

# INDIGENOUS NURSING STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEY REPORT

2020–2021

Registered Nurse Workforce,  
Canadian Production:  
Potential New Supply

November 2022



CASN  
ACESI 



Canadian Association  
of Schools of Nursing  
Association canadienne des  
écoles de sciences infirmières



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## Introduction

In December 2020, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), in partnership with the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association (CINA), was funded by Indigenous Services Canada to prepare and launch an annual survey to monitor progress among Canadian schools of nursing on the number of self-identified Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) nursing faculty employed in Canada and on the enrollment of self-identified Indigenous nursing students. The survey was administered as an adjunct to CASN's annual student and faculty survey, which has provided the nursing community, employers, and other key stakeholders with up-to-date information about the numbers of future nurses and their educators since its launch in 2004. The purpose of this survey is to create a mechanism to collect and disseminate high-quality, longitudinal evidence that will allow the recruitment and retention of Indigenous nursing students and faculty to be assessed and monitored across the country.

## Background

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015) calls on Canadian institutions and all levels of government to take action to address the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation. Call to Action 23 calls for an increase in the number of Indigenous health professionals. Nurses represent the largest health profession in all jurisdictions in Canada. Indigenous Peoples, however, are underrepresented in nursing services and nursing education. These actions are inextricably linked as increasing the number of Indigenous health professionals requires fundamental changes to the education system.

In 2017, "CASN member schools . . . adopted a motion to respond to the Calls to Action in nursing education" (CASN, 2020). This prompted the creation of a joint CASN-CINA task force that aimed to support the responsiveness of nurse educators to the TRC Calls to Action. As the national voice for nursing education and an organization that sets standards of best practices for education, CASN's role was to provide detailed guidance on practical steps every school of nursing could take. In 2020, CASN published the [\*Framework of Strategies for Nursing Education to Respond to the Calls to Action\*](#).

While CASN's framework spotlights strategies for schools of nursing to grow the number of Indigenous students in their programs and support their retention, CASN, CINA, governments and other key stakeholders lack systematically collected data to assess whether progress is being made in increasing the number of Indigenous nurses and nursing faculty. In 2020, CASN and CINA submitted a proposal to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) with the aim of creating an adjunct survey to its annual student and faculty survey that would collect data on the number of Indigenous students entering and graduating from nursing programs at baccalaureate and graduate levels, as well as data on the number of Indigenous nursing faculty. CASN and CINA were funded for an exploratory phase that involved gathering information about the administration of the proposed survey from schools of nursing, as well as developing a survey tool. ISC funded an implementation phase that allowed CASN to administer the survey in 2022.

## Data Collection, Sharing, and Ownership

The principle of Indigenous data sovereignty, which recognizes the authority of Indigenous Peoples over the collection and use of their data and knowledge (Walter et al., 2021), was used to guide the survey development and administration. CINA, CASN and the advisory committee co-developed the survey questions. The advisory committee guided CASN and CINA to include questions that would go beyond the numbers of Indigenous students and faculty, recognizing the importance of collecting data about the recruitment and retention strategies schools might have in place.

CASN collected the data from schools of nursing given that an annual student and faculty survey was already in place. A data sharing agreement between CASN and CINA was signed detailing the partnership: CASN collects and stores the data on its secure server and shares the aggregate data in response to the Indigenous survey questions with CINA. The data is owned by CINA, and CASN is not permitted to report on the Indigenous student and faculty survey responses without express permission from CINA.

## Explanatory Phase

### Focus Groups

Focus groups were organized with nursing faculty and administrative staff that had previously responded to the annual student and faculty survey. The purpose of these sessions was to explore possible facilitators and barriers that schools of nursing would face in responding to the survey. Focus groups were selected as the method for data collection to spur discussion among participants about potential solutions, and to share information on factors that facilitate data collection on the number of Indigenous student admissions, enrollments, and graduates as well as on the number of Indigenous faculty employed.

CASN invited 23 schools, a representative sample of 25% of CASN's membership, to participate. CASN invited diverse schools in terms of size, institution type, setting, location, and language. The invited schools had also completed the most recent CASN annual student and faculty survey. Fifteen schools accepted the invitation to participate, and the focus groups were attended by nineteen faculty members and/or administrative staff. Participants were provided with a questionnaire in advance of the focus group sessions to allow participants to plan their answers and/or consult with their colleagues.

The project advisory committee identified a gap in data that was being collected regarding the feasibility of an Indigenous student and faculty survey. As the survey would rely on Indigenous students self-identifying to the school of nursing, perspectives on self-identification must be considered. A focus group was organized with a convenience sample of Indigenous nursing students currently enrolled in undergraduate or graduate-level nursing programs as well as former students that had graduated within the last five years. The focus group was attended by six Indigenous nursing students or recent graduates and was facilitated by two Indigenous nurses (one faculty and one student) as well as an Indigenous Elder.

