



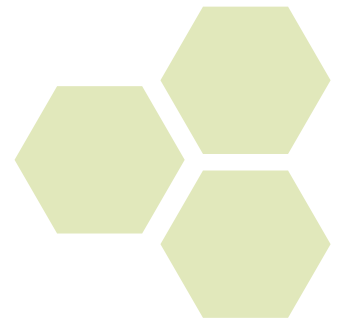
Australian College of Nursing

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

2024–2025







Contents

Foreword	2
Summary of recommendations	5
Image of Nursing	8
Workforce	10
Undergraduate support	10
Mentoring program	13
Support for supervised practice	15
Transition to retirement	16
Aged care	18
Clinical supervision	20
Education	21
Supporting lifelong learning and skills acquisition	21
Diabetes education	24
Leadership	26
About the Australian College of Nursing	29
References	30

Foreword

Nurses are the Solution



Australia is experiencing a health workforce crisis.

The most reported shortages are in medicine, primarily general practitioners. But most, if not all, the health professions are affected to varying degrees.

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.

Nurses can be mobilised quickly to meet rapidly increasing community demand for quality health care and to cope with the special health requirements of pandemics and extreme weather events.



But nursing, too, is experiencing workforce shortages. A coordinated strategy is needed to keep nurses in nursing, educate more nurses, and attract nurses back into the profession.

The nurse workforce pipeline shortage is happening at a time when governments are making health policy announcements that rely on supplying new nurses – thousands of new nurses nationally. But where are they? They do not exist. Not yet.

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 for government.

Work is underway to fix the health workforce crisis.

The Government has introduced major reforms and reviews, including:

- The Strengthening Medicare Taskforce;
- The Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-32;
- Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review;
- The National Nursing Workforce Strategy;
- The Nurse Practitioner Workforce Plan;
- The Mid-Term Review of the National Health Reform Agreement;
- The Working Better for Medicare Review; and
- Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (and Nurse-led Walk-in Clinics).

All this work highlights the key leadership role of nurses in health care.

ACN (Australian College of Nursing) is working closely with the reviews to ensure that Australians have access to the highest quality care available, no matter where they live and no matter their means.

ACN 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.

In this Pre-Budget Submission, ACN is presenting practical, achievable recommendations to build a nursing workforce in the right numbers with the right qualifications to serve the growing health needs of an increasing and ageing 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.

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.

To quote Professor Clint Douglas FACN from QUT School of Nursing:

“Nurse-led services are the sleeping giant of healthcare reform in Australia. Now is the time for policy and practice changes that will realise the transformative potential of nurse-led care.”

Nurse-led care is a priority.

Nurses are the solution.



**Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward RN, MMgt, FACN,
FCHSM, Wharton Fellow, MAICD**
Chief Executive Officer
Australian College of Nursing

Summary of recommendations

IMAGE OF NURSING

In the 2024-25 Federal Budget, ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

1. In collaboration with the States and Territories, invests in a national multi-media campaign that promotes the positive contribution nurses make to health care and society, the different roles and settings where nurses work, the diversity of the nursing workforce, and the attraction of nursing as a lifelong career.

In late 2023, the Australian Government launched a similar campaign to promote teaching as a career, attract more people to choose teaching as a career, and lure former teachers back to the profession. It is reported this campaign cost around \$10 million.

WORKFORCE

In the 2024-25 Federal Budget, ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

2. Provides financial support for undergraduate nursing students including a Cost-of-Living Stipend (up to \$3,000 per annum over three years) for eligible students, to ease the cost-of-living pressures while studying.
3. Invests in the development of a Mentoring Capability Framework and Nurse Mentor Preparation course for potential nurse mentors.
4. Provides funding to support nurses deemed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) to undertake supervised practice as a registration requirement at a cost of \$10.5 million over three years (1,000 places x \$10,500 per nurse at an average of 250 hours supervision), returning 1,000 nurses to the workforce who are ready to undertake clinical practice.
5. Invests in the development and implementation of a National Transition to Retirement Program for Nurses (\$2 million).
6. Reviews the rulings related to the aged pension and increases the limit of secondary income for high-need professions such as nursing.
7. Provides funding of \$1 million per year to continue and increase the current investment for the Aged Care Transition to Practice Program (ACTTP) program conducted by ACN - based on the feedback and success of this program to date.
8. Invests \$52.5 million over three years to fund 5000 scholarships for Registered Nurses (RNs) working in residential aged care to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care and Enrolled Nurses (ENs) to complete specialist pathways in Aged Care.
9. Invests in a nationally consistent framework that provides all nurses at risk of vicarious trauma with accessible and free clinical supervision.

