

**Testimony Prepared for the U.S. House 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)

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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. As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN represents more than 865 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 registered nurses (RN), advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), educators, researchers, and frontline providers. As you consider and advance the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) appropriations bill, 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 and a half

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

million RNs and APRNs, which include Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs), and Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs).² From the classrooms to the frontlines, we know first-hand how critical a well-educated nursing workforce is to providing high-quality health care. This need is only expected to intensify with the Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting the demand for RNs to increase by 6% through 2031, representing the need for an additional 195,400 jobs.³ Demand for certain APRNs (nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and certified nurse-midwives) is expected to grow even more, by 40%.⁴

While the COVID-19 public health emergency is set to expire on May 11, 2023, we continue to see the impact the last few years have had on the viability of nursing schools and the pipeline of faculty and students. These impacts illustrate the need for enhanced federal investment in FY 2024. For example, in 2021, student enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs increased by 3.3%.⁵ Yet, this increase was 2.3% lower than 2020.⁶ Further, nursing schools saw enrollment decline in baccalaureate degree-completion programs and graduate programs at the master's and PhD levels.⁷ 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.⁸ 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. Enrollment declines coupled with more than 2,100 full-time

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/nursing-regulation/national-nursing-database/licensure-statistics/active-rn-licenses.page>

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). Occupational Outlook Handbook-Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). 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/Press-Releases/View/ArticleId/25183/Nursing-Schools-See-Enrollment-Increases-in-Entry-Level-Programs>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

faculty vacancies in baccalaureate and/or graduate programs across the country underscores how vital funding for nursing education is to support the preparation of nurses to meet the healthcare needs of all communities, including those in rural and underserved areas.⁹

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 toll that the response to COVID-19 has had on the profession. In fact, the median age of RNs is now 52 years, with nurses aged 65 and older making up 19% of the workforce. More than one-fifth of all nurses reported they plan to retire from nursing over the next five years¹⁰.¹⁰ We must minimize the loss of experienced nurses who may prematurely leave the profession, and at the same time support nursing schools focused on meeting the current and future demand for nurses.

With increasing demands, an aging population, nursing retirements, and an increase in workplace stress,¹¹ bold investments in Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs and NINR are imperative, not only as we confront existing health challenges, but as we advance 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 needed to respond to public health emergencies and care for our aging population.

⁹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022). [Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions](https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Surveys-Data/2022-Faculty-Vacancy-Report.pdf). Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Surveys-Data/2022-Faculty-Vacancy-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ 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/S2155-8256\(21\)00027-2/fulltext](https://www.journalofnursingregulation.com/article/S2155-8256(21)00027-2/fulltext)

¹¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022) Fact Sheet: Nursing Shortage. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Factsheets/Nursing-Shortage-Factsheet.pdf>

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) program helps increase the number of APRNs in the primary care workforce, including support for more than 8,800 students in Academic Year 2021-2022 alone.¹² In the same timeframe, the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) supported 2,806 nursing students who intend to serve as nurse faculty, including 837 newly graduated nurses.¹³ 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 to 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. The Nursing Workforce Diversity (NWD) program serves as a glowing example of a successful Title VIII initiative that accomplishes the goal of strengthening pathways into the nursing workforce. In fact, in Academic Year 2021-2022, the NWD program awarded grants supporting 10,981 nursing students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁴ 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 2024.**

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. In fact, the 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

¹² Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Justification. Pages 153-156. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2024.pdf>

¹³ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Justification. Pages 165-167. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2024.pdf>

¹⁴ Health Resources and Services Administration. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Justification. Pages 157-160. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/budget/budget-justification-fy2024.pdf>

associated with health worker morale.”¹⁵ As one of the 27 Institutes and Centers at NIH, the 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. In fact, 80% of research-focused educational training grants at schools of nursing are funded by NINR.¹⁶ With this support, nurse scientists, often working collaboratively with other health professionals, are generating groundbreaking findings and leading translational research. The scope of this research encompasses a range of strategic imperatives such as health equity, social determinants of health, population health, health promotion, and new 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.**

Enhanced support for the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs and NINR is critical to sustaining a strong nursing workforce able to care for our nation’s population. AACN respectfully requests support in FY 2024 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.

¹⁵ 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>

¹⁶ 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.

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