

WSNA's priorities for the 2022 Legislative Session



Fix nurse and health care worker staffing

We need enforceable minimum safe staffing standards to allow nurses to do their jobs safely and give patients the care they deserve.

POLICY PRIORITY

In 2008 and 2017, we asked the Legislature to take concrete steps to fix nurse staffing in our state's hospitals. Those laws haven't done enough to address safe staffing and lack the enforcement mechanisms needed to compel hospitals to adhere to current laws. Washington has faced a shortage of nurses and health care workers for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic put longstanding problems in a pressure cooker, and we're now at a crisis point. Hospitals in Washington state and around the country are seeing a mass exodus of nurses due to high burnout rates. As more nurses leave the workforce, those remaining are being pushed to their limits. Nurses in critical care units, once responsible for no more than two patients at a time, are now tasked with managing as many as five to six patients – compromising care to unsafe levels.



Staffing laws enforcement

The past two years have made clear we need to increase enforcement of current laws designed to protect nurses.

POLICY PRIORITY

Nurses and health care workers made substantial gains when the Legislature updated the nurse staffing law in 2017, and when the Legislature passed meal and rest break and mandatory overtime protections in 2019 – yet many hospitals are not following those laws. WSNA and individual nurses have filed dozens of complaints with state agencies that lack the resources and enforcement mechanisms to hold hospitals accountable. When enforcement resources are low and the penalty is paltry, hospitals are unlikely to change or adjust their behavior – resulting in working conditions that drive nurses to quit.

WSNA's priorities for the 2022 Legislative Session



Invest in nursing schools

While we must fix nursing jobs to retain current staff, a strong education pipeline is crucial to ensuring we have the nursing workforce we need.

BUDGET PRIORITY

In 2019, the Legislature made a \$40 million investment in community and technical colleges to increase retention and recruitment of nursing faculty. That investment resulted in stronger recruitment, additional nurse educator positions and new student slots in our state's community and technical college nursing schools. As nurse staffing hits critical lows, the Legislature must continue to invest in expanding and strengthening the pathway for new nurses to enter the workforce and for current nurses to obtain graduate degrees to teach. We must take steps to diversify our workforce by investing in the schools that graduate more diverse nurses. Students also need adequate supports, such as child care and tutoring. The Legislature must also take steps to break the bottleneck currently caused by lack of clinical placements for nursing students.



Invest in school nurses

With school in full swing, the Legislature must also continue to invest in school nurses.

BUDGET PRIORITY

COVID-19 response has dramatically increased workloads for school nurses, some of whom spend less than one day per week in a school building. Kids are coming back to in-person school sicker with chronic conditions that were not managed during remote learning, and many more are struggling with mental health and behavioral health challenges due to the pandemic. We must invest in school nurses who support students' chronic conditions, triage mental health challenges, and who are responsible for COVID-19 prevention and response.