## Results

The focus group recordings were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was conducted to determine themes in the focus group discussions. The faculty and administrator focus group discussion resulted in nine themes in four categories. The student focus group discussion resulted in three themes in three categories.

### *Faculty/Administrator Focus Groups:*

#### Category 1. Characteristics of Nursing Schools

**Theme 1.** There is a lack of accurate student enrollment data.

Focus group participants described how, although schools of nursing often have designated enrollment seats for Indigenous students, they are only one indicator of Indigenous enrollment numbers. The focus group discussions around this observation centered around their belief that not all students self-declare upon application, leading to an inaccurate understanding of Indigenous enrollment numbers.

The data collection for the survey relies on students self-declaring as Indigenous. This theme indicates that there is a major barrier to accurate enrollment data collection. Further information about self-declaration is presented in category three.

#### Category 2. Current Recruitment and Retention Strategies

**Theme 2.** Recruitment activities must be culturally competent and safe.

**Theme 3.** The integration of Indigenous knowledge supports retention.

Focus group participants readily agreed that recruitment and retention strategies need to be **culturally safe, and they require the acknowledgment and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the school community, student resources, and curriculum.** Describing the findings associated with a recent curriculum review, one participant noted: “One of the things that needed to be worked on was the . . . whole idea of looking at Indigenous health.” Some participants described how acknowledging and incorporating indigenous content into the curriculum has already been made a priority. Another participant noted: “So far we do have a mandatory course on indigenous perspectives for our 1<sup>st</sup> year students, and we are also working on incorporating CASN’s framework of cultural competencies into our program outcomes and course blueprints.”

Other participants described previous retention efforts that had limited success, such as a “mentorship program that . . . has failed mainly because the Indigenous students who took part in the program ..... felt that it did not meet the mentorship needs of Indigenous students.”

#### Category 3. Challenges in Administering an Indigenous Student and Faculty Survey

**Theme 4.** Self-declaration under-represents Indigenous student enrollment.

**Theme 5.** Self-declaration underrepresents the number of Indigenous faculty.

Focus groups identified the widespread use of a Declaration of Personal Experience form that applicants are invited to complete upon application to the program and acknowledge that **many students and potential faculty choose not to self-declare**, which impacts their ability to accurately collect Indigenous student and faculty enrollment data. The student focus group members offered insight into potential challenges associated with relying on self-declaration as the source of data for enrollment numbers. One participant described their experience with self-declaration: “The institution didn’t state why the information was being collected or, like, it didn’t describe any process on self-identifying.”

#### Category 4. Potential Data Collection Solutions

**Theme 6.** The benefits of self-identifying must be clearly outlined.

**Theme 7.** The management and use of collected data must be appropriate.

The theme of **clearly outlining the benefits of self-identifying** is connected to the findings discussed in the previous category. To collect accurate enrollment numbers, the method of data collection must be reliable. Students and faculty need to believe that there is a benefit to self-identifying as Indigenous. As one participant emphasized: “It needs to be clear that for a student who is self-identifying, that there’s an advantage to it and it’s not a disadvantage.”

A large amount of the discussion also focused on the **appropriate management and use of collected data**. Concerns regarding transparency and utility of survey data were brought forth. For example:

What are we doing with the data? Who’s collecting it and where is it going . . . It’s like it should be our information, and it should come back to us to ensure that it is being collected in a safe and an appropriate way and that it’s not being transcribed just for numbers to get better funds, or that universities are selling themselves as a safe place cause as we know, they aren’t. It’s not a safe place still.

#### Category 5. Usefulness of Collecting Indigenous Student and Faculty Data

**Theme 8.** There is potential for the data to be useful.

**Theme 9.** There is a lack of information about why Indigenous students and faculty are leaving programs.

Consensus among focus group participants indicated that there is the **potential for data to be useful**. As described by one participant: “We do need to understand how our Indigenous populations are being represented, both as students and through our faculty that are involved in colleges and universities.”

Feedback indicated that exit interviews are generally not consistently performed. This results in **inaccurate information about why students and staff are leaving programs**. Prioritizing exit interviews was identified to be a potentially useful strategy for data collection to make sure “that we’re tracking what the real reasons are that students [and faculty] are leaving our programs would be useful.”

## **Student/Recent Graduate Focus Group:**

### **Category 1. Enrollment**

**Theme 1.** There is a need for enhanced enrollment data collection.

Student focus group participants recalled a process of self-identification of Indigenous status during application to their nursing program. Most participants described the process as a simple check box:

You just checked off if you self-identified as Indigenous. It was a means of getting put into the Indigenous pool or the just regular admissions pool and then from there, unfortunately, there's not much else in regard to self-identifying as Indigenous.

