



February 13, 2026

The Honourable René Legacy  
Minister of Finance and Treasury Board  
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Dear Minister Legacy,

***Pre-Budget Submission: Protecting New Brunswick Nurses to Improve Health and Long-term Care Efficiency***

***“New Brunswickers have told us very clearly what matters to them - accessible health care.”***

On behalf of two professional associations representing frontline nurses in New Brunswick, and united in our commitment to safeguard working conditions and protect healthcare workers, we are pleased to submit this pre-budget brief urging the Government of New Brunswick to prioritize nurse health and safety through targeted investments to prevent, detect, and treat chronic hand eczema (CHE).

In its call for pre-budget submissions, *Difficult Decisions*, the government underscores the need to improve healthcare across New Brunswick, including enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and strengthening care delivery. Maintaining safe and sustainable healthcare staffing levels is fundamental to achieving these goals. Addressing chronic hand eczema among nurses is a practical, evidence-informed way to advance these objectives.

**Budget Ask Summary: Improving Health Care Efficiency by Protecting New Brunswick Nurses from Chronic Hand Eczema**

**Key Issue**

Chronic hand eczema (CHE) affects up to **30% of nurses**, driven by unavoidable occupational exposure to hand hygiene products, irritants, and allergens. **CHE contributes to pain, infection risk, absenteeism, reduced productivity, and premature exit from frontline healthcare roles**, directly undermining nursing retention and safe staffing ratios.

**Budget Priority Alignment**

- ✓ Protecting New Brunswick’s frontline healthcare workers while boosting efficiencies
- ✓ Improving public health and working conditions

- ✓ Delivering better health and long-term care services
- ✓ Supporting safe and sustainable frontline staffing levels

### **Recommended 2026 Budget Investments**

**Occupational Health & Safety Protection:** Fund access to safe, gentle alternative hand sanitizing products and emollients, and eliminate harmful irritants in healthcare settings.

**Early Detection & Intervention:** Support and equip routine screening, training, and occupational health protocols to identify and manage CHE early.

**Access to Appropriate Treatment:** Ensure timely, evidence-based interventions and treatment options for nurses to prevent disease progression and work disruption.

**Workforce Sustainability:** Integrate skin health into broader healthcare workplace safety and retention strategies.

### **Expected Impact**

- ✓ Reduced sick leave, disability claims, and turnover
- ✓ Improved nurse retention and productivity
- ✓ Stronger frontline capacity and safer patient care
- ✓ Cost avoidance through prevention and early intervention

### **Chronic Hand Eczema: A Significant Occupational Health and Safety Issue**

Chronic hand eczema is a common, inflammatory, and often debilitating skin condition defined by persistent or recurrent hand dermatitis lasting longer than three months. Nurses are among the highest-risk occupational groups due to unavoidable exposure to frequent handwashing, alcohol-based sanitizers, gloves, and chemical irritants required for infection prevention.

A 2024 publication in the *Medical Journals of Sweden* estimates that the prevalence of hand eczema among nurses may reach 30%, with many cases going unreported. This is substantially higher than the approximately 5% prevalence observed in the general adult population. (1) Similarly, according to a 2025 multinational study including Canada, the prevalence among **Canadian nurses is estimated to be 30%**, reflecting their constant exposure to wet work, soaps, sanitizers, and the use of gloves. (2) These findings reflect the reality of frontline nursing work and the occupational hazards embedded in current care environments.

### **Impact on Nurses and Health System Performance**

Chronic hand eczema is not a minor inconvenience. It is a painful, relapsing condition that affects nurses' physical health, mental well-being, and ability to work safely and productively.

Findings from the *pan-Canadian Nurses Chronic Hand Eczema Survey Impact Report* (conducted with acute care nurses who have chronic hand eczema during the fall of 2024) (3) highlight the **alarming** scale of the issue:

- 75% of nurses reported persistent dry skin, and 64% reported itching on most days.
- 80% indicated their symptoms worsen due to unavoidable job-related triggers such as frequent handwashing and sanitizing.
- 68% reported a moderate to very high impact on quality of life, and 75% reported **a significant impact on work performance.**
- Nearly half experienced anxiety, frustration, or embarrassment related to their condition.
- Over half reported little to no benefit from current treatment approaches, resulting in ongoing pain, fissures, and open wounds.

These individual impacts scale into system-level consequences. Evidence from international longitudinal studies shows that **CHE contributes to absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced productivity, and premature exit from clinical roles.** In a five-year follow-up of patients with CHE, more than one-third reported taking sick leave in a single year, and over 5% left or changed their occupation entirely due to the condition. (4)(5)

In a context of persistent nursing shortages, preventable occupational health conditions that erode workforce capacity represent avoidable inefficiencies and costs.

### **A Cost-Effective Investment in Workforce Sustainability**

Protecting nurses' skin health is a workplace safety issue and a prudent fiscal investment. Preventing and managing CHE can reduce lost workdays, disability claims, and turnover, while supporting nurses' ability to remain in frontline roles and deliver high-quality patient care.

We respectfully recommend that the 2026 New Brunswick Budget include targeted investments to:

1. **Strengthen occupational health and safety protections** by supporting access to safe, gentle, alternative hand hygiene products and reducing exposure to harmful irritants and allergens in healthcare settings.
2. **Invest in early detection and prevention programs**, including routine screening, training, and occupational health protocols for chronic hand eczema.
3. **Ensure timely access to appropriate treatment options**, enabling nurses to manage symptoms effectively and remain productive members of the healthcare workforce.
4. **Integrate skin health into broader workplace health and safety strategies**, recognizing its role in workforce retention, public health, and safe staffing ratios.

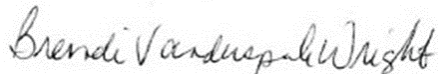
### **Conclusion**

Chronic hand eczema is a significant and underrecognized occupational health issue **affecting nursing retention and healthcare efficiency in New Brunswick**. Survey data indicate that nearly all nurses living with CHE report an impact on their ability to perform nursing work, and two-thirds are seeking greater occupational health support. (3)

New Brunswick's nurses should not have to choose between protecting their patients and protecting their own health. Strategic investments in the budget can mitigate this preventable condition, strengthen workforce resilience, and **support the government's commitment to accessible, high-quality, and efficient healthcare**.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the pre-budget consultation and would welcome further discussion.

Sincerely



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**President**

CANADIAN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
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ASSOCIATION  
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SOINS  
CRITIQUES



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF  
**Neonatal Nurses**

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## Resources

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