

Statement for the Record
American Nurses Association
LIFT America: Revitalizing our Nation's Infrastructure and Economy
House Energy and Commerce Committee
March 22, 2021

The American Nurses Association (ANA), representing the interests of the nation's 4.2 million registered nurses, commends the House Energy and Commerce Committee for convening this hearing on "LIFT America: Revitalizing our Nation's Infrastructure and Economy," and appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

ANA is committed to advancing the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting a safe and ethical work environment, bolstering the health and wellness of nurses, and advocating on health care issues that affect nurses and the public. ANA is at the forefront of improving quality of health for all.

Public Health Infrastructure and Workforce

The nation's public health infrastructure and workforce have been underfunded for decades, and we have witnessed the highlighted impacts of this chronic underfunding throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency. Federal funds for state, local, and tribal public health preparedness were cut from \$940 million in 2002 to \$675 million in 2019. During the same time period, hospital emergency preparedness was cut by nearly fifty percent, from \$515 million in 2004 to \$265 million in 2019¹. This has resulted in a loss of 55,000 public health workers since 2008. The current COVID-19 public health emergency has underscored that our nation must be better equipped with preparedness and response personnel, measures and processes. This is not only important during the time of crisis, but generally to address the overall health and well-being of our population.

The public health nursing workforce touches every aspect of health care and community well-being. Unfortunately, we can only imagine how different the coronavirus response would have been, had greater public health infrastructure investment afforded availability of sufficient numbers of nurses and other public health personnel in areas of the greatest need. Nurses could have played an enhanced role in encouraging and administering COVID-19 tests in high-risk populations, conducting contact tracing at an effective pace, educating the public about vaccine safety and all facets of COVID-19 prevention and mitigation, informing school opening protocols, and collecting data for feedback to pandemic response efforts.

Nursing Faculty Shortage

While more funding for physical infrastructure and hiring health care workers is necessary and will be a vast improvement, Congress must also act to ensure there are sufficient numbers of nurse educators to provide instruction and clinical training for future nurses and other health care professionals to provide the care patients need. With the devastating nursing shortage of the 1990's still fresh in our memories, ANA remains concerned about future shortages due to a rapidly retiring workforce², burnout³, and mental distress from COVID-19⁴. As such, ANA urges Congress to recognize that without ample capacity to

¹ <https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TFAH2020PublicHealthFunding.pdf>

² [https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554\(16\)30314-1/fulltext](https://www.nursingoutlook.org/article/S0029-6554(16)30314-1/fulltext)

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2775923>

⁴ <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus/what-you-need-to-know/mental-health-and-wellness-survey-2/>

educate nursing students and provide hands-on experience, the goal of increasing the health care workforce will not be achievable.

The numbers speak for themselves: nursing schools in the United States were forced to turn away more than 80,000 qualified applicants for baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2019 alone. Most nursing schools responding to a survey from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) pointed to faculty shortages as the top reason for not accepting additional qualified nursing school applicants to their programs. Another report by AACN found more than 1,600 faculty vacancies, not including new faculty positions⁵.

Faculty salary and student loan debt are additional barriers to attracting nurses to academia. When students graduate nursing programs are burdened by excessive student loans, they generally seek positions with higher salaries. According to AACN, 69 percent of graduate nursing students surveyed in 2016 took out federal student loans, with the median amount being \$40,000 to \$54,999. The most jarring finding was that more than half of students from ethnic minorities had to borrow more than \$55,000 – higher than the total average for the entire survey⁶. With the American Association of Nurse Practitioners finding the average salary of a nurse practitioner to be \$110,000⁷ and AACN reporting that the average salary for a master's-level assistant professor in nursing schools to be less than \$80,000, it is no wonder loan burdened students are less able to join academia and educate future generations of nurses.

ANA commends the House Energy and Commerce Committee for looking to the future and working to rebuild our public health infrastructure and workforce, where public health nurses serve as the first line of prevention in mitigating threats to the health of the U.S. population. ANA encourages the Committee to invest in the nation's public health infrastructure and provide resources to educate and train the next generation of public health nurses and workers.

Thank you for giving nurses the opportunity to provide input on the importance of rebuilding our nation's public health infrastructure. ANA stands ready to work with the Committee to find and implement sustainable solutions regarding this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact Ingrida Lusic, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Ingrid.Lusic@ana.org.

⁵ <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Fact-Sheets/Nursing-Faculty-Shortage>

⁶ https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/Debt_Report.pdf

⁷ <https://www.aanp.org/about/all-about-nps/np-fact-sheet>