

7 Findings from Interviews

7.1 Aboriginal Labour Force Issues

7.1.1 Methodology

A meeting was held with members of the Saskatoon Labour Market Committee to obtain their response to our suggested interviewees and obtain their input on names of persons who should be interviewed.

The information in this section was obtained through interviews of the following organizations:

- Aboriginal Human Resource Council of Canada
- Eagle Feather News
- Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations – Corporate Circle
- Intergovernmental Aboriginal Affairs
- Métis Employment & Training of Saskatchewan
- Métis Employment & Training of Saskatoon
- Post-Secondary Education
- Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations
- Saskatchewan Indian Federated College
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies
- Saskatchewan Representative Provincial Workforce Council
- Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority
- SaskTel

Wherever possible, personal interviews were scheduled but in some cases it was necessary to conduct telephone interviews. Interviews were booked in advance and confirmed on the day of the interview.

When personal interviews were held, the results page of the on-line survey dealing with recruitment and retention issues, challenges and success stories of Aboriginals was shared with the interviewee at the beginning of the interview.

The general line of questions related to problems being experienced on recruitment and retention of Aboriginals, programs that were in place to deal with these issues, the results and why these programs had been successful.

The following represents a compilation of those interviews.

7.1.2 Key Facts and Trends¹

- Saskatoon and Regina account for the highest Aboriginal population proportion in Canada, at 7.5% and 7.1% respectively.
- Statistics Canada reports that 50% of Aboriginal people live off-reserve, indicating a major migration of Aboriginal people to urban centres.
- The total population of 15 to 24 year olds is projected to decrease by 6% by the year 2011, while the corresponding Aboriginal age group will increase by 71%.
- In the 0-24 age group, Aboriginal people are expected to comprise 38% of the Saskatchewan population by 2011.
- By 2001 in Saskatchewan, about one quarter of all labour force entrants and one third of all new school entrants will be Aboriginal, with the vast majority being Indian.
- Presently, Aboriginals represent 9% of the Saskatchewan labour force, but in 15 years this will grow to 20%, as the young people enter the workforce.
- The Aboriginal unemployment rate is close to 30%, while the non-Aboriginal unemployment rate is at 5%.
- The Aboriginal workforce participation rate is 47%, while the non-Aboriginal workforce participation rate is 78%.
- 40% of working-age Aboriginals receive income from welfare.
- 56% of working Aboriginals make less than \$10,000 per year, and 75% make less than \$20,000 per year. The result is that only 20% of working Aboriginals make a high enough income to feed a family.
- In 1995, less than 1% of employees in the Healthcare sector were Aboriginal. This increased to 3% by 1999, due, in part, to the Representative Workforce Strategy.

7.1.3 Challenges Relating to Recruitment and Retention

The major issues that were identified can be summarized under the following:

7.1.3.1 Hidden barriers to Aboriginal employment

- The lack of succession planning on the part of employers – Part of the strategy of Aboriginal employment organizations is to go to employers and ask for detailed descriptions of the skill and training requirements they will need in the next few years. With this information, these organizations can better help Aboriginals find

¹ “SAHO Staff Training Manual: Aboriginal Awareness Training,” Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations.

employment. However, the problem is that employers are doing very little succession planning.

- Only 20% of all job openings are advertised – This is the case because most jobs are filled through word-of-mouth, employee referrals or internal recruiting. This puts Aboriginals at a distinct disadvantage, as few Aboriginals in the workforce means that they are unaware of most job opportunities.
- The unspoken rules of the workplace environment – Many Aboriginals will not be aware of the many unspoken rules of conduct and expectations of the workplace. The solution is an education of both employers and Aboriginals.

7.1.3.2 Unmet Need for Assistance in Aboriginal Employment

Even though there is the myriad of institutions designed to help employers recruit and retain Aboriginal employees, our personal interviews indicate that companies are only beginning to understand and utilize their services. There seems to be a large unmet need in communicating to the employers their service offerings.

7.1.3.3 Supply of Qualified Candidates for Employment

Companies advertising for employees report poor results on obtaining Aboriginal applications and resumes. The companies are also not using the Aboriginal employment agencies, due to lack of awareness.

The training institutions report that Aboriginal students tend to send out fewer resumes, which may be related to their desire to remain in the province and preferably close to home. Members of the Aboriginal community themselves describe the situation that the supply of qualified candidates does not match the demand requirements of industry.

7.1.3.4 Aboriginal Readiness

There is increasing awareness by companies that they have to offer an environment for Aboriginals that makes it attractive for them to apply and to remain with the company. Some progress has been made on this but more still needs to be done. Educated Aboriginals want to work for Aboriginal firms or companies with a high percentage of Aboriginal employees.

7.1.3.5 Supply of Qualified Candidates for Training

Training institutions are not reporting problems in obtaining applications from Aboriginal students for training, primarily in the regional colleges and technical institutions. These

institutions are offering upgrading courses so that these students will be able to handle the academic material. The number of Aboriginal graduates is increasing.