EDUCATION

In the 2024-25 Federal Budget, ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

10. Invests in the development and implementation of a nationally consistent education and training framework for nurses and midwives to support ongoing skills acquisition and competency building throughout their careers. It must be flexible enough to meet individual nurse whole of career goals and professional development needs.
11. Invests \$1.5 million over three years to fund scholarships to enable nurses to acquire skills over time, giving them easy access to funds to complete education programs (continuous professional development) designed to build skills in their areas of interest throughout their careers.
12. Invests \$1 million for the development and delivery of an online diabetes education program for nurses. It can be made available by ACN to all nurses in any clinical area across Australia, regardless of location, sector, or specialty. This recommendation was flagged – and welcomed – at the Parliamentary Inquiry into Diabetes in 2023.

LEADERSHIP

In the 2024-25 Federal Budget, ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

13. Invests \$16.5 million over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurses to attend ACN's Nurse Unit Manager Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
14. Invests \$16.5 million over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurses to attend ACN's Nurse Director Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
15. Invests \$3 million to support 300 nurse leaders and executives to attend ACN's Nurse Executive Leadership Program (at \$10,000 per course).

Image of Nursing

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

1. In collaboration with the States and Territories, invests in a national multi-media campaign that promotes the positive contribution nurses make to health care and society, the different roles and settings where nurses work, the diversity of the nursing workforce, and the attraction of nursing as a lifelong career.

In late 2023, the Australian Government launched a similar campaign to promote teaching as a career, attract more people to choose teaching as a career, and lure former teachers back to the profession. It is reported this campaign cost around \$10 million.

THE ISSUE

There is a shortage of nurses in Australia, yet the number of students taking nursing courses has dropped from 103,550 in the 2021/22 period to 99,904 in the 2022/23 period.¹ It is essential to attract more people into the nursing profession by providing the community with a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities available for nurses in the workplace.

Nursing roles are broad and varied. Nurses contribute to society in all settings, from acute tertiary hospitals to rural and remote settings, where they often work as sole practitioners. Job satisfaction is strongly related to professional identity.²

We must improve the image of nursing among the public, policymakers, and nurses themselves. A positive and realistic image of nursing can enhance the quality of care, the recruitment and retention of nurses, and the advancement of the profession.

THE SOLUTION

Nursing must celebrate its contribution to Australian society and educate the public on the full scope and capability of nurses and encourage people to explore the possibilities offered by a career in nursing.

The nursing campaign would feature nurses from different States and Territories, working in different roles and settings, who will share their stories of their contribution to their local communities.

The campaign would show the face of nursing, reflecting the diversity of our communities.

Nursing must attract people from all cultures, beliefs, and orientations.

The nursing campaign would raise awareness of the positive difference nurses make in people's lives by applying their skills and knowledge across all settings and populations.

It would highlight the profession's depth and breadth and educate the public on what it means to be a contemporary nurse in the 21st Century.

It would highlight both the rewards and the challenges of being a nurse. It would also allow community members to discuss what nurses have done for them.

The recent education campaign to attract teachers to the profession is a good example of this approach. As with the teaching campaign, the Federal, State, and Territory governments should support and fund the nursing campaign across various media platforms.



Workforce

Australia must continue to build and retain the nursing workforce to ensure the provision of safe effective health care into the future.

In October 2022, 448,129 nurses and midwives were registered, but only 372,759 were currently employed in nursing and/or midwifery roles. More than 75,000 registered nurses are not working in nursing in Australia.

Between December 2019 and December 2022, the number of nurses on the non-practising register doubled.³ Attracting nurses back into the profession is essential. Strategies include providing skills, education, and accessible pathways for nurses who have left the workplace into affordable re-entry programs.

Currently, 35 per cent of all practising nurses are over 50 years old.⁴ Having an ageing nursing workforce poses challenges for the healthcare system.

There is a need for effective strategies targeting both individuals and organisations to support nurses to remain in the workforce for longer. These older, experienced nurses are invaluable in supporting and mentoring younger less experienced nurses.

Providing a structured transition-to-retirement program will help keep this experience in the workforce, supporting nurses to achieve work life balance and helping services ease workforce pressures.



UNDERGRADUATE SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

2. Provides financial support for undergraduate nursing students including a Cost-of-Living Stipend (up to \$3,000 per annum over three years) for eligible students, to ease the cost-of-living pressures while studying.

THE ISSUE

There has been a decline in the number of people entering nursing degrees,⁵ reducing the pipeline of new nurses entering the Australian workforce. Once in their nursing program of study, students are reported to drop out early due to academic issues and to drop out late in their programs due to issues such as a mismatch between expectations and reality.⁶ The causes must be addressed.

One of the pressing issues relates to the requirement for undergraduate nursing students to complete a minimum of 800 hours of clinical placement before they can successfully register as a nurse in Australia.⁷

Nationally, clinical placements are unpaid. Amid a cost-of-living crisis, clinical placements are putting an increased financial strain on many students, impacting their overall health.

