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Right Care, Right Accountability: End Blame in Emergency Care
**A Joint Statement from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians and the
National Emergency Nurses Association**

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Emergency departments across Canada are subject to well-documented strain. Overcrowding, access block, and limited inpatient and community capacity create conditions that challenge even the most experienced clinicians.

In this environment, emergency department triage nurses are often placed in an untenable position—expected to make rapid, high-stakes decisions about patients in crowded, resource-constrained spaces, frequently without adequate sight lines, monitoring capacity, or timely access to downstream care. When adverse outcomes occur in waiting rooms or during periods of ED overcrowding, blame is too often misdirected toward these clinicians.

We want to be unequivocal: triage nurses should not be the focus of blame when system conditions lead to harm. These nurses are performing essential, highly skilled work within parameters defined by system capacity—not system control.

Misdirected blame is not a neutral act. It distorts accountability, obscures the true drivers of harm, and erodes psychological safety for frontline staff. Over time, it contributes to moral distress, burnout, and the loss of experienced clinicians from emergency care—outcomes that further weaken our already strained system.

A safe and effective emergency care system depends on clear accountability frameworks within a culture of patient safety. That means directing attention toward the structural issues driving overcrowding and delayed care, rather than finding fault with individual clinicians working within those constraints. The responsibility belongs with the decision makers to create a system where clinicians can work effectively and safely.

As we recognize National Nursing Week (May 11–17, 2026), we extend our deep appreciation to emergency nurses across Canada. Their clinical expertise, judgement, and commitment continue to sustain emergency care under increasingly difficult conditions.

We remain committed to advocating for a system that supports learning rather than blame, strengthens accountability at the system level, and ensures that emergency clinicians are enabled—not scapegoated—do deliver, high-quality care.

We call on federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work with CAEP and NENA to establish clear, consistent accountability frameworks for emergency care that prioritize system learning over individual blame.



These frameworks must distinguish clinical decision-making from system failure, support non-punitive review of adverse events in the spirit of just culture and embed real-time learning across emergency departments and health systems.

Canada has the expertise and evidence to build a true learning health system. What is needed now is coordinated action and sustained partnerships to make it a reality.

About NENA

The National Emergency Nurses Association (NENA) is the national voice for the highest standards and practices in emergency nursing and emergency departments across Canada.

NENA advocates and educates within the health community for the recognition and support of emergency nursing as a vital specialty in the field of health care. NENA also frequently publishes position statements on a wide range of topics pertaining to emergency nursing and the operation of emergency departments.

One of NENA's most important objectives is to promote the professional and skill development of emergency nurses, through educational exchange, networking, conferences and by offering and designing world class training courses such as the Trauma Nursing Core Course (TNCC), the Emergency Nursing Paediatric Course (ENPC), and the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS).

About CAEP

As the national voice of emergency medicine (EM), CAEP provides continuing medical education, advocates on behalf of emergency physicians and their patients, supports research and strengthens the EM community. In co-operation with other specialties and committees, CAEP also plays a vital role in the development of national standards and clinical guidelines. CAEP keeps Canadian emergency physicians informed of developments in the clinical practice of EM and addresses political and societal changes, that affect the delivery of emergency health care.

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