7.1.3.6 Students Have to Be Encouraged to Stay In School

The number of students in training is increasing, but more has to be done to encourage Aboriginal students to stay in school. This is the responsibility of the Aboriginal community, but industry can play a part by identifying the number and types of jobs that are available, so that counselors have the appropriate and up to date information.

7.1.3.7 Lack of Role Models

Many students and potential workers do not come from a home environment in which they have role models of working parents. Industry can only play a limited role in this regard. However, the larger companies can recruit high-level individuals to be role models in their organizations and to the outside community.

The Aboriginal communities have shown they can be instrumental in encouraging students to stay in school and even recruiting employees for the workforce.

7.1.3.8 Time is Running Out

With various studies over the past few years highlighting the coming bulge of young Aboriginals, there has been a growing awareness of the need to provide them with jobs if the province is to grow in economic activity. However, more important than coming to grips with this need, the issue is responding to it before it is too late. There is also recognition that whatever is done takes years to accomplish, which means action is required now and it must be coordinated and directed with benchmarks.

7.1.3.9 Types of Training

Traditionally, training recruitment efforts have been focused on the areas of social service, law and education. This created role models for many Aboriginals. However, to deal with the Saskatchewan labour force shortages, this needs to be expanded. For Aboriginals to participate fully in the economy and to provide the pool of skilled labour that is required, the students must be made aware of the opportunities within such areas as vocational trades.

7.1.3.10 Measurement

The measurements of success are not well done or organized. We found that there is a lot of work being done but not a lot of agreement on how successful it has been. For example, SAHO is measuring employment rates of Aboriginals, but they are not tracking the jobs for which the Aboriginals have been hired. Appropriate targets, on-going measurement and sharing the results of those measurements will ensure that stakeholders are outcome-oriented.

Before we can implement Best Practices on a widespread scale we first need to measure and document outcomes, and have a mechanism to communicate this to other employers.

7.1.4 Major Issues Identified

7.1.4.1 Aboriginal Training and Employment is a Complex Issue

There is increasing recognition of the gap between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Labour Force Participation. The rate for the non-Aboriginals is 78%, versus 47% for Aboriginals.

The issue of how to increase Aboriginal participation in the workforce is a major problem and will not be dealt with over night. Programs that are now starting to have results, such as the partnerships between SAHO, Sask. Aboriginal & Inter-governmental Affairs and the Health Boards, have taken years to start yielding results. CUPE serves as an example of how important a role the unions can play in creating a representative workforce. CUPE opened up their agreements to allow for compulsory Aboriginal awareness training for all employees.

7.1.4.2 Success Stories

There are many success stories. Cameco has achieved the position where they are employing 400 aboriginals, representing 40% of their technical positions and 80% of their operating positions. Their turnover with Aboriginal workers is no higher than with non-Aboriginal workers. Through the work of SAHO, the health care sector has seen a significant increase in Aboriginal employees, from less than 1% in 1995 to 3% by 1999.

7.1.4.3 Successful Strategies Have to Be Multi-Faceted

Strategies dealing with Aboriginal work force preparation, recruitment and retention have to cover many fronts. For example, Cameco has an Employee Family Assistance Program to ensure issues are dealt with promptly and privately.

There seems to be a consensus that bringing northern Aboriginals south into centers such as Saskatoon for training is a very difficult transition, with high risk of failure unless support systems are present to assist these people. The consensus from many of those interviewed is that training programs have a much higher chance of success if they can be delivered closer to the home communities for as long as possible, so that the family support structure can assist. In one interviewee's words, "Let the trainee gain self-confidence so that they can handle the material before they are sent south."

To recruit and retain Aboriginal workers, other Aboriginals have to be extensively involved. Examples included the use of mayors to assist in recruitment, Aboriginal counselors to assist in recruitment and retention, and wives and mothers to be involved in problem solving and possibly disciplinary issues. Many companies are forging partnerships in order to create these linkages.

There is a concern that creating tax havens on reserves creates a huge problem for employers not on reserves to hire Aboriginals because of the tax advantage that is created by the Aboriginal working on the reserve who doesn't have to pay income taxes. There is a concern that the province, by allowing tax havens to be set up, is creating an uneven playing field.

7.1.4.4 Roles and Responsibilities Are Being Defined

The issues of recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers is an issue in which many parties have to play their role to be successful. The success stories illustrate this.

The many partnerships between training organizations, Aboriginal organizations, and major employers have served to clarify role responsibility. The Aboriginal communities have to ensure students stay in school. They can assist in providing names of applicants for training and for jobs. The training institutions have the role of providing training in mathematics upgrades in order to have qualified students entering the institutions. The training institutions must ensure seats are available for qualified Aboriginal students. The training institutions must provide the support structures for students to stay and complete their diplomas and degrees. Industry's role is to identify the future jobs so that the training institutions provide the appropriate training. Their role is to provide the jobs and a workplace setting that is appropriate and supportive of different cultures.

7.1.4.5 Partnerships Are Fundamental To Success

It was clear from the interviews that where progress had been made on increasing Aboriginal participation in the work force, recruiting and retaining Aboriginals in the workforce, that this had been accomplished through partnerships.

The creation of the Corporate Circle provides a unique match making service between major employers, training institutions and the Tribal Councils. SREDA is extending this to be applicable to small and medium sized businesses as well. The intent is to identify and share Best Practices and to meet the Aboriginal community half way. The creation of the Corporate Circle assists in buy-in from the top down in all of these stakeholder groups. It also encourages communication, understanding and mutual respect amongst these stakeholders.

7.1.4.6 Support Services Have To Be Provided

As we talked to various Aboriginal leaders, they provided a perspective on the difficulties that a young Aboriginal faces when he leaves home to go to school or to take a job. In addition, to the normal concerns of a young person being away from home, the young person faces differences in culture, stereotyping and being a minority. Organizations such as SAHO, Cameco, SaskTel, SIAST, and Dumont Technical Institution, to name a few, have recognized this and attempted to provide supports. In many cases they have altered their training programs to meet these needs, as the following describes:

- Networks of Aboriginal employees are encouraged, such as the Aboriginal Government Employees Network.
- SAHO has developed a Policy Toolkit and Planning Guide for a Representative Workforce, the development of which had input from many stakeholders. This is intended to serve as a resource guide for all employees.
- One of the major reasons highlighted for the low retention rate was described as “creating isolation through ignoring”. When we look at the success stories such as with SAHO, the health boards, SaskTel and Cameco, the Aboriginal workers were not ignored; rather, they were made to feel like an important and contributing segment of that workforce.
- Several of the province’s colleges are competency based, which allows students to step out and then come back. This allows a very individualized program.

7.1.4.7 Successful Strategies Have Represented Thinking Out of the Box

As we talked to various individuals involved with this project, we were struck by the innovative solutions that were being developed. Examples were many and varied but included:

- Cameco dedicating a portion of a mine site to training underground workers
- Aboriginal Coordinators in the community have been instrumental in identifying potential applicants for Saskatoon District Health and other Health Boards.
- Organizations such as Dumont Training Institute are obtaining curriculum from SIAST and offering in local communities similar to the way in which a community college operates. Their program also includes Career Development and Work Placement, as well as Job Shadowing in order to provide students with

understanding of what employers are looking for and what to expect. The program being offered by DTI includes ABE (Adult Basic Education) and Adult 12 to prepare students for further training. According to DTI, 60% of their students taking the ABE and Adult 12 are going on for further training.

- When the Aboriginal enrollment in technical programs is assessed, there is room for cautious optimism. The combined SIAST and University of Saskatchewan program combines the first 2 years at SIAST followed by the 3rd and 4th year at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon and Regina campuses. The Aboriginal nursing program will soon be offered through the regional colleges. This provides the opportunity for Aboriginal nurses to take the first several years of nursing closer to their home. The NEPS program has increased the number of seats from 180 seats in 1997-98 to 260 seats in 2001-02. SIAST is offering advance certificates in nursing through distance education and on-line.

7.1.4.8 Cautious Optimism

During the interviews and in the focus groups many success stories were identified that provided a sense of cautious optimism to the writers. Much more has to be done and, as importantly, we need to measure what we are doing

- Graduates who are Aboriginal are now 11.5% of SIAST graduates. SIAST offers Aboriginal counselors, learning assistance centers and general counseling to assist aboriginal students.
- The College of Nursing has equity seats with Aboriginal nursing students representing 12.2% of seats, the highest in the country. Support services to prepare students for the program combined with the offering of the first two years in regional colleges has been very successful.
- SIAST by itself has 400 Aboriginal graduates per year of their certificate/diploma programs with 2,300 enrolled in apprenticeship programs.
- The LPN program being offered in Prince Albert has close to 100% retention, with close to 100% of the graduates obtaining jobs.

7.1.4.9 Challenges

- Industry must provide the jobs and an environment that is Aboriginal-friendly. There is some recognition of the importance of this in order to recruit and retain Aboriginal workers, but a great deal more has to be done.
- Aboriginal workers have pressures that non-Aboriginals workers do not experience to the same extent, such as the often large, extended families of Aboriginals that may put pressures on the individual.
- Aboriginals moving from the north to the south were described as potential “crash and burn” victims. For training and for jobs, it will be necessary for Aboriginals

- to go south for at least a portion of their training, and if they want to be considered for management jobs. Support systems are required for these people.
- Saskatchewan and Saskatoon do not have a “full participation economy” with Aboriginals having the same percentage of jobs as non-Aboriginals and similar pay schedules. There is recognition at the same time that the current lack of trained workers available to business will hurt the province. It is clear we cannot afford such low participation rates while at the same time needing those people to work in our businesses.
 - 80% of the Aboriginal graduates get jobs, which is 12% lower than non-Aboriginals. Employers must recognize that graduates have the same qualifications.

