
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2022HLTH0047-001138
July 19, 2022

Ministry of Health
Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation

British Columbia trains, recruits more allied health professionals

VICTORIA – British Columbians will soon benefit from as many as 322 more allied health professionals supporting their health-care needs as new training seats are added to public post-secondary institutions throughout B.C.

Additionally, the Province is providing bursaries to internationally educated allied health professionals and existing health authority employees to meet increasing demand for health professionals in B.C. and to help make training more affordable.

“Building up and supporting our health workforce is our biggest priority,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Our communities have been telling us how important the need for more health services is, and we are listening. You are heard. That’s why we’re supporting public post-secondary institutions to expand and create pathways to get more health workers into the system. We’re on our way to seeing hundreds of new allied health workers join an incredibly rewarding long-term career. Our commitment does not stop here. We know more needs to be done, and we will continue our work to grow B.C.’s health-care workforce.”

In B.C., the allied health workforce provides a range of preventative, diagnostic, technical and therapeutic health care, as well as clinical support services. They contribute specialized expertise, education, research and leadership, often working as integral members of a collaborative health-care team to improve the health and well-being of British Columbians.

The new training seats include:

- 278 ongoing allied health seats throughout the province;
- one-time funding for 24 seats at Vancouver Community College, supports for students at Camosun College, and regional distribution of Thompson Rivers University’s Open Learning program for urgently needed medical laboratory assistants;
- a new bridging program at the Justice Institute of British Columbia to help advanced-care paramedics trained in other provinces and countries transition to practice within B.C.; and
- as many as 20 one-time fast-track seats for respiratory therapists at Thompson Rivers University.

More than two-thirds of the intake for these seats will happen by fall 2023, with some starting as early as summer 2022.

“We are committed to making lives better for British Columbians. Expanding training and preparing a new generation of health-care workers is essential to our health-care system and people’s well-being,” said Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training. “By

investing in health programs and training-related equipment and space, we are training the passionate health professionals of tomorrow.”

The new seats build on recent investments to expand allied health programs in the province.

In 2021-22, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training provided \$3.5 million to public post-secondary institutions to expand allied health seats, with an investment of nearly \$18 million total planned by 2024. The Ministry of Health, through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, also provided approximately \$8.7 million in 2021-22 to support health education programs, which included the expansion of the British Columbia Institute of Technology’s (BCIT) sonography program, the expansion and distribution of the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) occupational therapy and physical therapy programs, as well as new anesthesia assistant students at Thompson Rivers University.

Investing in new training seats is a key pillar of the StrongerBC Economic Plan, which aims to close the skills gap with a generational commitment to accelerate talent development and skills training for British Columbians.

“Expanding training for health-care workers is an important part of our StrongerBC Economic Plan,” said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation. “These new seats in allied health programs will create opportunities for British Columbians and help fill the one million new job openings expected over the next decade.”

In addition to seat expansions, the Province is also investing more than \$10 million in bursaries and professional development funding to help train, retain and support allied health professionals.

Dix added: “Everyone in B.C. deserves high-quality health care and that begins with accessible and affordable training for health-care workers. This announcement is a significant investment in health human resources across the system and will help support health-care providers and patients now and into the future.”

The funding will be distributed as follows:

- \$4.5 million in bursaries for internationally educated high-priority allied health professionals that want to work in B.C.
- \$2.5 million in one-time funding to BCIT for a bursary program that will help current magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technologist students who are also health authority employees complete their training. The first bursaries were awarded April 2022. This is a partnership between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, and BCIT.
- \$1.5 million to support 36 Facilities Bargaining Association employees to become medical laboratory assistants to meet critical shortages.
- \$3 million in professional development funding to the Health Science Professional Bargaining Association to support the training and upgrading of health-science professional development in occupations such as medical laboratory technologists, pharmacists, psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and physiotherapists.

The expansion of seats and bursaries build off the Province’s commitment to train and hire more health-care workers, including allied health professionals. In Budget 2021, the Province

committed to investing \$96 million over three years to support expanded post-secondary education and training capacity for the health workforce. Along with new allied health seats in post-secondary institutions to meet the growing demand for health services and 602 new nursing seats provincewide, the Province is working with post-secondary institutions to expand health-care assistant training as part of the Health Career Access Program.

