



Evaluation Report

Supervised Practice Experience Partnership Program

Executive Summary

The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) protects the public by promoting safe nursing practice. This includes registering nurses, whether educated in Canada or internationally, who have the knowledge, skill and judgment to practice safely in Ontario.

In January 2022, CNO collaborated with Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health to launch the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership (SPEP) program. The program is designed to help applicants fulfill the evidence of practice or evidence of practice and language proficiency registration requirements. The goal of the program is to enhance opportunities related to registration, especially for internationally educated applicants, and to support the reinstatement process for non-practicing and former nurses—ultimately increasing the number of qualified nurses available to provide safe patient care in the province.

As the nursing regulator in Ontario, with a mandate of public protection, it is important for CNO to understand the impact of the SPEP program on a variety of domains. This evaluation report assesses the effect of the program on health human resources, examines the experience of key participant groups and investigates the relationship between program participation and nursing practice concerns. CNO collected and reviewed health human resource and professional conduct data from CNO's enterprise information system. Surveys with SPEP-eligible applicants, registrants, preceptors and placement employers were also conducted.

Since its inception, the SPEP program has had a positive impact on health human resources and has facilitated registration and reinstatement for many applicants. During the first three years of the program (Jan. 1, 2022, to Jan. 1, 2025), 5,593 applicants were eligible to participate in SPEP, with the majority (88%) being internationally educated nurses (IENs). A total of 4,183 applicants completed the SPEP program and became registered (representing 75% of those eligible to participate), mainly as Registered Nurses (77%).

Nurse retention and employment were other positive benefits revealed by the evaluation. Almost all applicants who registered after completing SPEP renewed their registration with CNO the following year. Completion of the SPEP program was also associated with an increased rate of renewal relative to those who had not completed the program, especially for IENs. In addition, 72% of surveyed placement employers reported hiring their candidate after program completion. The majority of SPEP applicants completed their program placement in hospitals (50%) and long-term care (37%) and reported employment after registration within these settings as well.

With respect to practice concerns, the overall rate of inquiries (complaints or reports made after registration) in both SPEP and non-SPEP registrants was low. However, the rate of report inquiries (practice concerns submitted by employers, colleagues or others) differed between the two groups following initial registration, with more reports being observed for the SPEP registrants. When looking at the nature of practice and conduct issues in report inquiries that had progressed through a Professional Conduct process and had been closed, there was no



significant difference in the percentage of reported concerns related to knowledge, skill and judgement between the groups.

Surveys conducted between 2022 and 2023 with samples of SPEP-eligible applicants, registrants, preceptors and placement employers indicated a positive experience; the opportunity for applicants to improve knowledge and skills and to gain experience in the Canadian health care system were reported benefits.

Moving forward, CNO will continue to work with system partners to offer the SPEP program to eligible applicants. CNO will also continue to track inquiries, gather additional data on Professional Conduct outcomes, and look at ways to incorporate monitoring of this information into current processes. Data from this evaluation and ongoing monitoring will be used to help identify potential opportunities for change.

Background and Purpose

In January 2022, CNO launched the SPEP program, in collaboration with Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health, to enhance timely registration with CNO.

To become registered with CNO, applicants must meet nine registration requirements, including evidence of practice and language proficiency¹. Evidence of practice refers to nursing practice in any jurisdiction within the previous three years in the same category as the category of their application. Language proficiency refers to an applicant's ability to read, write, listen and speak in English or French at a level required for safe nursing practice.

The two main options applicants can use to update their evidence of practice are:

- a) returning to a jurisdiction where the applicant was registered as a nurse, if required, and working as a nurse
- b) completing additional education, inclusive of specific theory components and specified hours of clinical practicum determined by the number of years out of practice².

Language proficiency can be met through education, experience, past registration or an approved language test³.

The SPEP program provides an alternative method for applicants to meet the evidence of practice, or evidence of practice and language proficiency, registration requirements. To be eligible, applicants must meet all registration requirements except for evidence of practice only; evidence of practice and language proficiency; evidence of practice and Transition to Practice; or evidence of practice, language proficiency and Transition to Practice. Their evidence of practice must have expired no more than five years before applying (meaning the applicant's last date of practice can be no more than eight years ago)⁴.

The program is a partnership between CNO, the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health and CNO-approved placement organizations. After approval by CNO, SPEP placement organizations can be matched via Ontario Health and have the opportunity to supervise applicants in a SPEP

¹ [Registration Requirements](#)

² [Requirements for Evidence of Practice](#)

³ [Requirements for Proficiency in English or French](#)

⁴ Applicants beyond the eight-year timeframe can request a review by the Registration Committee to determine their eligibility.



placement. Alternatively, applicants can find their own employer who must then be approved by CNO⁵. The Ministry of Health supports the SPEP program through funding for some organizations.

As part of participating, SPEP applicants must meet several program expectations⁶ including:

- completing a minimum practice experience of 140 hours and gaining relevant current nursing practice experience under the supervision of a qualified preceptor
- completing an initial and final self-evaluation related to the application of CNO's standards and guidelines

Some of the key program requirements for approved SPEP placement organizations⁷ include

- assigning an appropriate preceptor and arranging for practice experience
- assessing the applicant using CNO's or a similar assessment form, along with providing guidance, teaching, feedback and opportunities for remediation

While the program is open to all applicants who meet the eligibility criteria, the program was originally designed with IENs in mind, as a way to enhance registration opportunities. In May 2022, the program was also offered to non-practicing and former nurses wishing to reinstate and return to nursing practice. Along with other regulation changes, (for example, Temporary Class, reinstatement process⁸), an additional goal of the SPEP program is to increase the number of qualified nurses available to provide safe, competent patient care in the province.

As the regulator of nursing in Ontario with a mandate of public protection, it is important for CNO to understand the impact of the SPEP program, and an evaluation was conducted for this purpose.

Methodology

An outcome evaluation of the SPEP program was completed using a mixed-methods design, focusing on four main areas:

- health human resources
- nursing practice and conduct
- applicant and registrant experiences
- placement employer and preceptor experiences

Data was triangulated after collection. For health human resource insights, data was gathered from CNO's enterprise information system. The health human resource data reported below covers the period from Jan. 1, 2022, to Jan. 1, 2025 (the first three years of the program).

Data related to the number of SPEP program matches completed and the number of applicants willing to relocate to northern and rural communities was obtained from Ontario Health. Data related to approved placement employers is tracked by CNO.

⁵ All approved placement settings are within Ontario.

