Good morning, I am Eileen Breslin, and I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee this morning as President of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. AACN is the national voice for baccalaureate and higher degree nursing programs in the United States. The 768 schools affiliated with AACN are responsible for educating the nation’s baccalaureate-prepared nursing workforce as well as all of our advanced practice nurses, nurse scientists, and nurse faculty. AACN represents all members of the academic nursing unit, including more than 18,000 full-time faculty members and 450,000 nursing students.

When the IOM report was released in 2010, AACN was pleased to see the bold, evidence-based recommendations related to nursing education and the advancement of the profession. In January 2011, AACN’s Board of Directors convened a strategic thinking retreat to consider how best to leverage the organization’s unique strengths to advance the IOM report recommendations. The Board identified four strategic priorities for AACN:

- Advancing the educational preparation of the nursing workforce at the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral levels
- Leveraging the academic-practice interface to drive change
- Developing leaders for the future of nursing education
- Providing leadership to facilitate interprofessional education

AACN member deans expressed strong agreement with the Board’s priorities and provided additional direction to the association following a series of Webinars to collect input on the four strategic priorities. More than 500 deans and faculty attended these Webinars. AACN staff then integrated this feedback into the organization’s tactical plan for FY 2012-2014. Finally, in January 2013, the Board revisited this important work at its biannual strategic thinking retreat and identified additional steps the organization would take to sustain momentum toward advancing the IOM recommendations.

In terms of quantifiable results, here are some highlights of what we have achieved in nursing education since the IOM report was released:

- Since 2010, 38 new entry-level Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs have opened nationwide; enrollment in these programs has increased by 17% from 161,540 to 189,729 students.
- Over the last five years, the total number of schools offering accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs has increased from 231 to 293. These programs are designed to efficiently transition individuals with baccalaureate and higher degrees in other disciplines into nursing. Within this timeframe, enrollment in accelerated BSN programs has increased by 24% from 13,605 to 16,935 students.
In response to the call for more baccalaureate-prepared nurses, schools have also expanded capacity in RN-to-BSN degree completion programs. Since fall 2010, enrollment in these programs has increased by 69% from 77,000 to 130,000 students.

In 2011, AACN began conducting an annual survey on employer preferences for nurses prepared at the baccalaureate-level. Over the last 4 years, the percentage of employers requiring new RN hires to hold a baccalaureate increased from 30% to 45%. Within that same timeframe, the percentage of employers preferring nurses with a BSN increased from 76% to 80%.

In terms of doubling the number of nurses with doctoral degrees, we are well on our way to meeting this objective, due largely to the surge of enrollment in Doctor of Nursing Practice programs. Since fall 2010, enrollment in DNP programs has more than doubled, from 7,037 to 18,352 students (161% increase). Enrollment in PhD nursing programs has also increased by 15% over the last 5 years with 5,290 now pursuing the research-focused doctorate. (Number of DNP graduates has increased by 139% from 1,281 graduates in 2010 to 3,065 graduates in 2014. The number of PhD graduates increased from 533 in 2010 to 743 in 2014.)

Since 2000, AACN, together with our partners at the University HealthSystem Consortium, has been at the forefront of developing and promoting post-baccalaureate nurse residency programs. Since 2010, the number of AACN-affiliated nurse residencies has expanded from 62 to 105 sites, in addition to two statewide collaboratives being formed in Maryland and Hawaii to further expand these transition-to-practice programs. New nurse retention rates at residency sites are greater than 95%, which far exceeds the national average (80-85%). (AACN is aware that post-DNP residency programs are now offered at some practice sites. We are monitoring this development and have not taken a position yet since outcome data is not available.)

The IOM report has been an important catalyst for building new bridges between practice and academia while generating universal support for a more highly educated nursing workforce. More employers today are seeking nurses with at least baccalaureate level education given their important contributions to team-based care and population health, and many are moving to provide time and funding for nurses to take the next step in their education.

Over the next five years, AACN recommends collaborative action and engagement in these priority areas addressed in the IOM report:

- Scope of practice barriers in many states continue to impede advanced practice nurses from practicing to the full extent of their education. In some areas, local credentialing requirements and practice policies can limit nursing practice even though state regulations permit a broader legal scope. Though APRNs are typically the focus of conversations around scope of practice issues, baccalaureate-prepared nurses are not fully utilized across all practice settings; in particular in ambulatory care settings where they are needed to provide population health, health promotion, disease prevention, and chronic disease management. Nursing should consider new ways to credential and/or
license BSN nurses, including models based on competency and perhaps a new licensing exam for BSNs. AACN strongly recommends that the IOM Committee convene stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels to address scope of practice concerns directly and rally support for meaningful change.

- Despite the increasing number of baccalaureate and doctoral program graduates, more must be done to ensure that the nurses we are bringing into the profession are representative of our nation’s diverse population. The IOM Committee should consider mechanisms for identifying and promoting best practices related to recruitment and retention of individuals from under-represented backgrounds into nursing, including holistic admissions and successful recruitment strategies used by other health professions. Special attention must be paid to diversifying the nurse faculty population.

- Though nursing schools have made great strides in expanding baccalaureate level nursing programs, reaching the 80% BSN target by 2020 is not likely. Given the strong evidence linking baccalaureate-level education to quality patient outcomes and improvements in population health, AACN recommends that the IOM focus attention encouraging new recruits into the profession to pursue entry-level baccalaureate or accelerated baccalaureate programs. The IOM could also convene stakeholders to consider alternate ways to fund baccalaureate–level nursing education with a focus on minimizing the cost to students.

- Though enrollment in practice-focused doctoral programs is growing rapidly, more must be done to ensure a stronger pipeline of PhD-prepared nurses. Developing a larger pool of doctorally prepared nurses is critical for the profession. Only 49% of nurse faculty are prepared at the highest level. Though RWJF’s Future of Nursing Scholars program and the Jonas Nurse Leaders Scholars program are commendable, these programs alone will not produce enough nurses to meet the growing demand for faculty and nurse scientists. AACN welcomes the opportunity to partner with foundations and other stakeholders to develop strategies for overcoming barriers to building capacity in PhD programs, including containing the cost of doctoral level education, providing competitive stipends, ensuring quality education, and expanding interprofessional engagement. The IOM should recommend the post-baccalaureate PhD program for nurses seeking academic and research roles.

- In the interest of strengthening interprofessional education and practice, the IOM should also recommend the post-baccalaureate DNP for nurses seeking the most efficient route to a practice-focused terminal degree, especially for those seeking advanced practice and clinical faculty roles.

AACN remains committed to working with all stakeholders to better prepare nurses to lead and transform care across roles and practice settings by advancing their education to the baccalaureate and graduate degree level. We strongly believe that encouraging all nurses to continue their education is in the best interest of patients and the communities we serve. This will also serve to elevate nursing’s contribution to interprofessional practice. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this update.