



**Registered Psychiatric Nurses in
New Brunswick, Nova Scotia
and Prince Edward Island:
*A Feasibility Study***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAY 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Project Partners, Nova Scotia Health, Nurses Association of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island Health and Wellness and the Registered Psychiatric Nurse Regulators of Canada (RPNRC) express their gratitude to the members of the New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI Regional Advisory Committees and the study's Steering Committee who provided valuable guidance, much time and support throughout the past year. A special thank you to the Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee, Doug Bungay and Laura Panteluk for their invaluable time and effort planning and facilitating the discussions.

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Available in French under the title: *Infirmières psychiatriques autorisées au Nouveau-Brunswick, en Nouvelle-Écosse et à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard : Une étude de faisabilité – Résumé*

<<https://rpnmaritimesstudy.ca/assets/%c3%a9tude-de-faisabilit%c3%a9-sur-les-ipa-dans-les-maritimes---r%c3%a9sum%c3%a9.pdf>>

Full report is available at: <<https://rpnmaritimesstudy.ca/assets/rpn-maritime-feasibility-study-report.pdf>>



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The increased demand and ongoing gaps in psychiatric, mental health and addictions services are now at the forefront of national health related discussions. In May 2012, the first mental health strategy for Canada was developed and aimed to help improve the mental health and well-being of all people living in Canada, and to create a mental health system that can meet the needs of people living with mental health challenges. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (PEI) along with the other provincial and territorial governments responded with their own strategies and goals. An element common to all three strategies was workforce planning.

Licensed Practical Nurses¹ (LPN), Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses (RN) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN) provide care to people experiencing issues related to mental health and addictions in all service sectors in Canada today. LPNs, Nurse Practitioners and RNs are licensed/registered and regulated across the country while RPNs are only regulated in western Canada and the territories. RPNs work side by side with RNs and LPNs in various practice settings in the western provinces and territories and are especially concerned with the mental health of individuals, groups, families, and communities. Psychiatric nursing education prepares graduates to meet the national Entry-Level Competencies. The breadth and depth in mental health and addictions and advanced therapeutic relationships and communication distinguish psychiatric nursing education from the other nursing programs.

As a follow-up to the visionary 2015 *Mobility and Assessment of Canadian and Internationally Educated Registered Psychiatric Nurses* project, Nova Scotia Health, the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB), and PEI Health and Wellness discussed with the Registered Psychiatric Nurse Regulators of Canada (RPNRC) to understand the role and competencies of the RPN a potential feasibility of a pathway to licensure and regulation of RPNs in the Maritimes. Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program, the purpose of the feasibility study was to explore the pathway to licensure and regulation of RPNs in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI with a view to improve and support the access and provision of psychiatric, mental health and addictions services in the Maritime provinces, address the inequity faced by internationally educated psychiatric nurses (IEPNs) and improve the labour mobility of RPNs by laying the groundwork for regulation of RPNs in these provinces as well as in other jurisdictions.

The study was overseen by the Steering Committee which consisted of the four project partners, NANB, Nova Scotia Health, PEI Health and Wellness and the RPNRC in addition to one to two members from the Regional Advisory Committees (RAC). The RAC was established for each Maritime jurisdiction and while representation from all stakeholder segments was not uniform across the RACs, membership consisted of government, nurse regulators, employers, nurse educators, and unions representatives. Reporting to the Steering Committee, the RACs met virtually over the course of the

¹ Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) are called Registered Practical Nurses in the Ontario. For the purposes of this report, the term LPNs will refer to Registered Practical Nurses as well.

study and provided recommendations for the Steering Committee's consideration. A project manager was recruited to support both the study's Steering and Regional Advisory Committees and, the study's research and communication plans.

CAMPROF Canada Inc. was retained to complete the research which included the review of online and grey literature and data, key informant interviews and focus groups, an English and French survey of RPNs and a workshop of the RACs. Recruitment of participants over the summer and fall of 2022 together with nursing shortages, increased demands and competing priorities impacted the researchers' ability to consult with all stakeholder groups targeted. Notable gaps were the limited participation from the Maritime nursing unions and governments and the lack of representative diversity in the academic focus groups.

Feasibility of a pathway to license and regulate RPNs in the Maritimes explored 1) legal and regulatory, 2) education, 3) labour market and related and 4) knowledge and acceptance of RPNs to determine initial and sustainable feasibility. The Steering Committee acknowledged that a pathway to license and regulate RPNs in the Maritimes is feasible. There are opportunities to leverage and build on existing infrastructures and reimagine nursing education and healthcare teams to improve access and care for psychiatric, mental health and addictions. This will require long-term commitment of resources and time and in the case of New Brunswick, an amendment to its current legislation.

The decision to introduce and regulate RPNs in the Maritimes rests with each provincial government. The study's Steering Committee agreed that senior leaders of each provincial government and RN regulatory authority should form the initial membership of a Pan-Maritime or Atlantic Canada Collaborative since the decision to regulate RPNs in the jurisdiction is first required. Continued collaboration between the Maritime provinces welcoming Newfoundland and Labrador at some point if interested, will be beneficial to all.

Proceeding forward is long-term and calls for effective planning and decision-making to develop approaches that will support both initial and sustainable feasibility of regulating RPNs in the Maritimes should the decision be made to do so. Further discussions and research in legislation and regulation, change management and education may be necessary to inform the decisions and/or to explore the options.