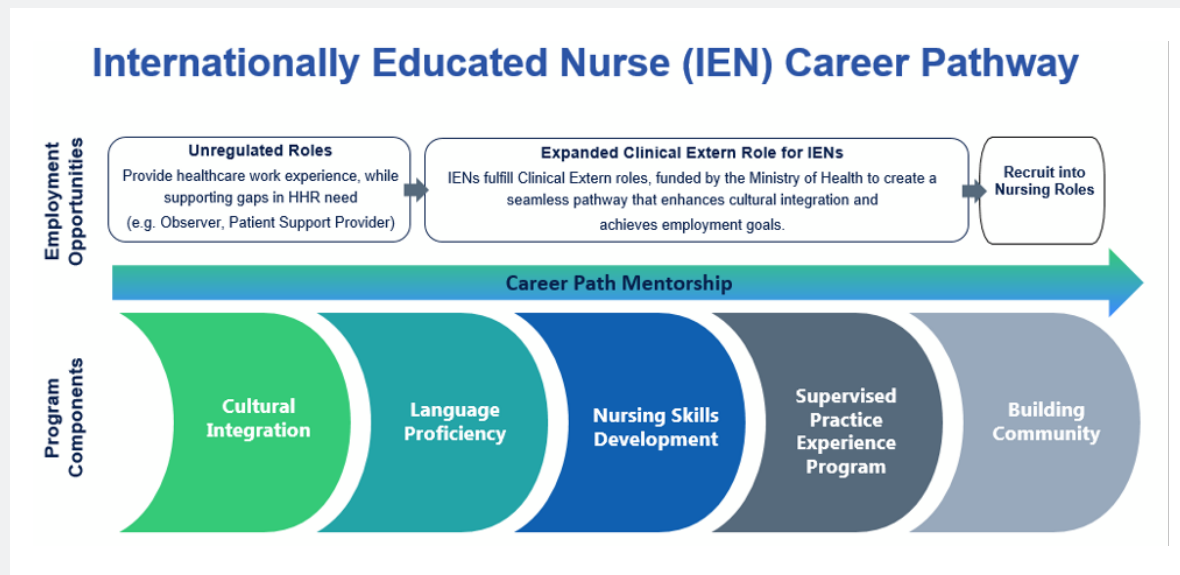
with Ontario Health (OH) and the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) that supports IENs who have passed all elements of the nursing licensure except their evidence of practice requirements and/or official language proficiency. At the end of the pathway, IENs are recruited into nursing roles at Sunnybrook.

LEVERAGING PROMISING PRACTICES

The Sunnybrook model includes many promising practices within its structure including recruiting locally, offering individual support and mentorship, and building partnerships with provincial governments and colleges/universities. Sunnybrook does not have an international recruitment strategy. Like the Southern Ontario hospital previously mentioned, Sunnybrook consciously sought out IENs employed in non-clinical roles within their organization, such as environmental or culinary services. After attending virtual information sessions, over twenty IENs decided to participate in the IEN Career Pathway.

Recruiting internally had clear benefits for the organization. Sunnybrook saving significant resources by avoiding international recruitment strategies and instead leveraging talent already onboarded to their

IEN CAREER PATHWAY FROM SUNNYBROOK HEALTH SCIENCE CENTRE:



¹⁹ Winter, K. Supporting Integration into Practice: The Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) pathway at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. Webinar. National Newcomer Navigation Network. 2022-12-14.

organization. By offering professional development sessions including shadowing opportunities, career conversations, and interview support, the relationship with their organization flourished. IENs noted feeling valued and a part of the Sunnybrook community.

Sunnybrook incorporated individualized support to IENs along the pathway to respond to the diversity of their needs. For example, newcomers often require support in finding adequate housing, daycare for their children, accessing low-interest loans, and other settlement services. Meanwhile, IENs who are more established in Canada may not require this extensive level of support but instead, they might require support in accessing micro-credentialing and education resources, or guidance in understanding the next steps to obtain nursing registration in Ontario. Sunnybrook offers individual, flexible support to IENs through dedicated mentorship and by partnering with the Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses (CARE) to ensure they are set up for success in every aspect. As one stakeholder said, "IEHPs move to Canada to build a life and work – not just to work."

Finally, Sunnybrook has created partnerships with multiple organizations to strengthen their IEN Career Pathway. The SPEP program is funded by the Government of Ontario to include financial compensation for participants, preceptors, and mentors; key resources for implementation. This government/hospital relationship also creates a direct dialogue between front-line workers and those creating programs and policies on the subject. Sunnybrook also formed relationships with IEN learners from local colleges and universities. To recruit IEN learners within the IEN Career Pathway, Sunnybrook has relationships with George Brown College, York University, Seneca College, Bay College, Sheridan College, and Toronto Metropolitan University (formally known as Ryerson University). Sunnybrook also partnered with settlement

organizations, such as Windmill Microlending who offers small low interest loans to persons who might otherwise not qualify due to a lack of Canadian credit history.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sunnybrook is one of Canada's largest academic hospitals, and not every health care organization across Canada has similar resources at their disposal. However, there are teachable and transferable lessons from Sunnybrook's innovative pathway that any organization can benefit from:

