

June 26, 2020

Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Preparing for the Next Pandemic

Dear Chairman Alexander,

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following comments on the “[Preparing for the Next Pandemic](#)” white paper. As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN works to establish quality standards for nursing education; assists schools in implementing those standards; influences the nursing profession to improve health care; and promotes public support for professional nursing education, research, and practice. AACN represents more than 840 schools of nursing offering a mix of baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate programs at public and private universities nationwide.¹ AACN member schools also represent more than 45,000 faculty members and 543,000 students who will comprise the future nursing workforce.²

AACN has a vested interest in improving our Nation’s health and health care. For over five decades, the association has championed professional nursing education to ensure that Registered Nurses (RN) and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN); including nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and clinical nurse specialists) are prepared to provide evidence-based, cost effective, and high-quality care.

As our nation combats current and future public health challenges, access to nursing care is essential and ensuring a robust nursing pathway is imperative. Below are AACN’s comments on the white paper’s recommendations on steps Congress should take to help federal, state, and local officials be better prepared. We appreciate your leadership to investigate these challenges and the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues on the committee to address them.

Tests, Treatments, and Vaccines – Accelerate Research and Development

4. How can the federal, state, and private sector work together to more effectively distribute and administer treatments and vaccines?

AACN recommends that Congress and the Administration prioritize stable funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While a pandemic brings public health to the forefront of everyone’s minds, historically, there has not been consistent funding of public

¹ About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/About-AACN>

² Ibid

health and prevention efforts. As the government and private sector move forward in the race to develop a vaccine and determine how it will be equitably distributed, nurses need to be utilized at the top of their education, especially given their intimate understanding of the communities they serve.

The American people have seen the faces of nurses throughout this pandemic and recognize them as heroes. Yet, nurses, and even nursing students, have always served as trusted information resources, especially in times of uncertainty. Utilizing nurses and nursing students in tracking, tracing, research, and response efforts is key. Accomplishing this requires additional federal investments in public health, education, and research, along with the prioritization of the nursing voice in these conversations. To that end, and as Congress seeks input on how best to work together, AACN urges that nurses, one of the country's most trusted professions, has a leadership role and is actively involved in the decision-making process.

Disease Surveillance – Expand Ability to Detect, Identify, Model, and Track Emerging Infectious Diseases

- 1. What other barriers, in addition to limited testing capacity, and insufficient and outdated technology, make it difficult to detect and conduct public health surveillance of emerging infectious diseases?*

AACN recommends increased funding for broadband infrastructure to ensure capacity and capability is enhanced and accessibility of this technology is expanded to all areas, including rural and underserved communities, so our nursing students can continue their education coursework. We recognize that the broadband connectivity gap can be an enormous barrier to improving rural health and education.³ As nursing schools continue to prepare our future nursing workforce by transitioning to remote/distance learning, many programs have been forced to significantly expand their remote capabilities. This transition is especially challenging as our schools provide clinical experiences specific to nursing education and to a variety of individuals, including students and faculty, with remote technological and equipment needs.

The Committee and Congress can address the broadband issue and digital divide by passing [*Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act \(S.3701/H.R. 6814\)*](#). S. 3701, which would provide funding for colleges and universities, with priority to HBCUs, Tribal colleges and universities, and Minority Serving Institutions. Further, increased investment in Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs, new investments to support nursing education infrastructure, and grant programs to help schools create and design telehealth education are essential. AACN advocates for innovations in education and infrastructure through access to sufficient broadband, which we believe is essential for higher education, students, faculty, health systems, and the broader community.

³ Closing the Rural Health Connectivity Gap: How Broadband Funding Can Better Improve Care, " Health Affairs Blog, April 1, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20150401.045856/full/>

6. *How can the private sector innovations to support and modernize federal and state surveillance be better leveraged?*

Encouraging public-private partnerships during this unprecedented time is helpful as we ensure nursing students are safely able to go back to school and have access to clinical education so they can be prepared to enter today's health care workforce. AACN for example, has partnered with companies to provide a digital solution to help schools of nursing mitigate the risk of COVID-19 by enabling AACN members to screen students for a fever – a common COVID-19 symptom, collect information on a student's travel and exposure to COVID-19, and provide educational training on preventing the spread of infectious diseases.⁴ Connecting these private partners with public entities can unify, innovate, and strengthen our education and healthcare endeavors.

Stockpiles, Distribution, and Surges – Rebuild and Maintain Federal and State Stockpiles and Improve Medical Supply Surge Capacity and Distribution.