⁶ [SPEP Program Expectations for Applicants](#)

⁷ [SPEP Program Requirements for Organizations](#)

⁸ [Changes to Temporary Class and Reinstatement Requirements](#)



Surveys were also conducted with SPEP-eligible applicants, registrants, placement employers and preceptors using a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Applicants who became eligible for the SPEP program⁹ between Jan. 2022 and Oct. 2023 and had not yet completed the program at the time the sample was extracted were included in the eligible applicant sample. The response rate for the eligible applicant survey was 30% (total contacted sample=1,278). For the registrant sample, nurses who successfully registered or reinstated after completing the SPEP program between April 2022 and June 2023 were contacted. A total of 1,589 registrants were contacted, with 52% responding to the survey. Organizations that were approved to have an applicant complete a placement for the SPEP program between Jan. 2022 and Oct. 2023 were also surveyed. The organization's main contact person for the SPEP program was invited to complete the survey. Twenty-two percent of placement employers responded to the survey (total contacted sample=603). Finally, preceptors who supervised an applicant in the SPEP program were also surveyed; they could participate by clicking on a survey link that was embedded within the assessment form they had to complete at the end of the placement. Eighty-four preceptors participated in the survey¹⁰.

CNO's enterprise information system was also used to extract data on inquiries as an indicator for nursing practice concerns that would relate to professional conduct and competence. Part of CNO's regulatory role is to maintain standards of practice, competence (knowledge, skill and judgment) and professional ethics of the profession. One way CNO does this is through its professional conduct process. In cases where there is a concern about a nurse's practice after they are registered with CNO, a complaint can be made by the public or a report can be made by an employer (or colleagues or others) to CNO¹¹. For this analysis, inquiries were defined as all complaints and reports received by CNO related to a nurse. Because of the low number of inquiries, and the time taken between receiving an inquiry and a final outcome after an investigation, only the receipt of an inquiry was included in the initial analysis. The nature, severity and final outcome of the inquiry were not considered. Therefore, the receipt of an inquiry is only a proxy measure for professional conduct or competence issues, as some complaint and report inquiries may result in no action, or some complaint inquiries may be assessed as an abuse of process. Nurses who registered after completing the SPEP program were compared to a sample of nurses who had registered without participating in the SPEP program. Nurses in both groups had to have been registered for at least six months as of Jan. 1, 2025 (registered on or before July 1, 2024). All inquiries received after registration and within the timeframe of the report were included.

Health Human Resource Data

SPEP ELIGIBILITY

As of Jan. 1, 2025, there were 6,075 eligible applications for the SPEP program (4,364 Registered Nurse [RN] applications; 1,711 Registered Practical Nurse [RPN] applications). In some cases, applicants can become eligible for two applications and have the option to

⁹ Applicants who had completed all registration requirements except for evidence of practice, or evidence of practice and language proficiency, and were sent a CNO eligibility email.

¹⁰ A response rate could not be calculated for the preceptor survey as the survey link was embedded within the preceptor assessment form and thus it is not clear exactly how many respondents had the opportunity to complete the survey.

¹¹ [Information on CNO's Complaint and Report Process](#)

complete the SPEP program twice (for example, if they have an open RPN application and an open RN application).

Table 1 shows how many applicants¹², or unique individuals, became eligible for SPEP during the first three years of the program (Jan. 1, 2022, to Jan. 1, 2025), broken down by their type of application to the General Class¹³. Dual applicants are counted as RN applicants in the table. Applicants for reinstatement are also included. A total of 5,593 applicants were eligible for SPEP with the majority being IENs (88%). A small proportion were applicants for reinstatement (5%). In terms of application category (RN or RPN), most applicants were eligible based on their RN application (74%).

Table 1: Total Applicants Eligible for SPEP

		Registration			Reinstatement	Total
		Ontario	Canadian	International		
2022	RN	33	5	925	47	1,010
	RPN	28	6	738	60	832
2023	RN	42	26	1,506	31	1,605
	RPN	23	4	293	45	365
2024	RN	45	125	1,292	47	1,509
	RPN	33	1	201	37	272
Total		204 (4%)	167 (3%)	4,955 (88%)	267 (5%)	5,593 (100%)

APPROVED PLACEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND MATCHING

As of Jan. 1, 2025, 787 placement organizations were approved by CNO to potentially participate in the SPEP program. When looking at the Ontario Health region and setting, most placement organizations were in the West (37%), East (27%) and Central (21%) regions; 56%

¹² Application data counts applications to CNO (individuals can be counted twice because it is possible to have more than one application—for example, an RPN and an RN application). Applicant data counts applicants or unique individuals (individuals are only counted once regardless of the number of applications they have).

¹³ Application type to the General Class is based on the location of nursing education—Ontario, Canadian or international.

of organizations were long-term care facilities and 14% were hospitals. A total of 5,510 matches were completed by Ontario Health. (Note: This does not include cases where an applicant found their own SPEP placement employer.) Of the total matches, 211 applicants were willing to relocate and were matched to employers in northern or rural communities.

REGISTRATION AFTER SPEP COMPLETION

Within the first three years of the program, 3,218 RNs and 1,234 RPNs successfully registered or reinstated after completing SPEP, for a total of 4,452 applications.

For those who registered after completing SPEP (n=4,335; excluding 117 reinstatements), 30% had an existing registration with CNO and were mainly RPNs using the SPEP program to become registered as an RN and gain an additional registration. In addition, to further understand the impact to the system, the total number of new registrations¹⁴ overall from 2022 to 2024 was compared to the number of new registrations from the SPEP program (Table 2). Overall, 8% of new registrations made use of the SPEP program. When looking specifically at internationally educated new registrations across 2022 to 2024 combined (n=21,659), 19% used the SPEP program to meet the registration requirements.

