

Performance Audit of the Saskatchewan Health Authority: Effectively Using Travel Nurses

Why It Matters



By using travel nurses effectively, the Saskatchewan Health Authority can support a positive work environment and quality patient care. Reducing reliance on travel nurses can have unintended impacts to overtime worked by nurse employees.

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.

Why We Did This Audit

Travel nurses can help the Saskatchewan Health Authority address staffing shortages and reduce excessive overtime hours, absenteeism, and burnout of permanent nurse employees.

This approach can ease immediate staffing pressures, but, due to higher costs, prolonged reliance can strain budgets and hinder long-term staffing investment.

Key Facts and Figures

- At November 2025, the Saskatchewan Health Authority contracted 116 travel nurses
- In 2024–25, the Authority paid 15 staffing agencies over \$75 million for travel nurses use
- Travel nurse staffing agencies are expected to invoice biweekly, but some agencies submitted invoices up to 11 months after services were provided
- The Authority did not 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
- One travel nurse with a documented performance issue in 2023 was used again at a facility in 2025
- Nurse employees require cultural sensitivity training but travel nurses do not

What We Found

We found, between 2023 and 2025, the **average hours worked by travel nurses decreased by 54%, while average overtime hours worked by nurse employees went up by 26%.**



We Made 7 Recommendations

The Saskatchewan Health Authority needs to:

- **Analyze how reductions in travel nurse usage affect overtime worked by nurse employees.**
- **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 lessen 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.

