American Association
of Colleges of Nursing

October 31, 2026

Courtney F. Aklin, PhD
Director
National Institute of Nursing Research
National Institutes of Health
31 Center Drive, Room 5B03
Bethesda, MD 20892

RE: [NOT-NR-26-001] Request for Information (RFI): Inviting Comments and Suggestions on the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2031

Dear Director Aklin,

As the national voice for academic nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the National Institute of Nursing Research's (NINR) Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2031. AACN represents more than 890 schools of nursing at public and private universities nationwide.[1] Our institutions educate more than 570,000 baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate nursing students and employ more than 58,000 faculty members.[2] Together, our member schools are committed to preparing a highly educated nursing workforce, strengthening the foundation of nursing science, and advancing innovative solutions to meet the nation's ever-changing healthcare needs.

We recognize that strong investment in nursing research and enhanced pathways for nurse scientists are essential to advancing scientific discovery, strengthening the evidence base for healthcare delivery, and improving patient and population health outcomes. As NINR charts a path forward, AACN is committed to ongoing collaboration with you to improve health for all and implement approaches that improve care and promote better outcomes. In reflection of the key areas outlined in this RFI, AACN offers the following recommendations for NINR's 2027-2031 Strategic Plan:

1. Sustain investment in foundational areas of nursing science across the lifespan and continuum of care.
2. Strengthen the nursing research workforce through increased visibility, sustained funding, and mentorship.
3. Support innovation and strengthen research capacity.
4. Prioritize implementation science and research on real-world delivery across care settings.
5. Examine how conditions of daily life influence intervention efficacy and health outcomes.
6. Expand partnerships that connect scientific discovery with clinical practice and community needs.
7. Ensure nurse scientists are represented on National Institutes of Health (NIH) review branches, advisory committees, and councils.

Recommendation 1: Sustain investment in foundational areas of nursing science across the lifespan and continuum of care.

NINR should continue to prioritize research that examine how nursing care influences health and well-being over time. Nursing science is based on a wholistic approach that considers not only physical health, but also mental health, behavior health, relationships, caregiving, and other environmental factors that shape how people experience health and illness. AACN recommends that NINR:

[1] American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2026) About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Retrieved from: https://www.aacnnursing.org/About-AACN.
[2] Ibid.

1. Sustain research on symptom science, prevention, acute and chronic diseases, treatment management, community and population health, and adaptation across the lifespan.
2. Investigate how nursing interventions support patients beyond clinical encounters, including through daily routines, community resources, caregiving responsibilities, and transitions between care settings.
3. Strengthen research on systems and models of care to ensure nursing science is translated into meaningful improvements in healthcare delivery.

These foundational areas will help NINR advance research that improves long-term health outcomes and quality of life and supports patients and families.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the nursing research workforce through increased visibility, sustained funding, and mentorship.

A strong nursing research enterprise depends on sustaining pathways for nurse scientists and providing the institutional resources needed to support their careers. Declining PhD nursing enrollment,[3] limited research-focused doctoral opportunities, and competition between research careers and clinical or academic employment threaten the future of nursing science. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Strengthen nurse scientist pathways through sustained support of PhD-prepared nurses as well as structured mentorships programs and cross-institutional networks that connect emerging researchers with current nurse scientists who have active research programs and can provide meaningful guidance.
2. Increase the visibility and earlier exposure of nurse scientists in clinical and academic settings to demonstrate how research advances nursing practice and improves health outcomes, while also encouraging and incentivizing clinicians and students to pursue careers as nurse scientists and researchers.
3. Promote long-term career stability by providing predictable funding, protected research time, and competitive salary support.
4. Expand support for nurse scientists through institutional training grants, individual fellowships, and other career development opportunities and awards.
5. Bolster research capacity across institutions by improving access to research resources, experienced research faculty, and collaborative training opportunities.
6. Inform the public by demonstrating how nursing research improves health outcomes, drives innovation, and benefits communities.

Sustained investments that support careers in nursing science will help retain nurse scientists, strengthen nursing research capacity, and ensure that future generations of nurse scientists have the resources and mentorship necessary to advance in the field. NIH's recent announcement of record funding for early-career investigators and a new initiative to recruit emerging scientists[4] are important steps toward strengthening the nation's research workforce that should be replicated within NINR. AACN encourages NINR to build on this momentum.

---

[3] American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (October 2026) Fact Sheet: Nursing Faculty Shortage. Page 2. Retrieved from: https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Fact-Sheets/Faculty-Shortage-Factsheet.pdf.

[4] National Institutes of Health. *NIH announces record number of grants to support early career investigators, launches new recruitment initiative for intramural research*. (October 8, 2026). Retrieved from: https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-announces-record-number-grants-support-early-career-investigators-launches-new-recruitment-initiative-intramural-research.