Table 2: Percentage of New Registrations from 2022 to 2024 Taking Part in SPEP

	New Registrations ¹⁴		
	SPEP	Overall	%
2022	1,105	15,435	7%
2023	1,602	17,518	9%
2024	1,628	18,057	9%
Combined	4,335	51,010	8%

Again, since it is possible to be a dual registrant and complete the SPEP program twice for an RN and an RPN application¹⁵, the total number of registrants¹⁶ that completed SPEP was also

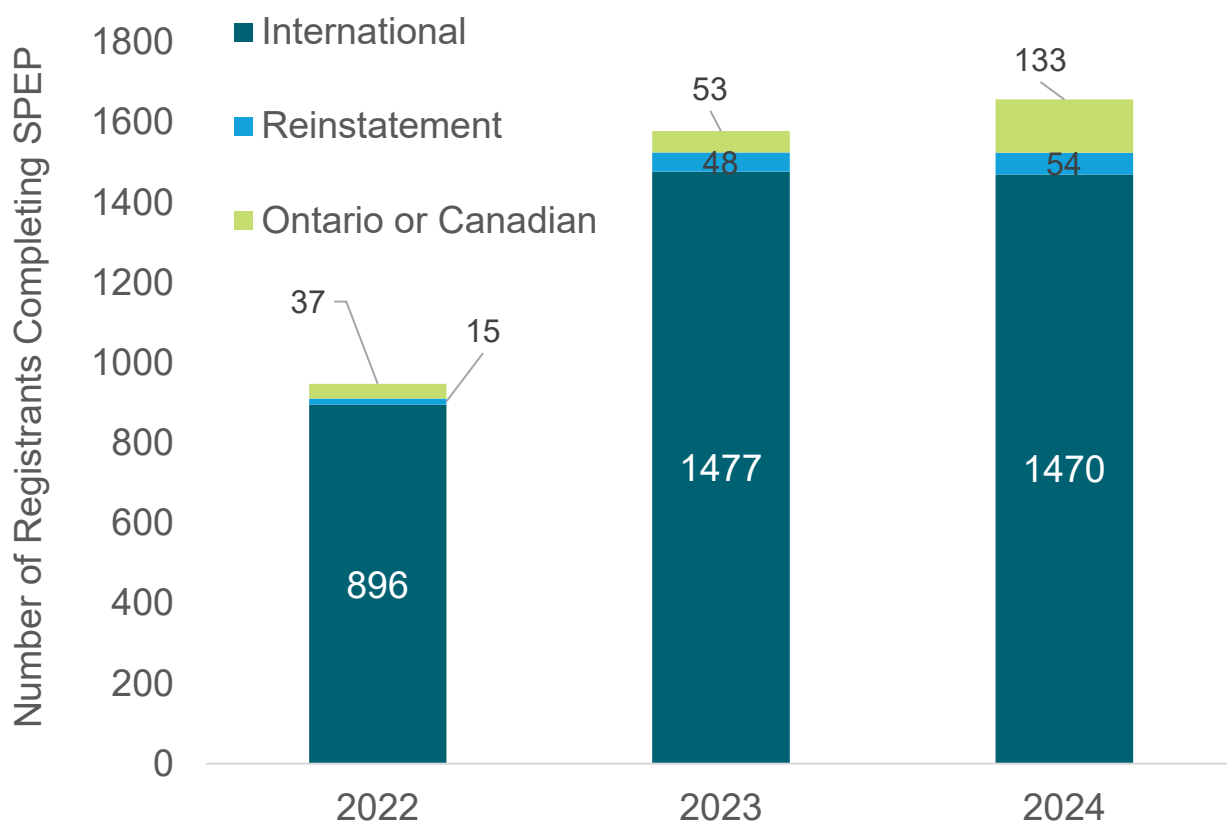
¹⁴ New registrations are defined as new registrants and additional registrations. New registrants represent nurses who have registered with CNO for the first time, representing new nurses added to the system. Nurses can only be categorized as a new registrant once in their career. Additional registrations are defined as nurses who were already registered with CNO and completed a new registration, representing enhanced capacity to the system (not new nurses).

¹⁵ Within the group of applications that completed the program and registered, 269 applicants completed the SPEP program twice from 2022 to 2024.

¹⁶ Registrant data counts nurses who have obtained their CNO registration (individual nurses are only counted once regardless of the number of registrations they have).

determined ($n=4,183$). This group will be the focus for the remainder of the Health Human Resources section. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of registrants by application type¹³ or reinstatement since January 2022.

Figure 1. The number of registrants who have completed the SPEP program since it began, by application type or reinstatement.



Most registrants who completed SPEP were internationally educated (92%; Figure 1) or completed an RN application (77%; Table 3)¹⁷. Only 3% were reinstatements (Figure 1).

¹⁷ Dual applicants were counted as RN applicants for the purposes of this analysis.

Table 3: Percentage of SPEP Registrants by Application Category

SPEP Registrants		2022	2023	2024	Total
Application Category	RN	569	1,241	1,408	3,218 (77%)
	RPN	379	337	249	965 (23%)

When looking at program uptake, approximately 75% of applicants who were eligible completed the SPEP program and registered or reinstated; this was largely driven by the uptake in the internationally educated group of registrants (Table 4). Sixty-nine percent of SPEP-eligible Ontario graduates also used the program. This represents only 141 applicants in total—a much smaller number compared to international applicants and the result of most Ontario applicants meeting their evidence of practice requirement by having completed their nursing program.

Table 4: SPEP Program Uptake

		Total Eligible	% Uptake
Registration	Ontario	204	69%
	Canadian	167	49%
	International	4,955	78%
Reinstatement		267	44%
Total		5,593	75%



EDUCATION

From the group of registrants who completed SPEP (n=4,066, excluding reinstatements), most completed a baccalaureate degree (75%). A diploma was the next most common education attained in this group (23%). This pattern was similar in the RN group (76% baccalaureate, 22% diploma¹⁸) and the RPN group (71% baccalaureate, 27% diploma). Of the RPN group with a baccalaureate degree (n=638), 69% also had an RN application. For internationally educated applicants, the most common country of education was India (69%), followed by the Philippines (21%), reflecting the typical pattern seen in internationally educated applicants at large in Ontario.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Looking at the registrants who used the SPEP program to become registered or who reinstated (n=4,183), 888 (21%) used the program to meet the language proficiency requirement in addition to the evidence of practice requirement.

SPEP PROGRAM PLACEMENTS¹⁹ BY SETTING AND REGION

For the group that completed the SPEP program and became registered or reinstated (n=4,183), hospitals were the most common program placement setting (50%), followed by long-term care facilities (37%), retirement homes (6%), primary care²⁰ (4%) and other²¹ (3%). In terms of Ontario Health regions, West (35%) was the most common region where applicants completed their SPEP placement, followed by Central (24%), Toronto (24%), East (13%), North East (2%) and North West (2%).

EMPLOYMENT POSITIONS AFTER REGISTRATION BY SETTING AND REGION

Table 5 shows the practice settings where registrants who completed SPEP reported employment after becoming registered. This number is greater than the number of registrants because some registrants had more than one employer and held multiple positions. Mirroring the settings where the SPEP placements were completed, the most common settings of reported employment after registration were hospitals (42%) and long-term care facilities (37%).

