

Testimony Prepared for the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
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*Submitted by: Jean Giddens, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN, Board Chair
American Association of Colleges of Nursing*

Maximizing the Current and Future Nursing Workforce

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), we would like to thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding leadership and support for nursing education, the nursing profession, and nursing research. As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN represents more than 875 schools of nursing at private and public universities, who educate more than 520,000 students and employ more than 57,000 faculty.¹ Collectively, these institutions graduate registered nurses (RN), advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), educators, researchers, and frontline providers. Given ongoing nursing shortages and the need to meet the growing demand for healthcare, investing in nursing workforce and research programs is crucial. AACN strongly urges your support of at least **\$530 million for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs** (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act [42 U.S.C. 296 et seq.], administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and at least **\$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)** in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Further, given proposals from and efforts by the Administration to reorganize programs within the Department of Health and Human Services and reduce funding for HRSA, AACN strongly encourages the Committee to maintain and prioritize Nursing Workforce Development Programs and NINR to ensure that all Americans have access to the high-quality care provided by nurses. As President Trump stated in his May 6th recognition of National Nurses Day, “from the frontlines of war to our local hospitals, nurses have shown an unwavering commitment to those in need, serving others and providing hope, help, and healing during times of crisis.”²

Landscape Overview: The Growing Nursing Workforce Demand

Nurses comprise the largest sector of the healthcare workforce, with nearly five million RNs and APRNs, which include Nurse Practitioners, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, Certified Nurse-Midwives, and Clinical Nurse Specialists.³ From the classrooms to the frontlines, we know first-hand how critical a well-educated nursing workforce is to providing high-quality healthcare. For example, nurses with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree have demonstrated abilities that benefit patients and other healthcare providers. BSN-prepared nurses are linked to an increased survival rate from cardiac arrest,⁴ lower inpatient mortality in

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2025). Who We Are. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/about-aacn>

² The White House. Message on National Nurses Day, 2025 (May 2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/05/message-on-national-nurses-day-2025/>

³ National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2025). Active RN Licenses: A profile of nursing licensure in the US. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncsbn.org/nursing-regulation/national-nursing-database/licensure-statistics/active-rn-licenses.page>

⁴ AACN’s Fact Sheet on the Impact of Education on Nursing Practice, Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Fact-Sheets/Education-Impact-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

hospitals,⁵ and shorter hospital stays.⁶ Further, the need for nurses with BSN and advanced preparation is expected to intensify. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics is projecting the demand for RNs to increase by 6% through 2033,⁷ and by 40% for certain APRN roles.⁸ This amounts to approximately 194,500 job openings for RNs⁹ and 31,900 job openings for APRNs¹⁰ projected every year for the next decade.

To meet this demand, the nation looks to nursing education. However, sustaining student enrollment in baccalaureate and graduate programs continues to be a challenge at U.S. schools of nursing, underscoring the pressing need for further federal investment. While AACN's latest survey shows enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increased by only 0.3% (or 825 students) from 2022-2023,¹¹ nursing schools saw enrollment decline in baccalaureate degree-completion programs and graduate programs at the master's and PhD levels, posing a threat to our ability to meet the nation's healthcare needs. Declines in graduate nursing programs are of great concern, as these programs help prepare individuals for critical roles in administration, teaching, research, informatics, and direct patient care. These enrollment realities, coupled with approximately 1,693 full-time faculty vacancies across the country, illustrate how vital funding for nursing education is to preparing nurses to meet the healthcare needs of our communities, including those in rural and underserved areas.¹² As we work to support population health and ensure patients have access to the nursing care they need, continued investment in nursing education and research is imperative.

Investments in Nursing Education Support a Stronger Nursing Workforce

Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs address all aspects of nursing demand, including education, practice, recruitment, and retention. In fact, each Title VIII program provides a unique and crucial contribution to keeping the nation healthy. For example, the Advanced Nursing Education (ANE) Programs help increase the number of APRNs in the primary care workforce, including support for more than 8,000 students in Academic Year (AY) 2022-2023 alone.¹³ Historically, we have seen more than 6,900 APRNs graduated from the Advanced Nursing Education Workforce program from AY 2017 through 2022, many of whom completed their education in rural and medically underserved communities.¹⁴ In the same timeframe, the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) supported 2,746 nursing students who

⁵ Porat-Dahlerbruch, J., Aiken, L. H., Lasater, K. B., Sloane, D. M., & McHugh, M. D. (2022, March). Variations in nursing baccalaureate education and 30-day inpatient surgical mortality. *Nursing Outlook*, 70(2), 300-308. Retrieved from: [https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554\(21\)00232-3/abstract](https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554(21)00232-3/abstract)

⁶ Lasater, K. B., Sloane, D. M., McHugh, M. D., Porat-Dahlerbruch, J., & Aiken, L. H. (2021). Changes in proportion of bachelor's nurses associated with improvements in patient outcomes. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 44(5), 787-795. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8440404/>

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook-Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook-Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nurse-practitioners.htm>

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook-Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook-Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nurse-practitioners.htm>

¹¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2024). New AACN Data Points to Enrollment Challenges Facing U.S. Schools of Nursing Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-aacn-data-points-to-enrollment-challenges-facing-us-schools-of-nursing>

¹² American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2024). Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions for Academic Year 2024-2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Reports/Faculty-Vacancy-Report-2024.pdf>

¹³ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification. Pages 143-146. Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250308124649/https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2025.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid

intend to serve as future nurse faculty.¹⁵ A shortage of faculty at schools of nursing remains a leading barrier to preparing enough nurses to meet workforce needs.

