

Nursing Leadership's 2023 Advocacy Priorities

A qualified, engaged, diverse workforce is health care's most precious resource. Health organizations cannot care for patients without health care workers. Prior to the pandemic, hospitals were already facing significant challenges, making it difficult to sustain, build and retain the health care workforce. In 2017, the majority of our nursing workforce was close to retirement, with more than half age 50 and older, and almost 30% age 60 and older. Yet, nursing schools had to turn away nearly 92,000 qualified applicants in 2021 due to lack of faculty, classroom space and clinical training sites.

Clinicians reported feelings of extreme stress and anxiety on the job. A National Academy of Medicine report indicated 35-54% of U.S. nurses and physicians had symptoms of burnout, which it characterizes as high emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a low sense of personal accomplishment from work.

The result of these mounting pressures on the health care workforce has created a historic crisis complete with real-time short-term staffing shortages and a daunting long-range picture of an unfulfilled talent pipeline. Just within the week of February 9, Department of Health and Human Services data showed 623 hospitals (or 16.7% of reporting hospitals) anticipated a critical staffing shortage. In addition, projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates U.S. health care organizations will have to fill more than 203,000 open nursing positions every year until 2031.

Our workforce challenges are a national emergency demanding immediate attention from all levels of government and workable solutions. We urge your support for efforts to ensure an adequate, sustainable nursing workforce including:

1. Increase the Health Care Workforce and Strengthen Capacity

- Expedite visas for foreign-trained nurses and physicians in medically underserved areas.
- Award scholarships and assist graduates of health professions programs with loan repayment in return for an obligation to provide patient care in underserved rural and urban areas.
- Reduce administrative burdens taking clinicians away from the bedside and contributing to burnout, such as excessive and unnecessary use of prior authorization.
- Make permanent telehealth flexibilities allowed during the public health emergency, including expanding eligible telehealth practitioners, lifting site restrictions limiting where patients can use telehealth, and allowing billing for audio-only telephone and video services.
- Extend the CMS Acute Hospital Care At Home waiver, allowing patients to receive care in their home through a daily in-person or remote evaluation by a nurse.
- Remove federal barriers for states to allow out-of-state providers to perform telehealth services.

2. Protect Health Care Workers From Workplace Violence

- Enact federal protection for health care workers against violence and intimidation.
- Provide hospital grant funding for violence prevention training programs, equipment and technology to create a safer environment.

3. Address Nurse Faculty and Clinical Site Shortages

- Invest in nursing schools to ensure nursing education pathways remain strong during PHEs.
- Support nursing schools, students, faculty, preceptors and education infrastructure by providing resources to hire and retain a diverse faculty, as well as enroll and retain nursing students.
- Modernize nursing curriculum, technology and simulation labs.
- Establish nurse-led interdisciplinary and interprofessional educational partnerships.

About AONL

As the national professional organization of more than 11,000 nurse leaders, the American Organization for Nursing Leadership is the voice of nursing leadership. Our membership encompasses nurse leaders working in hospitals, health systems, academia and other settings across the care continuum. Since 1967, AONL has advanced nursing leadership practice and patient care through professional development, advocacy and research. AONL is an affiliate of the American Hospital Association.

If you have questions regarding AONL's policy or advocacy efforts, please contact Stacey Chappell, director, advocacy and external communications, at 202-321-2392 or schappell@aha.org.