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Submitted via email to NINRstrategicplan@mail.nih.gov

Dear Dr. Zenk:

The American Nurses Association (ANA) appreciates the efforts of the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) as it develops its next strategic plan for 2022 through 2026. NINR's research goals and objectives are an important component for the field of nursing science, as the research conducted by NINR highlights evidence-based knowledge, processes, and solutions that are critical to furthering the nursing profession. The next strategic plan will send an important signal as to what future areas of nursing research will advance patient care.

ANA also appreciates the thoughtful work that went into the current strategic plan. The priorities laid out in that plan focus on research directions, supporting innovation, the 21st century nursing workforce, and continued stewardship of nursing science.¹ ANA urges NINR to continue to build on the successes of executing the goals and priorities set out in the previous plan as it moves forward with the new strategic plan.

As part of the process to develop the new strategic plan, NINR is soliciting feedback and ideas from stakeholders. We applaud this approach and appreciate the opportunity to weigh in with our vision for the future of nursing science. As the new strategic plan is developed, ANA urges NINR to consider the following recommended areas of focus:

- Health Equity
- Evidence-based Research
- Future of the Profession
- Preparedness and Mental Health
- Technology
- Payment Parity

These areas of research reflect current priorities and challenges facing the nursing profession. ANA details these areas of focus below, providing recommendations for NINR to adopt in its new strategic plan.

¹ National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR). The NINR Strategic Plan: Advancing Science, Improving Lives. February 2016. https://www.ninr.nih.gov/sites/files/docs/NINR_StratPlan2016_reduced.pdf. Accessed February 2021.

Health Equity

Recent analysis shows that the nation is diversifying faster than expected, with racial and ethnic minorities accounting for the most population growth.² Naturally, this results in patient populations in the United States becoming increasingly more diverse. However, racial and ethnic minorities—as well as a patient’s socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, geographic location, or other factors—face health care disparities. Health and health care disparities result in higher burdens of illness, disability, mortality, and barriers to access to care that often lead to poor patient outcomes.³ As the nation becomes more diverse, addressing health disparities is vital for the nation’s overall health and move toward achieving health equity across patient populations.

Federal focus on this important issue has been seen through the work of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which includes a department-wide action plan and the establishment of offices tasked with coordination activities that improve health outcomes for racial and ethnic minority populations and reduce overall health disparities at several agencies at HHS.⁴ ⁵ Recently, the federal focus on health equity was furthered when President Biden signed an Executive Order establishing the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. The task force will provide recommendations to mitigate inequities stemming from health and social disparities that result in worse outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic and how to prevent inequities in the future.⁶ These federal actions continue to emphasize the need to focus on health equity and find solutions that erase health disparities across the country.

ANA has also focused on this important issue. In recognition of systemic issues of racism in the nation and in the nursing profession, ANA’s current strategic plan includes addressing racism as an area of critical focus.⁷ As part of the association’s overall goal to evolve the practice of nursing to transform health and health care, in January 2021 ANA, in collaboration with a number of ethnic and minority nurses’ associations, launched a National Commission on Racism in Nursing to facilitate the necessary national discussion to identify and prioritize recommendations to successfully address racism in the nursing profession.⁸ In addition, providing culturally competent care to patients has long been an ethical imperative for the nursing profession. Nurses must embrace diversity and engage in culturally competent care, removing unconscious biases, to effectively promote meaningful patient outcomes.

² Frey, W. The nation is diversifying even faster than predicted, according to new census data. The Brookings Institution. July 1, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>. Accessed February 2021.

³ Artiga, S., Orgera, K., Pham, O. Disparities in Health and Health Care: Five Key Questions and Answers. Kaiser Family Foundation. March 4, 2020. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-five-key-questions-and-answers/>. Accessed February 2021.

⁴ US. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities. April 2011. https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/files/Plans/HHS/HHS_Plan_complete.pdf. Accessed February 2021.

⁵ HHS, Office of Minority Health (OMH). Offices of Minority Health at HHS. October 13, 2020. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=2&lvlid=7>. Accessed February 2021.

