

Direct International Registration and Licensing (DIRL)  
Project Evaluation Report (Interim)

Report #3: May 1, 2024 – October 31, 2024

**NOVA SCOTIA  
COLLEGE OF  
NURSING**



## Introduction

As Nova Scotia's nursing regulator, the Nova Scotia College of Nursing's (NSCN) role is to ensure that all nurses providing nursing services for Nova Scotians are qualified to do so. The public can depend on NSCN to license those who meet registration requirements and demonstrate they have the knowledge, skills, and competence required to safely and ethically practice as a nurse.

On May 1, 2023, NSCN implemented a new, first-in-Canada approach to registration and licensure that aims to establish a fast and predictable pathway to licensure in our province. Registered nurses who demonstrate good standing and good character and are licensed in Canada, the Philippines, India, Nigeria, USA, UK, Australia, or New Zealand, are eligible for NSCN's expedited registration and licensure process. Using an equity lens, the newly developed approach yields consistent and predictable licensing outcomes for nurses educated in Nova Scotia, Canada, as well as the seven specific countries where 87% of NSCN's international applicants traditionally apply from.

The expedited licensing process is intended to ensure a direct and efficient approach to licensing international nurses from designated countries and increase the number of qualified nurses available for the Nova Scotia health system.

## Evaluation Framework

As a relational regulator and in keeping with NSCN's values of accountability and transparency, it is important that we make evidence-informed decisions and are accountable and responsible for those decisions. A formal evaluation of NSCN's direct international registration and licensing process provides a systematic method to study our decisions, identify what is working well and what could be improved.

The logic model framework will evaluate:

- a) The regulatory processes used to implement the expedited registration and licensure process
- b) The number of international nurse license holders in Nova Scotia after May 1, 2023
- c) Any potential unintended regulatory impacts

The following questions will provide the context for the evaluation framework:

1. Has the expedited registration and licensure process resulted in more nurses available in the NS health system?
2. Has the expedited registration and licensure process resulted in any unintended regulatory impacts?
3. What evidence is there that the expedited registrant and licensure process has impacted the actual numbers of nurses available within the system?

Periodic evaluations are planned at six-month intervals with a final evaluation on May 1, 2025. Interim reports will be issued after each evaluation interval and compiled into a final report, including recommendations in June 2025.

## Consultation Tools and Data Sources

Data is being collected from the following sources:

- **NSCN Registrant portal.** The portal provides registration information, including the total number of registrants and NCLEX pass rates.
- **NSCN website analytics.** The website analytics provides the number of unique visits to NSCN website pages, including registration and practice support tools.
- **NSCN Practice Database.** The database provides the numbers and types of practice consultations offered by NSCN Practice Consultants.

- **NSCN Professional Conduct.** The professional conduct department provides the number of reports and/or complaints received by NSCN about registrants who registered and licensed as part of the DURL process.
- **Verification of Registration Requests Tracking Tool.** This tracking tool provides the number of ‘verification of registration’ requests received from registrants applying through the expedited registration and licensure process.
- **Nova Scotia Health Learning Institute for Health Care Providers.** The Institute provides evidence of the number of registrants referred to the RN Bridging program.
- **Online registrant survey.** This survey was used to obtain feedback from applicants who applied through NSCN’s expedited registration and licensure process. The survey was open for three weeks and had a 39% response rate.

## Results

This section of the report is framed around our research questions.

### Has the expedited registration and licensure process resulted in more nurses within the NS health system?

#### Numbers of Nurses

During this reporting period, 805 nurses were licensed. This represents a decrease of 28% when compared to the last six months where a total of 1,115 were licensed and a decrease of 47% from this same time frame in 2023 (May 1, 2023 - October 31, 2023). Since launching the new expedited pathway, NSCN has licensed 3,437 new nurses. Our findings show that this translates to a total increase of 21% of nurses eligible to work in Nova Scotia when compared with the total number of nurses registered and licensed on April 30, 2023.

