

Advancing Nursing Workforce Development and Diversity to Achieve Health Equity

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A diverse and sustainable nursing workforce is critical to health equity. The United States is facing a deepening nursing workforce crisis, with critical gaps in underserved and rural communities where access is already fragile. Persistent burnout, structural inequities, and underinvestment in nursing education and workforce development have weakened the pathways needed to prepare and retain a diverse nursing workforce. As a result, nursing does not reflect the communities it serves. Stabilizing the workforce and advancing health equity require coordinated federal action. **As the voice for more than 308,000 Black nurses the National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA)** urges the 119th Congress to prioritize policies that strengthen workforce stability, expand diversity, and advance equitable outcomes nationwide.

Policy Priorities for Congressional Action

1. **Expand Title VIII nursing workforce development programs.** Increase funding for the HRSA Title VIII programs to strengthen nurse education, advanced practice preparation especially in rural and underserved communities.
2. **Support the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act.** Reintroduce and pass legislation that promotes diverse faculty recruitment and retention, increases student enrollment, and upgrades academic infrastructure.
3. **Diversify the nursing workforce.** Expand federal funding for HBCUs, MSIs, and community college partnerships, to increase the number of Black nurses and nurse leaders, and strengthen faculty recruitment and retention.
4. **Reduce financial burden for nursing students and nurses.** Expand federal loan programs and redesign the Nurse Corps Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs with equity-focused criteria that reduce financial barriers.
5. **Strengthen equity-centered nursing workforce data.** Standardize data collection in education and workforce systems to track key metrics and monitor progress toward nursing workforce equity.
6. **Support culturally responsive training and leadership development.** Invest in continuing education and leadership development programs that expand opportunities for Black nurses to lead in the many settings where nursing expertise shapes decisions.

Why This Matters

- National projections show a shortage of more than **330,000 full-time nurses by 2036¹** making Title VIII investment essential to strengthen nurse education, advanced preparation, and retention, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- With more than **80,000 qualified** nursing applicants turned away², nearly **2,000** faculty vacancies, **one-third** of faculty retiring by the end of 2025³, and only **22%** from underrepresented groups⁴, nursing programs cannot expand or diversify without FAAN Act investment.
- **A diverse workforce is essential** for improving access and outcomes⁵, yet Black nurses remain significantly underrepresented at **7%** of nurses⁶, underscoring the need for targeted investment in HBCU and MSI programs.
- **Financial barriers** intensify nursing shortages and limit the development and advancement of a diverse, highly trained workforce conditions that ultimately undermine health equity.⁷
- Lack of equity-focused workforce data leads to missed inequities, poorer care, and an average hospital loss of **\$4.85 million** annually.^{8, 9, 10}
- Culturally responsive leadership development expands pathways for inclusive representation in nurse leadership where diverse leaders shape resource allocation, equitable policy, and progress toward health equity¹¹.

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