



2026 Report V1: Reduced Travel Nurse Usage Impacting Overtime for Nurse Employees

Analyzing overtime worked and verifying criminal record checks can support reliable patient care and a cost-effective workforce

REGINA—June 23, 2026: In her **2026 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 4**, Provincial Auditor Tara Clemett examined the Saskatchewan Health Authority's processes to effectively use travel nurses making **seven recommendations** to help better monitor costs, workforce impacts, and patient care risks.

Travel nurses—such as Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses—are commonly used to address short- and medium-term staffing shortages. Although this approach can reduce immediate staffing pressures, travel nurses generally cost more than permanent nursing staff. Prolonged reliance on travel nurses can impact healthcare budgets and limit investments in long-term staffing solutions.

Between 2019–20 and 2023–24, the Authority's estimated spending on travel nurses increased by over 4,500% from \$2.1 million to \$98.8 million. In response, the Authority worked to reduce reliance on using travel nurses, with spending declining to \$75.8 million in 2024–25. The key is for the Authority to assess that reductions in travel nurse usage do not result in excessive overtime for its own nurse employees, which increases the risk of burnout and further affect staffing.

“By closely monitoring and evaluating the use of travel nurses, the Saskatchewan Health Authority can make informed staffing decisions supporting a positive work environment for all its staff and ensure quality patient care,” said Tara Clemett. “The Authority's ability to achieve its reduction targets for travel nurse usage is directly related to its strategies for recruiting and retaining its own nurse employees to address vacancies across the province.”

We found the Authority has established processes to effectively use travel nurses, except where it needs to:

- **Analyze how reductions in travel nurse usage affect overtime worked by nurse employees.** While monthly average hours worked by travel nurses decreased by 54% in 2025–26 compared to 2023–24, monthly average overtime hours worked by nurse employees increased by 26%.
 - **Assess using an internal float pool of nurse employees traveling to healthcare facilities across Saskatchewan when needed** as a cost-effective alternative for addressing staffing gaps and reducing reliance on travel nurses.
 - **Verify completion of criminal record and vulnerable sector checks for travel nurses.**
 - **Document justification for using travel nurses with prior performance issues.**
 - **Mandate cultural sensitivity training for travel nurses** working in Saskatchewan.
 - **Consistently require timely invoices from travel nurse staffing agencies to reduce reliance on using estimated costs**, which can be inaccurate. For example, \$4.4 million in estimated travel nurse costs for March 2025 exceeded actual invoiced costs by more than 18%, limiting the reliability of information used for decision-making.
- At November 2025, the Saskatchewan Health Authority contracted 116 travel nurses
 - Paid 15 travel nurse staffing agencies over \$75 million in 2024–25
 - Travel nurse staffing agencies are expected to invoice biweekly, but some invoices were submitted up to 11 months after services were provided
 - One travel nurse with a performance issue in 2023 was used again at a facility in 2025
 - The Authority did not expect to meet its 2025–26 target for reducing staff overtime and contract nursing expenses as a percentage of total compensation—forecasted at 9.13% compared to 7% target

“Confirming criminal record checks and requiring cultural sensitivity training for travel nurses can help the Saskatchewan Health Authority make sure it is providing safe, equitable care to all Saskatchewan patients.” said Tara Clemett.

The full Provincial Auditor's 2026 Report – Volume 1 available online at auditor.sk.ca.

–30–

The Provincial Auditor is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Office advances government's accountability, transparency, and management of public resources through independent assessment and reporting.

Tara Clemett, CPA, CA, CISA, Provincial Auditor
306.787.6313 or info@auditor.sk.ca

April Serink, MA, Communications Specialist
306.531.6163 serink@auditor.sk.ca or media@auditor.sk.ca