The consistent theme identified by participants is that there is a **need for enhancement of enrollment data collection**. For example, one participant stated: "There's a way [to self-identify], but it just says like are you Indigenous, yes/no. It doesn't give you any space to elaborate at the department level." Participants also discussed that there is a lack of clarity regarding the advantages of self-identifying and, "therefore . . . not a lot of students did unfortunately."

### **Category 2. Barriers and Facilitators to Self-Identifying**

**Theme 2.** There is a need for enhanced Indigenous supports within nursing schools.

Much of the discussion surrounding barriers/facilitators to self-identifying centered around barriers/facilitators for Indigenous students once admitted into their program. One participant described how self-identifying at the time of application does not translate into support within the nursing program because "the only folks outside of the registrar's office that receive the information are the Indigenous student center, so they reach out to every new student with general supports, but there's no nursing specific supports." Another participant reported: "I don't feel as though they [nursing school] . . . understand my struggles and like the balancing act of everything on top of my cultural identity and feeling accepted in my school."

### **Category 3. Thoughts on Indigenous student data collection**

**Theme 3.** Indigenous student data collection must be culturally safe, meaningful, and done using a collaborative approach.

Focus group participants unanimously agreed that Indigenous student data collection is important and has the potential to be useful, **but it needs to be culturally safe, meaningful, and done using a collaborative approach**. Concerns were brought forth, such as:

Indigenous People get more access to and power over these statistics as well, in that, it's not a means of just, I guess, keeping us as numbers and keeping us as, like, you know, watching us sort of. I guess our people sort of bounce around on a graph, and it's just sort of dehumanizes the aspect.

Another participant questioned:

[Is] the data really reflecting the needs of the First Nations communities? Is it serving any sort of purpose? Who is it benefiting really, cause at the end of the day [is it] just for these universities to check off a tick box on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to say that

they, you know, did their due diligence and they're getting money for recruitment and retention?

## Recommendations

Through the thematic analysis process, considerations by both the faculty and student focus groups for implementing the survey were identified. These considerations were:

1. Communicating with schools about the questions that will be added to the survey in advance to encourage schools to be able to provide data on Indigenous student enrollments and number of Indigenous faculty;
2. Ensuring that the reports indicate the data only represents individuals that have self-declared as Indigenous to their schools and, therefore, may not be accurate; and
3. Sharing with schools and other stakeholders the data collection and reporting process.

Both focus groups cautioned CASN against presenting the statistics regarding Indigenous student enrollment and the numbers of Indigenous faculty in a vacuum. Concerns were expressed that schools would use the report as a way to “check a box” related to the TRC Calls to Action; the number of students and faculty does not indicate the experience of the Indigenous individuals in the school of nursing. While there may be an increasing number of Indigenous nursing students and faculty, it does not mean their experience has been positive.

## Development of the Survey Tool

Working with the advisory committee, a series of questions was developed to collect data on the number of Indigenous nursing faculty and the number of Indigenous nursing students across nursing programs. Considering the recommendations from the focus groups, questions were developed to determine (1) how schools were determining the number of Indigenous students in the nursing program(s) and (2) whether the schools had recruitment and retention strategies in place to support the Indigenous student population. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

## Implementation Phase

In the fall of 2021, CASN launched a campaign to inform schools about the new questions on the annual student and faculty survey to collect data on the numbers of Indigenous students and faculty. At CASN's annual Council meeting, information about the survey was shared to the 95 deans, directors, and chairs in attendance during the Executive Director's Report. In addition, information was posted on the CASN website, sent to its 5,000+ newsletter subscribers, and posted on CASN's social media platforms (Facebook – 1,800+, Twitter – 2,100+, LinkedIn – 300+).

The Indigenous nursing student and faculty survey was administered alongside CASN's annual national student and faculty survey. A separate, adjunct survey with the Indigenous nursing student and faculty questions was developed. The survey was administered online using [Qualtrics](#).

The survey was issued to all 137 schools of nursing in Canada offering entry-to-practice (ETP) pre-licensure education entitling successful graduates to apply for initial licensure/registration as a

registered nursing (RN), and/or post-RN baccalaureate programs for nurses, NP, and/or graduate RN education. The survey was open from January 2022 – September 2022.

## 2020 – 2021 Indigenous Nursing Student and Faculty Survey Findings

In total, 99 of the 137 schools completed the survey, including 92 of a possible 95 CASN members. Of the 99 schools, seven were CÉGEPs. The overall survey response rate was 72.3%; the CASN member response rate was 96.8%.

