



National Black Nurses Association, Inc.
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For Immediate Release

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National Black Nurses Association Mourns the Passing of Dr. Barbara L. Nichols, Trailblazing Nurse Leader Who Broke Racial Barriers in the Profession

NBNA honors the life and legacy of the first Black president of the American Nurses Association, whose courage and vision opened doors for generations of Black nurses

Silver Spring, MD – The National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA) joins the nursing community in mourning the passing of nursing ICON **Dr. Barbara L. Nichols, DL(h), DSc(h), PedD(h), MSN, RN, FADLN, FAAN**, a nursing pioneer whose historic leadership and lifelong advocacy for equity reshaped the profession and paved the way for Black nurses across the country. Dr. Nichols was a Lifetime member of the NBNA.



Dr. Nichols made history as the first Black president of the American Nurses Association (ANA), elected in 1978 and re-elected in 1980, serving two terms through 1982. She had already broken ground years earlier, becoming the first Black president of the Wisconsin Nurses Association from 1970 to 1972. Across a career spanning more than six decades, she built a legacy rooted in justice, integrity, and unwavering professional excellence, one that resonates deeply with NBNA's own mission to advocate for equity in health care and empower nurses of color at every stage of their careers.

“Dr. Nichols was a giant and role model whose shoulders so many of us have stood on,” stated Dr. Sheldon D. Fields, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, AACRN, FNAP, FAANP, FADLN, FAAN the president of the National

Black Nurses Association. “At a time when Black nurses were routinely overlooked and underestimated, she refused to be silenced or sidelined. She showed our profession, and



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our country, what Black nursing leadership looks like at the very highest level, and she did it with grace, grit, and an unshakable sense of purpose.”

Born in 1939 in Waterville, Maine, and raised in Portland, Dr. Nichols was one of only two Black students admitted to her class at Massachusetts Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. She went on to earn her bachelor's degree at Case Western Reserve University and her master's degree at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Early in her career, as the only Black registered nurse on staff at Boston Children's Hospital and later as a Navy Nurse Corps head nurse at the U.S. Naval Hospital in St. Albans, Queens, she often felt her voice was dismissed because of her race, an experience that fueled her determination to rise into leadership and ensure Black nurses would have a seat at the table.

As ANA president, Dr. Nichols championed baccalaureate education as the standard for entry into practice and led ANA's push for a stronger nursing voice in national health policy, forging historic collaborations with the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association. She later served as CEO of the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS), advocating for the fair treatment of internationally educated nurses, and served on the board of the International Council of Nurses, extending her commitment to equity onto the global stage. “Dr. Nichols understood, long before it was widely recognized, that representation in nursing leadership saves lives”. “She opened doors that had been closed to Black nurses for generations, and she never stopped reaching back to bring others through with her” ~ NBNA President, Dr. Fields.



Her many honors include being named a Living Legend of the American Academy of Nursing in 2010, the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Outstanding Woman of Color in 2018, induction into the ANA Hall of Fame in 2022, the inaugural Canary Savage Girardeau Award for Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion from the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Nursing in 2023, and induction as an Inaugural Luminary Fellow of the Academy of Diversity Leaders in Nursing in 2024.

The National Black Nurses Association extends its deepest condolences to Dr.



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Nichols' family, friends, colleagues, and the countless nurses across the country she mentored and inspired. Though her passing is a profound loss to the nursing profession and to the Black nursing community she championed throughout her life, her courage, wisdom, and trailblazing legacy will continue to guide and inspire nurses for generations to come.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BLACK NURSES ASSOCIATION, INC.

The National Black Nurses Association (NBNA), founded in 1971, represents the voices of over 308,000 Black nurses from the United States, Eastern Caribbean, and Africa. The NBNA serves as a cutting-edge force for social change and is committed to providing a forum for collective action to ensure access to the highest quality of healthcare.

For more information, visit www.nbna.org