7.1.5 Strategies

7.1.5.1 The Representative Workforce Strategy

The Representative Workforce Strategy (RWS), developed in 1995, is an initiative based on the principles of developing partnerships with major employers, integrating Aboriginal people into the workforce and creating an equal playing field. The strategy is implemented by means of partnership agreements that commit the employer, Aboriginal Affairs and other stakeholders (unions, if applicable) to provide cross-cultural training to prepare the workplace and create a positive environment.

Each partnership establishes a steering committee to implement initiatives to address Aboriginal employment. Aboriginal Affairs currently has partnerships agreements with 15 health districts, 2 government departments, Saskatchewan’s Universities, a crown corporation, a union, and several private sector employers including Canada Life Assurance and Federated Co-operatives Limited.

The Representative Workforce Strategy is a focused approach that seeks to address a history of systemic barriers through policy development, Aboriginal awareness training, focus training initiatives and the hiring of Aboriginal coordinators to assist with recruitment, retention and the building of internal external networks with the Aboriginal community.

The difference between affirmative action plans such as Employment Equity and the Representative Workforce Strategy is that the strategy does not force employers to hire Aboriginal people. The strategy ensures Aboriginal people will be hired based on their skills, not because they are Aboriginal.

To accomplish these goals, the employers agree to work in partnership to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture in the current health sector workforce.
- Promote recognition and elimination of exclusionary policies.

- Foster diverse workplaces that serve as strong examples of cooperation and mutual respect.
- Create a workforce that is better equipped to respond to a growing Aboriginal clientele.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in the workforce and community.

7.1.5.2 Saskatchewan Indian Federated College

The Chiefs and Elders of Saskatchewan created the SIFC in 1976. Currently, SIFC has campuses in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert, with a student population ranging from 900 to 1600. In Saskatoon and Prince Albert, 95% of the student population is Aboriginal, whereas in Regina, only 50% of the students are Aboriginal. Approximately 75% of the students at SIFC are women, the majority of whom are single.

The programs offered at SIFC include Native Studies, Indian Business Administration, Aboriginal Social Work, Dental Therapy, language and linguistics, and various majors in the social sciences. SIFC also expands its program offerings as the need arises.

The SIFC targets Aboriginal employers in placing its graduates, and has been very successful. Currently, all graduates from the Social Work program are employed, as are all graduates of the INCA program.

7.1.5.3 Recruitment and Training of Aboriginal Staff

To facilitate recruitment and training of Aboriginal staff, the following was suggested:

- Have Aboriginal staff in the human resource department who can explain the details of job descriptions for new positions and act as mentors.
- Enable Aboriginal people to work with other Aboriginals. This was one very positive result of the SaskTel Call Centre.
- Have an Aboriginal orientation package to explain the rules of the organization, including how to ask for help, how to appeal decisions that appear to be unjust, how the company is organized, and who to talk to about different issues.
- Recognize that the new recruit has a lifetime of experiences and skills, some of which will be important to the future of the organization.
- Recognize that the needs of the Aboriginal worker can vary from those of the non-Aboriginal workforce. Benefit programs will have to recognize the existence of extended families and cultural impacts on their workforce. For example, it must be recognized that time-off for bereavement may differ from that of the non-Aboriginal community.
- On the job, the supervisor should come by often and ask how things are going and whether the newcomer needs anything to do the job properly.

- Recognition, awards, and encouragement (in public or in private) can help to build loyalty and enthusiasm.

7.1.5.4 Labour Relations in the Workplace

To recruit and retain Aboriginal workers, Saskatoon businesses will have to be Aboriginal ready, throughout their workforce. Cultural awareness is required in these companies in order to offer an environment that is welcoming and supportive. This was described as requiring “a constant affirmation of culture versus a constant non-affirmation of your culture.” In particular, it was suggested that, in order to maintain smooth labour relations in the workplace, organizations should observe the following:

- Respect for Aboriginal traditions.
- Cultural awareness training for all labour relations and human resource consultants.
- The involvement of all employees in procedural changes in each department.
- Constant monitoring and improvement of policies and procedures to facilitate meaningful productive work environment for everyone.
- Regular communication regarding Aboriginal contributions to the organization, i.e. Aboriginal newsletter.

7.1.5.5 The Role of Business and Government Organizations

- SREDA and CanSask can play a much greater role in stressing to businesses that their future workforce will have to be representative or they will have increasing problems in recruiting workers. The statistic is that 1/3 of new students starting school in Saskatchewan are Aboriginal.
- Businesses need to be provided models of what has worked on both workforce preparedness, recruitment and retention. Training sessions are needed that include speakers from the business community, health sector and unions to outline what they have done and what has worked and not worked.
- Employers need access to materials that will assist them in developing a representative workforce. The example is that of SAHO, who has developed a Policy Toolkit and Planning Guide for a Representative Workforce for the various District Health branches in the province. A similar approach should be undertaken by SREDA through the Corporate Circle available for Saskatoon businesses.
- Work with companies to identify the Best Practices that would fit into a representative workforce.
- The Métis Nation believes that their voice is not requested nor heard and that to have a representative workforce, consideration must be given in equal measure to the Métis workers as to the rest of the Aboriginal community. It will be important that SREDA and the Chamber take the lead in initiating this input.