¹⁸ Registration requirements pertaining to education were updated as of April 1, 2025. The minimum education requirement for RN applicants is a baccalaureate nursing degree approved or recognized in any jurisdiction, and there is an education assessment process in place to determine education equivalency for applicants who do not have the required nursing credential. Further information on the updated education requirement can be found here: <https://www.cno.org/en/become-a-nurse/registration-requirements/education/>

¹⁹ SPEP program placement refers to the organization where the SPEP program was completed. An applicant in the SPEP program completes their placement with one organization, and organizations must be within Ontario.

²⁰ Examples of placement and practice settings within the “primary care” category are community health centres, home and community care services, family health teams and physicians’ offices.

²¹ Examples of placement and practice settings within the “other” category are addiction and mental health centres, correctional facilities, hospices and group homes.

**Table 5: Employment Positions of SPEP Registrants by Practice Setting**

Practice Setting	Number of Employment Positions (%)
Hospital	1,981 (42%)
Long-Term Care	1,729 (37%)
Primary Care ²⁰	174 (4%)
Retirement Homes	189 (4%)
Other ²¹	603 (13%)
Total	4,676

Table 6 shows the Ontario Health regions where registrants who completed SPEP reported employment after becoming registered. Also mirroring the regions where the SPEP placements were completed, the most common regions of reported employment after registration were West (33%) and Central (24%). Only 6% of reported employment positions were outside of Ontario.

Table 6: Employment Positions of SPEP Registrants by Ontario Health Region

Ontario Health Region	Number of Employment Positions (%)
Central	1,105 (24%)
East	617 (13%)
North East	91 (2%)
North West	77 (2%)
Toronto	989 (21%)
West	1,533 (33%)
Outside of Ontario	264 (6%)
Total	4,676

RENEWAL

Table 7 shows the percentage of all nurses who renewed their registration the following year after completing the SPEP program and becoming registered. A total of 948 nurses were registered in 2022, and 96% renewed their registration in 2023. Of the 1,578 nurses who registered in 2023, 94% renewed their registration in 2024. In 2024, a total of 1,657 nurses were registered, and 98% renewed their registration in 2025.

The rate of renewal observed in the SPEP registrants was slightly higher (2–4%) compared to those of non-SPEP registrants during the same timeframes (Table 7).

Table 7: Percentage of Nurses Renewing After Registration

	2022 Registrants	2023 Registrants	2024 Registrants
	% renewing in 2023	% renewing in 2024	% renewing in 2025
SPEP	96%	94%	98%
Non-SPEP	94%	90%	95%

Since the SPEP registrant group was mainly composed of IENs, the rate of renewal was also analyzed by looking at IENs only, and this data is shown in Table 8. When examining only IENs, the rate of renewal was higher in the SPEP registrants compared to the non-SPEP registrants (ranging from 6–14% higher). These data suggest that completion of the SPEP program may be associated with an increased rate of renewal, especially for IENs. This finding should be interpreted with caution as the direction of causality is not known—for example, individuals who are more likely to renew may also be more likely to complete the SPEP program, rather than participation in the SPEP program leading to a higher rate of renewal.

Table 8: Percentage of IENs Renewing After Registration

	2022 IEN Registrants	2023 IEN Registrants	2024 IEN Registrants
	% renewing in 2023	% renewing in 2024	% renewing in 2025
SPEP	96%	94%	98%
Non-SPEP	86%	80%	92%

UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

For a candidate to be considered unsuccessful, the SPEP placement employer would have indicated to CNO that they would not rehire the candidate due to conduct or competency issues



that occurred during the SPEP placement. In these cases, CNO opened a pre-registration inquiry to investigate the issue and make an assessment²². During the first three years of the program, the overall rate of unsuccessful SPEP placements was very low. Only 57 applicants in total were unsuccessful—this represents just 1.2% of applicants who participated in a SPEP placement.

SUMMARY

During the first three years, 4,183 registrants completed the SPEP program and registered with CNO, representing 75% of applicants eligible for the program. As expected, internationally educated applicants were the group that benefited the most from the program (3,843 registrants; 78% of eligible IEN applicants), and 77% of all registrants used the program to fulfil the requirements for an RN registration. For program placement, hospitals and long-term care facilities were the primary settings reported. This was also the case for employment settings reported after registration. In addition, almost all registrants who completed the SPEP program in 2022, 2023 and 2024 renewed their registration in the following year. Lastly, the overall rate of unsuccessful placements was very low—most placement employers indicated that they would rehire the applicant who had completed SPEP at their organization.

Nursing Practice and Conduct Data

INQUIRIES

To assess the relationship between nursing practice and conduct inquiries and participation in the SPEP program, an analysis was completed to determine whether there was a different rate of inquiries—total complaints and reports received divided by years registered—in the group completing the SPEP program compared to those who registered without taking part in SPEP.

All nurses who completed the SPEP program during the first three years and had been registered for at least six months (SPEP registrants, $n=3,379$) were compared to a sample of nurses who registered within the same timeframe (Jan. 1, 2022, to Jan. 1, 2025) and had also been registered for at least six months (non-SPEP registrants). To adjust for the IEN majority (95%) in the SPEP group, the non-SPEP comparator group was created to reflect a similar IEN composition. A sub-sample was extracted from the overall non-SPEP sample that included all non-SPEP IENs ($n=13,045$) and an additional 629 randomly selected non-SPEP Canadian- and Ontario-educated nurses. The proportion of IENs in the non-SPEP group (total $n=13,674$) matched the SPEP group at 95%. Reinstatements and registrants in the Extended Class were excluded from the analysis.

A comparison of the two groups is presented in Table 9. With respect to demographics, the SPEP group was slightly younger and had a slightly higher percentage of females. The mean rates of inquiries per year registered were low overall.

²²Applicants with pre-registration inquiries assessed as low risk may be offered the opportunity to complete the SPEP program a second time. High-risk pre-registration inquiries are referred to CNO's Registration Committee to make an assessment and in some cases, applicants may be directed to complete a refresher program.

Table 9: Demographics and Inquiries by Group

		SPEP REGISTRANTS	NON-SPEP REGISTRANTS	p-value²³
		N=3,379	N=13,674	
Demographics	% Female	88%	86%	0.072
	Mean Age	34.7	35.2	<.001
	% Internationally Educated	95%	95%	-
Inquiries	Total Inquiries	88 (16 complaints, 72 reports)	279 (60 complaints, 219 reports)	-
	Mean # of Inquiries	0.0260	0.0204	0.064
	Mean # of Complaint Inquiries	0.0047	0.0044	0.786
	Mean # of Report Inquiries	0.0213	0.0160	0.052
	Mean Years Registered	1.50	1.52	0.965
	Mean Rate of Inquiries/Year Registered	0.0199	0.0148	0.043

A multivariate quasi-Poisson regression analysis was performed to determine if there was an independent relationship between completion of the SPEP program (Group) and the number of inquiries received. The number of years registered was included as an offset variable to adjust for differences between registrants. Age and gender were included in the model as covariates to control for differences between groups.