To maintain privacy, the data for provinces and territories with only one school of nursing located there have been filtered out of the graphs below.

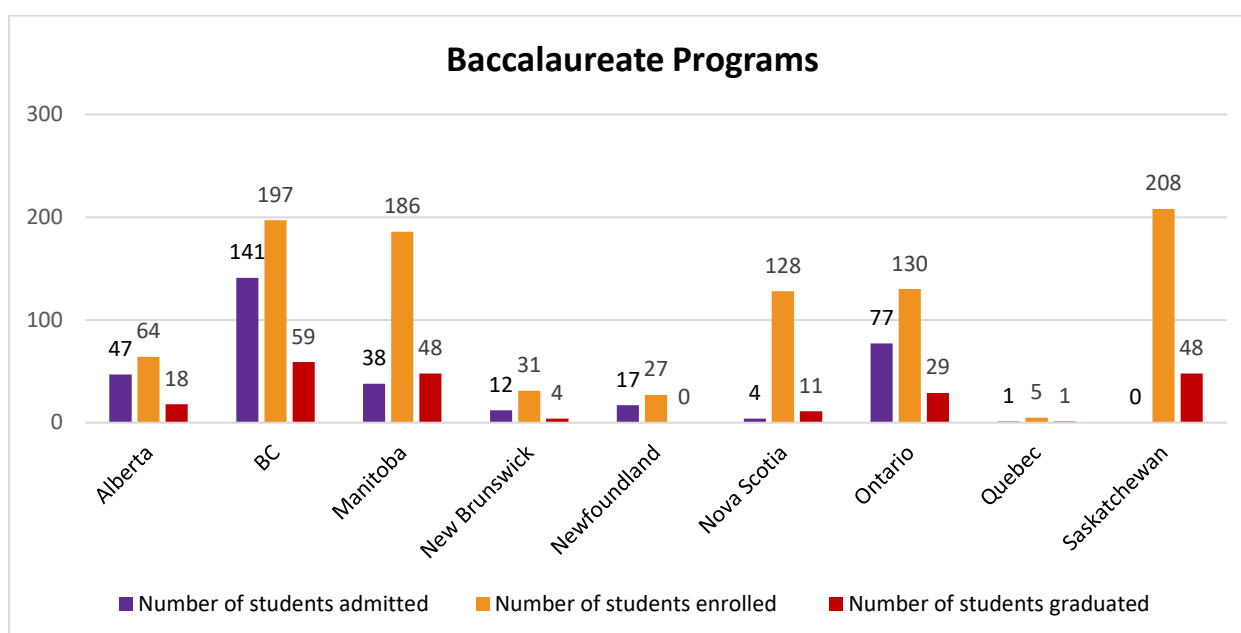
### Indigenous student Admissions, Enrollment, and Graduate Data by Program

This section of the report presents the admission, enrollment, and graduation data for Indigenous nursing students by program type. Overall admission, enrollment, and graduation data for all nursing students by program type can be found in CASN’s 2020-2021 Report *Registered Nurses Education in Canada Statistics*. **Only students that have self-identified as Indigenous to the schools of nursing are included in this report.** Due to variability in whether students choose to self-identify as Indigenous, the results presented in this report do not accurately reflect the total number of Indigenous students in nursing programs.

Admission and enrollment data are reported by academic year (September 2020 – August 2021). Graduate data are reported by calendar year (January – December 2021).