- 1. Develop pathways for IEHPs to build upon their skills;**
- 2. Seek out and leverage the knowledge, skill, and cultural expertise of IEHPs who are already within your organization;**
- 3. Implement a holistic pathway that can include, but is not limited to, cultural integration, skill building, relationship and community building, etc.**
- 4. Foster opportunities for mentorships;**
- 5. Form relationship with external partners to leverage financial and human resources through with local, provincial or federal government incentives and colleges/universities**

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

There is a need for coordinated efforts in the health care sector and across provinces to address the HHR Crisis strategy of leveraging IEHPs. Our work addressed the current state and activities of health care employers and identified the facilitators and best practices in removing the many barriers IEHPs face in becoming optimally employed.

NOTABLE STRENGTHS INCLUDE:

- The acknowledgment of the value of IEHPs in closing labour market gaps
- The commitment to EDI including increasing the diversity of the workforce to better represent the communities we serve
- The large number of IEHPs who have already immigrated to Canada and are seeking optimal employment

AREAS FOR ENHANCED EFFORTS:

- Recognition of newcomers as a distinct vulnerable sector
- Developing formal plans to identify and track outcomes for IEHPs within the workforce
- Partnerships with and referrals to those with the expertise necessary to navigate the pathway to employment
- Partnerships between health care employers and the community
- Developing mentorship opportunities to augment IEHP integration within organizations

Our interviews and document scans highlighted examples and tools that may be useful for other agencies. These resources can be found in Appendix A. One of our goals was to identify supports and knowledge needs that N4 could address. We heard from employers that developing tools and templates, as well as creating methods for sharing resources and knowledge, could support their work in advancing IEHP integration.

[N4's Employer Toolkit](#) is one tool employers can use as they work towards integrating IEHPs into their organization. N4 will continue to support employer efforts to advance IEHP integration through knowledge mobilization, sharing resources, and the development of additional tools.

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APPENDIX A

TOOLKIT FOR CANADIAN HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS RECRUITING AND RETAINING IEHPS

The purpose of the Employer Toolkit is to provide contemporary resources, promising practices, strategies and tools that can support the recruitment and retention of IEHPs into health care organizations.

For a more complete understanding of N4's recommendations for licensing for ITPs and IENs, please read:

- [Part of the Solution, Not the Problem: Recommendations for Welcoming Internationally Trained Physicians into Canada's Health Care Sector](#)
- [Welcoming Internationally Educated Nurses into the Canadian Health Care Sector: Recommendations for Change](#)
- [A Missing Part of Me:" A Pan-Canadian Report on the Licensure of Internationally Educated Health Professionals](#)
- [Checklist for Recruiting, Integrating, and Retaining Internationally Educated Health Professionals \(IEHPs\)](#)
- **Visual Pathways**

RETAINING NEWCOMERS:

The Government of Saskatchewan has a list of resources on [Retaining Newcomers Employees](#) that assists employers integrating newcomers into your workplace.

The Immigrant Employment Council of BC has a [Retaining Immigrant Talent](#) tip-sheet that provides ideas, skills and resources to retain immigrant talent.

The Immigrant & Refugee Services Association PEI offers [workshops for employers](#) on topics from the benefits of inclusion to retention of newcomers.

At Health Force Ontario, the [Access Centre for IEHPs](#) provides programs and services to help IEHPs integrate into the Ontario health care system with the primary goal of helping them become trained, licensed, and employed in their profession or an alternative career.

Anti-Racism at Work created [The Employer Playbook: Strategies for Immigrant Inclusion](#) that provides easy-to-

implement strategies that support your efforts to recruit, add diverse perspectives to your organization and foster an inclusive environment. Hire Immigrants Ottawa has an [Employer Playbook: Strategies for Immigrant Inclusion in Canadian Workplaces](#) to help employers leverage newcomer expertise and provide best practices to foster an inclusive workplace.

HIRE Immigrants Ottawa has resources to support workplace inclusion through their Fostering a Workplace Culture of Inclusion and Belonging workshop and a Cross-Cultural Competency Training Program.

- [Fostering a Workplace Cultural of Inclusion and Belonging](#)
- [Cross-Cultural Competency Training Program](#)

SUPPORTING IMGs/ITPS:

The [Community Retention Toolkit](#) offers suggestions on how communities across Newfoundland and Labrador can become involved in retaining the health professionals they successfully to their local health care system for IMGs/ITPs.

The [Physician Recruitment & Retention in the Atlantic Provinces](#) provides physician recruiters, health authorities, policy makers, students, and other stakeholders with a medical student-informed guide about the current recruitment and retention models of each of the Atlantic provinces and suggested action plans for future directions.

The Practice in B.C. [Family Physician Recruitment & Retention Toolkit](#) provides easy access to best or promising practice processes, tools, and templates that can assist in their local recruitment, retention, and practice coverage efforts and has dedicated resources for [IMGs/ITPs](#).