In 2022, as many as 65 per cent of students could not work while completing clinical placement, with 79 per cent reporting financial hardship and 62 per cent reporting that lack of money impacted their health and well-being.⁸

A 2019 study identified transport costs, meals, work-ready clothes, and childcare costs putting strain on nursing students financially.⁹

Adverse experiences during clinical placements were also an identified cause of dropout.¹⁰

Although clinical placements are defined as vocational placements under the Fair Work Act,¹¹ this needs to be reviewed urgently. In many European countries and some programs in the United States, nursing students are paid a small amount to study and undertake their placements.¹² This monetary value increases as the student's level of training increases.¹³

In Victoria, undergraduate nursing or midwifery students can be employed while they study. This employment arrangement is known as a Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing (RUSON) or a Registered Undergraduate Student of Midwifery (RUSOM). The COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the range of practice for RUSONs and RUSOMs, and these positions are now widely acknowledged in Victorian public health systems.¹⁴

There are anecdotal reports of universities funding nursing rural placements, but not all universities offer this opportunity.¹⁵ Positive student rural placements can be a powerful tool for addressing rural healthcare workforce shortages.

Supervisors who can mentor students, expose them to various learning and teaching experiences, and give timely and appropriate feedback are essential for successful student placements.

Because of the significant differences between rural and urban practice environments, effective placements with the assistance of host organisations, supervisors, and students are required to guarantee that everyone involved has a positive placement experience.¹⁶

THE SOLUTION

Provide financial support for undergraduate nursing students.

The ACT Government recently announced the Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Study Incentive Program to support new and existing students studying eligible qualifications at the University of Canberra and Australian Catholic University.

The program includes a Cost-of-Living Stipend (up to \$3,000 per annum over three years) for eligible students to ease the cost-of-living pressures while studying.

Placement Support Grants (up to \$1,000 per clinical placement) are also available for eligible students to provide financial support during their placements.



MENTORING PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

3. Invests in the development of a Mentoring Capability Framework and Nurse Mentor Preparation course for potential nurse mentors.

THE ISSUE

With many nurses currently leaving the profession early, Australia needs help attracting and retaining early career nurses in the profession.

For many new graduates, the transition from the idealistic academic setting of university to the reality of a busy clinical unit can be overwhelming. Mentoring can be useful to support this transition.

Professional socialisation involves an individual acquiring the skills, knowledge, values, and roles associated with an occupation. For New Graduate nurses, this socialisation usually begins in the early days of their first graduate appointment.

In the current environment, with an increasingly junior workforce, new nurses may feel anxious and apprehensive about the demands of the role, especially if they feel pressured to take on more patient care responsibilities than they feel able to manage.

If their manager does not intervene, there is a real risk that they will feel unsupported and dissatisfied and leave their job or, indeed, leave the profession altogether.

Staff satisfaction is significantly influenced by a person's perception of support, with a lack of support often leading to nurses leaving their roles.¹⁷

A recent report indicates that up to 60-75 per cent of nurses leave the workforce prematurely.¹⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted an already stretched workforce and the healthcare industry more broadly. According to a 2021 survey by the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA),¹⁹ more than a quarter of nurses in the industry (28.73 per cent) expect to leave their jobs in the next two to five years.

Around 78 per cent of survey participants reported feeling burned out, some saying they often or always felt burnout.²⁰

There is no nationally consistent program that assures the quality of the mentor skills and knowledge or the mutual benefit to the mentor and mentee.

THE SOLUTION

Mentoring has traditionally been a practice reserved for more senior nurses who seek out a more experienced nurse to help them navigate their career goals, grow their professional profile, or deal with complex work-related situations.

More recently, the value of mentoring programs in supporting new graduates transition to the profession has been explored in the literature.

An additional benefit of these programs can be providing more experienced nurses with professional development opportunities and an increased sense of satisfaction as these relationships are mutually beneficial when the work effectively.

Mentorship programs may be a support to help novice nurses navigate the dynamic and often overwhelming transition into experienced practitioners.

Mentorship improves problem-solving, professional communication, teamwork, quality, and safety in nursing, and impacts academic and practice settings. It fosters new partnerships and may improve patient outcomes when initiated in academia.²¹

Mentoring programs have successfully transitioned new graduates into nursing practice, with experienced supervising nurses supporting and integrating nurses into daily practice.

Understanding nursing mentorship's impact on nurse transition and retention amid burnout is crucial for improving safety and workforce outcomes.

Mentorship can help nurses develop workforce capacity to lead and contribute to local, national, and worldwide policy agendas.