Group was statistically significant as a predictor in the multivariate model, indicating an elevated risk of inquiry for the SPEP registrants compared to non-SPEP registrants (Table 10). The incidence rate ratio for Group was 1.32, indicating that the incidence rate in the SPEP group was 1.32 times the incidence rate in the non-SPEP group.

²³ Univariate analysis was completed using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test, Pearson's Chi-square test or Student's t-test.

Table 10: Incidence Rate Ratios by Group and Inquiry Type

Inquiry Type	Group	Incidence Rate Ratio	p-value
All Inquiries	Non-SPEP Registrants (Reference group)	-	-
	SPEP Registrants	1.32	0.049*
Report Inquiries Only	Non-SPEP Registrants (Reference group)	-	-
	SPEP Registrants	1.40	0.033*
Complaint Inquiries Only	Non-SPEP Registrants (Reference group)	-	-
	SPEP Registrants	1.03	0.930



Upon further examination, it was evident that the rate of report inquiries, reports made by employers, colleagues or others, was higher in the SPEP group relative to the non-SPEP group (Table 9), likely driving the pattern observed for overall inquiries. When stratified by inquiry type, the rate of report inquiries remained elevated in the SPEP group (Table 10) but was not statistically significant for complaints alone, inquiries made by patients/the public (Table 10).

One limitation related to the initial analysis of inquiries is that the nature, severity and final outcome of the inquiry were not taken into account. The receipt of an inquiry is only a proxy measure for practice and conduct issues. Therefore, to investigate further the higher rate of report inquiries in the SPEP group, additional analysis was completed to examine the nature of practice and conduct issues from the perspective of the reporter. Only report inquiries that had progressed through a Professional Conduct process and had been closed²⁴ were included, and the analysis focused specifically on identifying differences in report inquiries involving a reported pattern of nursing knowledge, skill and judgment issues²⁵.

Because the rate of report inquiries was different between the two groups, only report inquiries that had been closed at the time of analysis were included. (Sixty-five percent were closed for the SPEP group and 68% were closed for the non-SPEP group.) When looking at reported issues of knowledge, skill and judgement, 17% of closed reports in the SPEP group and 13% of closed reports in the non-SPEP group involved issues of this type. However, there was no significant association between Group and the pattern of a knowledge-skill-and-judgement issue from the perspective of the reporter ($\chi^2(1, N = 196) = 0.25, p = 0.62$), suggesting that the two groups did not differ significantly.

SUMMARY

Overall, at the time of analysis, participation in the SPEP program appears to be associated with a slight increase in the likelihood of receiving a report inquiry during the time following initial registration, approximately the first one and a half years. Specifically, SPEP registrants received slightly more report inquiries relative to other new IENs registered within the same time period.

It remains unclear at this time why the SPEP group had a slightly higher rate of report inquiries, so further investigation is required. There was no significant difference between the SPEP and non-SPEP groups in patterns of knowledge, skill and judgement issues described by reporters in closed report inquiries. While this is one indicator that the increased rate of reports is not related to perceived competence issues in the SPEP group, it is not fully clear what is driving the increased rate. Additional sources of data and further follow-up will be needed to understand this finding. Whether this pattern holds over time also remains unknown. Since only a short period of time has elapsed since initial registration, the data included in this analysis only

²⁴ The dataset contained only inquiries that had been closed with a final decision as an early report inquiry resolution or as an investigation case.

²⁵ Reported issues, as identified by the reporter (employer, colleagues or others), of nursing knowledge, skill and judgement were defined as a pattern or multiple issues demonstrating gaps in nursing knowledge, skill and judgement and/or a lack of understanding or ability to fulfill nursing responsibilities. In some cases, a single significant incident could meet the threshold. Specific issues of professional misconduct, for example, a privacy breach, or a lapse in performance due to health or extenuating circumstances were not included in the definition. The data is not based on CNO's Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee decisions regarding reported issues.



captures a short window of time since registration took place. Future work will be needed to assess if the difference in the rate of reports between groups persists over time.

While inquiries represent a valuable source of data that is tracked by CNO and are a potential indicator of professional conduct or competence concerns, there are other limitations with respect to this data source and analysis that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. These include

- 1) Inquiries are relatively uncommon in relation to the total number of nurses and, as such, are not a very sensitive indicator.
- 2) The inquiry date does not always reflect the incident date. (There can be a time lag between when the incident occurred and reporting.)
- 3) Factors related to work environment may be significant and cannot be accounted for.

Finally, it is important to remember that, while the relative risk of a report inquiry was higher in the SPEP group, overall the absolute risk of an inquiry was very low. Across both groups, the average rate of inquiries per year registered was < 0.020 .

Applicant and Registrant Survey Data

ELIGIBLE APPLICANT SURVEY

In Oct. 2023, CNO surveyed applicants who became eligible for the SPEP program between Jan. 2022 and Oct. 2023 to learn more about their experience. The surveyed applicants had not yet completed the program at the time the sample was extracted. There were 1,278 applicants who fell into this category, and 388 applicants responded to the survey, a 30% response rate.

Applicants eligible for the SPEP program were notified by CNO of their eligibility through a message on the applicant portal. In the survey, 96% of applicants indicated they had received the message and were aware of their eligibility.

Applicants could click a link in the message and complete a SPEP intake form, which was submitted to Ontario Health, to express interest in taking part in the program and being matched via Ontario Health. Filling out the form was optional as applicants could choose to find an employer on their own with whom they could complete SPEP. Of the eligible applicants surveyed

