

Ontario Hospital Nearly Halves Staff Turnover by Rewriting Their Wellness Playbook

Partnering with Excellence Canada, Health Sciences North cut employee turnover from 15% to 8%, not by adding programs, but by connecting ones they already had

TORONTO & SUDBURY, ON, CANADA, June 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- At a time when healthcare worker shortages and burnout dominate headlines across Canada, a Northeastern Ontario healthcare system has quietly achieved something most health systems are struggling to do: keep more of its people.

[Health Sciences North](#) (HSN), a regional hospital with a team of over 4,400, serving more than 557,000 people across Northeastern Ontario, has reduced employee turnover from over 15 percent to approximately 8 percent over three years, nearly cutting the rate in half, without launching a single new [wellness](#) program. Instead, HSN did something counterintuitive: it stopped adding initiatives and started intentionally connecting the ones it already had.

The approach, initiated in partnership with [Excellence Canada](#), is the subject of a new paper released today: *Connecting the Dots: Beyond Programs: How Excellence Canada is Supporting Health Sciences North as They Build a Culture of Connection*. The paper, part of Excellence Canada's Executive Insights Series, offers a concrete and replicable model for organizations mired in fragmented programs and struggling to show culture change at scale.



Excellence Canada Logo - Improving performance - recognizing excellence



Logo for Health Sciences North



Excellence Canada President, Sean Slater

The Problem Most Organizations Recognize but Can't Name

HSN's situation was familiar. Like most hospitals, it had invested in wellness initiatives, engagement surveys, occupational health and safety programs, accreditation, leadership development, and patient experience tracking. None of these were bad investments, but they operated in silos, with separate committees, separate champions, and separate reporting, creating what staff described as "initiative overload." Good work was happening. Almost none of it was connecting.

"Sometimes we forget what we do really well, but also where we need alignment," said Julie Dénomonné, Director of People, Safety and Development at HSN.

In 2025, rather than adding another program, HSN adopted the Excellence Canada Healthy Workplace Standard as an integration framework, a structure for connecting what already existed under a single system of governance, accountability, and continuous improvement. A diagnostic assessment confirmed HSN already had approximately 60 to 70 percent of the required elements in place. The gap was not effort. It was connection.

What Changed and What It Produced

By aligning accreditation, safety, wellness, and employee engagement under one framework, and embedding healthy workplace accountability directly into leadership performance management, HSN began to see measurable shifts:

- Employee turnover fell from over 15% to approximately 8% over three years
- Workplace violence incidents declined significantly, with improved staff reporting confidence
- Absenteeism decreased and workforce stability improved
- Early data shows improving patient experience scores
- Staff and leaders increasingly describe wellness, safety, and accreditation as parts of a single strategy rather than competing demands

In November 2025, HSN received the Canada Award for Excellence at the Essentials/Silver Level, national external third-party validation of its foundational systems.

"We really came to the conclusion that it's about empowering people," said Jessica Diplock, Vice President, People and Culture at HSN. "The Healthy Workplace Standard gave us a common framework to connect the important work already happening across our organization. Instead of asking people to engage with another initiative, we helped them see how everything fit together."

Leadership transparency was central to the shift. CEO David McNeil made a culture of trust and open communication the norm and tied accountability for healthy workplace outcomes directly to performance management systems.

"If you don't have structures and processes in place, it doesn't matter what your behavioural approach is," said McNeil. "Culture change isn't about launching more programs. It's about creating systems that connect people, priorities, and purpose. When those systems align, trust grows and performance follows."

None of this would have taken hold through leadership commitment alone. HSN's results were made possible by intentional, coordinated support that ran through every layer of the organization, from the executive team that embedded accountability into formal performance structures, to managers and department leads who translated that strategy into day-to-day decisions, to frontline staff and physicians whose lived experience shaped where the framework needed to flex. It was this alignment across levels, not a single directive from the top that has turned a vision into one coherent strategy, and made the resulting gains in turnover, safety, and engagement possible.

A Model Made for the Moment

Canada's healthcare system faces compounding pressures: chronic staffing shortages, post-pandemic burnout, tightening budgets, and growing demands on frontline workers. HSN's experience suggests that the answer may not be more investment. It may be better integration and alignment of what organizations already have.

The paper draws on extensive interviews with HSN physicians, nurses, patient and family advisors, frontline staff, and senior leaders, and is written for executives, HR leaders, and healthcare decision-makers facing similar challenges.

"Health Sciences North's story demonstrates that excellence is not achieved by doing more. It is achieved by connecting what matters most," said Sean Slater, President and CEO of Excellence Canada. "When wellness, safety, engagement, and organizational strategy intentionally align under a shared framework, culture becomes a measurable driver of performance, resilience, and long-term success."

The full paper, *Connecting the Dots*, is available at excellence.ca/hsn-executive-insights/

About Health Sciences North

Health Sciences North is Northeastern Ontario's regional specialized referral centre and academic health sciences centre, serving more than 557,000 people across 300,000 square kilometres. Through excellence in healthcare, research, and education, HSN is committed to improving health outcomes and advancing patient-centred care for the communities it serves.
About Excellence Canada

Excellence Canada is Canada's national authority on organizational excellence, healthy workplace practices, and continual improvement. Through its standards, certification programs, and

awards, Excellence Canada helps organizations build stronger cultures, improve performance, and achieve sustainable results.

Media Contacts:

Excellence Canada
Sean Slater, President & CEO
416-613-8724/ media@excellence.ca

Health Sciences North
Arron Pickard, Content Storytelling Communications Associate
705-919-0948/ apickard@hsnsudbury.ca

Sean Slater
Excellence Canada
+1 519-766-2853

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