

## Fact Sheet

### Health and Safety Issues Facing Health and Community Services Workers

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- In Nova Scotia, a workplace injury occurs every 15 minutes. The 50,000 people who work in health care and community services in this province have a greater risk of workplace injuries (both physical and psychological) than workers in any other field. Since 1987, Canadians in health occupations lost an average of 1.5 times more days due to illness or disability than the average for all other occupations.
- Workers in this sector face a wide range of hazards including violence, stress, injuries resulting from lifting and transferring patients, latex allergies, needle stick injuries, infection, disease, and exposure to toxic chemicals, gases and vapors.
- Six of the ten occupations at highest risk for back injury are in this sector.
- An American study conducted in 2002 showed that a hospital worker's risk of non-fatal assault on the job was more than four times greater than the risk for workers in all private sector industries.
- In a hospital setting, the likelihood of patients assaulting staff increases in situations of long waiting periods and understaffing – situations that are increasingly common in today's health care system.
- A recent study determined that high levels of role overload are systemic in Canadian hospitals. **Role overload** was defined as a lack of time (too many time commitments, time constraints, and unrealistic work deadlines and work expectations), multiple competing priorities, a lack of help and support due, in many cases, to understaffing, and an inability to control the situation.
- The study (conducted in four Ottawa hospitals) found that 59% of employees were experiencing high stress levels, 36% were feeling depressed, and one in five were in poor physical health.
- A previous study (2001) showed that health care workers' role overload had increased more than any other sector over the previous ten years.
- In the US, two of the most hazardous industries – agriculture and construction – have become safer for workers in the past decade. In contrast, rates of occupational injury to health care workers have risen, noticeably.