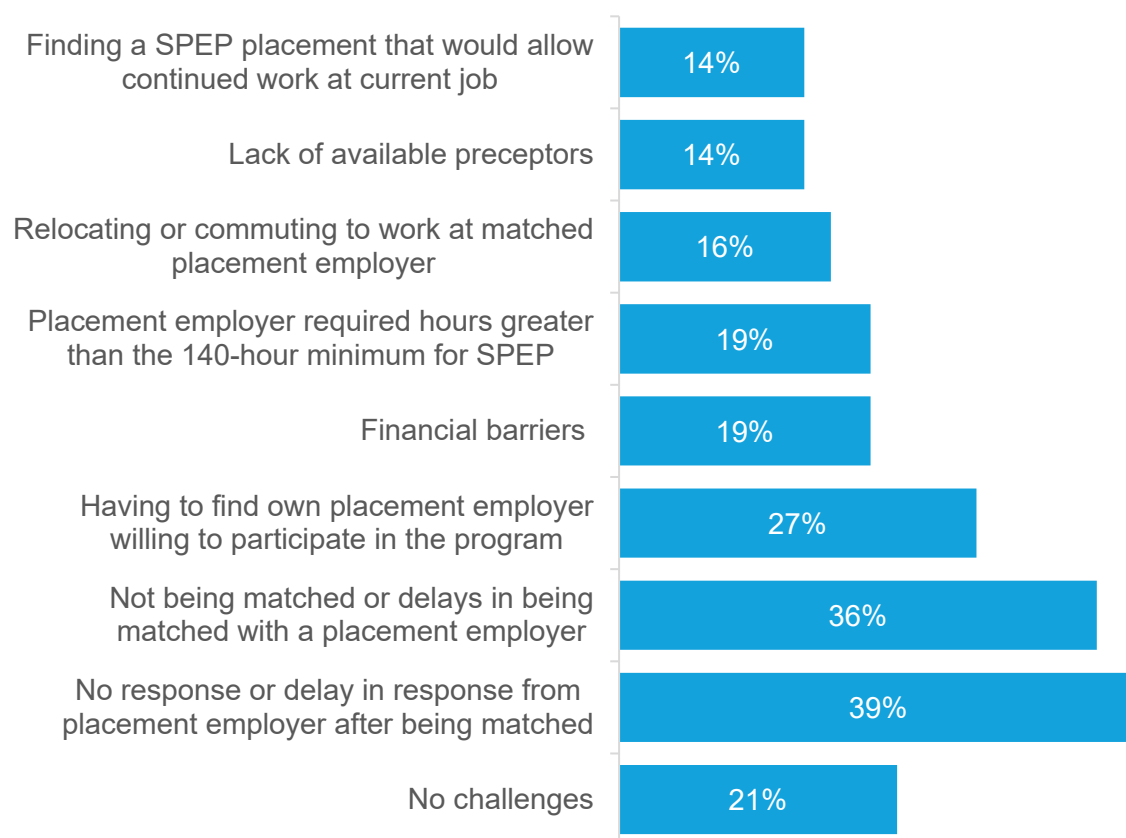
- 76% completed the SPEP intake form expressing their interest to participate
- 21% had not completed the intake form but planned on participating or were currently participating
- 3% were not planning to participate

Of those not planning to apply ($n=13$), the main reasons were that the applicants had already met the evidence of practice requirement in another way (31%) or were currently located outside of the province (23%).

For all surveyed eligible applicants ($n=388$), the main challenges to participation were being matched with a placement employer (36% had experienced delays or had not been matched with a placement employer) or communicating with the matched placement employer. Thirty-nine percent had experienced delays in hearing back from their matched placement employer. In cases where eligible applicants were looking for their own placement employer, 27% reported

difficulty finding a placement employer willing to participate in the program (Figure 2). More than one in five respondents (21%) also reported experiencing no challenges.

Figure 2. Main challenges experienced by SPEP-eligible applicants ($n=388$)²⁶.



For those who were planning to participate or were currently participating in SPEP ($n=375$), 66% said that they had a very positive or somewhat positive experience with the program, and 58% had found a placement employer where they could complete the program. Many applicants had found the placement employer on their own (56%) rather than being matched via Ontario Health—only 37% reported being matched through this process. The main settings where eligible applicants had found a placement employer were hospitals (56%) and long-term care facilities (33%).

For those who had found a placement employer ($n=216$), 61% were currently working in their SPEP placement through the approved employer. Of those who had begun their supervised practice experience ($n=131$), 93% expected to complete the program within the next two months, and 98% felt supported by their preceptor.

Positive aspects of the SPEP program reported by eligible applicants included having the opportunity to develop skills and build knowledge while participating in the program (25%) and

²⁶ Multiple responses possible.

specific benefits for internationally educated applicants, such as gaining experience in the Canadian health care system (13%). The process of being matched to a placement employer was the aspect of the program that most eligible applicants felt could be improved by making it easier or clearer (17%)—for example, sharing a list of approved employers with candidates, increasing the number of approved employers or providing guidelines on how the candidate should proceed if additional matches are required—and faster (16%)—for example, reducing waiting periods during the process or matching with multiple employers to facilitate a successful match in a more timely fashion.

REGISTRANT SURVEY

A survey of nurses who successfully registered with CNO after completing the SPEP program between April 2022 and June 2023 was also conducted. A total sample of 1,589 nurses were contacted and 826 responded to the survey (52% response rate).

Almost all registrants (99%, $n=826$) said their goals were met by the SPEP program, with the top goals reported to be learning and development (59%), meeting requirements (37%) and gaining experience in the Canadian health care system (32%) (Figure 3). Similar to the eligible applicant group, nearly all registrants (99%) felt supported by their preceptor.

Figure 3. Main goals reported by registrants who had completed the SPEP program ($n=826$)²⁶.



In terms of what worked well with the program, there were similarities between what was reported by SPEP registrants and eligible applicants. SPEP registrants mentioned skills and knowledge development (35%) and the direct benefits to IENs, such as gaining experience in the Canadian health care system (17%). In addition, registrants pointed to the SPEP process overall being smooth and organized (28%) and the mentorship of their preceptor (21%) as positive aspects of the program.



Also mirroring the responses from the eligible applicants, many registrants mentioned the matching process—to make it clearer/easier (15%) and faster (14%)—as the main area where the SPEP program could be improved. Some suggestions included giving clearer instructions about how applicants can find their own employer, sharing a list of approved employers with candidates, or reducing turnaround times during the matching process. Many registrants stated they experienced no challenges when participating in the SPEP program (37%). For those who reported challenges, the main issues were delays in the matching process (8%), along with other issues related to matching, such as the lack of flexibility to choose the matched placement employer or setting and a lack of clarity regarding whether an applicant can find their own employer (8%).

SUMMARY

Almost all SPEP registrants surveyed reported a positive experience, with the program meeting their goals. Slightly fewer eligible applicants reported a positive experience, which was likely related to the main challenge they reported facing: difficulty finding or communicating with a placement employer. Similar challenges were reported by SPEP registrants, although to a lesser degree. Both groups also identified similar program benefits related to knowledge and skills development and benefits to IENs, such as gaining experience in the Canadian health care system.

