An additional 90 overseas nurses will be working in the Northern Territory hospital system over the next two years under a Bridging Program for International Qualified Nurses.

The Health Minister Chris Burns said the 90 nurses are qualified and registered in India.

“The first intake of 15 nurses began their 20-week training course a couple of weeks ago,” Dr Burns said.

“The bridging program builds on the first intake of 19 nurses from the University of Indonesia in 2006.

“Of those 19, nine successfully completed the course – eight of those remain employed at Royal Darwin Hospital, helping to boost our nursing workforce.

“We know there is a national and international shortage of nurses and the Territory is using strategies such as the international bridging program to attract nurses and provide quality care for Territorians.”

Dr Burns said the Department of Health runs the bridging program in collaboration with the Charles Darwin University.

“The nurses have already been assessed for competency in English but will undertake a 10-week course specifically concentrating on medical terminology. They will also undergo 10 weeks of clinical theory and practice with particular emphasis on health issues in the NT to maximise their integration into our health system,” he said.

“The nurses will undertake their clinical placements at Royal Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs hospitals.”

Once the 90 nurses successfully complete the bridging program, they will be eligible to apply for registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of the NT and seek sponsorship with the Department of Health under a 457 visa.

Another five intakes of 15 nurses from India are planned for 2009 and 2010.