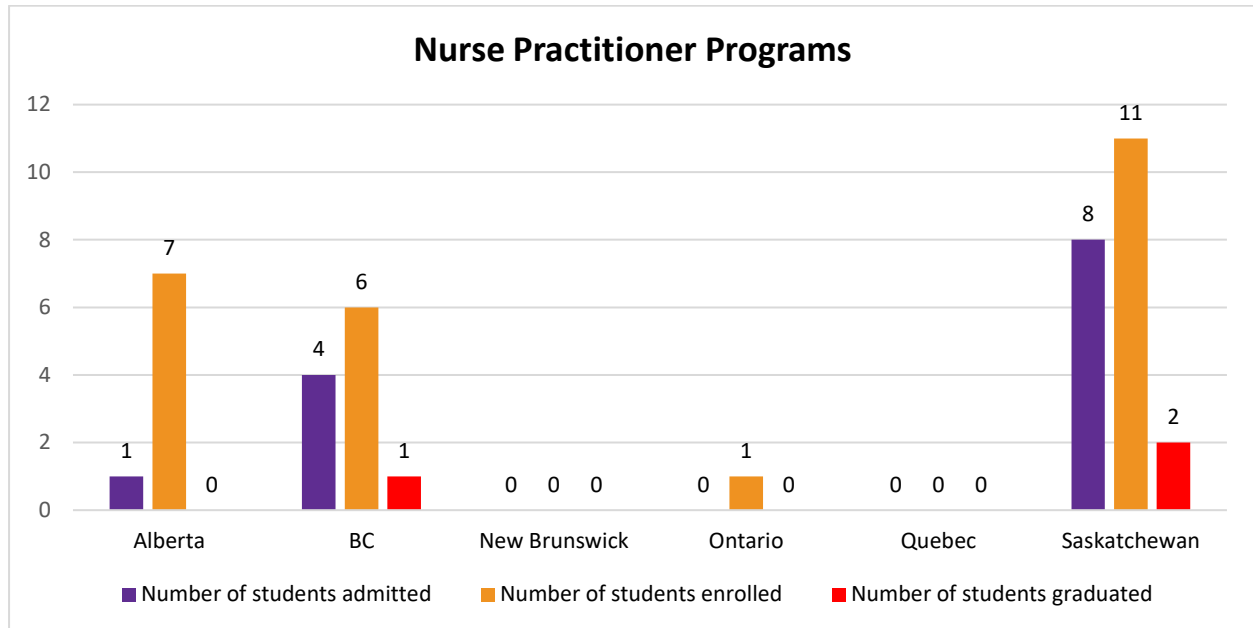
### Baccalaureate Programs

The provincial and territorial response rate from schools regarding 2020-2021 baccalaureate program admissions, enrollment, and graduate data for self-declared Indigenous students ranged from 60-100%.



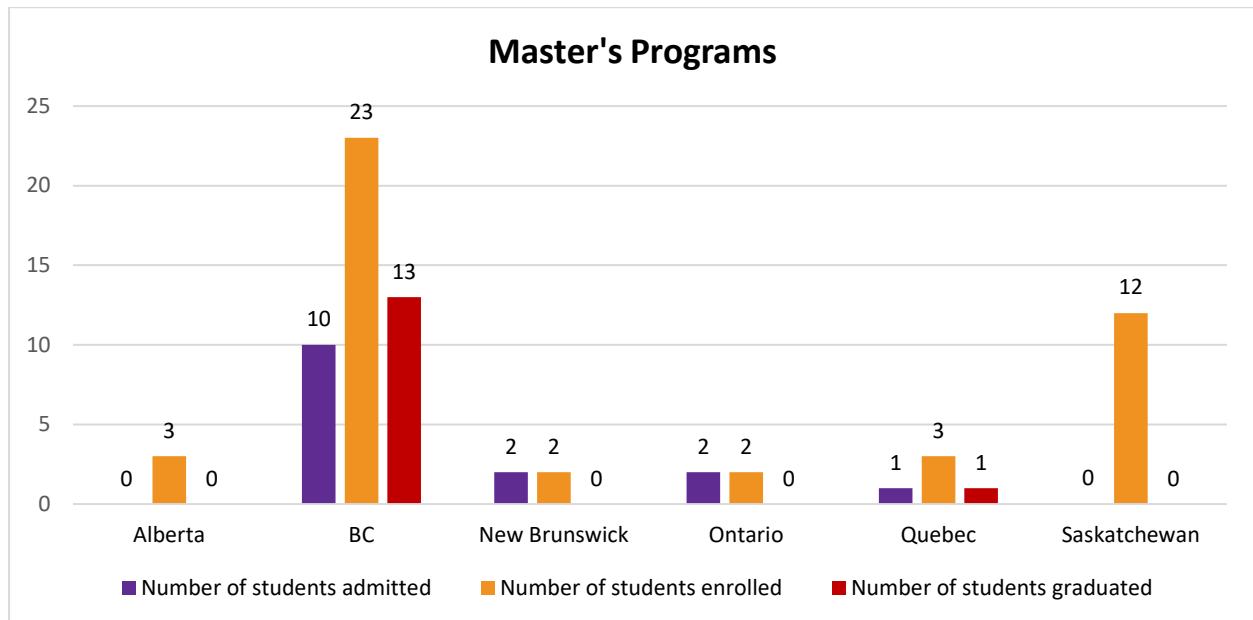
## Nurse Practitioner (NP) Programs

The provincial and territorial response rate from schools regarding 2020-2021 NP program admissions, enrollment, and graduate data for self-declared Indigenous students ranged from 67-100%.



