2012 Federal Policy Agenda

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Advancing Higher Education in Nursing
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. The association represents over 690 schools of nursing that educate approximately 360,000 students and employ over 16,000 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 that meets America’s healthcare needs. For 42 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 2012 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 its Federal Policy Agenda items to reflect the important recommendations of the report.

Specifically for 2012, AACN will work to:

• Amplify nursing’s leadership role in the redesign and improvement of the healthcare delivery system.

• Expand federal appropriations to increase funding for professional nursing education.

• Improve the federal investment in nursing research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation.

• Advance new and existing policies that meet the call for a more highly educated and diverse nursing workforce and support interprofessional practice.

Together, with our dedicated members, AACN stands ready to collaborate on achieving effective and sustainable policy for nursing and health care.
1. **Amplify 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. 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 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.

The contributions made by the practice and science of nursing are significant, and in collaboration with other healthcare professionals, improve the quality of America’s healthcare system. 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.

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2. Expand federal appropriations to increase funding for professional nursing education.

According to the 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Employment Projections 2010-2020, the Registered Nursing workforce is one of the leading occupations that will add the most positions by 2020. It is expected that the number of practicing nurses will grow from 2.74 million in 2010 to 3.45 million in 2020, an increase of 712,000 or 26%. The projections further explain the need for 495,500 replacements in the nursing workforce bringing the total number of job opening for nurses due to growth and replacements to 1.2 million by 2020.1

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 (PHSA)) 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. The Title VIII programs have supported the supply and distribution of qualified nurses to meet our nation’s healthcare needs since 1964 and an investment in their sustainability is vital.

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), have also seen significant funding increases during the recent fiscal years. Other programs, such as the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need program require continued support in the coming year to prepare the next generation of nurses.

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 expand funding for professional nursing education, as the demand for nursing care grows steadily.

3. Improve the federal investment in nursing research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation.

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 nursing science has in healthcare innovation is more critical than ever as the federal government searches for best practices that also reduce cost and improve quality.

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. More must be done to invest in nursing and medical research for the health of our nation.

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, and many nurse scientists rely on these federal dollars.

Therefore, AACN is committed to advancing nursing science, by supporting an increased federal investment and helping to translate its innovations into federal policy that improves the quality of patient care.
4. **Advance new and existing policies that meet the call for a more highly educated and diverse nursing workforce and support interprofessional practice.**

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 42 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 expertise achieved through baccalaureate and graduate nursing education. At the same time, the interprofessional healthcare team is critical to the success of an improved healthcare system. AACN is actively engaged in coalitions to improve interprofessional education and practice, which extends to our advocacy work.

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 the benefits of a truly integrated healthcare team.

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