



ANA-PAC 2008 Presidential Candidate Questionnaire

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1. The American Nurses Association holds a fundamental belief that health care is a basic human right and supports restructuring health care in order to provide access to affordable essential health care services to all residents of the United States, regardless of pre-existing conditions. ANA further believes that health care services should be reorganized to concentrate on community-based primary care and preventive care while also focusing on better control of rising health care costs. How do you plan to address the issue of providing adequate health care coverage for the uninsured and underinsured?

I was proud to be the first major presidential candidate to propose a specific plan to guarantee truly universal health care for every man, woman and child in America. My plan takes on big insurance and drug companies, which we need to do to get the change we want. Under my plan, businesses will either cover their employees or help pay their premiums. The government will make insurance affordable through new tax credits and by leading the way toward more cost-effective care. New "Health Care Markets" will give families and businesses purchasing power and a choice of quality plans, including one public plan based on Medicare. Finally, once these steps have been taken, all American residents will be required to take responsibility and get insurance. Over time, the system may evolve toward a single-payer approach if individuals and businesses prefer the public plan.

America spends more per person on health care than anywhere else in the world, but the results of all that spending are often disappointing. Under my plan, families without insurance will get coverage at an affordable price. Families that have insurance today will pay less and get more security and choices. Businesses and other employers will find it cheaper and easier to insure their workers. I have proposed steps that will save an average family \$2,000 to \$2,500 a year and eliminate at least \$130 billion a year in wasteful health care spending.

Structural reforms in my plan will achieve significant savings. Universal coverage will bring down premiums. The cost of caring for the uninsured adds \$922 to an average family policy. Health Care Markets will bring down costs for small businesses through negotiating power and administrative efficiencies. Giving individuals in Health Care Markets a choice of insurance plans including a public plan based on Medicare will force private insurers to operate in a more competitive market holding down costs and improving care. I will also require insurers to keep plans open to everyone and charge fair premiums, regardless of preexisting conditions.

Starting with Medicare and the plans available through Health Care Markets, I will help encourage primary, preventive, and chronic care through new reimbursement rules. Primary care providers will guide care for patients to make sure they are getting proven treatment from a coordinated team. I will also require preventive care coverage, with public plans offering preventive care with little or no copayments, and provide incentives for patients to participate.



- a) **Describe what benefits and services you believe should be included in basic health care coverage.**

Under my health plan, every American would be covered for primary, chronic, and preventive care, hospital stays, prescription drugs, catastrophic illnesses and mental health. Families should also have a choice of affordable, additional coverage.

- b) **Describe the mechanism you believe would best finance such coverage.**

We need to be honest about the cost of universal health care. My plan costs \$90 billion to \$120 billion a year. I will generate the necessary revenue primarily by repealing the Bush administration tax cuts on families earning more than \$200,000 a year. In addition, my plan will reduce costs for businesses and government by eliminating the cost of treating the uninsured, increasing bargaining power and reducing administrative costs, improving the quality of medicine and investing in cost-effective preventive care.

- c) **What is your position on coverage of mental health services?**

There is a mental health epidemic in this country, but stigma and cost keep us from fully addressing these issues. Under my universal health care plan, there will be full mental health parity, including substance abuse treatment.

2. What policy initiatives would you propose to ensure that Americans receive safe, cost-effective, comprehensive, quality comprehensive health care services?

As I discussed previously, I have proposed a detailed plan that guarantees quality, affordable health care for every single man, woman and child in America. All plans will include comprehensive benefits.

- a) **What is your position on legislation or regulations that would require health care facilities to develop and implement systems that ensure appropriate and safe registered nurse staffing levels?**

Nurses are the backbone of our health care system, yet there are far fewer nurses than our hospitals, health clinics, and nursing homes need. As a result, Americans are paying more and getting less from their health care. I believe that we need rules to assure appropriate staffing levels. It is nurses themselves who understand what is required by the job and they must be



involved in developing those rules. Safe staffing levels should be determined on a unit-by-unit level.

3. How would you seek to address the severe nursing shortage facing this country?

We cannot provide true universal health care without strengthening the nursing profession. We need to make a serious investment in nursing, starting today. To ensure my plan succeeds and delivers quality health care for everyone, I will invest the resources we need to add 100,000 nurses within five years – by improving working conditions to retain and bring back 50,000 nurses and graduating 50,000 new nurses.

- a) What is your position on measures that address working conditions for registered nurses and the safety of their patients, such as legislation prohibiting the use of mandatory overtime as a staffing tool, and “whistleblower protections” that would support nurses’ right to speak without reprisal about activities, practices, or conditions that threaten the health and safety of their patients or the environment?**

Nearly 450,000 RNs are not working as nurses today, deterred by long hours, unsafe workplaces, low compensation and a lack of respect. Many hospitals, for example, have responded to the nursing shortage by increasing the number of patients that each nurse is responsible for and forcing nurses to work dangerously-long shifts – often more than 12 hours at a time.

When hospitals force nurses to work more than 12 hours at a time, it becomes difficult for nurses to provide top-quality care and they are more likely to quit their jobs. We need a national solution. As president, I will ban mandatory overtime for nurses, with limited, temporary exemptions for truly understaffed areas.

