PRESS RELEASE: *Psychiatric Nursing Shortage: Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan Releases Labour Market Needs Assessment*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 8, 2021

The Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan (RPNAS) has released findings from a Labour Market Needs Assessment, sharing the results of a year-long research project that included a survey of stakeholder needs, and RPNAS membership. The report identifies a critical shortage of Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) and the need for immediate educational investment.

The Needs Assessment was conducted to evaluate labour market supply and demand issues and identify the increase in RPN education seats needed to resolve the shortage. The report also provides deeper perspectives and insight on the RPN profession overall and was an important opportunity to gauge member retirement intentions.

Beverly Balaski, RPNAS Executive Director and Registrar, stresses the impact the shortage of psychiatric nurses has on the overall health and wellness of the people of Saskatchewan.

"This assessment highlights a significant supply and demand gap," says Balaski. "Half of the province's psychiatric nurses are over 50 and eligible to retire, with the majority intending to do so within the next three to five years. The loss of RPNs to retirement alone will reduce access to mental health care services in Saskatchewan, an area already in crisis."

Some of the key findings from the report include:

- There are an estimated 165 vacant RPN positions in the province
- 120 education seats are required immediately to sustain the profession in Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford is reportedly unable to fully open all units
- Other mental health units in the province have had to temporarily close beds due to lack of staff
- RPN retirements exceed those graduating and entering the profession

The projected need of 1400 RPNs lies in sharp contrast to the 800 members currently registered in Saskatchewan, as the sector wrestles with a shortage of RPN graduates and high retirement levels. RPNAS is working towards an action plan dedicated to establishing 120 RPN education seats as soon as possible. There are currently 56 seats dedicated to RPN education; last year, this meant over 100 applicants were unable to secure a spot in this program.

"Immediate government investment is necessary to ensure an adequate number of RPNs are available to address our province's mental health and addictions crisis," says Balaski. "While RPNAS representatives have appreciated meeting with government officials on this matter, no commitment to increasing RPN education seats has been made."

RPNs are a critical part of the health care team and provide expertise in assessing mental health and the symptoms of mental illness, with capacity in psychopharmacology, counselling, and therapeutic interventions, in addition to providing basic nursing skills related to physical care. Specialized education prepares RPNs to intervene in psychiatric emergencies, including overdoses, psychoses, and suicide crises.

"RPNs are on the front lines of the province's mental health crisis, which has become increasingly challenging as a result of the pandemic," says Balaski. "RPNs are a crucial part of the solution. With the province facing growing crises in addictions, overdose deaths, youth suicide, and increasing mental health needs in the elderly, the specialized approach of psychiatric nurses is needed more than ever."

About RPNAS
With a mandate to protect the public, RPNAS regulates the profession of psychiatric nurses in Saskatchewan. The organization registers RPNs, sets and maintains the standards for RPN practice, evaluates and approves RPN education programs and presides over complaints and disciplinary processes related to practice concerns.

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