Mentorship programs can help nurses find their voice and increase their confidence and capacity to lead and build future strategic leaders.²²

Health services must encourage mid-career nurses to engage in mentoring, pursue additional education in their specialty area or explore new specialties to enhance their knowledge and career prospects.

SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISED PRACTICE

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

4. Provides funding to support nurses deemed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) to undertake supervised practice as a registration requirement at a cost of \$10.5 million over three years (1,000 places x \$10,500 per nurse at an average of 250 hours supervision), returning 1,000 nurses to the workforce who are ready to undertake clinical practice.

THE ISSUE

Some nurses want to return to clinical practice but must overcome significant barriers, including the financial burden of re-entry programs and the lack of opportunity to undertake supervised practice.

Returning nurses who must register with the NMBA are assessed against the National Board's eligibility criteria according to the nurse's qualifications, skills, competence, years of practice, and clinical experience.

Many are offered the opportunity to undertake supervised practice, yet there is no clear pathway for them to follow to meet the National Board's expectations. Nurses must seek out opportunities for unpaid supervised practice with healthcare providers, which are extremely hard to find.

Many nurses request that the NMBA provide an alternative but costly pathway to re-entry, but struggle to afford the program's cost.

THE SOLUTION

Education providers who deliver the Re-Entry to Practice program have experience supporting nurses in the workplace during clinical placements.

Funded supervised practice programs managed by these institutions would provide nurses with the pathway to supervised practice and the National Board's supervision requirements without burdening clinical partners.

ACN can also work with their affiliate partners to find placement and future employment opportunities.

TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

5. Invests in the development and implementation of a National Transition to Retirement Program for Nurses (\$2 million).
6. Reviews the rulings related to the aged pension and increases the limit of secondary income for high-need professions such as nursing.

THE ISSUE

There are currently 154,002 nurses aged 50 years and over registered with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Board, which represents 35 per cent of all practising nurses.²³

Having an ageing nursing workforce poses several challenges for the healthcare system. Some of the challenges include:

- **Physical difficulties:** older nurses may experience mobility impairment, back pain, or other health issues that affect their ability to perform manual tasks such as lifting patients, moving equipment, or standing for long periods.
- **Tiredness and fatigue:** older nurses may feel more exhausted due to heavier and more complex patient loads, long shifts, or night work. This may impair their concentration, decision-making, or safety.
- **Treatment difference:** older nurses may face discrimination, stereotyping, or marginalisation from their younger colleagues, managers, or employers. They may be perceived as less competent, less adaptable, or less willing to learn new skills or technologies.
- **Lack of respect and opportunities:** older nurses may feel undervalued, unappreciated, or overlooked for recognition, promotion, or education opportunities. They may also lack support, feedback, or mentoring from their peers or leaders.
- **Workforce shortage:** older nurses may retire earlier than expected due to the above challenges or personal reasons. This may create a gap in the supply of skilled and experienced workers in the aged care sector, which is already facing a growing demand due to the ageing population.^{24,25,26}

These challenges require effective individual, organisational, and policy strategies to support older nurses working to their full potential and contributing to the healthcare system.

THE SOLUTION

Phased retirement options for nurses, allowing a gradual reduction in work hours while maintaining benefits, could support the adjustment process.

Consideration should be given to developing a transition to retirement program for nurses, similar to the one offered to Australian Defence Force Members.

The program for nurses would cover topics such as identity, mental health, wellbeing, moving forward with purpose, leaving a legacy, connecting, and giving back. A program of this type would support nurses in their final years and may encourage them to stay in the workforce longer.

A review of rulings related to the aged pension is suggested to entice newly retired nurses back into the workforce. An increase in the limit of secondary income for high-need professions such as nursing would help increase and support the nursing workforce.



AGED CARE

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

7. Provides funding of \$1 million per year to continue and increase the current investment for the Aged Care Transition to Practice Program (ACTTP) program conducted by ACN - based on the feedback and success of this program to date.
8. Invests \$52.5 million over three years to fund 5000 scholarships for Registered Nurses (RNs) working in residential aged care to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Aged Care and Enrolled Nurses (ENs) to complete specialist pathways in Aged Care.

THE ISSUE

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety²⁷ (the Royal Commission) revealed terrible harm suffered by those living in residential aged care facilities (RACF).

Recommendations from the Royal Commission included a mandated requirement for every RACF to have a registered nurse (RN) on duty 24/7²⁸ and a mandated minimum of care minutes per resident per day.²⁹

While the Government has invested \$36.03 billion for the 2023-24 period, including \$11.3 billion to fund additional workers and pay increases towards pay parity for nurses working within the sector,³⁰ it is recognised that the availability of an appropriately trained workforce to fill newly funded roles needs to be addressed.

In 2023, the Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review³¹ (Cormack Review) commenced investigating how to extend the scope of practice for all healthcare professionals.

