



July 27, 2021

Dawn O'Connell  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary O'Connell:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), we congratulate you on your swearing in as Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. We applaud your previous work coordinating the Department-wide COVID-19 response as a counselor to the Secretary and welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff.

As you know, nurses and nursing students are currently serving on the frontlines in the fight against COVID-19 by educating, tracing, testing, and vaccinating communities. We at AACN have a vested interest in supporting this work, as our 840 member institutions are preparing over 580,000 nursing students to thrive in the workforce. Given the critical role nurses play in addressing public health emergencies and providing evidence-based care, we look forward to working with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that nurses are engaged in the national dialogue on improving health and health care.

As the collective voice for academic nursing, AACN serves as the catalyst for excellence and innovation in nursing education, research, and practice. Our 2021-2022 Federal Policy Agenda reflects our core policy values of sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity. We believe these principles are essential for strengthening and advancing our nation's health.

As the implementation of the American Rescue Plan continues, please consider engaging nurses more purposively in this important work. Nursing professionals are the largest segment of the healthcare workforce responsible for providing evidence-based, community-rooted, and cost-effective care. Preparing the next generation of diverse, highly qualified nurses is essential to keeping individuals and communities safe.

My colleagues and I hope to work with you in your new leadership role as you manage our nation's emergency preparedness and response, ensuring nurses are a key voice in this work. Please know that AACN is here to connect you with nursing leaders, researchers, and policy experts who offer critical insights. I welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how we can assist in your work. If we can be of any assistance, please contact AACN by reaching out to Dr. Colleen Leners, Director of Policy, at [cleners@aacnnursing.org](mailto:cleners@aacnnursing.org).

Sincerely,

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

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