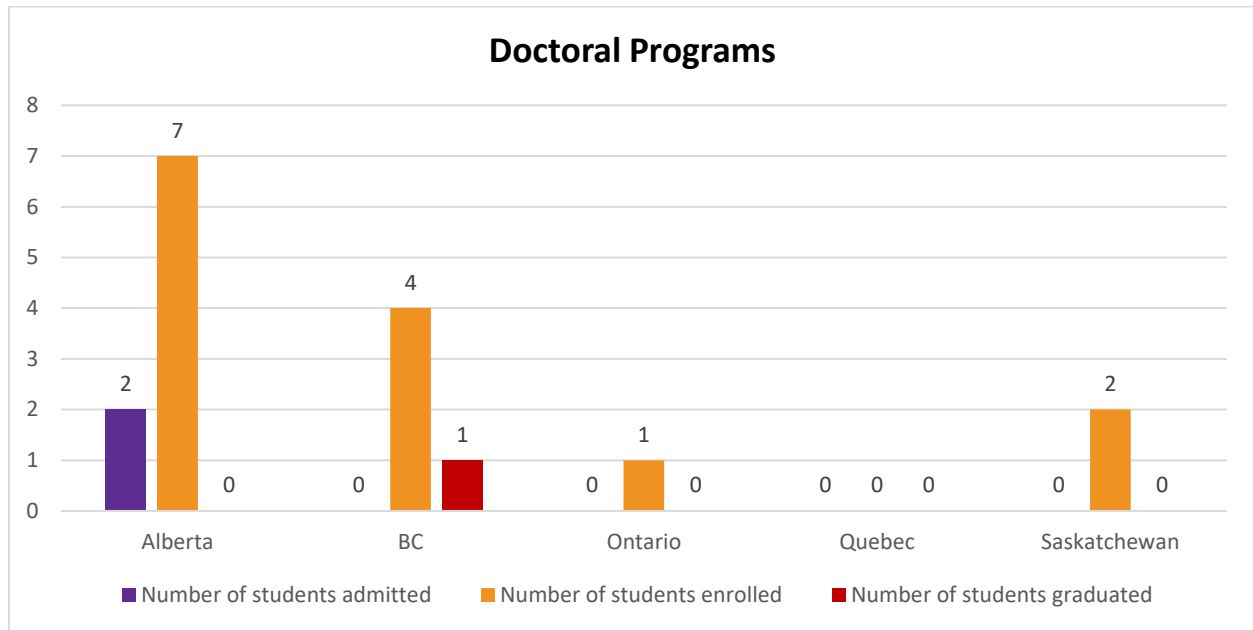
## Master's Programs

The provincial and territorial response rate from schools regarding 2020-2021 master's program admissions, enrollment, and graduate data for self-declared Indigenous students ranged from 50-100%.



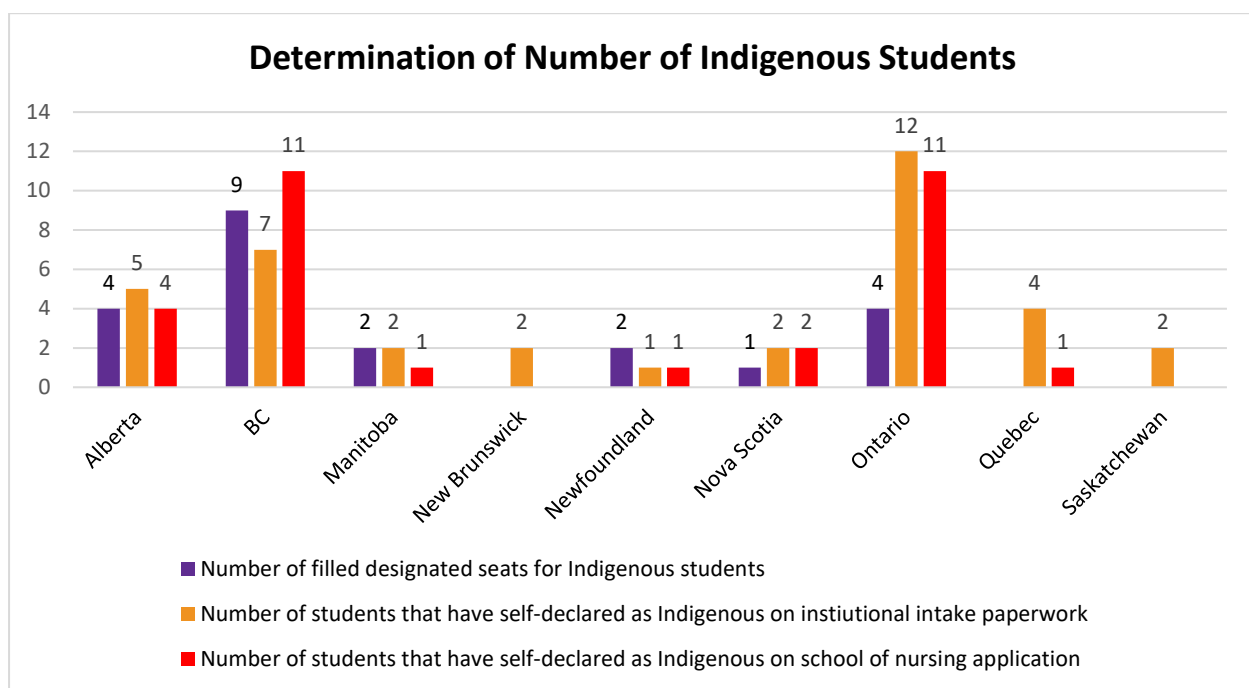
## Doctoral Programs

The provincial and territorial response rate from schools regarding 2020-2021 doctoral program admissions, enrollment, and graduate data for self-declared Indigenous students ranged from 75-100%.



