


The Growing Nursing Shortage:

A Call for National Recognition as a Public Health Emergency

The U.S. healthcare system is facing a rapidly escalating nursing shortage that jeopardizes patient care, strains existing healthcare professionals, and necessitates immediate national action. We urge the Administration to declare the nursing shortage a public health emergency to unlock critical resources and implement effective solutions.



The Evidence is Clear and Alarming.

Multiple data points from leading healthcare organizations paint a stark picture of the current and projected crisis:

193,100

projected U.S. openings for RNs each year through 2032 due to workforce exits and growing demand (AACN, 2024; BLS, 2023)

65,766

number of qualified applications U.S. nursing schools turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2023 due to insufficient faculty, clinical sites, and classroom space (AACN, 2024)

100,000

number of RNs who left the workforce between 2020 and 2021, the largest drop observed in four decades (AACN, 2024, citing Auerbach et al.; NCSBN, 2023)

37

number of states by 2025 projected to face critical nursing shortages (RegisteredNursing.org, 2025, citing HRSA)

610,388

RNs reported to have intent to leave the workforce by 2027 due to stress, burnout, and retirement (NCSBN, 2023; AHA News, 2023)

The ten states with the largest projected nursing shortage in 2035 are:

- Washington (26%)
- Georgia (21%)
- California (18%)

- Oregon (16%)
- Michigan (15%)
- Idaho (15%)

- Louisiana (13%)
- North Carolina (13%)
- New Jersey (12%)
- South Carolina (11%)


Impact on Patient Care and Safety

The nursing shortage directly impacts the quality and safety of patient care. Studies show a correlation between inadequate nurse staffing and:


- Increased patient mortality (Bradley University Online, n.d.).
- Higher rates of medication errors (Bradley University Online, n.d.; Fennemore Law, 2025).
- Increased risk of infections and falls (Fennemore Law, 2025).
- Delayed detection of complications and insufficient care (Fennemore Law, 2025).
- Overcrowding in emergency departments (Bradley University Online, n.d.).

Why This Constitutes a Public Health Emergency:


A public health emergency, as defined under section 319 of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act, can be declared when a disease or disorder presents a public health emergency, or when a public health emergency otherwise exists (ASPR, n.d.; CDC, n.d.). The nursing shortage, while not a disease itself, is crippling the healthcare system's ability to respond to the ongoing health needs of the population, including health promotion, disease prevention, and chronic disease management.




Impedes access to care for individuals and communities.




Compromises the quality and safety of healthcare services, leading to poorer patient outcomes.



Overwhelms the existing healthcare infrastructure and workforce.




Exacerbates health disparities, particularly in underserved and rural areas already facing critical shortages (Nightingale College, 2024).



Threatens national preparedness for future health crises.

The sustained and worsening nature of the nursing shortage, its profound impact on patient health and safety, and its detrimental effect on the overall healthcare system align with the serious implications that warrant a public health emergency declaration. Such a declaration would elevate the issue to a national priority, enabling the mobilization of resources, the implementation of waivers or modifications to certain regulations (ASPR, n.d.), and the focused development and execution of strategies to address this crisis comprehensively.

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