



REPORT

To: Health Care Scholarship Committee

Report Number: ADM-HCSC-015

From: Corporate & Financial Administration

Date: July 16, 2025

Subject: Health Care Scholarship Administration Options

RECOMMENDATION #1:

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board discontinue the RN/RPN Return of Service Scholarship, Licensed Practical Nurse Scholarship, Career Professional Development Scholarship, and RN/RPN Professional Development Scholarship.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board establish an RN Scholarship Program for students enrolled in the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program offered by UNBC in Fort St. John BC with the funding no longer allocated to previously offered scholarships in the amount of \$70,000, in addition to the \$30,000 previously allocated for the Northern Baccalaureate Program, to establish a new scholarship program specifically targeting Baccalaureate Program participants.

RECOMMENDATION #3

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board apply the following eligibility criterion to the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program Scholarship Program:

- open to students entering final year of degree program; and
- priority given to applicants who graduated from high school in the Peace River Regional District, Regional District of Fraser Fort George, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, Grande Prairie County, or Saddle Hills County;

further, that the applications be reviewed annually by the Committee at its October meeting on the basis of residency, academic standing and community involvement, with no consideration given to Return of Service commitment which would require partnership with Northern Health; and

finally, that the program consist of a maximum of 20 scholarship awards per year valued at \$5,000 each.

RECOMMENDATION #4

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board approach the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) regarding administration of the scholarship program created by the Regional Board specific to the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program to request that UNBC administer the scholarship program on behalf of the Regional Board with an initial intake in September 2026 to allow time to negotiate an agreement between UNBC and the Peace River Regional District for the scholarship administration.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

At the May 22, 2025 Regional Board Meeting, two recommendations were brought forward from the April 25, 2025 Health Care Scholarship Committee (the Committee) meeting and the following resolutions were passed by the Regional Board:

MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED,

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board suspend health care scholarship programs previously administered by Northern Health for the 2025 intake year, and authorize an investigation into potential alternative options for the administration of the scholarships that were administered by Northern Health; RN/RPN Return of Service Scholarship (Part 2), Licenced Practical Nurse Scholarship, Career Professional Development Scholarship, and RN/RPN Professional Development Scholarship; further, that the investigation include submission of a report to the Health Care Scholarship Committee at a future meeting, to prompt a review of the options available for scholarship administration against the option to refocus funding on recruitment/retention, or other health care improvement initiatives permissible within the establishing bylaw for Function 180 – Health Related Services.

AND

MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED,

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board suspend Part 1 (4th year degree program completion funding in the amount of \$2500 per student) of the RN/RPN Scholarship administered by the Regional Board for the 2025 intake year, pending the results of the review of potential alternative options identified in the investigation summary report, for the administration of the scholarships/refocusing of the funding available to other health care initiatives permissible under Function 180.

These scholarship programs have been removed from the Peace River Regional District's (PRRD) website and are no longer being promoted to student nurses or Northern Health (NH) staff by NH, as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) expired on April 30, 2025 and was not renewed by the PRRD.

The Committee has been discussing the impact, success and structure of the Health Care Scholarship Committee and its programs since [January 2024](#), and whether to renew the MOU with NH for administration of a number of scholarship streams since June 2024. At the October 4, 2024 Committee meeting, Chair Veach submitted a [Director's Report](#) which included a recommendation to terminate the MOU with NH and investigate the options of entering an MOU with local educational institutions for scholarship administration, or taking over scholarship administration in house, however, the motion was defeated by the Committee. Chair Veach also proposed at that time to restructure the scholarships by reducing the number of scholarships and increasing the value of each scholarship. That concept was deferred until 2025 to allow the Committee to seek input from University of Northern BC (UNBC), Northern Lights College (NLC), and NH regarding the best way to offer scholarships to improve healthcare recruitment and retention in the region. On [January 10, 2025](#), the proposal to reduce the number and increase the value of the scholarships, and another proposal to increase the value of RN Scholarships by \$50K were also defeated by the Committee.

A special meeting was called for [February 11, 2025](#), again, with input invited from Northern Health, [NLC](#) and [UNBC](#) on how best to structure funding streams to enhance recruitment of students into health related fields and jobs in the North, and how to retain the current staff given the staffing levels, morale, and frequent diversions, despite ongoing efforts to improve the situation by NH, the existing scholarship programs, and the recruitment/retention grants provided annually to the North Peace Division of Family Practice and the South Peace Health Services Society.

