

August 2, 2024

The Honorable Diana DeGette
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Larry Bucshon, MD
2313 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman DeGette and Congressman Bucshon,

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) applauds your bipartisan work to build upon the 21st Century Cures initiative and appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the ongoing reform process. As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN represents more than 875 schools of nursing offering a mix of baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate programs at public and private universities nationwide, including 520,000 students and 57,000 faculty.¹ Our member schools are committed to preparing a highly educated nursing workforce, strengthening the foundation of nursing science, and advancing solutions to meet the nation's healthcare needs.

Shaping a healthcare landscape that is innovative, responsive, and patient-focused requires strong investment in nursing education pathways and the nursing profession. As you work to develop the next steps in the Cures initiative, it is important to maintain policies that have been effective, while providing a flexible framework that can adapt to the ever-changing needs of our communities. Below are AACN's recommendations in response to the questions outlined in your request for information.

Question 1: Do the policies included in Cures 2.0 that have advanced through legislation or executive action meet the needs that the original Cures 2.0 bill aimed to address?

AACN is proud to have been a part of previous Cures initiatives such as the National Institutes of Health *All of Us* Research Program. We were able to facilitate the engagement of nurse researchers with the *All of Us* workbench, which included developing and disseminating information from our nursing schools, faculty, and students. We encourage you to consider the significant existing and potential contributions of the nursing profession by enhancing the following aspects of Cures 2.0 in any future legislative effort:

- **Increase Representation within Clinical Trials – Ensure Nursing is at the Table:**
 - When Congress looks at ways to decentralize clinical trials and integrate them in communities across the country, it is important that nurse scientists, researchers, practitioners, and students are included in these efforts.
 - As the largest healthcare profession in the nation with more than four and a half million registered nurses (RNs) nationwide,² it is imperative that nursing is an active participant in this effort. We encourage you to add nurses to any existing and new taskforces, committees, or councils created.
- **Include Provider-Neutral Language:** In the spirit of full inclusivity and the role that all providers have in improving healthcare delivery, AACN acknowledges and endorses the important use of provider-neutral language throughout any future Cures proposals. Including Registered Nurses and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) reinforces the reality that the contributions of all providers maximize the patient's experience and quality of care.

¹ About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/About-AACN>

² National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2024). [Active RN Licenses](#).

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- **Make Telehealth Waivers Permanent:** As we witnessed during the last public health emergency, telehealth technology allowed increased flexibility and access to the healthcare system, especially for those in rural and underserved communities. Supporting the removal of geographic and site restrictions for services for Medicare beneficiaries is important. We encourage you to make telehealth waivers permanent within the next Cures package.

Question 2: What elements might be missing that are essential for further progress?

In past Cures initiatives, support for education and training of caregivers and young scientists was included. Consistent with this theme, it is important that support for the education of future nurses and nurse researchers be reinforced. In a recent AACN survey, enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs only saw a 0.3% increase.³ Further, nursing students in research-focused (PhD) programs have seen enrollments declines, going from 5,145 students in 2013 to 4,244 students in 2023.⁴ Nurses looking to advance their expertise and impact healthcare delivery at a higher level should be encouraged and supported in their educational endeavors.

A prime solution advancing this goal is the passage of the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (H.R.7266/S.3770), which would invest \$1 billion into accredited schools of nursing with special consideration to institutions and schools located in medically underserved, rural, or health professional shortage areas. Specifically, the FAAN Act would enroll and retain nursing students; hire and retain faculty to educate the nursing workforce and future nurse scientists; support academic-practice partnerships; modernize technological infrastructure including audiovisual, simulation, and telehealth technologies; support future nurse scientists; and help establish of nurse-led partnerships.

As we attract new students to the profession, it is important to invest in our young scientists and researchers to advance nursing practice, improve patient care, and eliminate health disparities. Providing a historic investment in nursing education pathways, particularly for baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate nursing programs, is essential. As such, we encourage any future Cures initiative to include the **Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (H.R.7266/S.3770)**.

3. What additional reforms, support mechanisms, or incentives are needed to enhance or improve the effectiveness of the steps already taken, including any structural reform to agencies, offices, or programs involved?

A key element of any transformative proposal is ensuring effortless dissemination of healthcare innovations that can be delivered to patients in need. During the pandemic, it took far too long to allow qualified health professional students, including nursing students, to assist with vaccination efforts.⁵ Mobilizing nursing students, under the supervision of a qualified practitioner, contributed to the success of vaccine distribution efforts, while allowing them increased hands-on clinical experience. We encourage you to include the bipartisan Student Assisted Vaccination Effort (SAVE) Act (H.R.5699/S.2114 in the 117th Congress). This bill codifies successful

³ American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2024). "New AACN Data Points to Enrollment Challenges Facing U.S. Schools of Nursing." Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-aacn-data-points-to-enrollment-challenges-facing-us-schools-of-nursing>

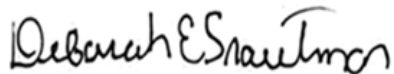
⁴ American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2024). ""New AACN Data Points to Enrollment Challenges Facing U.S. Schools of Nursing." Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-aacn-data-points-to-enrollment-challenges-facing-us-schools-of-nursing>

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Emergency, PREP Act Guidance. Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-16/pdf/2021-05401.pdf>

implementation of past efforts. We urge you to ensure that future reforms include qualified health professional students, such as nursing students, working under the supervision of a qualified practitioner to allow for a more expedient response to any future public health challenges.

AACN has been proud to be part of each bipartisan Cures discussion and welcomes the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues again this Congress. As you continue to develop a path forward, AACN stands ready to serve as a resource and vital stakeholder to you and your staff. If we can be of any assistance, please contact AACN's Director of Government Affairs, Rachel Minahan at RMinahan@aacnnursing.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah E. Trautman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" at the beginning.

Deborah E. Trautman, PhD, RN, FAAN
President and Chief Executive Officer