ACN has welcomed this Review and is providing input into the report. Many nurses have expressed frustration over local policies that restrict them from working to scope of practice despite their education and training. Nurses in aged care settings are similarly impacted, working to a limited scope in an environment that would benefit from their full experience and knowledge.

Appropriate skill mix³² within the nursing team is essential to ensure high-quality, safe, and effective care.

The Residential Aged Care setting includes an appropriate mix of RNs, ENs, and unregulated healthcare workers (UHCWs) to ensure care provision meets the expected quality standards.³³

THE SOLUTION

In recognition of the need for more consistency in supporting nurses transitioning into aged care settings, both as graduates and later in their careers, nurses need access to courses that provide the specialist knowledge and skills to work in the aged care sector.

In a recent review of ACN's Aged Care Transition to Practice Program, participants were asked to rate their confidence in their aged care clinical skills.

The most significant finding shows the proportion of 'strongly agree' respondents rising from 8 per cent to 38 per cent after completion of the program.³⁴



CLINICAL SUPERVISION

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

9. Invests in a nationally consistent framework that provides all nurses at risk of vicarious trauma with accessible and free clinical supervision.

THE ISSUE

Nurses care for patients and residents in all manner of settings and geographic locations.

In many circumstances, what nurses deal with can cause vicarious trauma, leading to stress and anxiety and breaking down nurse resilience.³⁵

One such area where vicarious trauma affects nurses is in circumstances where nurses are dealing with children and young people who are in contact with child protection services and at risk of, or are victims of, a form of abuse.

THE SOLUTION

ACN advocates for a consistent national framework for appropriate and effective clinical supervision and support for nurses at risk of vicarious trauma through the course of their work.

To be effective practitioners, nurses must be confident, competent, and adequately supported.

This means having solid structures that provide the opportunity for regular clinical supervision and the space for constructive support.

There must also be time allowed for nurses to reflect on their practice and develop skills to safeguard their wellbeing.³⁶

Local supervision arrangements must be robust and flexible enough to meet the needs of a 24/7 workforce, meet the specific needs of staff in their area, and demonstrate the effective discharge of statutory duties to safeguard children and promote their welfare.



Education

SUPPORTING LIFELONG LEARNING AND SKILLS ACQUISITION

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

10. Invests in the development and implementation of a nationally consistent education and training framework for nurses and midwives to support ongoing skills acquisition and competency building throughout their careers. It must be flexible enough to meet individual nurse career goals and professional development needs.
11. Invests \$1.5 million over three years to fund scholarships to enable nurses to acquire skills over time, giving them easy access to funds to complete education programs (continuous professional development) designed to build skills in their areas of interest throughout their careers.

THE ISSUE

Nursing career pathways are neither clearly defined nor nationally aligned. Nurses must be supported to explore areas of interest and change direction in their careers when opportunities arise if they are to make nursing a life-long commitment.

It is well documented that Generation Y and Z nurses are much more likely to have multiple careers in their lifetime than Generation X and baby boomers did.

The long-held view that nurses choose nursing as a lifetime career will be increasingly challenged.

In addition, the younger generations have different expectations regarding work-life balance and variety of work. Therefore, they are likely to be attracted to careers that have clear pathways and opportunities for both variety and balance.

Nurses in rural and remote settings of Australia care for around 7 million people, many from lower socio-economic backgrounds dealing with a high rate of chronic disease and significantly lower life expectancy compared to urban dwellers.

Many nurses feel their undergraduate study does not adequately prepare them to fulfil the complexity of the rural and remote nursing role.

As nurses outnumber their medical colleagues in rural areas by 1:4, RNs working to their full scope of practice could significantly reduce the burden of disease, estimated to cost in the region of \$4 billion.³⁷

Nurses are highly educated³⁸ and often engage in post-graduate nursing programs to enable them to progress along particular pathways. However, the cost of such programs can be prohibitive.

In contrast to the medical profession, opportunities for nurses to access ongoing training and education programs are inconsistently supported by employers, often only through mandatory education programs.

Nurses are often required to access their annual leave to undertake such courses and personally cover the costs.

THE SOLUTION

If nurses are to achieve their potential and be enabled and confident to work to their full scope, there is a need to develop a nationally consistent education and training framework for continuing professional development (CPD) and postgraduate study.

Ongoing access to quality education and training and options for self-development and improvement will also help maintain an engaged and committed workforce.

This framework must be supported by quality education programs that meet the needs of the workforce.

Education and skills acquisition are critical elements in supporting nurses to build skills and expand their scope of practice throughout their careers. As such, there is a requirement for ongoing, accessible high-quality education and training opportunities that meet their needs at all stages of their careers.

Access to education programs is costly.

Equitable access to further education can be supported through scholarships, guaranteeing a highly educated nursing workforce.