## Methods for Determining the Number of Indigenous Nursing Students

Schools were asked to provide details on how they determined the number of Indigenous nursing students in their program(s). The response rate for this question was 77% (n=87). Nineteen per cent (n=17) indicated that they do not collect this data. The remaining schools indicated that they determined this number using a combination of the number of filled designated seats, and students that have self-declared on school of nursing or institution paperwork.



### Number of Indigenous Nursing Faculty, 2021

Nursing faculty encompasses different types of nursing educators. For the purposes of this report:

- “Permanent faculty” refers to tenured/tenurable faculty who teach nursing courses in a university as well as permanent full-time or permanent part-time faculty who teach nursing courses in a college.
- “Full-time faculty” refers to full-time permanent faculty who teach nursing courses as well as full-time contract faculty (these are faculty who hold contracts of one academic year or longer) who teach nursing courses.
- “Contract faculty” refers to full-time contract faculty (these are faculty who hold contracts of one academic year or longer) who teach nursing courses as well as part-time contract faculty (these are faculty who hold contracts of less than one academic year) who teach nursing courses.
- Clinical faculty (i.e. Clinical Instructors) are not included in faculty counts.
- “RN faculty” and “faculty” refer to all of the above.

### **Number of Indigenous Faculty by Employment Status, 2021**

<b>Faculty Category</b>	<b>Total Number of Faculty</b>	<b># Reported Indigenous Faculty</b>	<b>% of Faculty Workforce Reporting as Indigenous</b>
Permanent Faculty	3181	72	2.2%
Contract Full-Time Faculty	593	9	1.5%
Contract Part-Time Faculty	7141	13	< 1%

### **Recruitment and Retention of Indigenous Nursing Students and Faculty**

Schools of nursing were asked three questions regarding the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students and faculty. Schools were provided a variety of options and could indicate all strategies used by the school, in addition to being able to submit strategies not listed. Respondents were also given the option to indicate “none of the above.”

Respondents were asked about the structures and policies their school has in place to support Indigenous student and faculty recruitment and retention. More than a majority of schools 56% (n=59) did not respond to the question, while 11% reported they did not have any policies and structures in place. The remaining respondents reported having multiple structures and policies in place. Strategies used most frequently by the respondents included a committee focused on increasing recruitment and retention and a school policy on anti-racism, diversity, and equity.

When asked about the strategies and supports the nursing program uses to increase the retention of Indigenous nursing students, 57% (n = 60) did not respond. The most common strategies and supports offered by schools include peer support programs (15 schools) and specifically designed orientations (6 schools). Eleven schools responded using “other” strategies, most commonly having Elders in residence and Indigenous centers on campus. Eighteen per cent (18%) of respondents reported having no strategies or supports in place to increase retention.

With regards to supporting the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty, 55% (n = 58) of schools did not respond, and 15% (n =16) reported having no strategies in place. Faculty job postings and support for using an Indigenous pedagogy were mostly commonly selected by respondents.

### **Discussion**

The findings from the inaugural Indigenous nursing student and faculty (INSF) survey are in-line with the themes identified by both the faculty/administrator and student focus groups during the exploratory phase of the project. While ongoing data collection is required to identify trends, it is clear that there is a lack of accurate student data. Due to the variation in how schools are collecting enrollment data (and some schools not collecting it at all), it is difficult to ascertain the true number of Indigenous students that are admitted, enrolled, and graduate from various nursing programs. As mentioned by members of the focus groups, self-identification as an Indigenous student does not consistently happen and therefore, is a barrier to accurate enrollment numbers. Similar findings are seen regarding reported faculty numbers. Many current

and potential Indigenous faculty members choose not to self-identify, thereby impacting the accuracy of the data.

As mentioned previously, focus group participants agreed that recruitment and retention strategies for students and faculty need to be culturally safe, and they require the acknowledgment and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the school community, student resources, and curriculum. However, given that over 50% of schools did not respond to the questions related to recruitment and retention strategies, little is known about the current strategies being used and their associated success.

