American Association of Colleges of Nursing
2015 Federal Policy Agenda Priorities

As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) represents over 750 schools of nursing that educate more than 425,000 students and employ nearly 17,000 faculty members. Together, these institutions produce about half of our nation’s registered nurses (RNs) and all of our nation’s advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), nurse faculty, and nurse researchers.

For 2015, AACN has focused its federal policy agenda on key components of the profession—education, research, and practice. Consistent with the organization’s history, AACN’s 2015 Federal Policy Agenda directly addresses these critical components while incorporating the many facets of policy that impact nursing and national health care. Additionally, the 2015 agenda takes into account the impact of the political and fiscal climates on the national legislative agenda. The four overarching priorities (equally valued) include:

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.**

The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) report the *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* states that “nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.”¹ This objective has been the cornerstone of AACN’s advocacy for over 45 years.

The changing healthcare system and the demands it places on nurses to stay current on best practices renders it critical that nursing students are educated to adapt and contribute to quality health care. These vital skills are clearly linked to the expertise achieved through baccalaureate and graduate nursing education. At the same time, interprofessional healthcare teams are critical to the success of an improved healthcare system. AACN is actively engaged in coalitions to improve interprofessional education and practice, which extend to our advocacy work. AACN will continue to weigh in on major federal legislation aimed at improving higher education to provide nursing education’s perspectives.

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

The IOM calls for nurses “to be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning healthcare in the United States.”¹ 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 care. AACN will work with nursing experts and other coalitions to ensure a redesigned healthcare system incorporates the practice and leadership skills of nurses as well as 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.

3. Secure federal investments that strengthen the academic nursing infrastructure.

A pervasive challenge facing our healthcare system is meeting the demand for more highly-educated nurses. In fact, nearly 80,000 qualified applications were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2014 alone due to factors including: a lack of nursing faculty; a lack of clinical training sites; and budget constraints.\(^2\) For over 50 years, the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act) have supported the supply and distribution of qualified nurses to meet our nation’s healthcare needs, and they also address specific aspects of the workforce, including increasing the number of nurse faculty.

Continued investments in the Title VIII programs have demonstrated Congress’ awareness that educating the next generation of nurses is essential and requires federal support that will assist the profession in this endeavor. However, our nation’s fiscal climate threatens the great strides made to bolster the pipeline of nurses. Given the great need for RNs, APRNs, and nurse faculty, AACN is committed to reinforcing the efforts of the federal government to expand 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. Nursing research emphasizes reducing burdensome and costly chronic illnesses, improving quality outcomes, and promoting health and wellness through a patient-centered approach to care. Often working collaboratively with physicians and other professionals, 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.

AACN is committed to advancing nursing science and translating innovative discoveries for the public’s consumption. Investments in federal research entities including the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, among others, are essential to ensuring the longevity of healthcare research and future generations of scientists.

For more information about AACN’s Government Affairs, visit: [https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs](https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs).

View AACN’s Appropriations Advocacy work here: [https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/appropriations](https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/appropriations).


Learn more about AACN’s Grassroots Network: [https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/take-action](https://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/take-action).

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\(^2\) American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2014). *2013-2014 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing*. Washington, DC.