Scholarships should be flexible and allow nurses to pursue education and training opportunities across a broad range of specialty and subspecialty areas to ensure they are tailored to individual needs.

There are some areas of health care where workforce shortages have seen a higher impact on care provision, including aged care and rural and remote nursing.

For nurses choosing to work in these areas, there is a need for tailored courses, offering flexible delivery modes, which support them to gain the necessary skills to ensure the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable and under-served within the community.

This can be achieved through supporting ongoing education opportunities for registered nurses choosing to work in these areas.



DIABETES EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

12. Invests \$1 million for the development and delivery of an online diabetes education program for nurses. It can be made available by ACN to all nurses in any clinical area across Australia, regardless of location, sector, or specialty. This recommendation was flagged – and welcomed – at the Parliamentary Inquiry into Diabetes in 2023.

THE ISSUE

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects more than 1.3 million Australians.³⁹

It is associated with a range of serious complications, such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, blindness, and lower limb amputation.⁴⁰

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in 2020-21 an estimated \$3.4 billion in the Australian health system was attributed to diabetes, representing 2.3 per cent of total disease expenditure.⁴¹

Nurses play a vital role in preventing, detecting, and treating diabetes.

They provide education, support, and advice to people with diabetes and their families, administer medications, monitor blood glucose levels, and manage complications.

Nurses face many challenges in delivering quality diabetes care, such as keeping up with the latest evidence, guidelines, and technologies, and meeting the diverse and complex needs of people with diabetes.

Nurses must have access to ongoing professional development opportunities that can enhance their competence and confidence in diabetes care.

THE SOLUTION

An online training module would help upskill all nurses by providing flexible, accessible, and relevant learning tailored to individual nurses' needs and interests.

This module could be developed as a micro credential, a short and targeted training product that can help nurses update their skills and knowledge on diabetes management and care.

The benefits of investing in an online training module are twofold.

Firstly, it will improve the quality and safety of diabetes care by ensuring that nurses have the most current and accurate information and skills to deliver best-practice care. This would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of diabetes care by reducing errors, complications, and hospitalisations and improving patient outcomes and satisfaction.

Secondly, it will enhance nurses' professional development and career progression by providing them with a recognised credential to demonstrate their expertise and commitment to diabetes care.

ACN is an Institute of Higher Education, registered and accredited by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) for delivering higher education courses.

ACN is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), approved to deliver nationally accredited training with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

It is ACN's core business to develop and deliver courses to meet the emerging education needs of healthcare professionals.

Funding of \$1 million a year would allow ACN to work with Diabetes organisations to develop and deliver a quality training module for nurses.



Leadership

RECOMMENDATION

ACN recommends that the Australian Government:

13. Invests \$16.5 million over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurse unit managers to attend ACN's Nurse Unit Manager Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
14. Invests \$16.5 million over three years to provide scholarships to 3,000 nurse managers to attend ACN's Nurse Director Leadership Program (at \$5,500 per course).
15. Invests \$3 million to support 300 nurse leaders and executives to attend ACN's Nurse Executive Leadership Program (at \$10,000 per course).

THE ISSUE

The social, political, and economic challenges in healthcare today, and over the coming years, make it critical that leaders are equipped to respond to these challenges.

The role of nurse executives has evolved from a focus on nursing services to broader accountability for patient or client care services across aged/residential care, hospital and community settings in public and private, not-for profit, and non-government organisations.

Nurse executives exemplify the mission and vision of their organisation; are effective communicators and architects of change; encourage creativity and innovation; and provide learning and growth opportunities.

They must be dynamic, innovative, and strategic in their approach to facilitate the design of care delivery systems that are safe and cost effective.

To meet these challenges, nurses must be supported to gain the skills and knowledge they need. Strong leadership within the nursing workforce is vital to ensure a high-quality, sustainable, and effective healthcare system.

At the Nurse Unit Manager level, only 33 per cent have completed studies beyond an undergraduate degree.⁴²

Within Australian health care, nurses comprise the most significant proportion of workers within the industry classification.

To help manage this large workforce, there is a prediction that nurse unit managers (NUMs) will be expected to grow by 23.1 per cent by 2026.⁴³

Evidence demonstrates that appropriately qualified and supported NUMs can significantly improve the quality of care, efficiency, and workplace coordination.

Providing NUMs with upskilling and leadership opportunities can boost staff morale and retention while creating a pathway for early-career nurses looking to advance their careers.⁴⁴

THE SOLUTION

The Australian College of Nursing Institute of Leadership supports nurses at all career stages to extend their leadership skills and confidence. In 2023, ACN launched the Nursing Unit Manager Leadership Program.

Clinical nurses transitioning to nursing unit managers face challenges in hybrid management, balancing professional and managerial responsibilities.

The Nursing Unit Manager Leadership Program aims to enhance nursing management capabilities. It focuses on their ability to lead and manage units in current and emerging environments, benefiting staff, community, and care recipients.

Leadership programs empower nurses to influence and shape the healthcare environment and outcomes for patients and communities.

Currently, ACN offers a fully funded leadership program (Emerging Nurse Leaders Program) to address this issue. This program has been running for ten years and has assisted over 252 nurses in becoming confident leaders in nursing.

It is, however, a competitive award program with a maximum intake of 50 participants in a cohort. Given these programs' success, we recommend making them available to all nurses throughout their careers.

Other leadership courses offered by the Australian College of Nursing include:

- **The Emerging Nurse Leader Program** supports current and future nurse leaders, from undergraduate nursing students to enrolled and registered nurses in their sixth year of nursing practice, to kickstart their leadership careers by providing access to mentoring, career coaching, professional development webinars, and leadership workshops.
- **The Nurse Director Leadership Program** develops nurses who have more than six years of professional experience and have worked in leadership roles within the health or aged care system.
- **The Nurse Executive Leadership Program** will develop those in, or those aspiring to, nurse executive roles to meet the capabilities of ACN's [Nurse Executive Capability Framework](#).



About the Australian College of Nursing

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national voice of the nursing profession focused on policy, advocacy, and education to advance nurses' status, recognition, and respect.

We are committed to our intent of 'Shaping Health, Advancing Nursing' to enhance the health care of all Australians.

Our membership, events and higher education services allow nurses at all levels to stay informed, connected and inspired.

We are excited to lead change and create a strong, collective voice for our profession by bringing together thousands of extraordinary nurses nationwide.

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).



References

1. Ahpra and National Boards (2023). Annual report 2022/23 Growing a safe workplace.
2. Williams, K., Westera, A. B., Fildes, D. L., Salamonson, Y., Halcomb, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2019). Topic 2: Nursing as a career choice.
3. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (2023). "Nurse and Midwife Registration Data Table - 30 June 2023." Retrieved 19 October 2023, from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/about/statistics.aspx>.
4. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ahpra (2023), Statistics. [Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia - Statistics \(nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au\)](https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/au).
5. Ahpra and National Boards (2023). Annual report 2022/23 Growing a safe workplace.
6. ANMAC (2020). [Updated ANMAC communication to education providers 1 September 2020](#). ANMAC Communique. 1 September 2020.
7. ANMAC (2020). [Updated ANMAC communication to education providers 1 September 2020](#). ANMAC Communique. 1 September 2020.
8. Usher, K., Fagan, A., Brown, J. A., Mather, C., Marlow, A., Power, T., ... & Lea, J. (2022). The financial challenges for Australian nursing students attending placement-based work-integrated learning. *Collegian*, 29(2), 154-160.
9. Grant-Smith, D., & de Zwaan, L. (2019). Don't spend, eat less, save more: Responses to the financial stress experienced by nursing students during unpaid clinical placements. *Nurse education in practice*, 35, 1-6.
10. Bakker, E. J., Verhaegh, K. J., Kox, J. H., van der Beek, A. J., Boot, C. R., Roelofs, P. D., & Francke, A. L. (2019). Late dropout from nursing education: An interview study of nursing students' experiences and reasons. *Nurse education in practice*, 39, 17-25.
11. Fair Work Ombudsman (2023) Student placements <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/migration/723/Student-placements.pdf>.
12. Bumby J. Evidence-Based Interventions for Retention of Nursing Students. *Nurse Educator*. (2020); 45 (6): 312-315. doi: 10.1097/NNE.0000000000000797.
13. Hoffman, N., & Schwartz, R. (2015). Gold Standard: The Swiss Vocational Education and Training System. International Comparative Study of Vocational Education Systems. *National Center on Education and the Economy*.
14. Victoria Government. (2023). [Undergraduate student employment programs](#).
15. University of Sydney (2019) Nursing student experiences rural placement. Faculty of Medicine and Health <https://www.sydney.edu.au/medicine-health/news-and-events/2019/08/19/going-rural-nursing-placement-in-orange.html>.
16. Coe, S., Marlow, A., & Mather, C. (2020). Whole of Community Facilitators: An Exemplar for Supporting Rural Health Workforce Recruitment through Students' Professional Experience Placements. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(14), 7675. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18147675>.