7.1.5.6 Keeping Students in School

There must be programs directed to having students stay in school. The effort to do this has to be occurring earlier and earlier in order to overcome the problems often caused by a lack of role models or an unsupportive home environment. Ideas that came from the interviews include the following:

- Safe, secure housing is required in Saskatoon, which will assist in providing stable family situations and encourage them staying in school.
- The Aboriginal community must provide role models that show success is possible. Role models need to be identified and kept in high profile in terms of schools, counselors and students in training institutions. Although SREDA and CanSask can encourage this, it is the responsibility of Aboriginal political bodies.
- It is up to industry to tell the training institutions the requirements for positions and commit to positions that will employ aboriginal graduates.
- The FSIN, Métis organizations, the training institutions and industry have to make a commitment to provide up-to-date information to the communities on a regular and sustained basis. Students in the communities have to be able to hear the same story.
- Identify and employ Aboriginal Coordinators who will go out into the community, meet with potential applicants and provide them with the necessary information.

7.1.5.7 Measure, Measure, Measure

A basic premise of business is that what gets measured, gets improved. The strategy has to deal with not only programs, but with measuring and communicating how we are doing.

1. The training institutions, the business community and the Aboriginal community require measurements to determine what is working and what is not working. For the province, the large number of Aboriginal students currently starting school cannot be lost. SREDA talked in terms of the need to measure the following:
 - Retention rates of Aboriginals in high school
 - Graduation rates of Aboriginals from high school
 - Attrition rates of Aboriginals among employers
 - Number of new jobs created
 - Number of Aboriginals hired
 - Labour force participation of Aboriginals
2. There is a need for targets, and public commitment to meet those targets.

3. The Aboriginal community's view is that there is a need to measure the effectiveness of the various organizations that have been set up to provide training and employment opportunities.

7.2 Healthcare Sector Issues

The information in this section was obtained through interviews of the following organizations:

- College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan
- Health Care Administration Program, College of Commerce, University of Saskatchewan
- Private Business Owner (anonymous)
- Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations
- Saskatchewan Health Department
- Saskatchewan Health Sciences Association
- Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology
- Saskatoon District Health – Administration Department
- Saskatoon District Health – Professional Leaders (3)

Prior to conducting the personal interviews, we surveyed 27 employers in the health sector (of which Saskatoon District Health was 1 respondent), researched literature relevant to the issues of recruitment and retention, and the health labour market, as well as conducted 3 focus groups, of which the health sector was one.

The personal interviews were used to further explore issues identified in the literature review and presented in the focus groups. Personal interviews were held with stakeholders in the health sector including unions, regulators, professional associations, training institutions, and with members of both the public and private health sector.

The personal interviews pursued many lines of inquiry including:

- Key recruitment and retention issues;
- Further exploration on the identification of hard to recruit occupations;
- Future changes that may impact human resources in the local Saskatoon health sector;
- The present and future impact of the private health sector on local labour needs;
- Identification of present strategies being undertaken by employers, provincial government, and training institutions to address both recruitment and retention; and
- Identification of potential new strategies that may be implement to combat recruitment and retention challenges in this sector.

In this section, we will discuss what we were told in relation to the health sector.

7.2.1 Recruitment Challenges

7.2.1.1 International Issue

The personal interviews reemphasized that the labour shortages experienced in the Saskatoon health sector are by no means just a local issue; rather, it is one of international scope, and the ability to deal with it will involve creative solutions.

Certain health care occupations are in such demand, that the cost of attaining these services must be spread over a considerable catchment area to make them sustainable. For example, SDH recently lost their only pediatric cardiologist due to a couple of factors. First, retaining this occupation in Saskatoon was difficult due to other attractive remuneration offers from other geographical locations. Furthermore, a province of one million people cannot support certain high skill specialists, as the small population means the occupation's services would be needed on a variable basis. Due to a variable demand, lack of appropriate backup and considerable expense, this occupation is not a sustainable occupation for Saskatoon.

The demand for health care occupations is considerable from all geographical occupations including the United States. Like most occupations, the aging baby boomers are causing shortages in health care occupations. Allan Backman's report entitled Job Satisfaction, Retention, Recruitment and Skill Mix for a Sustainable Health Care System, cited the following newspaper article: "How would you like to be a patient in an area hospital and be told you'll have to wait a couple of hours for whatever help you need because there is not enough nurses on duty?" The Dean of Nursing predicts that hospitals would soon be paralyzed by a lack of nurses. This was not in a Saskatchewan newspaper but in the Morning News of Northwest Arkansas on July 6, 2000.