I have proposed stronger protections and greater incentives for health professionals who report health and safety problems in hospitals. Current whistleblower laws are a patchwork of coverage that often allow workers to be harassed, fired and even blacklisted for pointing to violations of law or waste, fraud and abuse. As president, I will strengthen protections for workers who report injuries or unsafe conditions, including an expedited process for hearing complaints of retaliation. I will also allow the Secretary of Labor to require companies to temporarily rehire whistleblowers while their case is heard. Workers deserve to know that they can speak up in the workplace. We need to ensure that whistleblowers are protected, not punished.

- b) What measures would you support to encourage more people to enter and stay in the field of nursing? What level of federal funding would you provide for Title VIII programs and the Nurse Reinvestment Act to ensure sufficient numbers of qualified**



nurses are available to provide a full range of nursing services in all geographic areas?

Educating and training the next generation of health care workers is essential to meeting the increased demand of a universal health care system. As president, I will make the federal investments necessary to add 50,000 new nurses to the profession within five years.

To add new nurses to critical shortage areas, I will provide funding for up to full tuition and fees for 50,000 new students to become nurses. In return, these nurses would agree to serve for at least four years in areas where nurses are in critically short supply, such as rural hospitals and urban public hospitals.

In addition, to ensure that schools have the resources to provide the new students with high-quality training, I will invest to increase the capacity of the nation's nursing schools – including training and recruiting nursing faculty -- by 30 percent to meet the challenge of the nursing shortage. I will also support distance learning initiatives that can help bring advanced training to rural areas.

Classroom training is vital, but there is no substitute for experience. I will support training partnerships of nursing schools and hospitals, like medical schools already have. To reach a new generation of nurses, I will help high schools implement career education programs in nursing that combine applied skills with rigorous academics.

There are hundreds of thousands of low-wage health care workers in hospitals and home care agencies across the country with the dedication and familiarity with the field to become professional nurses – but they don't have the time or money to go to nursing school. I will support Career Ladder partnerships, where employers and unions help low-wage health care workers and displaced workers from other sectors move up the skills ladder with on-the-job training, time off for training and guaranteed placement.

4. Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) play a crucial role in providing health care services in our nation's most underserved areas. These nurses typically hold degrees at the highest levels of education and receive advanced training in specialty areas of practice (i.e. Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Midwives, and Clinical Nurse Specialists, among others). Despite the resolution of many practice and reimbursement issues, APRNs still experience discrimination and barriers to practice in our health care system. What is your position on the full utilization of APRNs?

- a) **Given that APRNs typically serve underserved communities, what is your position regarding APRNs as primary care providers in community settings?**



Advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) in all their forms -- nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, certified registered nurse anesthetist, and certified nurse-midwife – offer critical services to patients everyday. These nurses are skilled and experienced, meeting advanced educational and clinical practice requirements beyond the already stringent registered nurse requirements. To respond successfully to the current health care crisis, we have to use all resources available. That means ensuring APRNs are fully utilized in concert with physicians and in a way that ensures that patients receive the quality care that they need.

5. On-the-job injuries caused by the strain of lifting and repositioning patients cause 12% of nurses to leave the profession annually. The average nurse working an 8 hour shift is currently required to lift 1.8 tons. If elected, how would you require health care facilities to invest in safe patient lifting technology to reduce the risk of workplace injuries to nurses?

The simple act of doing your job should not cause you harm. I will instruct the Department of Health and Human Services to lead a nationwide initiative on nursing safety and establish a presidential commission to recommend improvements in the nursing workplace, including safe patient handling and protections from pandemic flu. In addition, as president, I will implement a broad, mandatory ergonomics rule and appoint OSHA officials who are committed to enforcing it.

6. The Centers for Disease Control has confirmed the presence of hundreds of potentially harmful chemicals in the blood, urine, and breast milk of the U.S. population. Even more, toxic chemicals have also been detected in umbilical cord blood, indicating the ability of these chemicals to cross the placenta and reach the fetus. The incidence of diseases thought to have an environmental component are on the rise: Asthma prevalence has doubled in ten years; autism has increased more than tenfold; 1 in 6 children are born with a developmental disability; and a woman’s lifetime risk of breast cancer is now 1 in 7. What is your plan to create a healthy environment in order to reduce the rates of environmental causes of illness?

I have proposed three initiatives to reduce environmental health risks. We need a better understanding of what concerns are real. We need stronger disclosure laws to help us identify risks. And we need stronger enforcement of existing laws, especially in low-income and minority communities.

We don’t know enough about what factors in the environment – in the air, the water and elsewhere – cause cancer. We need more research to collect and analyze the evidence, allay concerns and take corrective action dictated by science. I support a new national initiative to study the role environmental factors play in the development of cancer.



Americans have no information on the toxicity of at least 60 percent of the most common and pervasive chemicals, even those suspected to be carcinogenic. I will improve Americans' right-to-know about toxic, potentially carcinogenic substances in their consumer products and communities. I will reverse the Bush EPA's December 2006 rule shielding polluters from increased disclosure, and make the reports easier for regular Americans to search and understand. I will also strengthen the EPA and FDA's power to require testing and labeling of potentially toxic chemicals in foods and consumer products.

Proximity to toxic waste is more closely correlated with race than with any other factor. Pollution and brownfields are concentrated in low-income neighborhoods where big corporations think that the people will not fight back. To give communities the tools to defend their rights, we must maintain access to the courts and vigorous enforcement of our civil rights laws, including reversal of the Supreme Court's misguided decision in *Sandoval v. Alexander* with respect to injunctive relief. We must also do more to make Clean Air Act enforcement as vigorous in Texas and Louisiana as it is in California. I am committed to equal justice for all Americans, and that includes equal environmental justice.