⁶ HHS OMH. About COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. February 22, 2021. <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=2&lvlid=100>. Accessed February 2021.

⁷ American Nurses Association (ANA) Enterprise. 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. October 27, 2020. <https://www.nursingworld.org/~4ad752/globalassets/ana-enterprise/about-us/descriptions-enterprise-strategies-and-objectives.pdf>. Accessed February 2021.

⁸ ANA. Leading Nursing Organizations Launch the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing. Press Release. January 25, 2021. <https://www.nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2021/leading-nursing-organizations-launch-the-national-commission-to-address-racism-in-nursing/>. Accessed February 2021.

Ultimately, nurses are key in designing and directing care that appropriately meets the needs of patients, improve access to needed care, promote positive outcomes, and reduce disparities.⁹

ANA recommends NINR to prominently feature the issue of health equity in the new strategic plan and identify areas of key research. The association suggests conducting research to identify and implement culturally appropriate care to patients. Moreover, research into what the nurse's role is in designing and delivering that care. NINR also can build on existing work and research conducted by other government agencies and identify areas where the nurse can hold a larger role to bring about needed change, within the profession, among the interprofessional team, and in care to patients. This focus is imperative as health care policymakers and providers continue to meet the needs of changing patient demographics while overcoming health disparities.

Evidence-Based Research

ANA's *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (2021) details how the nursing profession is deeply rooted in evidence-based knowledge and practice, which are foundational competencies in nursing practice.¹⁰ The evidence-based practice process provides nurses a framework in which to fully analyze situations by asking the right patient-centered questions, resulting in practice guidelines that optimize patient outcomes. Further, it is critical that nurses can translate research into practice—which nurses are at the forefront of this work as they implement evidence-based practices into clinical care, lead research teams, and advocate for the adoption of evidence-based policies throughout the health care system.¹¹

We continue to see some nurses' express hesitancy to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine over concerns about long- and short-term side effects and the vaccine's safety.¹² This hesitancy is a prime example as to why nurses must remain connected to the evidence-based practice processes. It is critical that nurses not only have greater exposure to evidence-based research but are taught to question available evidence to reach the best, science-based conclusions.

ANA suggests NINR strongly highlight in its strategic plan the need for evidence-based research to be prolific throughout a nurse's career. Nurses must trust in the science. The association recommends specifically researching into how to best involve nurses in scientific, evidence-based research beginning with the nursing school curriculum and as they advance in their careers.

Future of the Profession

An important component of the new strategic plan is the future of the nursing profession. Research should be conducted that examines shortages, impacts of staffing committees, nurse demographics, workplace violence, and what changes should be made to ensure nurses enter the workforce prepared and confident. A better understanding of these aspects of the profession are important to identify what else is needed to support new nurses and advance the profession into the 21st century.

⁹ ANA. *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, 4th ed. 2021. Pg. 31. Silver Spring, MD. American Nurses Association.

¹⁰ ANA. *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, 4th ed. 2021. Pgs. 18-19. Silver Spring, MD. American Nurses Association.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ANA. Pulse on the Nation's Nurses COVID-19 Survey Series: Year One COVID-19 Impact Assessment, February 2021. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/health-safety/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus/what-you-need-to-know/year-one-covid-19-impact-assessment-survey/>. Accessed March 2021.

Workforce and Staffing

ANA recommends an aggressive research agenda is needed to examine why nursing shortages continue and where they are felt most acutely. The nation is facing impending health care workforce shortages due to changing patient demographics and demands on the health care system. This includes nurses, where projections hold that the nation will need over a million new RNs by 2022 to mitigate a critical nursing shortage.¹³ In addition to shortages, how nurses are utilized in comparison to their state scope of practice is key to understanding other gaps in the workforce. To that end, research also is needed to determine the impact of staffing committees on the nursing workforce. Further, how traveling nurses fit into the nursing workforce, how they impact the patient experience, and address or obfuscate long-term staffing considerations.