17. Jochim, V., & Rosengren, K. (2022). Nursing preceptorship, a supportive and reflective approach for promoting a healthy working environment: a multi-methods design. *Nordic Journal of Nursing Research*, 42(3), 147-157.
18. Ziebert, C., Klingbeil, C., Schmitt, C. A., Stonek, A. V., Totka, J. P., Stelter, A., & Schiffman, R. F. (2016). Lessons learned: newly hired nurses' perspectives on transition into practice. *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*, 32(5), E1-E8.
19. APNA (2022). Complex care takes a back seat: APNA Workforce Survey 2021.
20. Tsirtsakis, A. (2022) A quarter of the primary care nurse workforce could soon quit, survey shows. newsGP 17 February 2022 <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/professional/a-quarter-of-the-primary-care-nurse-workforce-coul>.
21. Gulate-Rinaldo, J., Baumgardner, R., Tilton, T., & Brailoff, V. (2023). Mentorship ReSPeCT Study: A Nurse Mentorship Program's Impact on Transition to Practice and Decision to Remain in Nursing for Newly Graduated Nurses. *Nurse Leader*, 21(2), 262-267.
22. Rosser, E. A., Edwards, S., Cho Kwan, R. Y., Ito, M., Potter, D. R., Hodges, K. T., & Buckner, E. (2023). The Global Leadership Mentoring Community: An evaluation of its impact on nursing leadership. *International Nursing Review*, 70(3), 279-285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inr.12860>.
23. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ahpra (2023), Statistics. [Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia - Statistics \(nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au\)](https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au).
24. Denton, J., Evans, D., & Xu, Q. (2021). Being an older nurse or midwife in the healthcare workplace—A qualitative descriptive study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 77(11), 4500-4510.
25. Matters, E. (2019). Healthy ageing in the nursing workforce. *The Hive* <https://www.acn.edu.au/the-hive-2019/healthy-ageing-nursing-workforce>.
26. Denton, J., Evans, D., & Xu, Q. (2021). Being an older nurse or midwife in the health-care workplace—A qualitative descriptive study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 77(11), 4500-4510.
27. Pagone, G., & Briggs, L. (2021). Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia Retrieved from <https://agedcare.royal-commission.gov.au/publications/final-report>.
28. Department of Health and Aged Care (2023). [24/7 registered nurse responsibility](https://www.health.gov.au/24-7-registered-nurse-responsibility).
29. Department of Health and Aged Care (2023). [Care minutes](https://www.health.gov.au/care-minutes).
30. Nicols, Sam (25 May 2023). Billions in extra aged care funding welcomed, but is it enough to save the sector from financial instability? ABC News.
31. Department of Health and Aged Care (2023). [Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of practice review](https://www.health.gov.au/unleashing-the-potential-of-our-health-workforce-scope-of-practice-review).
32. Australian College of Nursing (ACN), (2022). 'Position Statement: Skill Mix in Residential Aged Care Facilities' - A Position Statement by ACN, ACN, Canberra.
33. Australian College of Nursing (ACN). (2021), 'The role of nurses in supporting older people to access quality, safe aged care', ACN, Canberra. ©ACN 2021.
34. Smith, J. (2023) Supporting the transition of recent nursing graduates in their first year in aged care. Presentation to members of the Australian College of Nursing.

35. Lonne, B., Higgins, D., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Scott, D. (2020). Reconstructing the workforce within public health protective systems: Improving resilience, retention, service responsiveness and outcomes. *Child abuse & neglect*, 110(Pt 3), 104191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104191>.
36. Russ, E., Lonne, B., & Lynch, D. (2020). Increasing child protection workforce retention through promoting a relational-reflective framework for resilience. *Child abuse & neglect*, 110(Pt 3), 104245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104245>.
37. National Rural Health Alliance. (2021). Rural Health in Australia Snapshot 2021. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/rural-health-australia-snapshot>.
38. Schwartz, S. (2019). Educating the Nurse of the Future—Report of the Independent Review into Nursing Education.
39. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Diabetes: Australian facts, Type 2 diabetes - <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/diabetes/diabetes/contents/total-diabetes/type-2-diabetes>.
40. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Diabetes: Australian facts, Type 2 diabetes - <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/diabetes/diabetes/contents/total-diabetes/type-2-diabetes>.
41. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Diabetes: Australian facts, Type 2 diabetes - <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/diabetes/diabetes/contents/total-diabetes/type-2-diabetes>.
42. Labour Market Insights (2022), <https://labour-marketinsights.gov.au/occupation-profile/nurse-managers?occupationCode=2543>.
43. Federation University (2022) Why you should do a postgraduate nursing course. Federation University Online. <https://online.federation.edu.au/why-postgraduate-nursing-course/#:~:text=Beyond%20any%20financial%20benefit%2C%20taking,influential%20experts%20in%20the%20field>.
44. Rahmah, N. M., Hariyati, T. S., & Sahar, J. (2021). Nurses' efforts to maintain competence: a qualitative study. *Journal of public health research*, 11(2), 2736. <https://doi.org/10.4081/jphr.2021.2736>.







Australian College of Nursing

acn.edu.au

