

Position Statement | March 2026

Work-Integrated Learning for Workforce Development in Long-Term Care

Long-term care (LTC) homes across Canada face persistent and acute workforce shortages, particularly among Personal Support Workers (PSWs)—the essential care providers who deliver the majority of direct resident care¹. Despite ongoing recruitment initiatives, the LTC workforce has not kept pace with the sector’s workforce needs. These shortages continue to be experienced in regulated nurse professional roles including the practical nurse and registered nurse.

Strategic, coordinated workforce development is urgently required. Work-integrated learning (WIL), apprenticeship-style models, and structured career pathways offer practical, evidence-informed approaches to strengthen recruitment, accelerate competency development, enhance career satisfaction, and improve retention within the LTC sector².

The Canadian Association for Long-Term Care (CALTC) identifies three priority areas for action:

1. Access to Paid Work-Integrated Learning

Paid, on-the-job training models have demonstrated success in select jurisdictions yet care careers in Canada are not widely supported through formal apprenticeship pathways or formalized learning environments. Expanding “earn and learn” approaches, such as the Health Care Aide Program (HCAP) program in BC,³ would modernize workforce development in LTC and align with successful models used in other sectors nationally and internationally. “The Living Classroom⁴” is another example of how a learning environment can be integrated into the long term care home. This may also reduce the financial burden that may prevent potential students from completing PSW training.

¹ [Regional dynamics of vacancies in health-related occupations in Canada, 2024](#)

² <https://cris.maastrichtuniversity.nl/en/publications/keep-on-learning-fostering-continuous-learning-and-improvement-in/>

³ [Becoming a health care assistant in B.C. - Province of British Columbia](#)

⁴ [The Living Classroom - Ontario Centres for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care](#)

Federal mechanisms such as the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP)⁵ provide a strong foundation to expand apprenticeship-style training in collaboration with unions, employers, provinces, territories, and educators.

CALTC supports the development of a national PSW apprenticeship pathway that:

- Combines paid, on-the-job learning with structured instruction
- Recognizes and formalizes national competencies
- Strengthens recruitment and retention through career development opportunities
- Supports the potential development of regulation and labour mobility considerations
- Any national strategy should leverage existing federal investments while ensuring LTC-specific relevance and accessibility.

2. Consistent National Competencies

PSW education, certification, and job expectations vary significantly across provinces and territories. The absence of nationally aligned competencies limits workforce mobility, complicates potential regulatory discussions, and creates inconsistencies in training outcomes.

The 2023 National Occupational Standard for Personal Care Providers⁶ supported by ESDC Canada provides an important foundation by identifying entry-level competencies required to deliver quality care.

A coordinated federal-provincial-territorial approach to adopting shared competency outcomes would:

- Support a common competency-based training framework
- Enable recognition of PSWs as a clearly defined national occupational group
- Facilitate labour mobility across jurisdictions
- Strengthen the case for apprenticeship designation and credential recognition

3. Career Progression Pathways

Retention improves when staff have access to mentorship, skill development, and career advancement opportunities. Work-integrated learning models strengthen professional identity, job satisfaction, and long-term attachment to the sector.

Examples such as Ontario's Nursing PLEDGE Program and Preceptor Resource⁷ and Education Program in Long-Term Care demonstrate how structured placement and mentorship investments can support

⁵ [About the Union Training and Innovation Program \(Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy\) - Canada.ca](#)

⁶ [CICan_NationalOccupationalStandard_PersonalCareProviders](#)

⁷ [Nursing Partnership for Learning, Employment, Development, Growth and Experience \(Nursing PLEDGE\)| Ontario Health](#)

workforce sustainability. “Career laddering” initiatives that allow PSWs or Practical Nurses to pursue advanced credentials while remaining employed—such as provincial bridging programs⁸—further reinforce retention.

Work-integrated learning initiatives must support existing staff and create advancement opportunities without introducing unnecessary barriers or requiring experienced workers to re-qualify for roles they already competently perform.

CALTC Position

CALTC acknowledges the significant staffing pressures facing LTC homes across Canada and emphasizes that sustainable workforce development requires coordinated leadership and investment from all levels of government.

A national work-integrated learning strategy focused on LTC and the PSW role is essential to:

- Strengthen recruitment pipelines
- Improve retention of experienced staff through proven strategies
- Recognize PSWs as a skilled occupational group
- Support potential for regulation, labour mobility and long-term workforce sustainability
- LTC homes cannot implement sector-wide transformation alone. Federal leadership, in collaboration with provinces and territories and the long term care sector itself, is necessary to scale proven models and ensure equitable access across jurisdictions.

Recommendations

CALTC calls on the federal government to:

Lead a federal–provincial–territorial work-integrated learning strategy focused on strengthening the long-term care (LTC) workforce.

Advance national alignment on the Personal Support Worker (PSW) National Occupational Standard, supporting consistent competencies and recognition across jurisdictions.

Prioritize PSWs under the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) to expand apprenticeship-style and work-integrated learning opportunities in LTC.

⁸[Nursing Transformation: PSW to PN Pathway | Ontario Colleges](#)

Work with provinces and territories to establish a formal PSW apprenticeship style pathway, creating a clear and sustainable entry route into the sector.

Expand existing federal retention initiatives to better reflect LTC realities, including adapting the Nursing Retention Toolkit to incorporate LTC-specific best practices.

Conclusion

Canada's long-term care workforce crisis is measurable and structural. Work-integrated learning, competency alignment, and structured career pathways offer practical solutions to strengthen recruitment, retention, and quality of care.

A coordinated national strategy—supported by federal leadership—will help ensure that LTC homes remain sustainable and capable of meeting the growing needs of Canada's aging population while supporting a skilled, stable, and valued workforce while relieving pressure on hospitals and families.

References:

- [Recent staffing and quality indicator trends in Canadian long-term care | CIHI](#)
- [Missouri Talent Pathways | dmh.mo.gov](http://dmh.mo.gov)
- [Nursing PLEDGE - Ontario Centres for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care](#)
- [Preceptor Resource and Education Program in Long-Term Care \(PREP LTC\) - Ontario Centres for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care](#)
- [Professional development and mentorship: Nursing retention toolkit - Canada.ca](#)
- [Saint John initiative details](#)
- [WeRPN Begin – WeRPN Begin](#)
- [8: Super-invisibility: older' care workers in home care and residential long-term care in: Ageing Equitably with Care](#)