On March 20, 2020, AACN put out a call to action to all members schools asking them to donate personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies to their community healthcare facilities to help compensate for the lack of PPE.⁵ AACN members responded in kind. Now, as the country opened up the stockpiles, we are still seeing a need for PPE. While often mentioned through the clinical lens, access to PPE remains a top concern for our membership. The safety of our students as they continue their clinical rotations is paramount and essential to completing their education to become future frontline providers. Congress needs to continue to invest in PPE manufacturing and distribution for the safety of all frontline workers, including our nursing students.

AACN also strongly recommends partnerships with healthcare organizations, universities and/or schools, including schools of nursing, to prepare and train for surge capacity of nurses or other allied health professions. AACN has experienced tremendous success with the Veterans Affairs Nursing Academic Partnerships program (VANAP). This program enables stronger, mutually beneficial relationships between nursing schools and VA facilities by:

- Expanding faculty and professional development;
- Increasing nursing student enrollment, primarily in baccalaureate programs, although some increases in graduate programs may also occur;
- Providing opportunities for educational and practice innovations; and
- Increasing recruitment and retention of VA nurses as a result of enhanced roles in nursing education.⁶

⁴ AACN Partners with CastleBranch to Fight Back Against COVID-19, April 13, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Press-Releases/View/ArticleId/24607/CastleBranch-COVID-19>

⁵ AACN Call to Action to Member Schools, "Donate PPE to Your Local Community Healthcare Facilities." March 20, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.magnetmail.net/actions/email_web_version.cfm?ep=ZXPXI6nLA_PLLRUK1uCCIJ_wKHEvVxMQ98c7dBXKoZQUKIQYm5xFqtObYRrJSTM47K51hRO8Rqd36xBcDXPn3-i6TxFQjOj1AF4WpdBG1iFptNsy6_AQ7O-SSc_CSV

⁶ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Academic Affiliation, VA Nursing Academic Partnerships. Retrieved from: <https://www.va.gov/oaa/vanap/default.asp>

These faculty hold a dual position in both the VA and the school of nursing. This allows for greater flexibility in a surge capacity for the VA, but could also be utilized in any other federal, state, or local organization. The faculty could work with health departments or other organizations in an established partnership, allowing the school's students to train in those clinical sites. Should a national or local disaster occur, this would ensure availability of trained staff and/or students trained in surveillance to come into the health department to help respond to any emergency.

Public Health Capabilities – Improve State and Local Capacity to Respond

1. *What specific changes to our public health infrastructure (hospitals, health departments, laboratories, etc.) are needed at the federal, state, and local levels?*

During healthcare crises, lawmakers should encourage a collaborative effort of healthcare leaders who propose and support academic-practice partnerships between healthcare facilities and pre-licensure RN programs across the country. This potential model would serve as a voluntary, innovative approach to meeting academic and workforce needs during public health emergencies.

- Healthcare facilities, public health departments, and nursing education programs are encouraged to partner during a healthcare crisis.
- Pre-licensure RN students from diploma, associate degree, and baccalaureate degree nursing could augment and support nursing services in healthcare facilities and public health departments.
- Nursing students could be employed by the facility on a full- or part-time basis and would work in the role of a student nurse for compensation, and, in conjunction with the student's nursing education program, would receive academic credit toward meeting clinical requirements.⁷

Who Is on the Flagpole? – Improve Coordination of Federal Agencies During a Public Health Emergency

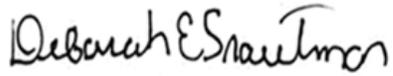
AACN understands the multifaceted federal approach necessary to respond quickly, nimbly, and effectively to any public health crisis. While a coordinated emergency response taskforce, bringing together all of the federal players, is imperative, we would encourage the addition of practice partners, such as academic nursing, in these efforts. AACN members partner with state and local response teams to prepare for disasters and provide simulation activities for students. This partnership could be replicated on the federal level, with nurse educators at the table to help better respond to public health emergencies today and in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of AACN's feedback on the "Preparing for the Next Pandemic" white paper. This legislative focus is timely, essential, and critical to improving

⁷ Policy Brief Supporting Academic-Practice Partnerships During the COVID-19 Crisis, March 25, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/Policy-Brief-US-Nursing-Workforce-COVID-19.pdf>

efficiency, safety, and innovation. Please consider AACN an ally in this endeavor. If our organization can be of any assistance, please contact AACN's Director of Government Affairs, Rachel Stevenson at RStevenson@aacnnursing.org or AACN's Director of Policy, Colleen Leners at cleners@aacnnursing.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah E. Trautman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and "T".

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