

**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
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) & National Institutes of Health
(NIH)
May 10, 2022
Submitted by: Cynthia McCurren, PhD, RN, Board Chair
American Association of Colleges of Nursing**

Strengthening 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 leadership and continued support of nursing education, the nursing profession, and nursing research, especially during this unprecedented time. As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN represents more than 850 schools of nursing at private and public universities, who educate more than 565,000 students and employ more than 52,000 faculty.¹ Collectively, these institutions graduate our nation's registered nurses (RN), advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), educators, researchers, and frontline providers.

As we work to combat current public health challenges, such as COVID-19, and prepare for the future, ensuring a robust nursing pathway requires a strong and sustained federal investment. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, AACN respectfully requests that you provide 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 HRSA and at least **\$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)**.

Landscape Overview: The Growing Nursing Workforce Demand

Nurses comprise the largest sector of the healthcare workforce, with more than four million RNs and APRNs, which include Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs), and Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs).² Nurse educators, students, and practitioners are leaders within their institutions and communities; many of whom are also serving on the frontlines of this public health emergency.

From the classroom to the frontline, we have witnessed how critical a well-educated nursing workforce is to the provision of high-quality health care. This need is only expected to grow, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 9% increase in RN workforce demand through 2030,

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022) Who We Are. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/About-AACN/Who-We-Are>

² National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2021). Active RN Licenses: A profile of nursing licensure in the U.S. as of April 23, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncsbn.org/6161.htm>.



representing the need for an additional 276,800 jobs.³ Demand for certain APRNs (NPs, CRNAs, and CNMs) is expected to grow even more, by 45%.⁴

While AACN saw student enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increase by 3.3% in 2021, the increase was 2.3% lower than 2020.⁵ Further, nursing schools saw enrollment decline in baccalaureate degree-completion programs and some graduate programs at the master's and PhD levels.⁶ For the first time since 2001, enrollment in master's programs decreased by 3.8%, which translates to 5,766 fewer students enrolled in 2021 than in the previous year.⁷ This is concerning because graduate programs prepare individuals for a variety of advanced roles in administration, teaching, research, informatics, and direct patient care.

There were bright spots in 2021, with enrollments in Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs up 4.0%.⁸ However, the fact remains that a total of 91,938 qualified applications (not applicants) were not accepted at schools of nursing nationwide in 2021 alone.⁹ As our annual survey found, “the primary barriers to accepting all qualified students at nursing schools continues to be insufficient clinical placement sites, faculty, preceptors, and classroom space, as well as budget cuts.”¹⁰

Educational pathways are just one piece of the puzzle. Strong and historic investments in the current nursing workforce are imperative, especially as we contend with an aging nursing workforce and the lasting impact COVID-19 has had on the profession. In fact, registered nurses age 65 and older already make up 19% of the workforce, and “more than one-fifth of all nurses reported they plan to retire from nursing over the next 5 years.”¹¹ Not to mention a recent study which found 52% of nurses considered leaving their position during the pandemic, up from 40% a year earlier.¹² We must minimize the loss of experienced nurses who may prematurely leave the profession, and at the same time support nursing education to meet the current and future demand for nurses.

With increasing demands, an aging population, nursing retirements, and an increase in workplace stress,¹³ bold investments in Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). Occupational Outlook Handbook- Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). 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>

⁵ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022) Nursing Schools See Enrollment Increases in Entry-Level Programs, Signaling Strong Interest in Nursing Careers. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/PressReleases/View/ArticleId/25183/Nursing-Schools-See-Enrollment-Increases-in-Entry-Level-Programs>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ National Council of State Boards of Nursing and the National Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers (2021) The 2020 National Nursing Workforce Survey. Retrieved from: [https://www.journalofnursingregulation.com/article/S21558256\(21\)00027-2/fulltext](https://www.journalofnursingregulation.com/article/S21558256(21)00027-2/fulltext)

¹² American Nurses Foundation. (2022). Pulse on the Nation's Nurses Survey Series: COVID-19 Two-Year Impact Assessment Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.nursingworld.org/~492857/contentassets/872ebb13c63f44f6b11a1bd0c74907c9/covid-19-two-year-impact-assessment-written-report-final.pdf>

¹³ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2020) Fact Sheet: Nursing Shortage. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Factsheets/Nursing-Shortage-Factsheet.pdf>

and NINR are imperative, not only as we confront existing health challenges, but as we provide tomorrow's equitable and innovative healthcare solutions.

