

Statement for the Record
American Nurses Association
Ready or Not: U.S. Public Health Infrastructure
House Appropriations Labor, Health, and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
February 24, 2021

The American Nurses Association (ANA), representing the interests of the nation's 4.2 million registered nurses, commends the House Appropriations Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee for convening the hearing titled "Ready or Not: the U.S. Public Health Infrastructure", 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.

The nation's public health infrastructure and workforce have been underfunded for decades. Federal funds for state, local, and tribal public health preparedness were cut from \$940 million in 2002 to \$675 million in 2019. During the same time period, health care emergency preparedness was cut by nearly fifty percent, from \$515 million in 2004 to \$265 million in 2019. This has resulted in a loss of 55,000 public health workers since 2008. The current COVID-19 public health emergency has underscored that our nation must be better equipped with preparedness and response personnel, measures and processes. This is not only important during the time of crisis, but generally to address the overall health and well-being of our population.

The public health nursing workforce touches every aspect of health care and community well-being. Unfortunately, we can only imagine how different the coronavirus response would have been, had greater public health infrastructure investment afforded availability of sufficient numbers of nurses and other public health personnel in areas of the greatest need. Nurses could have played an enhanced role in encouraging and administering COVID-19 tests in high-risk populations, conducting contact tracing at an effective pace, educating the public about vaccine safety and all facets of COVID-19 prevention and mitigation, informing school opening protocols, and collecting data for feedback to pandemic response efforts.

Congress now has an opportunity to look to the future and begin to rebuild our public health infrastructure and workforce, where public health nurses serve as the first line of prevention in mitigating threats to the health of the U.S. population. ANA encourages the Subcommittee to invest in the nation's public health infrastructure and provide resources to educate and train the next generation of public health workers.

Thank you for giving nurses the opportunity to provide input on the importance of the nation's public health infrastructure. ANA stands ready to work with the Subcommittee to find and implement sustainable solutions regarding this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact Ingrida Lusis, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Ingrid.Lusis@ana.org.