Nurse Demographics

ANA recommends that NINR conduct research into the underlying reasons for and potential solutions to bring more diversity to the nursing workforce. Nursing as a career path continues to be primarily chosen by women. The nursing profession seems to struggle in attracting men, people of color, various ethnicities, that would ensure a robust, diverse workforce. As noted above, patient demographics are changing—nurses in the workforce should mirror the populations they are serving. This, coupled with larger workforce and staffing issues, can help push the profession into the 21st century and appropriately reflect the current landscape.

Workplace Violence

ANA recommends that NINR adopt in its strategic plan research into effective mitigation strategies and the cost to the profession of workplace violence. Reinforced in ANA's *Code of Ethics with Interpretive Statements*, nurses are required to create an environment of dignity and respect—and be afforded the same. This results in the nursing profession at a point where violence of any kind can no longer be tolerated in the nursing profession.¹⁴ Unfortunately, we know that workplace violence remains pervasive. While research has been conducted on the prevalence and the impact of smaller tactics to address this issue, more meaningful research is warranted. NINR must build on existing research to identify evidence-based solutions.¹⁵ In addition, research is needed into quantifying what the cumulative issues are that finally push many nurses out of the profession. Last, research and identification of effective reporting measures are critical to fully capture the scope of this issue. Together, focusing on these aspects can help to identify successful, sustainable solutions that can be implemented across all care settings to finally put an end to workplace violence experienced by our nation's nurses.

Curriculum Changes

ANA recommends that NINR incorporate research into their strategic plan that identifies approaches and changes that can best ensure that a nurse's education adequately prepares them for their first day on the job. To better prepare the nation's future nurses, changes are needed to the curriculum and overall educational approach of nursing school programs. Textbooks often continue to portray patients

¹³ ANA. Workforce. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/workforce/>. Accessed February 2021.

¹⁴ ANA. American Nurses Association Position Statement on Incivility, Bullying, and Workplace Violence. July 22, 2015. <https://www.nursingworld.org/~49d6e3/globalassets/practiceandpolicy/nursing-excellence/incivility-bullying-and-workplace-violence--ana-position-statement.pdf>. Accessed February 2021.

¹⁵ ANA continues to prioritize research and advocacy that aims to mitigate workplace violence. Through various efforts, the association has identified the types of violence, potential interventions, and resources for nurses. NINR should consider these existing efforts—using them to further its own research on this critical issue. Additional information about ANA's efforts is available at <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/work-environment/violence-incivility-bullying/>.

and nurses in stereotypical fashions. This does not reflect current demographics and advance more culturally competent care, as detailed above. It is also critical that nursing students have opportunities and experience to hone their clinical skills before they enter the workforce. Research is needed into how changes in textbooks, that highlight lived experiences, strengthen the nursing curriculum. This, in turn, impacts what is included in the NCLEX. Examining how the foundation of the nursing profession can be improved to adequately prepare nurses entering the workforce is critical.

Preparedness and Mental Health

The nation continues to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted various deficiencies in our ability to respond to natural and manmade disasters and pandemics. For example, the COVID-19 response exposed supply chain and distribution issues for needed materials to appropriately provide care to patients—directly impacting the ability of nurses to carry out their job functions safely. Given their critical role in the health care delivery system and their relationships with patients and families, it is imperative that nurses are included in planning and decision-making for future disaster and pandemic response.

ANA recommends that NINR conduct further research into what the nurse’s role is and should be in disaster and pandemic response. Areas to examine should center on what the nurse’s role is in preparation and planning for disaster and pandemic response and how to bolster that role for future crises. Further, the threat of natural and manmade disasters is only likely to be more acute in the future. Effects of climate change and disease pandemics will challenge the nation’s preparedness. Because of that, it is crucial that nursing curriculum include education and approaches to emergency preparedness. ANA encourages NINR to include this in research on curriculum changes detailed above.

Additionally, the toll responding to the pandemic has had on the mental health of our frontline workers—and especially nurses—cannot be overstated. As part of our ability to be better prepared for future emergencies, it is critical that we have a complete understanding into how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of nurses and the stability of the profession overall. ANA encourages NINR to conduct research into this vital issue and identify approaches to proactively lessen the mental health impacts in future responses.