Investments in Nursing Education Lead to a Strong Nursing Workforce

For over fifty years, Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs have been a catalyst for strengthening nursing education at all levels, from entry-level preparation through graduate study. Through grants, scholarships, and loan repayment programs, Title VIII federal investments positively impact the profession's ability to serve America's patients in all areas, bolster diversity within the workforce, and increase the number of nurses, including those at the forefront of public health emergencies and caring for our aging population.

Each Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Program provides a unique and crucial mission to support nursing education and the profession. For example, the Advanced Nursing Education (ANE) programs help increase the number of APRNs in the primary care workforce and supported more than 8,800 students in Academic Year 2020-2021 alone.¹⁴ In addition, the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) supported 2,763 graduate nursing students who intend to serve as nurse faculty.¹⁵ "By the end of the Academic Year, the programs graduated 779 trainees, 92 percent of whom intended to teach nursing."¹⁶

As we address social determinants of health and work to build an equitable healthcare system for all patients, it is imperative that we recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds into the nursing profession. Increasing diversity in the profession will not only create lifelong career pathways, but will also improve care quality and access to population-centered care. A recent HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) report makes the recommendation to "optimize existing workforce development programs to support diversity in the health professional workforce and further support the development of a diverse workforce through pipeline programs."¹⁷ The Nursing Workforce Diversity (NWD) program serves as a glowing example of a successful Title VIII initiative that accomplishes this goal. In fact, in Academic Year 2020-2021, the NWD program awarded grants supporting 10,155 nursing students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁸ To ensure the stability of our nursing workforce now and in the future, we request at least **\$530 million for Title VIII Nursing Workforce Programs in FY 2023.**

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,

¹⁴ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Justification. Pages 164-170. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2023.pdf>

¹⁵ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Justification. Page 181. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2023.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Health Policy. *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Hospital and Outpatient Clinician Workforce Challenges and policy responses.* (2022) Retrieved from: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/9cc72124abd9ea25d58a22c7692dccb6/aspe-covid-workforce-report.pdf>

¹⁸ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Justification. Pages 171-174. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2023.pdf>



and sustaining the health of the nation. In fact, a recent ASPE’s report recommends to “support research that investigates long-term workforce trends arising from the pandemic and how they can be addressed including entry and departure issues, impact on facility staffing, and factors associated with health worker morale.”¹⁹

As one of the 27 Institutes and Centers at NIH, NINR plays a fundamental role in improving care and is on the cutting edge of new innovations impacting how nurses are educated and how they practice. In fact, 80% of research-focused educational training grants at nursing schools are funded by NINR.²⁰ Through these grants and others, nurse scientists, often working collaboratively with other health professionals, are generating groundbreaking findings and leading translation research that works to address strategic imperatives, to include health equity, social determinants of health, population health, health promotion, and models of care. To further this vital work, we are requesting a total of at least **\$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research.**

Conclusion

Strong investments in Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs and NINR have a direct impact on sustaining pathways into nursing and patient access to high-quality, evidence-based care in all communities across the nation. During these unprecedented times, AACN respectfully requests support in FY 2023 of at least **\$530 million for the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs** and at least **\$210 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research.** Together, we can ensure that such investments promote innovation and improve health care in America.

¹⁹ Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Health Policy. *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Hospital and Outpatient Clinician Workforce Challenges and policy responses.* (2022) Retrieved from:

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/9cc72124abd9ea25d58a22c7692dccb6/aspe-covid-workforce-report.pdf>

²⁰ Journal of Professional Nursing (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? Retrieved from

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S8755722319301164?via=ihub>