As the INSF survey continues to be offered in subsequent years, it is hoped that the data collected will become more robust so that trends in Indigenous student admissions, enrollment, and graduates as well as Indigenous faculty numbers can be identified and utilized to influence policy to successfully meet the TRC Call to Action 23. However, as cautioned by the focus groups, statistics related to Indigenous student enrollment and numbers of Indigenous faculty should not be considered without context. On its own, this data does not indicate the experience of Indigenous individuals in their schools of nursing. While it is of the utmost importance for the number of Indigenous students and faculty to increase, it is essential that schools ensure that the experience is positive. Research to support the development of such strategies should be an urgent priority for nursing scholars and schools of nursing.

## References

- Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing. (2020). *Framework of strategies for nursing education to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action*. <https://www.casn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EN-TRC-RESPONSE-STRATEGIES-FOR-NURSING-EDUCATIONTRC-Discussion-Paper-Revised-date-Final.pdf>
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## Appendix A (Survey Questions)

### Questions Pertaining to Faculty Numbers

1. Please indicate the number of **Indigenous** Faculty F1, F2 and F3 employed in the program. Please leave the question blank if you do not have data regarding Indigenous faculty in your program. A '0' should only be used to confirm that there are no Indigenous faculty.

**Indigenous Faculty refers to nursing faculty members who self-identify as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis.**

	Indigenous Faculty
F1 - Full-time, Permanent Faculty	
F2 - Full-time faculty on a contract of more than 1 year	
F3 - Full-time or part-time faculty on contract of less than 1 year	

### Questions Pertaining to Student Numbers

The questions below were repeated for each program type (RN baccalaureate, RN Baccalaureate Collaborative, Registered Psychiatric Nurse Baccalaureate Program, Post-RN Baccalaureate Program, Post-RPN Baccalaureate Program, Master's Program, NP Program, Doctoral Program).

2. How many Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) students were admitted to the program in the 2021-2022 academic year?
  - Box for number
  - Unknown
  - Prefer not to respond
3. How many Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) students were enrolled in the program in the 2021-2022 academic year?
  - Box for number
  - Unknown
  - Prefer not to respond
4. How many Indigenous students that graduated from the (*insert type*) program in the 2021 calendar year?
  - Box for number
  - Unknown
  - Prefer not to respond

5. Please indicate how your program determines the number of Indigenous students. (*Check all that apply.*)
- Number of filled designated seats for Indigenous students
  - Number of students that have self-declared as Indigenous on institution intake paperwork
  - Number of students that have self-declared as Indigenous on school of nursing application
  - Other, please describe:  
The program does not collect data about Indigenous students

### Questions Pertaining to Recruitment and Retention of Indigenous Nursing Faculty and Students

6. What structures or policies are in place to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty and students at your school? (*Check all that apply.*)
- Committee or other advisory group focused on increasing Indigenous presence within the institution
  - School or program has goals related to recruitment and retention of Indigenous faculty in the strategic plan
  - School or program has a policy on anti-racism, diversity, and equity
  - Creation of leadership or faculty positions reserved for Indigenous nurses
  - Guiding documents/position statements outlining institution plan, commitment, and principles related to the recruitment and/or retention of Indigenous faculty
  - Reporting structure on progress related to the recruitment and/or retention of Indigenous faculty
  - Other, please describe:
  - None of the above
7. What strategies does the nursing program use to recruit Indigenous students? (*Check all that apply.*)
- Designated equity seats for Indigenous students
  - Working with secondary schools in Indigenous communities to provide prospective students with information about the nursing program
  - Pre-training programs for Indigenous high school students and/or high school graduates
  - Specific admission pathway for Indigenous students
  - Scholarships, bursaries, and/or financial aid for Indigenous nursing students
  - Flexible delivery modalities including distance delivery or faculty teaching in the community
  - Other, please describe:
  - None of the above
8. What strategies and supports does the nursing program use to increase retention of Indigenous students? (*Check all that apply.*)
- Orientation specifically designed for Indigenous nursing students
  - Using distance delivery modalities to Indigenous communities
  - Faculty teaching in an Indigenous community

- Peer support programs for Indigenous students
  - Mentorship/involvement of Indigenous alumni to support current students
  - Indigenous students' association or group
  - Scholarships, bursaries, and/or financial aid to Indigenous students
  - Other, please describe:
  - None of the above
9. What strategies are in place to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous nursing faculty? (*Check all that apply.*)
- Faculty job postings for Indigenous nurse educators
  - Support for using an Indigenous pedagogy
  - Elders and other members of the Indigenous communities provide input into the curriculum
  - Funding opportunities for Indigenous health research
  - Recruitment strategies in place to encourage nursing students to pursue graduate education
  - Other, please describe:
  - None of the above