Concerns of the interviewees were focused more on neighboring provinces or the United States, rather than on local employers. The concern with local employers was primarily due to the growth in the private sector businesses that employ health professionals. To examine the issue as a local phenomenon is very limiting and difficult to identify trends or issues.

SDH is a large employer of health occupations in Saskatoon and area. To compare their experiences with other much smaller private employers provides insights into the growing influence of the private sector but on a very small scale. Given the number of potential employers, the majority would need to be included in this study to derive meaningful comparisons. However, as in any research, many do not choose to participate. Including other Saskatchewan employers, such as those in Regina, would provide a more meaningful comparison.

7.2.1.2 Crisis Occupations

A variety of occupations were indicated to be hard to recruit occupations. These occupations included the following:

- Respiratory Therapists
- Registered Nurses
- Registered Psychiatric Nurses
- Licensed Practical Nurse
- Operating Room Technicians
- Pharmacists
- Pathologists
- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Public Health Inspectors
- Neuropsychologists
- Cardiologists
- Psychiatrists
- Speech Language Pathologists
- Anesthetists
- Psychologists (Ph.D.)
- Paramedics
- Sonographers

Aside from a simple demand and supply explanation of the shortages, the following insights were also provided:

- A shortage of Respiratory Therapists is occurring due to workload issues as well as a lack of a training institution in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan depends on many of their Respiratory Therapists to be recruited from Alberta colleges; however, many of the students decide to remain in Alberta.
- Despite having a pharmacy program at the University of Saskatchewan, many pharmacists do not chose the public sector due to the fact they can make up to \$6 to \$8 more per hour in the private sector. Also, workload is less of an issue in the private sector.
- Occupational Therapists are difficult to recruit due to a lack of training institutions.
- Not enough Physiotherapists are being graduated from the University programs.
- Not enough Nurses (RNs, LPNs, RPNs) are being graduated from Saskatchewan programs. This is further made difficult by the fact that if these seats were increased, there is a lack of qualified instructors to teach an increasing number of students.
- Paramedic recruiting difficulties were identified by one individual to be due to a pay issue.

- The lack of Speech Language Pathologists is primarily a supply issue; however, this is compounded by the fact that the nearest school is in another country. Also, workload is an issue in that according to the Health Sciences Association, a SLP employed by a school board ends up typically working a school day. In public sector employment, an SLP will work on average 250 hours more a year.
- Public Health Inspectors are difficult to recruit in that they are also not trained in Saskatchewan. Also, due to an increase in the knowledge base with the general evolution of environmental health hazards, higher qualifications are being required.
- Psychologists at the Ph.D. level are very hard to recruit due to the fact they have 8 to 10 years of schooling and are attracted to top clinical programs in the country. Also they can typically make a higher income in the private sector.

7.2.1.3 Private Sector

According to a private sector employer, the private sector is increasingly impacting public sector health care recruitment for a variety of reasons. These reasons include:

- Higher wages in the private sector (10-15% higher salaries than the public sector). In fact, one private employer indicated they have many physiotherapists, originally trained in Saskatchewan, (identified by public sector employers as a hard to recruit occupation) coming back from Alberta due to the fact that they could be paid higher salaries here and be closer to their family.
- Less workload issues than the public sector
- The opportunity to work with patients in which you can see marked improvement over time, rather than just work on a client-base that is typically aging and in which success is limited.
- More self-development opportunities
- More attractive work in that the employee of a private sector employer gets to work in his or her preferred area.
- Not being restricted by a global budget that can inhibit innovative ideas in both delivery of health services and human resource programs.
- Restricted services that can be offered in the public sector. For example, concern was expressed that there are no services being offered by the public sector to deal with chronic pain.

7.2.1.4 Aggressive Recruiters

The local health sector has experienced recruiting issues due to aggressive out of province/country recruiters. According to the SRNA, the out-migration/in-migration ratio for registered nurses is approximately 4:1. In other words, four nurses leave for every one that comes to Saskatchewan.

This is attributed to aggressive recruiting including offering packages not available in the public sector including the paying off of student loans, a major issue especially for new graduates. As an example of what is being offered to new nursing graduates at a recent career fair, a recruiter from the United States promoted a \$10,000 signing bonus, free housing, and financial assistance to pursue a graduate program.

Also mentioned was that detailed career mapping was being provided in that a structured plan was created for a new recruit providing professional development opportunities to advance in his or her career in a planned fashion.

The lack of an orientation program for many new recruits was expressed as an issue at SDH. The comment was made by one interviewee that due to the shortages and the needs required by the district, young nurses were sometimes ill prepared to deal with challenges of the job due to lack of proper orientation and experience required to deal with emergency situations.

7.2.1.5 Media Coverage

Sometimes the airing of issues concerning recruitment and retention by unions and associations, as correct and relevant as they may be, discourages many students to avoid the health care profession as a profession of choice. Many individuals with an interest in science may choose computer science or information technology occupations rather than pursue an occupation in which they have heard negative issues such as employees being overworked, underpaid, and suffering from burnout.