The [Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program](#) (NBNP) provides students with the skills and knowledge to enter the registered nursing field. The NBNP introduces students to the unique aspects of delivering health care in **small urban and rural communities located throughout northern BC** and beyond. The program is designed for individuals with previous experience and achievement in university-level, post-secondary education who are interested in careers as Registered Nurses (RNs). Upon completion, students earn a BScN and are eligible to write the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), which qualifies them to work as RNs in any health care sector where RNs have legislated scope of practice. The program is promoted by UNBC and is now in its third year, with admission applications trending upwards and space for 32 students. The next intake is September 2026, with an admissions application of January 2026.

Focusing on the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program is recommended based on previous Board direction to create a new scholarship stream for this program, and the Committee/Board's preference for supporting local residents as part of eligibility for scholarships and a desire to train locals to stay local. This program fits with those aspirations. Also, the Committee has been pleased with the agreement with NLC for administration of the Health Care Assistant/Practical Nursing/Access to Practical Nursing Scholarships.

The proposed scholarship program structure mirrors the previous eligibility and evaluation considerations with the exception of inclusion of a Return of Service amount. The proposed Northern Baccalaureate focused scholarship program does not include a Return of Service (ROS) component as ROS would necessitate some form of cooperation or agreement with Northern Health in order to identify successful hires into RN positions in the region that may be eligible to apply for Return of Service funding if it was included. Scholarships are traditionally offered to students to assist with the costs of education. Return of Service grants may be more suitable for offer by Northern Health in the form of signing bonuses, funded via the Ministry or through the funding previously approved for Northern Health for their recruitment of staff and programs. This funding has been graciously declined in recent years by Northern Health which has allowed the funding to be redirected to the Allied Health, STARS, Search and Rescue, and other programs authorized by [Health Related Services Grants-in Aid Bylaw No. 2445, 2021](#) in alignment with [Health Related Services Grant In Aid Policy 0340-64](#).

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. That the Health Care Scholarship Committee request further information on some or all of the following potential additional options available for scholarship program administration not yet investigated:
 - a) Administration of health related services grants 'in-house' through hiring of dedicated staff.

- b) Identification of other scholarship programs and parameters, and potential service delivery partners for agreed upon scholarship programs, such as the Northeast BC Community Foundation, South Peace Division of Family Practice or South Peace Health Services Society.
 - c) Seek a qualified contractor to administer the PRRD scholarship programs as previously structured that were suspended on May 22, 2025
 - d) Re-allocation of funding to existing commitments in Function 180 (such as Allied Health Care) to reduce requisition pressures in 2026.
2. That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board review the options available to refocus funding previously used for health care scholarships currently suspended to programs with a health care professional recruitment/retention focus, or other health care improvement initiatives permissible within the Health Related Services Grant in Aid Service Establishing Bylaw for Function 180 – Health Related Services.
3. That the Health Care Scholarship Committee provide further direction.

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:

☒ Not Applicable to Strategic Plan

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

The 2025 Function 180 – [Health Related Services Grants-in Aid Budget](#) was approved at the Special Regional Board Meeting held on February 26, 2025.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):

At the April 25, 2025 Health Care Scholarship Committee (HCSC) meeting, Chair Veach “encouraged Committee members to share their funding-related ideas and issues with staff prior to the meeting so that the discussion at the July 16, 2025 Health Care Scholarship Committee meeting regarding potential approaches to administering the funds previously administered in cooperation with Northern Health funds would be an engaging conversation exploring all options.” No suggestions from Committee members were communicated to staff prior to the July 16, 2025 HCSC meeting agenda cut off.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

Function 180 - Health Related Services Grants-In-Aid was established by Bylaw No. 2445, 2021 to provide grants and scholarships that enhance the quality and availability of various health-related services in the region. This function provides grants to organizations that provide health related services within the PRRD. Funding may include air ambulance, search and rescue, not for profits offering accommodation, or health related services for patients and family members receiving health care services, and not-for profits with mandates to recruit and retain health care professionals to work and remain working in the Peace Region. Funding is also available for scholarships in a health care or medical field to enhance the recruitment and retention of medical staff and professionals in Peace River Region Hospitals.

External Links:

1. Links to prior meeting minutes, agendas, and presentations relative to the ongoing review of the Committee structure and impact, the specifics of scholarship programs offered, and potential restructure have been included within the body of the report.