Recommendation 3: Support innovation and strengthen research capacity.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics, electronic health records, telehealth, digital health platforms, wearable sensors, remote monitoring, and virtual simulation offer significant opportunities to advance nursing research. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Evaluate the impact of emerging technologies on nursing practice and patient outcomes to determine how they may affect clinical decision-making, nursing workload, patient safety, and quality of care.
2. Investigate how technological advancements like telehealth can reduce barriers to care in rural and medically underserved communities.
3. Involve nurses in every stage of development, testing, implementation, and evaluation of these technologies to better support the healthcare needs of the nation and serve patients responsibly and sustainably.
4. Recognize that these tools and advances should support, not replace, the clinical judgement of the nurse.

Dedicated investments in emerging technologies and research capacity will help NINR advance nursing science, improve access to care, and prepare future generations of nurses and nurse scientists to translate innovation into meaningful improvements in patient outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Prioritize implementation science and research on real-world delivery across care settings.

Nursing science is foundational to translating scientific discoveries into practice, generating the evidence needed to implement and sustain effective interventions across a range of healthcare settings. NINR should support research that evaluates what works in practice, which challenges prevent adoption, and how interventions can be scaled to improve long-term outcomes. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Promote meaningful community participation and academic-practice partnerships in nursing research and intervention adaptation, recognizing that trust, caring relationships, local needs, and organizational practices influence implementation and outcomes.
2. Compare models of care delivery to determine which approaches, including in-person, virtual, and home-based care, best promote access, safety, quality, continuity, and sustainability.
3. Support implementation research examining how staffing, clinical decision-making, care coordination, and transitions between care settings affect the adoption of evidence-based practices.

Research spanning different care settings is essential to understanding the realities of everyday care. Focusing on real-world care delivery will strengthen the relevance of nursing research and help ensure that findings can be applied across all healthcare settings.

Recommendation 5: Examine how conditions of daily life influence intervention efficacy and health outcomes.

The effectiveness of health interventions depends on the circumstances in which people live. Employment, housing stability, food security, transportation, income, caregiving responsibilities, education, community services, and other factors, can influence whether individuals are able to access and sustain recommended care. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Support research examining how daily living conditions affect health outcomes and the ability to manage chronic illness, maintain mental health, and sustain recommended care.

2. Investigate factors that shape engagement with care, including health literacy, social support, digital access, and individual preferences.
3. Support practical, community-based, and nurse-led approaches that address barriers to care in rural communities and settings with limited resources.

By accounting for the circumstances that shape patients' ability to engage in care, nursing science and research identifies more effective interventions and generates findings that support healthcare for all.

Recommendation 6: Expand partnerships that connect scientific discovery with clinical practice and community needs.

Strong partnerships are essential to ensuring that research informs and enhances models of care, which can benefit the patient and community alike. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Engage patients, families, and communities in research by involving them in designing interventions, interpreting findings, and sharing results.
2. Strengthen PhD-DNP partnerships to connect rigorous scientific inquiry with clinical practice and strengthen the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.
3. Partner with national nursing organizations to strengthen nursing research capacity, advance shared research priorities, and support the dissemination of nursing science into practice and policy.
4. Expand collaborative research networks that bring together institutions and care providers across a range of settings.

One of the strengths of the nursing profession is our ability to collaborate with patients, families, care team members, and communities. By further expanding meaningful research partnerships, NINR can leverage these connections to advance nursing science.

Recommendation 7: Ensure nurse scientists are represented on NIH scientific review groups and branches, advisory committees, and councils.

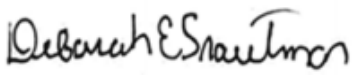
Nurse scientists bring expertise in health research and clinical innovation that should inform the evaluation of research proposals and the development of national research priorities. Their involvement in NIH scientific review and advisory activities can help ensure that research addressing complex patient, healthcare, and community needs receives appropriate consideration. AACN recommends that NINR:

1. Promote the representation of nurse scientists in NIH scientific review groups and branches, advisory committees, councils, and other leadership roles that shape research priorities and funding decisions.
2. Establish mechanisms to identify and nominate qualified nurse scientists for NIH review and advisory appointments, including experts across research specialties and career stages.
3. Monitor nurse scientist representation across NIH review and advisory bodies and identify opportunities to address gaps in participation, such as ensuring nurses are represented in the oversight of the NIH Clinical Center, on the Scientific Management Review Board, and in the Clinical and Translational Science and Awards program.

Thank you for reviewing AACN's recommendations for the NINR Strategic Plan for 2027-2031. Please consider AACN an ally in this important endeavor. With your continued leadership of NINR at the forefront of nursing science, the nation's nurse researchers will be well-positioned to embrace innovation, advance health, and mentor the nurse next generation of nurse scientists. If our organization can be of any

assistance, please contact AACN's Chief Government Affairs and Policy Officer, Rachel Minahan at rminahan@aacnnursing.org or AACN's Policy Assistant, Ashley Morales at amorales@aacnnursing.org.

Sincerely,



Deborah Trautman PhD, RN, FAAN
President and Chief Executive Officer