Media coverage was also mentioned as a reason for lack of professional development opportunities for Saskatoon public health sector employers. It is hard to justify providing time off to attend conferences or courses as well as the costs of traveling, accommodations, entrance fee, and supplies required due to issues such as publicized waiting lists. As one interviewee stated: “If paying for these benefits became public knowledge, how can a district justify paying for these benefits when we have these waiting lists to deal with?”

7.2.1.6 Foreign Worker Recruitment

Please note that, for the purposes of this study, “foreign workers” refer to non-Canadian citizens living outside Canada who are recruited by Canadian businesses to fill a specific position within Canada, while “immigrant workers” refer to immigrants who are already living in Canada when they are recruited to work for a Canadian business.

Concerns about foreign worker recruitment were expressed in our personal interviews from two standpoints, the first being a concern about the quality of care, and the other concern related to ethical reasons.

The quality concern was due to that fact that, in many occupations such as nursing, there are no international standards in place to guarantee the quality and skills of foreign workers.

The ethical concerns related to two issues. The first issue is related to the country in which the professional is recruited from. The demand for nurses is an international issue. Recruiting from other countries was seen as “stealing from Peter to pay Paul”. Also, recruiting from less developed countries was seen as morally inappropriate in that nursing shortages in these countries or in any health profession are extremely high.

The other ethical concern is in relation to pursuing foreign workers at the expense of training our “own” Saskatchewan people. As an example, interest in the RN program last year included 700 applicants of which only 260 seats were available. Given the large number of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, it was seen that these monies should be spent on further educating this underrepresented group.

7.2.1.7 Lack of Educators

A couple interviewees identified a lack of educators, particularly in the nursing profession. The movement in the United States has been one toward Clinical Nurse Specialists. These are individuals with a masters or Ph.D. level of education and individuals who would be qualified to educate our future nurses. A mechanism of fast tracking our nurses through masters and Ph.D. programs is necessary in order to increase the number of educators required to teach the increasing number of nursing students.

Recently the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan pulled its approval of the province’s nursing education program. After this year, graduates will no longer be able to register as Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN). One of the reasons the College of Nursing at the University Saskatchewan lost its accreditation was due to the lack of RPN faculty. The College, however, points out that it is very difficult to find and recruit RPNs with Masters or Ph.D. to teach the undergraduate program. As an example, the percentage of RNs with a Ph.D. is estimated to be approximately 0.3% in Canada.

7.2.1.8 Bursary Programs

The provincial department of health provides a Health Provider Bursary Program (non-physician), which provides financial assistance to students during their educational programs. According to the department of health, the occupations eligible for bursaries are determined based on the needs identified by the 32 health districts and the results of the Health Employer Survey. In the past years, occupations included physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, audiology, public health inspection, prosthetics and orthotics.

One interviewee expressed concern over the process. It was felt that the process was too informal and lacked discussion with the associations and unions. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the bursary program was questioned in that many students within these occupations are being trained in other provinces, and although awarded the bursary, they may not return to Saskatchewan to practice. Also, the 2001 bursary program did not enable recipients to work in Saskatoon or Regina health districts and was designed to promote these occupations in rural areas. The Saskatoon health district indicated this hampered their ability to recruit these occupations. Furthermore, concerns were expressed by some interviewees of the lack of the program for nursing students. The re-entry programs were not seen as being adequate to address the nursing shortage.

A larger bursary program is currently be designed, though it is not finalized at this point as to whether Regina and Saskatoon health district employment will again be ineligible for the program.

7.2.1.9 Negative Morale

The medical and health provider training programs require a portion of clinical work on site. During this time it is not uncommon for the students to hear the negative morale through conversations with other health providers, decreasing the likelihood that they will pursue a career in Saskatchewan.

7.2.2 Positive Initiatives

7.2.2.1 Regions

The recent announcement to reconfigure the 32 health districts to 12 regions will have a positive impact on the ability to recruit health professionals. Having 12 regions rather than 32 health districts will make it easier to monitor recruitment needs as well as coordinate the required responses. Under this scenario, targeted bursary programs may be more effective, as it will require fewer health districts to work with.

The concept of regions is larger than just the regions formed in Saskatchewan. Discussions are happening regarding the idea of Centers of Excellence in Western Canada. In this way, occupations that are very difficult to recruit and require a large population, such as the pediatric cardiologist, will be better utilized within the regional system not just the Saskatchewan system. Under this plan, Saskatchewan will no longer be required to compete with other locations that have a larger population base that can support these high priced specialists.

7.2.2.2 Primary Care Model

The emphasis of the primary care model means a de-emphasis on acute care and more emphasis on primary care. The Primary Health Service Model is built on the principle of making the best use of the skills and training of all members of the team. Should the Fyke Report be accepted, and primary health care become the model of our health care system, we will begin to see less “widgetizing” of the health care providers and greater utilization of their skills.