In support of national nursing needs and strengthening the healthcare workforce, Nurse Education, Practice, Quality, and Retention (NEPQR) programs, “aim to increase the number of nursing students exposed to meaningful clinical experiences and training in medically underserved and rural communities, who will then be more likely to choose to work in these settings upon graduation.”¹⁶ In AY 2022-2023, NEPQR programs trained 10,342 nursing students and nurses, ultimately helping improve care access and increase nurse retention.¹⁷ To ensure the stability of the nursing workforce now and in the future, AACN requests **at least \$530 million for Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs in FY 2026.**

From Research to Reality: Nursing Science Protects Americans’ Health

AACN recognizes that scientific research and discovery are the foundation on which nursing practice is built and is essential to advancing evidence-based interventions, informing policy, and sustaining the health of the nation. As one of the 27 Institutes and Centers at NIH, NINR is integral to improving care and is on the cutting edge of new innovations that impact how nurses are educated and how they practice. According to a 2019 report, “NINR funds 80% of training grants and >70% of Center grants, which support the education and infrastructure for research, respectively, at Schools of Nursing.”¹⁸ Yet, a separate report states that, “NINR funding is inadequate relative to the number of doctoral programs in nursing,” and that the NINR budget would need to “increase at least fivefold” to “adequately fund nursing science.”¹⁹

It is through NINR funding that nurse scientists, often working collaboratively with other health professionals, are generating groundbreaking findings and improving patient care. A few examples of the transformational work NINR has supported includes nurse scientists developing a transitional care model for early discharges; improving infant health that saves approximately \$18,560 per infant in hospital and physician costs;²⁰ and identifying the hallmarks of positive care environments linked to reduce turnover and burnout, as well as improved patient safety and satisfaction.²¹

Nurse scientists and researchers at NINR and across NIH are working collaboratively with others, breaking down silos, serving as faculty to future nurses, and informing best practices, all while contributing to a stronger healthcare system through patient-centered care across the

¹⁵ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification. Pages 154-156. Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250308124649/https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2025.pdf>

¹⁶ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification. Pages 151-153. Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250308124649/https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2025.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Schnall, R. (2019). National Institute of Health (NIH) funding patterns in Schools of Nursing: Who is funding nursing science research and who is conducting research at Schools of Nursing? *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 36(1), 34-41. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S8755722319301164?via=ihub#>

¹⁹ Kiely, D. P. & Wysocki, A. B. (2020). Federal funding of nursing research by the National Institutes of Health (NIH): 1993 to 2017. *Nursing Outlook*, 68(3), 270-283. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S002965541930315X>

²⁰ Cantelon, P. L. (2010, September). National Institute of Nursing Research, NINR, Bringing Science to Life. Page 87-88. Retrieved from: https://www.ninr.nih.gov/sites/default/files/NINR_History_Book_508.pdf

²¹ The National Institute of Nursing Research, Changing Practice, Changing Lives: 10 Landmark Nursing Research Studies. Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-HE20-PURL-gpo29659/pdf/GOVPUB-HE20-PURL-gpo29659.pdf>

lifespan. To further this vital work, we are requesting Congress provide a total of **at least \$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research, retain NINR as an independent institute within NIH, and support nurse scientists and researchers in FY 2026.**

The Administration's FY 2026 skinny budget proposes an overall reduction of \$1.732 billion for programs under HRSA, including a \$1 billion decrease for multiple health workforce programs. Additionally, the Administration's FY 2026 skinny budget proposes eliminating funding for NINR entirely.²² Years of evidence has shown that supporting Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs and NINR is critical to sustaining a strong nursing workforce and addressing ongoing nursing shortages, as well as supporting nursing education and research. Therefore, AACN respectfully requests **at least \$530 million for the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs and at least \$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research** in FY 2026. Together, we can ensure that such strategic investments for current and future nurses will yield immeasurable benefits by helping promote innovation and improving the health of all Americans. Protecting and investing in these vital nursing programs is critical to achieving the President's vision of addressing, "the root causes of chronic disease, reduce its prevalence, and ensure that nurses have the support they need in order to continue providing life-saving care."²³

²² Executive Office of the President. President's FY 2026 Discretionary Budget Request (May 2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf>

²³ The White House. Message on National Nurses Day, 2025 (May 2025). Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/05/message-on-national-nurses-day-2025/>