The StrongerBC Economic Plan moves British Columbia forward by tackling the challenges of today while growing an economy that works for everyone. The long-term plan builds off B.C.'s strong economic recovery and works to address two long-standing challenges – inequality and climate change – by closing the skills gap, building resilient communities, and helping businesses and people transition to clean-energy solutions. The plan sets two main goals for the province – inclusive growth and clean growth – and puts forward six missions to keep B.C. on track.

Quotes:

Keilly Phyllis Campbell, Level 4 student, medical laboratory science, BCIT –

“Thanks to BCIT and my amazing instructors who inspire and provide me with practical skills to be job ready, I am close to achieving my career goal of becoming a medical laboratory technologist. With the Province’s investment in programs like medical laboratory science, more students will now have the opportunity to pursue a career that provides timely and reliable test results to support patient care in B.C.”

Kane Tse, president, Health Sciences Association, and spokesperson for the Health Science Professional Bargaining Association –

“Heavy workload and growing shortages of specialized allied health professionals have pushed the health-care system to the brink. Today’s announcements will help by expanding educational opportunities and reducing financial barriers to work in allied health professions across the province. Bursaries for domestic and internationally trained individuals who want to join the rewarding field of allied health, as well as \$3 million to support the training and upgrading of current health-science professionals are key pieces of the recruitment strategy we need to urgently fill these highly skilled positions. I look forward to welcoming graduates of these post-secondary programs as colleagues soon.”

Meena Brisard, secretary-business manager, Hospital Employees’ Union, and spokesperson for the Facilities Bargaining Association –

“Recruiting and retaining skilled workers in a range of allied health occupations is vital to addressing growing workloads and ensuring the sustainability of our health-care system in the future. Expanding access to training and education in these fields while reducing affordability barriers with financial support to students is critical to our efforts to build tomorrow’s health-care workforce.”

Paul McCullough, interim president, BCIT –

“Through flexible, relevant and future-proof education, BCIT students are ready to meet the health-care needs of British Columbia. Our school of health sciences delivers 32 programs that inspire and educate lifelong learners who foster health and well-being in communities across

the province. This includes our unique magnetic resonance imaging and radiation therapy programs and our medical laboratory technologists, who provide crucial care to help inform our health decisions. Investing in our health-care students strengthens the very foundations of the B.C. health-care system.”

Learn More:

To read more about the StrongerBC Economic plan, visit: www.strongerbc.gov.ca/plan

For the most recent announcement on streamlining assessments for internationally educated nurses, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022HLTH0120-000589>

For the latest nursing seats announcement, visit:
<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022HLTH0004-000250>

Two backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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Public post-secondary institutions receiving seats

As many as 322 new ongoing and one-time allied health seats will be added to B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions.

The anticipated intake timelines for the new seats are as follows. Timelines and programs are subject to institutional, ministerial and regulatory college approvals.

Thompson Rivers University
New seats: 10 anesthesia assistants
First intake: September 2021

University of British Columbia
New seats: two genetic counsellors
First intake: September 2023

British Columbia Institute of Technology
New seats: 16 medical laboratory technologists
First intake: September 2022

College of New Caledonia
New seats: 12 medical laboratory technologists
First intake: January 2023

British Columbia Institute of Technology
New seats: 12 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technologists
First intake: January 2023

College of New Caledonia in partnership with Selkirk College
New seats: 10 pharmacy technicians
First intake: August 2023

Okanagan College
New seats: 16 pharmacy technicians
First intake: June 2022

Vancouver Island University in partnership with Selkirk College
New seats: 15 pharmacy technicians
First intake: August 2022

Capilano University
New seats: 20 rehabilitation assistants

First intake: January 2023

Thompson Rivers University

New seats: 20 respiratory therapists

First intake: September 2022

University of British Columbia – Okanagan

New seats: 10 social workers

First intake: September 2022

University of British Columbia

New seats: 16 occupational therapists

First intake: September 2023

University of British Columbia

New seats: 12 dietitians through a new master's of nutrition and dietetics

First intake: September 2022

University of Victoria

New seats: 15 social workers

First intake: September 2023

British Columbia Institute of Technology

New seats: eight radiation therapists

First intake: September 2022

Justice Institute of British Columbia

Advanced-care paramedic bridging program: demand-driven program

First intake: fall 2022

Expansions for the following programs are also planned with further details to come:

- occupational therapist: 16 seats in 2026
- physiotherapist: 40 seats (20 seats in 2024, and 20 in 2026)
- rehabilitation assistant: 20 seats in January 2024
- speech-language pathologist: eight seats in September 2024

One-time funded seats:

Medical laboratory assistant: 24 seats at Vancouver Community College in May 2022, with student supports at Camosun College for January and September 2022 intakes, and regional distribution of Thompson Rivers University's program through 2022.

