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. The association represents over 660 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.

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.

AACN views federal advocacy as having an integral role in the ability to shape, advance, and promote a professional nursing workforce. For 41 years, AACN has focused its policy agenda on two key components of the profession – education and research. Consistent with the organization’s history, AACN’s 2011 Federal Policy Agenda directly addresses these critical components while incorporating the many facets of policy that impact nursing. Additionally, with the release of the landmark Institute of Medicine’s report *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, AACN closely aligned our Federal Policy Agenda items to reflect the important recommendations of the report.

**Specifically for 2011, AACN will focus on:**

- Amplifying nursing’s leadership role in the redesign and improvement of the healthcare delivery system.

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

- 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.

Together, with our dedicated members, AACN stands ready to collaborate on achieving effective policy solutions for nursing to promote Americans’ health.
1. Amplifying nursing’s leadership role in the redesign and improvement of the healthcare delivery system.

The IOM report 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 care. During the 112th Congress, the Administration will continue to implement the many provisions enacted through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). AACN will work with nursing experts and other coalitions during the regulatory process to ensure these provisions incorporate the practice and leadership skills of registered nurses as well as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). Removing scope of practice barriers, improving quality care standards, and focusing on health promotion and disease prevention are only a few of the many themes that will require insight from professional nursing during the regulatory process. Moreover, ACA seeks 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 that nursing’s expertise is a continued presence in future healthcare decisions for the benefit of our nation’s patients.

AACN represents over 660 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.
2. Advancing new and existing nursing education legislation that will meet the call for a more highly educated nursing workforce.

The IOM report states that “nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.” This objective has been the cornerstone of AACN’s advocacy for 41 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 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 degree-completion programs or graduate study, a number of nursing school capacity barriers must be addressed. According to AACN’s report on Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing, U.S. nursing schools turned away more than 67,000 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2010 due to insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints. Almost two-thirds of the nursing schools responding to the survey pointed to faculty shortages as a reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into their programs. While additional funding is necessary to address these barriers, innovative policy solutions must be explored.

AACN is committed to raising 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.
3. Expanding federal appropriations to increase funding for professional nursing education.

Over the past few years, federal funding for nursing education has steadily improved. Dramatic increases to the Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act [PHSA]) have demonstrated Congress’ awareness that educating the next generation of nurses is essential and requires a firm investment. This momentum must continue as Congress considers funding for the immediate fiscal years.

The ACA also provided further opportunities to enhance support of nursing education. For instance, the Medicare Graduate Nurse Education demonstration program would provide funding for the clinical education of APRNs. Additionally, career ladder programs, residency programs, and efforts to build a more diverse nursing workforce are all incorporated in the law.

Existing programs that support nursing and APRN education such as the National Health Service Corps (Title III, PHSA) and the Health Professions Programs (Title VII, PHSA), also have seen significant funding increases during the recent fiscal years. Moreover, these programs have been enhanced by the ACA. Other programs, such as the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program, require continued support in the coming year to achieve increased funding. Additionally, newly established programs through ACA such as the Nurse Managed Health Centers require allocated funding levels.

Given the demand for nurses, including APRNs, and nurse faculty in a newly reformed healthcare system, AACN is committed to capitalizing on the efforts of the federal government to expand funding for professional nursing education.
4. **Improving the federal investment in nursing research and elevating 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. 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 budget continues to be one half of one percent of the entire NIH’s multi-billion dollar budget.

Nursing science’s impact on improving healthcare delivery was recently advanced at the national level through the ACA, 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. In addition to NIH, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will help to advance healthcare innovations through research spending.

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

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