

CANADIAN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
CRITICAL  
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ASSOCIATION  
CANADIENNE DES  
INFIRMIÈRES ET DES  
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SOINS  
CRITIQUES



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF  
**Neonatal**Nurses

April 8, 2026

The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside  
Minister of Labour  
c/oa PO Box 9064  
Stn Prov Govt  
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Email: [jennifer.whiteside.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:jennifer.whiteside.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Whiteside,

**Policy Ask:** Recognize chronic hand eczema among nurses as an occupational health and safety issue and strengthen workplace prevention, early detection, and treatment supports.

On behalf of two professional nursing associations representing frontline nurses across British Columbia, we are writing to highlight an urgent and underrecognized occupational health issue affecting nurses: chronic hand eczema (CHE).

We commend the Government of British Columbia for **introducing Bill 10**, the *Labour Statutes Amendment Act*, which aims to strengthen employment standards and protect workers. As the province advances these important workplace protections, there is a **timely opportunity to address occupational skin disease among healthcare workers**, particularly nurses who are routinely exposed to “wet work,” including frequent handwashing with agents containing known chemical irritants, alcohol-based sanitizers, and prolonged glove use.

While these infection-prevention measures are essential for patient safety, repeated exposure can damage the skin barrier and lead to chronic hand eczema. This painful, persistent inflammatory condition can impair hand function and compromise a nurse’s ability to work safely. CHE is estimated to affect up to **30% of nurses**, significantly higher than in the general population.

At a time when healthcare systems across Canada are **facing workforce pressures**, preventable occupational health conditions that contribute to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and **premature departure from frontline roles must be addressed proactively**.

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## **Policy Opportunity: Protecting BC Nurses from Chronic Hand Eczema**

### **Issue**

Chronic hand eczema among nurses is driven by unavoidable workplace exposure to irritants and allergens in healthcare settings. Without adequate prevention and early intervention, CHE can lead to pain, infection risk, sick leave, and workforce attrition.

### **Alignment with Bill 10**

- ✓ Protecting BC's workers
- ✓ Improving working conditions
- ✓ Supporting safe and sustainable frontline staffing levels

### **Recommended Actions**

#### **Strengthen Occupational Health Protections**

Support access to skin-safe hand hygiene products and protective emollients while reducing exposure to harmful irritants in healthcare environments.

#### **Support Early Detection and Prevention**

Equip occupational health programs with protocols, screening tools, and training to identify and manage CHE early.

#### **Improve Access to Treatment**

Ensure timely access to evidence-based treatment options so nurses can manage symptoms and remain in frontline care roles.

#### **Integrate Skin Health into Workplace Safety Strategies**

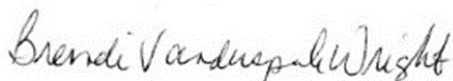
Recognize occupational skin disease as a workplace safety issue and incorporate prevention into broader healthcare worker protection initiatives.

### **Expected Impact**

- ✓ Reduced sick leave, disability claims, and turnover
- ✓ Improved nurse retention and workforce stability
- ✓ Stronger frontline capacity and safer patient care
- ✓ Cost avoidance through prevention and early intervention

Protecting nurses from preventable occupational conditions such as chronic hand eczema aligns directly with the province's commitment to safe workplaces and sustainable healthcare staffing. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how these measures could be incorporated into BC's workplace health and safety framework.

Sincerely



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**President**



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cc.

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## **Additional Context**

### **Chronic Hand Eczema: A Significant Occupational Health and Safety Issue**

Chronic hand eczema is a common, inflammatory, and often debilitating skin condition characterized by persistent or recurrent hand dermatitis lasting more than 3 months. Nurses are among the highest-risk occupational groups due to unavoidable exposure to frequent handwashing, alcohol-based sanitizers, gloves, and chemical irritants required for infection prevention.

A 2024 publication in the *Medical Journals of Sweden* estimates that the prevalence of hand eczema among nurses may reach 30%, with many cases going unreported. This is substantially higher than the approximately 5% prevalence observed in the general adult population. (1) Similarly, according to a 2025 multinational study including Canada, the prevalence among **Canadian nurses is estimated to be 30%**, reflecting their constant exposure to wet work, soaps, sanitizers, and the use of gloves. (2) These findings reflect the reality of frontline nursing work and the occupational hazards embedded in current care environments.

### **Impact on Nurses and the Health System**

Chronic hand eczema is not a minor inconvenience. It is a painful, relapsing condition that affects nurses' physical health, mental well-being, and ability to work safely and productively.

Findings from the *pan-Canadian Nurses Chronic Hand Eczema Survey Impact Report* (conducted with acute care nurses who have chronic hand eczema during the fall of 2024) (3) highlight the **alarming** scale of the issue:

- 75% of nurses reported persistent dry skin, and 64% reported itching on most days.
- 80% indicated their symptoms worsen due to unavoidable job-related triggers such as frequent handwashing and sanitizing.
- 68% reported a moderate to very high impact on quality of life, and 75% reported a significant impact on work performance.
- Nearly half experienced anxiety, frustration, or embarrassment related to their condition.

- Over half reported little to no benefit from current treatment approaches, resulting in ongoing pain, fissures, and open wounds.

These impacts translate directly into workforce challenges. Evidence from international longitudinal studies shows that **CHE contributes to absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced productivity, and premature exit from clinical roles.** In a five-year follow-up of patients with CHE, more than one-third reported taking sick leave in a single year, and over 5% left or changed their occupation entirely due to the condition. (4)(5)

At a time when BC faces ongoing nursing shortages and staffing pressures, preventable occupational health conditions that erode workforce capacity must be addressed proactively.

### **A Cost-Effective Investment in Workforce Sustainability**

Protecting nurses' skin health is a workplace safety issue and a prudent fiscal investment. Preventing and managing CHE can reduce lost workdays, disability claims, and turnover, while supporting nurses' ability to remain in frontline roles and deliver high-quality patient care.

We respectfully recommend that the Province consider the following recommendations:

- 1. Strengthen occupational health and safety protections** by supporting access to safe, gentle, alternative hand hygiene products and reducing exposure to harmful irritants and allergens in healthcare settings.
- 2. Invest in early detection and prevention programs**, including routine screening, training, and occupational health protocols for chronic hand eczema.
- 3. Ensure timely access to appropriate treatment options**, enabling nurses to manage symptoms effectively and remain productive members of the healthcare workforce.
- 4. Integrate skin health into broader workplace health and safety strategies**, recognizing its role in workforce retention, public health, and safe staffing ratios.

### **Conclusion**

Chronic hand eczema is a significant and underrecognized occupational health issue **affecting nursing retention** across BC. Survey data show that nearly all nurses living with CHE report an impact on their ability to perform nursing work, and two-thirds are seeking greater support from occupational health services. (3)

**BC's nurses should not have to choose between protecting their patients and protecting their own health.** Provincial workplace considerations can mitigate this preventable condition, strengthen workforce resilience, and support the government's commitment to protecting workers and delivering better healthcare services.

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## Resources

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