7.2.2.3 Quality Workplace Pilot Project

Currently, there are 3 sites in Saskatchewan undertaking the Quality Workplace program, namely the Moose Jaw Health District, Parkridge, and a Health Center in Unity Saskatchewan. The program focuses on changing the working environment in a way as to increase job satisfaction and hopefully increase retention, decrease absenteeism, and promote quality care. The program involves the use of a facilitator who works with the staff on the unit to resolve issues and conflicts, and promote working collaboratively in areas, for example, such as self-scheduling.

The idea of increasing the quality of the working environment is important. It is felt by many of the interviewees that Saskatchewan cannot compete with the beaches of California or the money offered in other jurisdictions; however, we can make our health care workplaces a preferred place to work that can then also lead to superior health care to patients.

7.2.2.4 Health Human Resources Council

The recent formation of the Health Human Resource Council is seen as a positive step toward addressing issues related to health recruitment and retention issues. The council is made up of individuals based on their expertise and interest from unions, regulatory bodies, educational institutions, employers, academics, researchers, and the public.

This group will report to the Minister of Health and make recommendations on health human resource issues, by monitoring trends and developing appropriate linkages. Although the group has only met a couple times since its formation, this is seen as a positive step toward a coordinated approach to recruitment as districts can no longer compete with each other for health professionals.

7.2.3 Suggested Strategies

7.2.3.1 Student Survey

One suggestion was to conduct a survey of the students in the health professions to determine what they are looking for from their future employer. Young adults have unique ideas about what they want from their employer. For example, as one interviewee indicated, many in this age group have the attitude of “chill out and cheer up”. As such employers need to be aware of what this age group demands and how to work with this age group, taking into account the diversity in attitudes. As one interviewee said, “we need to look less at why people left and more at what our future professions require in order to stay, by using a survey or some means to directly solicit this group.”

7.2.3.2 Career Mapping and Development

As one interviewee indicated, “it is now recognized by recruiters that nurses have careers; they are not just nurses”. Another interviewee indicated that health districts including SDH “do not undertake a comprehensive orientation program; they are concerned with getting warm bodies in areas with a low number of staff”.

This type of practice does not increase job satisfaction, and impacts retention in a negative manner. Recruiters from other locations explain to applicants before hiring the areas in which areas they will work, rotations that will be included to increase their exposure and experience, and, in some cases, financial assistance to pursue further education. According to focus groups conducted by the Conference Board of Canada with post-secondary students, the critical factors in choosing an employer were:

1. Compensation
2. Challenging Work
3. Work-Life Balance
4. Recognition/Respect
5. Advancement Opportunities

Our personal interviews support these findings. Recruitment efforts that include not only financial support for pursuing a master program but also advancement opportunities are extremely attractive to both students and working health professionals in Saskatchewan.

It was indicated by one interviewee “SDH can be more creative in how they offer career development opportunities that not only benefit the health professional but also the quality of care in this province.” One example put forward by an interviewee was the idea of providing rotations to other locations in Saskatchewan. For example, La Loche has a shortage of nursing professionals. Why not have one-month rotations, where nurses can gain rural exposure and provide care in different settings and locations?

7.2.3.3 Marketing

There is concern that the health districts, including SDH, do not market themselves to the health professionals. One interviewee stated it this way: “They must learn to market themselves. They have to market that they offer challenging work, and career and succession planning. The Americans do this.”

Marketing the community was also identified as important in recruiting health professionals. SDH needs to work closely with SREDA to provide promotional materials on Saskatoon and provide information on services available here for a new recruit and his or her family.

7.2.3.4 Mentorship Programs

One interviewee expressed that a good quality mentorship program would enhance recruitment efforts. For example, SDH should involve even first-year nurses in a mentorship program. Even though they would lack the clinical experience to work on the ward, they could work with the nurse managers in providing research and administration. It is hoped that through relationships, the young nurse is less likely to leave for employment elsewhere.

7.2.3.5 Spousal Recruitment

One interviewee indicated the following: “The problem with recruiting a highly educated health care person to Saskatoon is that they are likely married to another highly educated person. We need to find them both jobs.”

A solution to this problem was a linkage between recruiters in the health sector with a central database of job vacancies and potential employers. In order to effectively recruit health professionals, the interviewee indicated the following: “We need access to both the job vacancies and the employers most likely to have jobs that meet the spouse’s needs. Emphasis becomes one of recruiting the family rather than the individual.” This finding was also expressed by other sectors in our focus groups.

7.2.3.6 Student Loan Repayment Programs

The remuneration of student loans was indicated as a very effective recruitment strategy. As one interviewee indicated, “why wouldn’t a young graduate move to the United States and agree to work with an employer there for a two year period in order to pay off their student loans, rather than take ten years here in Saskatchewan? Even just paying a percentage of their student loan would be beneficial.”