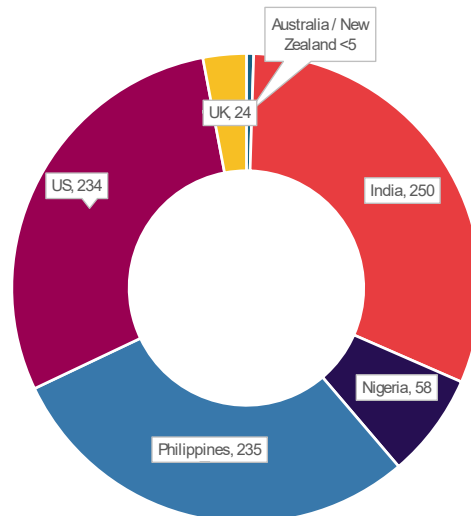
#### Time to Licensure

During this reporting period, results show that applicants were made eligible for licensure on average of 17.1 days after NSCN received a completed expedited application and the application fee. This is an increase of 8.5 days from the last six-month reporting period. Several factors have contributed to this increase in time for applicants to be made eligible for licensure. There has been an increase in more complex applications, increase in workload for other priority registration accountabilities such as annual renewal, processing applications under the Canadian Free trade agreement and natural attrition of staff in term positions. Despite the increase in the time, we are still meeting our key performance indicator of 30 days.

Once eligibility has been established, applicants can activate their license by paying the registration and licensure fee. On average, applicants take 17.7 days from initial notification of eligibility to activate their license. This is an increase of seven days. We have no specific evidence to explain this increase in time.

### How many nurses are eligible to move from a conditional license to a practicing license?

Prior to successfully passing the required entrance exam, nurses can work within the health system with a conditional license. Successfully passing the entrance exam makes the nurse eligible for a practising license.



Number of expedited DURL licence holders by country of origin

A total of 306 registrants have successfully passed the applicable licensing exam (263 passed the NCLEX and 43 passed the CPNRE) during this reporting period. A total of 711 IENs have successfully passed the applicable licensing exam since the launch of the new expedited pathway.

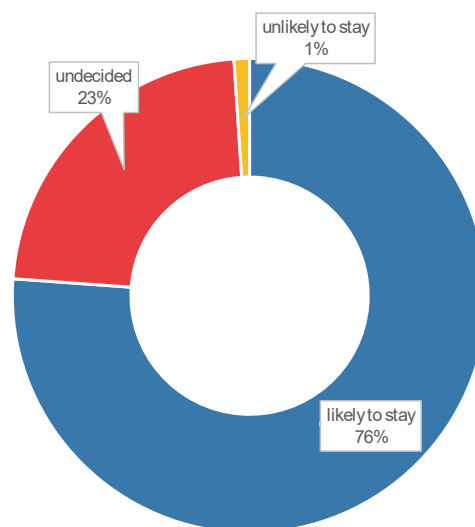
A question was added to the registrant survey during this last evaluation period to gain some insights into why conditional license holders were not writing the applicable licensure exam. Fifty-four respondents provided verbatim answers, which were then themed. Results indicated the following themes:

- Preparing for the exam (22)
- Financial challenges (5)
- Visa issues/not in Canada (4)

## How many nurses are staying in Nova Scotia?

This is being evaluated through a few measures, including registrant requests for a Verification of Registration (VOR). Requesting a VOR can be an indication that a registrant may be seeking registration and licensure in another jurisdiction because other regulatory bodies require VORs as part of their application requirements. During this reporting period, 339 requests were received. This is up from 179 requests in the first reporting period. Since first introducing the expedited registration and licensure process, 16% of IENs licensed under the process have requested VORs.

Survey participants were also asked how likely they were to stay in Nova Scotia. Results for this reporting period indicated that 76% of respondents (217 individuals) indicated they were very likely to stay in Nova Scotia, while 23% of respondents (65 individuals) reported they were undecided. 1% of respondents (three individuals) reported they were unlikely to stay in the province. These results are showing a trend in an increased number of nurses being undecided if they will stay in Nova Scotia. Only 5% reported being undecided in the first reporting period and 7% reported being undecided in the last reporting period.