Respiratory therapist: as many as 20 additional fast-track seats at Thompson Rivers University in September 2022.

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BACKGROUND 2

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Supports for post-secondary education, training for health professionals

Health care is one of the fastest growing fields of employment in B.C. and is an important part of a strong, resilient economy. By investing in learning spaces, hospitals, clinics, equipment and front-line care providers, more people, such as seniors, young families and children, will be able to access the health care they need when they need it.

Since 2017, government has provided ongoing annual targeted funding of close to \$140 million for health-education programs to public post-secondary institutions across B.C., but also providing one-time additional investments to respond directly to health workforce demands.

Increasing nursing training:

- In February 2022, the B.C. government added 602 new nursing seats to approximately 2,000 seats in nursing programs at B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions. The new seats include 362 registered nursing seats, including 96 new seats at BCIT, 40 registered psychiatric nursing seats, 20 nurse practitioner seats and 180 licensed practical nurse seats at 17 public post-secondary institutions. As part of this expansion, new seats will support health-care assistants who want to train as a licensed practical nurse as well as those looking to move into a career as a registered nurse.
- A new nursing program in Fort St. John allows, for the first time, people to train to be a registered nurse in the northeast.
- The number of specialty nurse training seats at BCIT has increased to 1,000 annually. The nurse practitioner programs at University of British Columbia, University of Victoria and University of Northern BC have all expanded, and a new program is under development at Thompson Rivers University.
- Since 2017, the number of nurse practitioner seats has more than doubled, as well as a 46% increase in practical nursing seats and 22% increase in bachelor of nursing seats.
- To meet the increasing demand for nurses in British Columbia, the Province has also recently launched new supports and bursaries to make it easier for eligible internationally educated nurses to enter the province's health system, so they can support British Columbians' health-care needs sooner.

Training more health-care assistants:

- The Province is working with post-secondary institutions to expand health-care assistant training as part of the Health Career Access Program.
- Through this program, government is recruiting 3,000 health-care workers in home and community care, long-term care homes and assisted-living facilities throughout the province.

- As of January 2022, there have been 3,819 hires and almost 2,500 people are enrolled in a training program.
- This program is supported through investments of \$30.2 million to help thousands of people up-skill or re-skill, and is added to the \$8.5 million announced as part of StrongerBC: B.C.'s Economic Recovery Plan.

Expanding physical therapy training:

- The Province is investing \$24.9 million into the purchase and renovation of new program space in Surrey so that the University of British Columbia can expand its masters of physical therapy program in the Fraser region, helping to train and retain health professionals in the area.
- Twenty new seats will be available this fall, with those students moving to the new location in Surrey when it opens in 2023.
- Physical therapists are identified as high-demand jobs, with 1,860 job openings in B.C. expected between 2021 and 2031.

Investing in health-care innovation:

- The Province recently announced a \$25-million investment into a new learning environment for the school of biomedical engineering at the University of British Columbia.
- Biomedical engineering combines engineering principles with medical sciences to design, create and evaluate equipment, computer systems and software used in medicine and health care.
- Spanning many fields, biomedical engineering focuses on improving human health, including designing and building artificial internal organs and body parts, such as hip joints; designing computer software to operate complex medical equipment, such as 3D X-ray machines; and developing new drug therapies.

Improving access and affordability of post-secondary education:

- The Government of B.C. is investing in student housing as part of Homes for B.C., a 10-year housing plan with 8,000 new on-campus student beds to be built by 2028.
- To date, 6,837 new beds (3,950 government funded, 2,887 funded by the institutions) for student housing are open or underway, so more British Columbians have affordable housing alternatives to pursue post-secondary education.
- The Province ended interest payments on student loans in 2019, saving students \$40 million so far.
- The B.C. government launched the BC Access Grant – the first new grant in 15 years – with 32,000 students receiving more than \$36 million for tuition since 2020.
- In May 2022, the Province invested \$3.75 million to support scholarships for graduate students at 10 public post-secondary institutions.
- The Province introduced the B.C. Graduate Scholarships in 2018 and invested nearly \$20 million to support student success and decrease barriers for graduate students in all regions of the province.
- The Province eliminated tuition fees for former youth in care age 26 and under, including for trades training, which has helped more than 1,600 students.

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