

MEDIA RELEASE

10 March 2024

ACN calls for major positive image of nursing campaign to help drive health workforce reforms

ACN Pre-Budget Submission 2024-25

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is calling on the Government to fund a major national campaign to promote a positive image of a lifelong career in nursing as a core component of major reforms needed to build a multidisciplinary health workforce skilled to meet the complex needs of a growing and ageing Australian population.

Releasing ACN's 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission, ACN CEO, Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN, said that a highly skilled nursing workforce and nurse-led care must be at the forefront of health policy now and in the coming decades.

"As we mark the 40th anniversary of Medicare, governments must be more clever and more strategic with health budgets and health spending, especially with building the right health workforce to meet the needs of communities with increasingly complex and chronic health conditions.

"Australia, like the rest of the world, is experiencing a health workforce crisis," Adjunct Professor Ward said.

"The most reported shortages are in medicine, primarily general practitioners.

"This is having a major impact on access and affordability of quality health care for many Australians.

"The shortages are being felt most severely in rural, regional, and remote communities, and in isolated First Nations communities.

"The solution is to make better use of all the health professions to provide people with the right care in the right place at the right time, throughout all stages of life.

"Nursing is the largest and most geographically dispersed health profession in Australia, with nurses on the front line of health care in communities across the nation.

"Nurses are often the most qualified health professional living and working in many communities, especially in rural and remote areas.

"In some communities, a nurse is the only health professional.

"Nurses are highly regarded and respected in the community. People trust nurses and the care they provide in all settings.

“There are more than 450,000 nurses and midwives providing care in Australia.

“Plus, it is estimated that there are more than 75,000 qualified nurses who are presently not working as nurses. They are doing other things. They are a health workforce in hiding. We must get them back to nursing.

“A coordinated strategy is needed to keep nurses in nursing, educate more nurses, and attract nurses back into the profession.

“But governments must not look at nurses as a ‘quick fix.’

“Nurses must be at the centre of health policy for the long term. Investing in nurses is a wise decision of government.

“A national campaign to promote a positive career in nursing – with many roles in many different locations and opportunities for advancement – would help attract people, especially young people, male and female, to the best profession in the world.

“This campaign must also be targeted at schools.

“The Government has already shown with its teachers’ campaign that promoting a positive image can attract new teachers and keep teachers in the profession they love.

“They can do the same for nurses and nursing, Australia’s most trusted profession.”

Adjunct Professor Ward said that the ACN Pre-Budget Submission is stressing that radical and meaningful reform is needed, including with funding models for primary care.

“Nurses and Nurse Practitioners must have greater access to the MBS. The outdated GP-led fee for service model is broken. There are better ways,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

“We are presenting practical, achievable recommendations to build a nursing workforce in the right numbers with the right qualifications to serve the growing health needs of the Australian population.

“This investment in nurses is cost effective and will deliver tangible benefits for government, the nursing profession, the health system, the community and patients – and is far less than is spent on other health professions.”

Under the headings - ***Image of Nursing, Workforce, Education, and Leadership*** – ACN sets out in this submission a plan to:

- recruit and retain nurses in nursing and the health workforce as a lifelong career;
- provide incentives to attract qualified nurses back to the profession;
- make use of the skills and experience of older and retired nurses in education, mentoring, and to meet surge demand in pandemics or natural disasters;
- provide lifelong learning opportunities;
- create meaningful and rewarding diverse career pathways;
- and produce a campaign to promote a positive image of nursing to draw young people into nursing as a career and keep nurses in nursing for the long term.

Adjunct Professor Ward said that nurses are leaders and innovators in health care.

“Nurses are highly skilled, versatile, mobile, flexible, and have access to postgraduate education and training opportunities to constantly improve their knowledge and skills.

“Nurses must be enabled to work to their full scope of practice.

“Nurse-led care is a priority.

“Nurses are the solution.”

The ACN Pre-Budget Submission 2024-25 is at <https://www.acn.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/pre-budget-submission-2024.pdf>

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Notes to Editors:

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurses and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva in collaboration with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF). An organisation not afraid to challenge industry issues affecting the nursing profession or Australia's health care, ACN is a well-connected and educated national body that drives change with people of influence to enhance the delivery of health services to the Australian community. ACN's membership includes nurses in roles of influence, including senior nurses, organisational leaders, academics, and researchers.

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