Number of nurses staying in NS

## Are nurses employed within the Nova Scotia health system?

Survey participants were asked if they were currently working within the Nova Scotia health system. Results for this reporting period indicated that 57 respondents reported they were working as a nurse in the system, 22 as an LPN and 35 as an RN. Most LPNs have gained nursing employment within two months of being licensed (77%), while the majority of RNs gained nursing employment within four months of being licensed (77%). These results are about the same as the results from the last reporting period from May 1, 2024 to October 31, 2024.

Results indicate that the majority of LPNs are working full time (68%) with the remainder reporting they are working part-time (5%) or casual (27%). 77% of respondents reported this is their preferred employment status.

Results indicate that only 54% of RNs are working full time and 37% are casual with the remainder reporting they are working part-time (11%). Only 60% of respondents reported this is their preferred employment status.

This represents a trend of an increase in casual employment for these nurses and a decrease in this being their preferred employment status.

Survey respondents who are not employed were asked why they were not currently employed as a nurse in Nova Scotia. 50% indicated they could not find a job, 22% indicated they do not live in Canada or in NS. About the same percentage reported they could not find a job (58%) in the last reporting period. These survey responses are consistent with the themes found in the practice consultations for these nurses over the same time frame.

# Has the expedited registration and licensure process resulted in any unintended regulatory impacts?

## NSCN Practice Supports

NSCN received 18 requests for practice support from registrants licensed through the expedited registration and licensure process or from managers supporting these registrants during this reporting period. This is about the same as the last reporting period (21). The nature of the practice support requests focused on matters concerning employment (e.g., inability to find a job and/or requests about working as a Continuing Care Assistant) and on questions about conditional license holder restrictions. Matters concerning public safety were not raised.

NSCN has developed a variety of resources to support these nurses, many whom are new to the Nova Scotia health system. Web traffic to the NSCN website featuring these resources received 1,407 unique visits from May 1, 2024 to October 31, 2024, representing an increase of 5% over the last reporting period. A total of 3,791 unique visits were recorded from May 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024.

The Registration team reviewed and revised the registration section of the website to help inform applicants of the process to register and license in NS. There were 5,424 unique hits to these webpages during the period of May 1, 2024 to October 31, 2024, representing a 66% decrease over the last reporting period. A total of 54,292 unique visits were recorded from May 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024.

## Bridging Program

The Nova Scotia Health Learning Institute for Health Care Providers ('The Learning Institute') has an established RN Bridging Program to support nurses who lack currency of practice to re-enter the profession. This 10-month program has been used in the past to support international nurses in practice. It provides a more extensive orientation, mentorship and transition to practice program than some employers are able to provide. A total of 88 referrals were reported from May 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024. Of these, 19 were asked to stop the bridging program and complete sponsored language training as a condition of their employment. Following successful language training they will be welcomed back to the Bridging Program as part of a future cohort. Additionally, 14 IENs were also referred to language support outside the context of the bridging program.

Data suggests that establishing practice currency by passing the required registration exam or having practiced more than 5 years, but less than 10 years in the absence of other practice currency requirements is a predictor of a referral to the bridging program.

## Regulatory Impact

Data to measure the regulatory impact was collected by evaluation of registrant engagement with NSCN regulatory activity. During the current reporting period NSCN received five reports, complaints or notices of employment termination of registrants who achieved licensure through the expedited registration and licensure process. The disposition of these reports are: no action (2); dismissed (1); informally resolved (1); and, under investigation (1).

There had been no reports, complaints or notices of employment termination in the previous two reporting periods. We will continue to monitor these indicators to identify and act on trends that may impact public safety.

## Conclusion

This interim report highlights a summary of data and survey results to support the evaluation of NSCN's expedited registration and licensure process for international nurses from the Philippines, India, Nigeria, the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand. Overall, the results show the expedited registration and licensure process has increased the number of nurses eligible to practice in Nova Scotia. While not captured especially in the evaluation survey, it is important to note that in this reporting period, the majority of IENs registered and licensed under the expedited pathway do not reside in Nova Scotia nor Canada. It is also important to note that IENs located in Nova Scotia continue to note challenges with finding employment. System partners including employers and The Learning Institute continue to evolve programs to support the successful transition of nurses in Nova Scotia. NSCN looks forward to ongoing evaluation over the next six months, with a final evaluation expected in June 2025.