2010 Federal Policy Agenda
Advancing Higher Education and Research in Nursing

As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is dedicated to advancing higher education within the profession. AACN views federal advocacy as having an integral role in the ability to shape, advance, and promote a professional nursing workforce. For 40 years, AACN has focused its federal policy agenda on two key components of the profession – education and research. Consistent with the organization's history, AACN’s 2010 Federal Policy Agenda directly addresses these critical components while incorporating the many facets of policy that impact nursing.

Specifically for 2010, AACN will focus on:

- Sustaining and amplifying nursing’s voice through the healthcare reform process;

- Expanding federal appropriations to increase funding for professional nursing education;

- Improving the federal investment in nursing research and elevating the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation; and

- Advancing new and existing nursing education legislation that will meet the call for a more highly educated nursing workforce.
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. Strong federal investments in nursing education and research will be necessary to realize this vision.

**Sustain and amplify nursing’s voice through the healthcare reform process.**

Many of the complex issues facing nursing education, research, and practice are addressed in federal healthcare reform legislation. Strategies to ease the nursing and nurse faculty shortages, enhance Advanced Practice Registered Nurses’ (APRNs) scope of practice, elevate the need for quality care standards, and focus on health promotion and disease prevention are only a few of the many themes that will require insight from professional nursing during the legislative and regulatory processes. Moreover, the current proposals seek to expand access, decrease cost, and improve quality. Nursing care is central to addressing these reform measures, which will create a significant demand for additional nurses, including APRNs.

AACN is committed to helping create a reformed system that is patient-centered by ensuring that critical issues important to nursing education, research, and practice are addressed and sustained in the legislation and that nursing's expertise is a continued presence on future healthcare decisions.

AACN represents over 640 schools of nursing that educate approximately 270,000 students and employ over 13,000 faculty members. Together, these institutions produce about half of our nation’s registered nurses and all of the nurse faculty and researchers. Together, with our dedicated members, AACN stands ready to collaborate on achieving effective policy for nursing.
Expand federal appropriations to increase funding for professional nursing education.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 marked a shift in the federal government’s efforts to expand funding for nursing education. The Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act) received a 9.6% increase in funding over the FY 2008 level. While a modest increase, the additional funding broke the five-year trend of near level funding for the programs. Within the same appropriations year, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), providing an additional $42.2 million for the Title VIII programs. An even stronger commitment to nursing education was seen when the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010, which provided the Title VIII programs with $243.872 million in FY 2010, a 43% increase over FY 2009. Of significant interest to AACN’s federal agenda, Congress provided the Nurse Faculty Loan Program with $25 million, a 117% increase over the FY 2009 level. However, the President’s FY 2011 Budget Proposal requested level funding for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs.

Healthcare reform has provided further opportunities for enhancing support of nursing education. For instance, the Medicare Graduate Nursing Education demonstration program would provide funding for the clinical education of APRNs. Additionally, career ladder programs, nurse practitioner residency programs, and efforts to build a more diverse nursing workforce are all legislative options to increase support for nursing education.

Given the ongoing nursing and nurse faculty shortages as well as the projected demand for additional nursing care in a newly reformed system, AACN is committed to capitalizing on the efforts of the federal government to expand funding for professional nursing education.
Improve the federal investment in nursing research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation.

The ground-breaking research conducted at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) translates to life-saving innovations that promote the health and wellness of the public. Through ARRA, an additional $10.4 billion was provided to the NIH budget to continue and expand its critical work. Nurse researchers, whose projects are funded by many of the agency’s institutes and centers, have benefited from this substantial investment. However, a lack of funding at the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) limits vital investigation and scientific discoveries that would improve nursing care. The NINR’s FY 2010 budget ($145.66 million) continues to be one half of one percent of the entire NIH’s $31 billion budget.

Nursing science’s impact on improving healthcare delivery was recently advanced at the national level through the healthcare reform legislation, which includes initiatives based on seminal nursing research. Elevating the role nursing science has in healthcare innovation is more critical than ever as the federal government is investing in comparative effectiveness research and
searching for best practices. Federal agencies will be offering significant grants to meet the national healthcare goals of improved access, decreased cost, and enhanced quality care.

Therefore, AACN is committed to advancing nursing science and helping to translate its innovations into federal policy that improves the quality of patient care.

**Advance new and existing nursing education legislation that will meet the call for a more highly educated nursing workforce.**

With the release of Dr. Patricia Benner and colleagues’ decisive study, *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation*, the profession is offered yet another validation of the need for a more highly educated nursing workforce. 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 healthcare. These vital skills are clearly linked to the competence level achieved through baccalaureate and graduate nursing education.

In order to ensure that a higher percentage of individuals choose to advance their nursing education either through baccalaureate-degree completion programs or graduate study, a number of nursing school capacity barriers must be addressed.

AACN is committed to raising the awareness at the federal level about the positive patient-care outcomes associated with a highly educated nursing workforce and developing legislation that promotes viable solutions to achieve this goal such as career ladders, enhanced articulation agreements, capitation grants, and other factors that affect nursing school capacity.