Placement Employer and Preceptor Survey Data

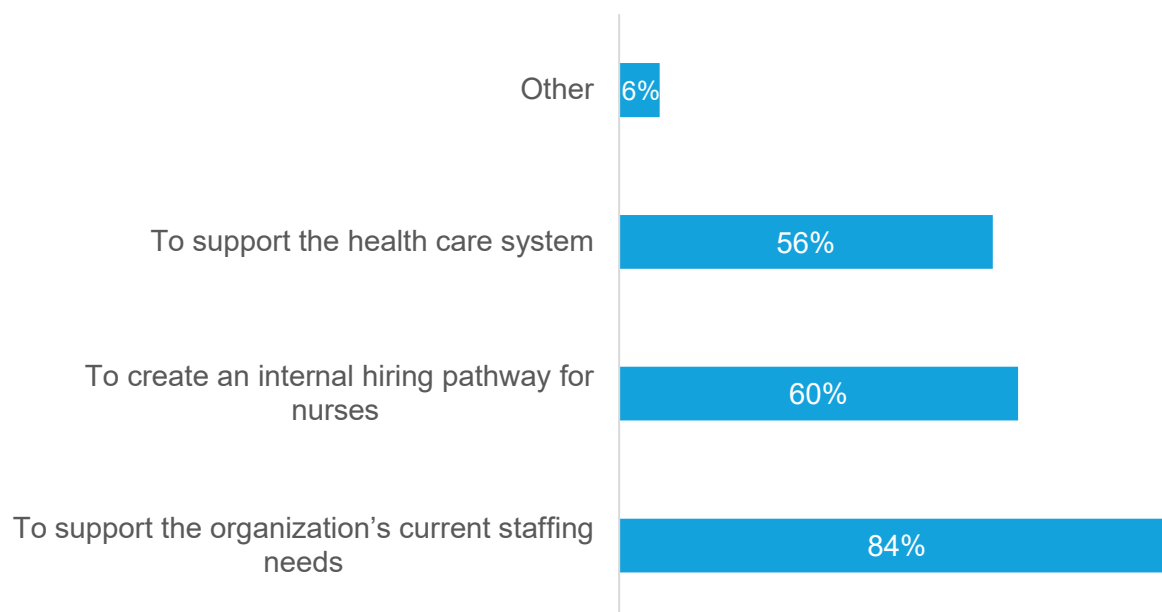
PLACEMENT EMPLOYER SURVEY

Organizations that were approved to participate in the SPEP program between Jan. 2022 and Oct. 2023 were also surveyed ($n=603$). The contact provided to CNO when the placement employer was approved was invited to complete the survey or asked to forward the survey to the relevant SPEP contact person at their organization. A total of 132 placement employers responded to the survey (22% response rate). Of these, 45% were long-term care facilities, 24% were hospitals, 12% were retirement homes, 12% were home or community health care organizations, and 7% were classified as other types of employment settings.

The majority of placement employers surveyed had applicants complete the SPEP program (81%), and many also reported having applicants actively completing their placement at the time of the survey (35%). Some of the organizations reported not yet being matched with an applicant (15%).

The main reason placement employers provided for accepting applicants in the SPEP program was to support the current staffing needs of the organization (84%, $n=131$). Creating a hiring pathway (60%) and supporting the health care system (56%) were also reasons for program participation (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Main reasons for accepting SPEP applicants given by participating organizations (n=131)²⁶.



Placement employers were also asked whether the requirement of supervision played a role in their organization's ability to accept SPEP applicants—73% said the supervision requirement had no impact, whereas 22% said supervision was an issue due to the limited resources available for new trainees and the availability of preceptors. The remaining group (5%) was unsure.

Of the placement employers that had an applicant complete the SPEP program ($n=105$), 72% hired the applicant after the program. For those employers that did not hire (28%), the main reason was that they had tried to hire the applicant, but the applicant declined (31%); others mentioned that their organization did not have any positions available (21%). These findings align with data captured on the SPEP Completion Form, the form placement employers must submit to CNO upon program completion. Eighty-seven percent of placement employers reported considering an offer of employment or making an offer of employment to the group of registrants who had completed and became registered.

Finally, placement employers that had an applicant complete the program or had one actively participating ($n=108$) were asked about any unanticipated outcomes that they experienced. Most did not provide a response (57%) or said that there were no issues (18%), while others mentioned the unanticipated experience of having applicants leave after program completion rather than being hired (16%).

Given that the surveyed employer group represents only organizations that opted to participate in the SPEP program, the views captured in the survey data might not be representative of other employers who chose not to participate, and the findings should be interpreted with this in mind.

PRECEPTOR SURVEY

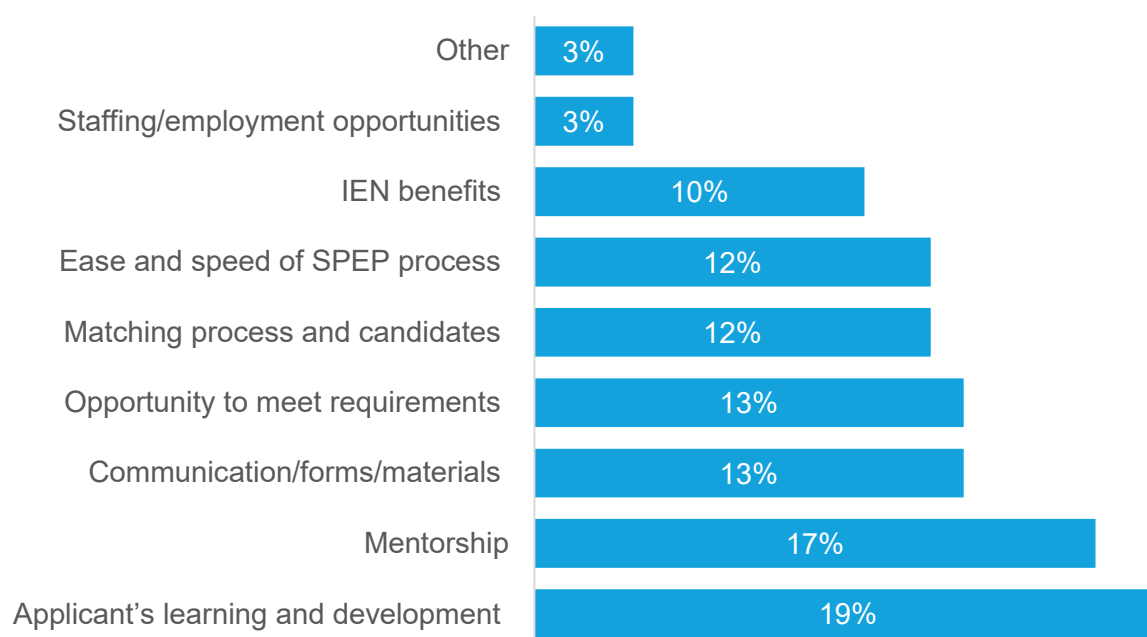
Preceptors were also surveyed via a link that was available within the SPEP Assessment Form for Preceptors, a form that was completed at the end of the program. Preceptors could click on

the link within the form to complete the survey. From April 2022 to Dec. 2023, a total of 84 respondents completed the survey. A response rate is not available due to the methodology used for distributing the survey. It was not possible to determine how many preceptors had the opportunity to complete the survey.

When asked if the SPEP program met its goal of enabling CNO applicants to demonstrate evidence of practice and language proficiency in an Ontario practice setting, 80% of preceptors felt that the SPEP program achieved its intended purpose. Some preceptors were unsure (8%), and some did not agree (12%). For those who did not agree or did not know if the SPEP program met its goals ($n=17$), the main reason was because their organization was never matched with a candidate, or the matched candidate did not participate (29%).

In terms of what worked well, preceptors ($n=84$) indicated that the learning and development opportunities for candidates (19%), along with the mentorship provided by themselves or other staff members (17%), were the main program benefits (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Main SPEP program benefits reported by preceptors ($n=84$)²⁶.



With respect to program improvements, many preceptors suggested creating more training opportunities for candidates via courses, skills labs or orientation (16%). Improvements to other aspects of the process were also suggested, such as modifying the hours requirement (14%)—for example, having a higher minimum number of hours or having different hours requirements depending on the setting—and improving communication from CNO (14%)—for example, providing clearer program guidelines and more support related to program questions.

SUMMARY

The overall experience with the SPEP program was also positive for placement employers and preceptors. The SPEP placement employers reported that the main reason for participating in



the program was to support the organization's staffing needs, and a large portion reported hiring the SPEP applicant once they completed the program and became registered. Preceptors felt that the program met the goal of enabling applicants to demonstrate evidence of practice and language proficiency, citing learning and development and mentorship as the main benefits of the program.

Conclusion

Overall, the SPEP program had a positive impact on health human resources during its first three years. Seventy-five percent of applicants who were eligible used the program to meet the evidence of practice and, in some cases, the language proficiency requirements to become registered. During the first three years, there were a total of 4,335 new registrations that resulted from use of the SPEP program. Overall, 19% of CNO's new international registrations in 2022–2024 involved an applicant who took part in the program, indicating SPEP played a material role in facilitating the growth in new IEN registrations. There were 4,183 unique applicants who completed the SPEP program and became registered; the majority of applicants were internationally educated (92%), although the program also benefitted Ontario graduates, Canadian graduates, and applicants for reinstatement.

Another positive aspect of the SPEP program was related to retention of participants as CNO registrants and participant employment following the program. Almost all applicants who registered after completing SPEP renewed their registration the following year (96% in 2023; 94% in 2024; 98% in 2025), and completion of the SPEP program was associated with an increased rate of renewal compared to those who had registered without completing the program, especially for IENs. In addition, the group who completed SPEP and registered in the first three years reported employment settings and regions that mirrored the settings and regions where SPEP program placements occurred. This aligns with the findings from placement employers who were surveyed and had an applicant complete the SPEP program—72% had hired the applicant after the program. As well, only 6% of employment positions reported by registrants—positions obtained after completing SPEP and becoming registered—were outside of Ontario. Taken together, the data provides evidence that employers are using the program as a hiring pathway and that SPEP registrants are finding employment within Ontario in the same settings and regions where their SPEP placements took place. In addition, there were 1,981 employment positions in hospitals reported by registrants who completed SPEP and another 1,729 reported in long-term care facilities, suggesting that both hospitals and long-term care settings are benefiting from placements and employment positions being filled as a result of the SPEP program.

Furthermore, there was a relationship between program participation and the rate of inquiries, complaints and reports, during the period following initial registration. The SPEP registrants received slightly more report inquiries relative to non-SPEP registrants. When looking at report inquiries that had been closed, issues of knowledge, skill and judgement from the perspective of the reporter did not differ between the groups. Further work will be needed to determine why there is a difference in the rate of report inquiries and whether this pattern persists over time. As part of monitoring, it will also be important to consider that registration requirements have recently changed in 2025, including the introduction of a new Transition to Practice requirement that is meant to support the smooth and safe integration of new nurses into the Ontario health care system²⁷. Additionally, it is critical to take the findings of the inquiries analysis into account

²⁷ <https://cno.org/become-a-nurse/registration-requirements/transition-to-practice>



within the context of the other findings of the evaluation. For example, the survey of placement employers did not reveal any major concerns with practice or conduct among SPEP participants, and the overall rate of unsuccessful SPEP placements, defined as the placement employer indicating that they would not re-hire the candidate due to conduct or competency issues, was very low during the first three years of the program.

Regarding surveyed participant groups, the overall experience with the program was reported to be positive. Almost all surveyed registrants who completed the program and registered reported that the program met their goals (99%), and many preceptors indicated that the program met the goals of allowing applicants to demonstrate the evidence of practice and language proficiency registration requirements (80%). The experience of surveyed SPEP-eligible applicants was slightly less positive in comparison to registrants, with only 66% reporting a positive overall experience with the program. While 97% of eligible applicants surveyed were taking part in the program or planning to take part, many noted difficulties with finding a placement employer or communicating with the placement employer once they were matched. Many eligible applicants reported finding a SPEP placement employer on their own (56%). The matching process was also mentioned by registrants as an area for program improvement: 14% recommended making it faster and 15% recommended making it easier and clearer. In some cases (22%), surveyed placement employers mentioned that the supervision requirement of the program was an issue that impacted their ability to take on SPEP participants due to the limited availability of resources at their organizations.

Finally, there were many program benefits reported by surveyed groups. One of the most common benefits mentioned was related to the opportunity for applicants to learn and develop skills through the program. The ability to gain experience in the Canadian health care system was another common program benefit cited by several groups. Mentorship provided by a preceptor was also highlighted as a key program benefit and almost all eligible applicants actively participating in the program, and all applicants who had completed the program, felt supported by their preceptor.

Next Steps

CNO will continue to work with system partners to make the SPEP program available to eligible applicants who need to meet the evidence of practice, or evidence of practice and language proficiency, registration requirements. In addition, CNO will continue to track inquiries and gather additional data on outcomes from the Professional Conduct process related to the SPEP program. Data from the evaluation and ongoing monitoring activities will be used to help identify potential changes to the SPEP program moving forward.