

2027: Nursing's Public Policy Platform

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Nursing organizations from across Virginia seek the following commitments from the commonwealth on behalf of Virginia's more than 151,000 registered nurses.

STRENGTHENING THE NURSING WORKFORCE

Ensuring Safe Staffing and Promoting Workplace Safety

The shortage of available healthcare professionals coupled with growing demand makes the importance of safe staffing even more critical. Nurses across all practice settings, including hospitals, long-term care facilities, outpatient clinics, home health, schools, public health, and community-based care, are increasingly being expected to care for more patients than can be managed safely and effectively. Excessive patient assignments contribute to burnout, workforce attrition, and increased risks to patient safety and quality of care. Virginia's nurses must be empowered and involved in developing and implementing staffing plans that reflect patient acuity, care complexity, and the realities of each practice setting.

Additionally, stronger policies must be enacted to better ensure healthcare professionals' safety at work. Healthcare professionals continue to face an elevated risk of workplace violence from patients, visitors, and others; as much as five times higher in hospitals than the national average. These risks extend across the continuum of care and threaten workforce retention, well-being, and patient outcomes. Addressing workplace safety through prevention, reporting, accountability, and support measures is essential to maintaining a strong healthcare workforce and ensuring a safe standard of care for all Virginians.

Investing in Nursing Programs and Growing the Workforce

Virginia continues to experience an alarming shortage of healthcare professionals, especially in the nursing profession, while large numbers of nursing school applicants are being denied admission based not on merit, but rather on a lack of faculty and available clinical sites. It's crucial that the Commonwealth continues to invest in growing nursing education programs to increase enrollment and eliminate the nursing shortage. We should continue strengthening support for nursing faculty, clinical preceptors, the Earn While You Learn program, nursing scholarships, and the Virginia Nursing Workforce Center to ensure a high-quality nursing workforce for all Virginians. At the same time, these investments must be fully leveraged to reach as many students and future nurses as possible, while also advancing greater diversity in faculty and admissions so that the workforce truly reflects our communities.

Promoting Transparency and Patient Safety

Our healthcare system relies on the concept of "Just Culture," that is, it acknowledges that errors occur due to system failures that allow them to occur. When an error is made, healthcare facilities rely on clinicians to voluntarily report the error so that a root cause analysis can be performed, and future errors can be prevented via system changes. Evidence-based patient safety programs depend on clinicians reporting unintentional errors so that healthcare organizations can identify system failures and prevent future harm. If clinicians fear criminal prosecution for voluntary disclosure of a medical error, they will be much less likely to report errors, and this will allow system failures to go undetected and uncorrected, ultimately making patients less safe. Such a risk also makes it more difficult to recruit individuals to be healthcare providers. It is vital that we preserve Just Culture to protect patient safety by removing the fear of criminal prosecution for an unintentional error as was passed in Kentucky.

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INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE

Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of All Virginia Communities

All Virginia communities deserve the opportunity to live in a state of well-being and have equal access to safe and affordable healthcare. To ensure the optimal health of all Virginians, it is crucial that wellness be factored into decisions related to all policy areas, and that legislative solutions are advanced that promote a culture of health and tackle the barriers to wellness regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, policymakers should work to safeguard privacy and autonomy within the patient-provider relationship and protect against policies that make serving patients more difficult and expensive, including as it relates to malpractice insurance. Climate and rural health initiatives must also be prioritized to safeguard the health and well-being of Virginia communities.

A Nurse in Every Virginia School

School nurses are front line healthcare providers, serving as the bridge between the healthcare and education systems. They serve as public health advocates, overseeing the physical and mental health of all students. For many children living in or near poverty, the school nurse is the only healthcare professional they see. School nurses are essential in communicable disease surveillance, identification, and intervention. Above all else, access to a school nurse is a student health and safety issue. We must work toward ensuring there is a nurse in every school across Virginia by providing resources and assistance to get more schools participating in Medicaid reimbursement for providing eligible services in schools.

ADVANCING FULL PRACTICE AUTHORITY

Practice and Payment Policies that Improve Access to Care

Outdated practice restrictions and reimbursement policies can limit patient access to timely care, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Virginia's healthcare system should support team-based, patient-centered care by enabling qualified nursing clinicians to practice according to their education, training, demonstrated competency, and professional standards. Regulatory oversight should remain informed by the expertise of each healthcare profession and focused on patient safety and quality outcomes. To accomplish this, nursing clinicians must be licensed to practice to the full extent of their education and training, and be held accountable to the Board of Nursing, rather than a Joint Board of Nursing and Medicine. Healthcare organizations should have the flexibility to utilize qualified clinicians effectively to meet community needs, while reimbursement policies should recognize the value of services provided across the healthcare team. Modernizing practice and payment policies can strengthen Virginia's healthcare workforce, improve access to care, and support better health outcomes, especially in areas experiencing provider shortages.