SUPPORTING IENS:

[McMaster University Employer's Guide](#) assists employers in hiring IENs which includes resources on hiring, recruitment, entry and orientation, succeeding in the workplace, culture and language, mentorship, helping IENs adjust, etc.

[Internationally Educated Nurse \(IEN\) Career Pathway at Sunnybrook](#) outlines their innovative pathway, showing how IENs can start their careers in health care and transition into registered nursing positions, both RN and RPN positions.

[CARE Centre](#) provides IENs in Ontario with one-on-one case management, language and communication skills, exam preparation, professional development, mentoring and networking to be successful in the nursing profession.

[Manitoba Health care Providers Network](#) has a step-by-step process to assist IENs in becoming registered nurses.

[HIRE IEHPs](#) is an online repository of educational resources for health professionals and employers.

RURAL SUPPORT:

[The New Brunswick Multicultural Council](#) provides coordination, training, materials, and develops common tools and resources to strengthen the quality and reach of settlement services and improve retention across rural communities.

The [Local Immigration Partnership](#) aims to strengthen the role of local communities across Canada in integrating and serving our newcomer population. They have resources for employers on how to develop an inclusive workplace, recruitment practices, onboarding new and diverse employees, and ways to find newcomer talent.

OTHER:

The [Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Project \(IRMHP\)](#) offers online training, tools and resources to settlement, social and health service professionals working with immigrants and refugees

[N4 / Saint Paul University IEHP Online Program](#) is designed to accompany and support IEHPs overcome barriers to finding health care jobs in Canada.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO NEWCOMERS:

[Windmill Microlending](#) is Canada's only national charity offering affordable loans to skilled immigrants and refugees.

[SEED Winnipeg](#) works in partnership with over 100 organizations in Manitoba to deliver customized financial empowerment programs.

NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT SERVICES ACROSS CANADA:

[IRCC Settlement Services Database](#) is a national database that can help newcomers in finding employment, language assessment, register for language classes, find a place to live, sign up your kids for school, and learn about community services.

[Saint John Newcomer Centre](#) works towards improving

cultural, social, and economic well-being of citizens and newcomers of all backgrounds to Greater Saint John, New Brunswick.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the [Association for New Canadians](#) delivers settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees.

[Settlement.org](#) provides support to newcomers in housing, education, employment, and community in Ontario.

The Government of Nova Scotia's Department of Immigration compiled a list of [settlement organizations across Nova Scotia](#) for newcomers in Halifax, Antigonish, and Cape Breton.

In Manitoba, the [New Journey Housing](#) reduces the challenges newcomers face as they seek to attain and retain decent affordable housing in Manitoba with a priority in Winnipeg.

In British Columbia, the [B.C.'s Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services](#) is available in multiple languages and provides support from [housing for newcomers](#) and understanding B. C.'s [culture and systems](#).

PROVINCIAL NAVIGATORS:

The Province of New Brunswick has made it a priority to attract, support and retain valuable health-care professionals through the [IEN Navigation Services](#) and [IEHP Navigation Service](#) that provides customized, client-centred assistance at no cost to the candidate.

[The Access Centre at HealthForce Ontario](#) is the centralized point of access for all IEHPs in Ontario seeking information and advice about the licensing process and alternative career options.

[The Recruitment and Retention Secretariat](#) of Prince Edward Island provides health human resource planning and undertakes recruitment and retention efforts to meet the current and future needs for physicians, nurses and allied health professionals.

[Alberta International Medical Graduates Association \(AIMGA\)](#) is a non-profit organization that supports IMGs as they complete the professional requirements in order to integrate into the Canadian health care system.

[World Education Services \(WES\) Summary of Recent Provincial Initiatives Supporting Internationally Educated Health Professionals \(IEHPs\)](#) provides a summary of some recent initiatives (policies, programs, legislation) at the provincial level over the last three years.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

- Alberta Continuing Care Association
- BC Care Providers Association
- Canadian Association of Long-Term Care
- Eastern Health
- Glen Haven Manor
- Government of New Brunswick, Department of Health
- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Health
- Government of Prince Edward Island, Department of Health
- Hamilton Health Sciences
- Health Association of Nova Scotia
- Health PEI
- Health Sciences North
- Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
- Intercare Alberta
- Kingston Community Health Centres
- Kingston Health Sciences Centre
- London Health Sciences Centre
- New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes
- Saskatchewan Health Authority
- The Ottawa Hospital
- Umbrella Multicultural Health Co-Op

APPENDIX C

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION SET

How is your organization experiencing the health human resource (HHR) crisis?

Are there any other stakeholders doing work or who have done work in this area we should connect with as we begin this project?

How do you recruit or retain IENs/ITPs into your organization?

What barriers or challenges exist that prevent you from recruiting/retaining IENs/ITPs into your organization?

What solutions would make recruiting/retaining IENs/ITPs easier for your organization?

What resources are useful to you in this work and what would like to see?

What metrics does your organization track for HHR (vacancy rates, turn-over rates, time to fill).

Does your organization track workplace diversity? If so, how many newcomers to Canada are amongst your organization?