Technology

The use and proliferation of technology in the health care delivery system continues to evolve and expand. Technological advances greatly influence how nurses’ practice and can provide a better work environment for nurses if it is designed with a nurse’s workflow in mind. Importantly, this greater use of technology helps to reduce errors, eliminate redundancy, and provides important timely information to deliver better care to patients. At the same time, nurses are challenged with retaining the human element of practice.¹⁶

The association urges NINR to conduct research into what the appropriate role of the nurse is as technology advances. Further, how will these advances change health care and, more specifically, the nursing profession. As nurses adapt to technological advances in the delivery of care to patients, ANA believes more research is needed into how these advances are impacting the profession and clinician burnout and what, if any, future considerations must be accounted for.

¹⁶ ANA. *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, 4th ed. 2021. Pg. 48. Silver Spring, MD. American Nurses Association

We also are seeing a movement to using telehealth technologies to provide access to care to patients facing barriers. This is especially true now as clinicians turn to telehealth to provide the continuum of care to patients, while adhering to all COVID-19 mitigation requirements. The use of telehealth has quickly become more commonplace, requiring research into how the nurse fits into this care delivery model. NINR should research how telehealth can adapt to address access issues and the role of the nurse in utilizing this technology. This is key to help inform future policies regulating the scope of services that can be provided through telehealth and how those services should be adequately reimbursed.

Last, the introduction of the electronic health record (EHR) has added a layer of administrative burden on the patient care process. While, moving away from paper documentation has significant advantages, there is concern about burnout due to heavy administrative burden that detracts from direct patient caregiving. ANA suggests that NINR, as part of an overall examination of technology, identify challenges with increased technology and the EHR and mitigation strategies.

Payment Parity

Currently, many nursing services are bundled in the acute care setting under “room and board.” Other nursing services are paid disproportionately less than other clinicians providing the same service. These payment disparities do not reflect the critical nurse role in delivering health care services. At the same time, we are seeing providers and facilities adopt alternative payment models and care coordination efforts to drive efficiency and increase quality in patient care. Many of these include nurse led models or other recognition of the nurse role. This correct recognition has underscored the importance of nursing services and, thusly, ensuring all nurses are appropriately compensated for the services they provide to patients and families. There must be parity in payment across all qualified health professionals for the scope of services tied to delivering high-value care to patients.

ANA recommends that NINR examine what evidence-based measures can be researched and then adopted that reflect the value and role of the nurse in care delivery across all care settings. To bolster efforts to achieve payment parity, additional research is key to strengthen the argument to policymakers. Through research, NINR can identify methods to quantify the value of nursing services in the health care delivery system. We also know that many nurses choose care settings based on the experience and reputation of the nursing staff. NINR should examine how that relationship with patients and value to health care facilities further stress the need for payment parity.

ANA is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation’s 4.2 million registered nurses (RNs), through its state and constituent member associations, organizational affiliates, and individual members. ANA members also include the four advanced practice registered nurse roles (APRNs): nurse practitioners (NPs), clinical nurse specialists (CNSs), certified nurse-midwives (CNMs), and certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs). ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting a safe and ethical work environment, bolstering the health and wellness of nurses, and advocating on health care issues that affect nurses and the public. ANA also advocates for the adoption of solutions based on research through policies enacted at all levels of government. RNs serve in multiple direct care, care coordination, and administration leadership roles, across the full spectrum of health care settings. RNs provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions including essential self-care, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members.

ANA appreciates the opportunity to comment and weigh in as NINR considers the direction of the new strategic plan. ANA and its members stand ready to provide additional comments, share expertise, and find areas of potential collaboration—as well as monitor for additional chances to contribute to the development of the strategic plan. Advancing nursing science—and the nursing profession—is critical to meet the demands of an ever-evolving health care delivery system and ensuring patients receive appropriate, quality care.

We look forward to continued engagement. Please contact Ingrida Lulis, Vice President, Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Ingrid.Lulis@ana.org with any questions.

Sincerely,



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Chief Nursing Officer/EVP

cc: Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN, ANA President
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