As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is dedicated to ensuring the nurses educated today are prepared to meet the patient demands of tomorrow. The association represents over 760 schools of nursing that educate approximately 457,000 students and employ over 17,000 faculty members. AACN’s vision for the profession is clear. By 2020, highly educated and diverse nursing professionals will lead the delivery of quality health care and the generation of new knowledge to improve health and the delivery of care services. Robust federal investments and policy changes that impact health and healthcare delivery must include the contributions of nursing education, science, and practice.

AACN views advocacy as having an integral role in the ability to shape, advance, and promote a professional nursing workforce that meets America’s healthcare needs. For nearly five decades, AACN has focused its federal policy agenda on inserting the voice of academic nursing in discussions that will impact workforce development and the creation of evidence-based research to transform care delivery. As the nation has focused on healthcare reform, AACN has been a strong partner with our colleagues in the health, education, and research communities to find policy solutions that put patients and their families first.

Consistent with the organization’s history, AACN’s 2015 Federal Policy Agenda directly addresses the need to promote policies that embraces an interdisciplinary team of providers committed to high-quality, cost-effective care. The four overarching agenda items (equally valued and not listed in order of importance) include:

- Advance policies that allow academic institutions to meet the need for a more highly-educated and diverse nursing workforce, focusing on seamless academic progression, affordability, and interprofessional education.

- Amplify nursing leadership to transform America’s healthcare delivery system into one that is patient-centered and team-based.

- Secure federal investments that strengthen the academic nursing infrastructure.

- Secure federal investments in research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation, discovery, and application.
1. Advance policies that allow academic institutions to meet the need for a more highly-educated and diverse nursing workforce, focusing on seamless academic progression, affordability, and interprofessional education.

Education is not a static process. It evolves with newly discovered best-practices, technology, and innovation in the classroom. AACN member institutions are at the forefront of incorporating changes to their curriculums that will prepare students for emerging care delivery models, interprofessional as well as interdisciplinary teams, and care within the community. As our nation's healthcare system transforms and more services are provided outside the hospital walls, nurses must be educated for these opportunities and challenges. Continuous education is required for nurses to stay current, which includes higher levels of education and continual learning beyond the academic setting. Moreover, the future nursing workforce must be ready for innovative and leadership roles within the evolving structure. It will require recruitment from a pool of highly-qualified and diverse individuals who have a solid background in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education. AACN is committed to working with federal legislators and our health professions partners to identify policies that will:

◆ Build upon the existing workforce
◆ Respond to developing roles and shortages areas
◆ Provide opportunities for nurses to achieve advanced degrees through seamless academic pathways
◆ Recruit diverse individuals with a strong interest in STEM education, and
◆ Ensure all members of the healthcare team are equipped to focus together on the patient.
2. Amplify nursing leadership to transform America’s healthcare delivery system into one that is patient-centered and team-based.

The Institute of Medicine’s 2010 report the *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* calls for nurses “to be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning healthcare in the United States.” AACN firmly agrees that the unique expertise derived from the science, skills, and philosophy of nursing care will help ensure access to high quality and cost-effective services. AACN will work with Congress, nursing experts, and other coalitions to ensure a redesigned healthcare system incorporates the practice and leadership skills of registered nurses as well as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). AACN believes that allowing APRNs to practice to the full extent of their education and training by granting them full practice authority is essential to this endeavor. Support to remove barriers to APRN practice at the federal level is critical to increasing timely access to quality care.
3. Secure federal investments that strengthen the academic nursing infrastructure.

Over the past few years, federal funding for nursing education has steadily improved. Increases to the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act) have demonstrated Congress’ awareness that educating the next generation of nurses is essential and requires a firm investment. However, our nation’s fiscal climate threatens the great strides made to bolster the pipeline of nurses. Federal funding needs to keep pace with inflation as educational costs rise for both the student and the institution. Title VIII’s success is vital to supporting the supply and distribution of qualified nurses to meet our nation’s healthcare needs, and an investment in their sustainability is vital. Additionally, AACN will work with our partners to raise the awareness that programs like the National Health Service Corps and Health Professions programs (Title VII of the Public Health Service Act) are necessary to ensure highly-qualified providers are practicing in our nation’s most rural and underserved communities.

Given the great need for nurses, including APRNs, and nurse faculty in a newly reformed healthcare system, AACN is committed to reinforcing the efforts of the federal government to maximize funding for professional nursing education.
4. Secure federal investments in research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation, discovery, and application.

For decades, nursing science’s impact on improving healthcare delivery has proven far reaching. It is an essential part of the scientific endeavors to improve the nation’s health. Often working collaboratively with physicians and other researchers, nurse scientists are vital in setting the national research agenda. Elevating the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation is more critical than ever as the federal government searches for best practices that also reduce cost and improve quality. Research funded at National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) helps to integrate biology and behavior as well as design new technology and tools. NINR’s research fosters advances in nursing practice, improves patient care, works to eliminate health disparities, and attracts new students to the profession.

AACN is a strong supporter of all institutes and centers at the National Institutes of Health, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are committed to working with the research community to ensure funding for these agencies are sustainable to design the innovations necessary for improved health and quality of life. Moreover, as Congress considers such initiatives as 21st Century Cures, Innovation for Healthier Americans, and Precision Medicine, AACN will work to share insights gleaned from nursing’s expertise.

For more information of AACN’s advocacy efforts see: www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs