

The Nursing Shortage has Reached Crisis Level

Nurses are the backbone of the health care system in the United States, comprising the largest portion of the health care workforce. An aging nursing workforce and the entry of “Baby Boomers” into retirement signaled an increasing demand for nurses. This demand was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mandatory quarantining, risk of illness, stress, anxiety, depression, burnout and workplace violence have all impacted the health and well-being of the nursing workforce. Many have left their positions providing bedside care to utilize their education and training in other ways or, worse, to leave the profession altogether. During the pandemic, the health care sector has lost nearly half a million workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Some estimates show that as many as 18 percent of health care workers have quit since the pandemic began. The impact on patient care in our communities cannot be overstated.



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Impact of Staffing Shortages on Emergency Departments

Emergency departments are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They will not turn anyone away. They also require staff with specialized experience and training to provide optimal care to patients. Staffing shortages affecting the emergency department impact several critical tasks including triage, taking of vitals, administering medication and much more. Delays in the performance of these duties only translates into longer wait times for patients in critical need of care.

Critical Investment in Nursing Schools Cannot Wait for the Next Pandemic

Policies and programs—including those focused on workplace violence prevention and behavioral health resources—designed to address turnover and support nurse retention, only work to solve part of the staffing problem. For years, other factors, such as high student debt, low wages and lengthy training and hiring processes, have served as barriers to potential nurses

entering the pipeline. Further, a lack of support for nursing schools in hiring and retaining faculty limits the number of slots a school can offer. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reported that in 2020, nursing schools reported having to turn away tens of thousands of qualified students due to lack of clinical education sites and faculty constraints.

The need has always been present, but the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the consequences of inadequately supporting the colleges of nursing. An investment must be made in the future of this workforce to enable the next generation to face future public health emergencies.

The Future Advancement of Academic Nursing Act

The Future Advancement of Academic Nursing Act (H.R. 851/S. 246) will provide a \$1 billion investment to increase the number of faculty and students at nursing schools to enhance U.S. preparedness during these emergencies, as well as enhance and modernize nursing school programs. The bill also strives to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce and student population by prioritizing those from disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation college students and those from rural and underserved areas.

The bill seeks to invest \$1 billion in our nation’s nursing schools to:

- Enhance enrollment and retention of nursing students, prioritizing those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those from rural or underserved areas.
- Create, support or modernize educational programs and curriculum at those schools.
- Retain or recruit nurse faculty with an emphasis on underrepresented communities.
- Modernize infrastructure at nursing schools, including technology resources and PPE.
- Increase the number of clinical education sites.

Fixing the nurse staffing shortage will not happen overnight. The nation needs significant investment in critical areas supporting the nursing workforce pipeline, including passage of the FAAN Act (H.R. 851/S. 246), which will help bolster the country’s ability to respond to future public health emergencies.

House Request: Cosponsor and Support the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing Act (H.R. 851). *This bill was introduced by Reps. Lauren Underwood, D-Ill., and Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, on Feb. 4, 2021, and was referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee for further action.*

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing Act (S. 246). *This bill was introduced by Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., on Feb. 4, 2021, and was referred to the Senate HELP Committee for further action.*