

## Statement for the Record American Nurses Association VA's Federal Supremacy Initiative: Putting Veterans First? House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health

## **September 19, 2023**

The American Nurses Association (ANA) would like to thank the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health for this opportunity to submit a statement for the record with respect to the subcommittee's oversight hearing on "VA's Federal Supremacy Initiative: Putting Veterans First?" As the voice of our nation's nurses, ANA is committed to working with the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to ensure that our nation's veterans and their families have access to highly qualified healthcare professionals during their time of need. With this mission in mind and given how nurses provide care for VA patients on a national basis, ANA supports the VA's ongoing efforts to develop national practice standards for nurses and other providers. This initiative gives nurses needed flexibility to practice across state lines, improving VA capacity to meet veterans' needs in more areas of the country.

The VA has struggled for years to recruit and retain nurses and other healthcare professionals, which has in turn adversely impacted veterans' access to timely, high-quality care. This predicament has gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report published last year by the VA' Office of Inspector General, 91 percent of VA facilities reported severe shortages for nurses during Fiscal Year 2022.<sup>1</sup> As the VA works to address this nursing shortage crisis, it cannot afford to underutilize its existing nursing workforce.

Registered Nurses (RNs) have a critical role in the care of patients within the VA. RNs are frequently the provider who has the most contact with patients, and therefore offer unique insights into the needs of their patients. Unfortunately, nurse burnout is worsening the shortage of nurses nationwide. ANA's most recent survey shows that almost half of nurses are considering leaving their current position and a lower, but not insignificant, percent are considering changing professions and leaving nursing entirely.<sup>2</sup> This would allow RNs to practice at the top of their license and would provide flexibility to the VA by allowing nurses to practice where they are most needed within the VA system.

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) play a vital role in providing anesthesia care across the care continuum, ranging from general anesthesia to regional anesthesia to non-opioid pain management. Past studies have shown that CRNAs can render high-quality

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2022 (va.gov)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus/what-you-need-to-know/annual-survey--third-year

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anesthesia care without physician supervision.<sup>3</sup> In fact, CRNAs in other federal health systems and the armed services have been granted full practice authority. This is why it is crucial for the VA to promptly develop and issue national standards that empower Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) employed within the VA healthcare system to practice to the full extent of their education and licensure.

In closing, ANA appreciates this opportunity to share the nursing community's perspective on how the VA can utilize the federal supremacy initiative to expand access to care for veterans and their families. We stand ready to work with this subcommittee and the full committee to advance this mission. Should you have any questions, please reach out to Tim Nanof, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Tim.Nanof@ana.org.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2008.0966