

Statement for the Record
American Nurses Association
Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do We Go From Here?
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
February 16, 2023

The American Nurses Association (ANA), representing the interests of the nation’s 4.4 million registered nurses (RN) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), commends the Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions for convening this hearing on “Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do We Go From Here?,” and appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

ANA is committed to advancing the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting a safe and ethical work environment, bolstering the health and wellness of nurses, and advocating on health care issues that affect nurses and the public. ANA is at the forefront of improving quality of health care for all. Nurses work in a variety of health care settings, including in rural, urban, and underserved areas. They also work in a variety of specialties, and, for many, they are the sole and trusted provider in a community.

Nursing is a complicated field requiring the RN to not only understand hard sciences but also develop the emotional intelligence to empathize with patients and families. They must have sound critical thinking skills, react to rapidly changing situations, be physically and mentally strong, and not fatigued to be successful. Patients go to hospitals for nursing care and hospitals cannot operate without RNs.

Current challenges with nurse staffing shortages are not new—this crisis has been growing for decades and was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The nursing shortage harms not only nurses, but patients as well, as studies show quality care decreases when nurses are stretched too thin.

ANA urges Congress to take meaningful action in the three areas highlighted below to increase the number of nurses educated and alleviate the burden on those who have served their communities throughout the pandemic. These actions will help to ensure a robust, appropriately valued workforce both now and in the future.

Increasing the Nursing Workforce Pipeline

ANA urges the Committee to address the nurse shortage crisis by considering and passing the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (S.246/H.R.851 in the 117th Congress) which supports nursing educational programs to grow, hire more faculty, and strengthen the future workforce of nurses.

Expanding the number of nurses to respond to the current and future needs of the population is a critical step towards solving the shortage, especially in rural and underserved areas. A well-prepared nurse workforce that is adequately supported is critical now and in the event of any future public health emergencies to ensure patients have continued access to quality, needed services.

Addressing Workplace Violence

An important factor in addressing health care workforce shortages is ensuring protections in the workplace through a workplace violence prevention standard. Nurses are four times as likely to experience violence at work than other professions. All of this has increased significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, ANA urges the Committee to consider and pass the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act (S. 4182/H.R. 1195 in the 117th Congress). This legislation has passed the U.S. House of Representatives twice with bipartisan support. It requires the Department of Labor (DOL) to issue an interim, and later final, occupational safety and health standard that requires employers to take actions to protect workers and other personnel from workplace violence within one year. DOL has said they are working on a standard for more than a decade. One in four nurses are assaulted at work. Nurses are more abused than police officers and prison guards. These statistics are unacceptable and workplace violence must be addressed as the Committee explores solutions to provider shortages.

Nurse Burnout

During the COVID-19 pandemic, everyday Americans saw thousands of stories about nurses quitting their jobs, retiring early, or leaving the profession altogether. The issues that caused nurses to leave are not new – they’re decades in the making. They all contribute to “burnout” amongst nurses. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that more than half a million RNs would retire by the end of 2022 and projects the need for 1.1 million new RNs. Burnout and resulting shortages will only get worse unless Congress, the Administration, and health care facilities act to place more value on RNs and improve their work environments.

Major contributing factors to nurse burnout include being forced to work more hours in a shift or over the course of a week than an individual nurse determines is safe for patients and their own mental and physical well-being.

As the Committee considers policy solutions to address mental well-being and burnout, ANA stands ready to work with Senators on this important topic.

Thank you for your leadership in holding this hearing and giving nurses the opportunity to provide input on the critical topic of ensuring the nursing workforce is robust today and in the future. ANA stands ready to work with the Committee to implement policy solutions to comprehensively address the nation’s health workforce challenges. If you have any questions, please contact Tim Nanof, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Tim.Nanof@ana.org.