

The Future of Nursing 2020-2030

Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity

REPORT BRIEF



Fostering and Diversifying Nurse Leaders

The Challenge

The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated how nurses at every level and in every setting are well-positioned to lead and engage in meaningful ways to make sure everyone can live a healthy life. Nurses can lead teams, promote community health, advocate for systems and policy changes, foster the redesign of nursing education, and advance efforts to achieve health equity.

But over the next decade, educational institutions and organizations that employ nurses must better prepare and empower the workforce—from licensed practical nurses to those with doctoral degrees—to further develop and grow as leaders. There is a particular need for more nurse leaders who can comfortably steer or direct multi-sector partnerships with organizations outside of health care, including community-based organizations that address challenges tied to food insecurity, transportation, housing, and social isolation.

Nurse education traditionally has emphasized the development of clinical skills over leadership and management skills. And, while nursing school curricula touch on public health, the social determinants of health, and health equity topics, they do not adequately prepare future nurses to lead on these issues. Educational institutions, as well as organizations that employ nurses and foster their professional development, will need to step up to address this disparity by providing nurses at all levels and in all settings with ample opportunities, resources, and mentorship to fully realize their leadership potential.

Diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, geography, and experiences among nurse leaders will also be essential to achieving health equity and must be a priority over the next decade. Today, however, there are relatively few nurses of color in leadership positions, particularly in more senior roles. For instance, few Black nurses are in positions of leadership and even fewer advance to careers as nurse executives.

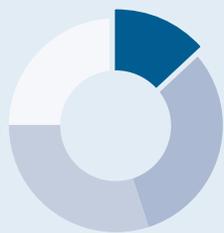
About the Report

For too long, the United States has overinvested in treating illness and underinvested in promoting health and well-being and preventing disease. Even before COVID-19 illuminated disparities and exacerbated inequities in the United States, nurses were advocating for better care and access for individuals, families, and communities. At the request of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a National Academy of Medicine committee conducted a study aimed at charting a path forward for the nursing profession to help ensure that all people have what they need to live their healthiest lives. The report was published in May 2021 and builds on progress nurses have made over the past decade.¹

Why Nurses?

Promoting health and well-being has long been an essential role of nurses—they are bridge builders and collaborators who engage and connect with people, communities, and organizations to ensure people from all backgrounds have what they need to be healthy and well. But they need ongoing support from the systems that educate, train, employ, and enable them to fully deploy their expertise and training so they can help advance health equity for all.

¹ <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/12956/the-future-of-nursing-leading-change-advancing-health>



Only
11%
of nurse leaders with the
highest salaries are Black.

Compared with **27%** who are Asian American, **25%** who are Hispanic, and **21%** who are white.

A 2019 National Academies [report](#) on minority serving institutions found that structured mentorship programs in these institutions can improve leadership diversity in nursing and the health care field generally. Diverse leaders can serve as important role models, provide guidance and mentorship for other nurses, influence how resources are allocated, and shape policies aimed at eliminating systemic and structural inequities in health care and in the workplace.

Over the next decade, nurse leaders across settings can help improve health and well-being within their communities by advocating for social change and health equity and bringing a nurses' perspective to organizational and public policymaking discussions. The leadership style and effectiveness of nurse leaders has been associated with improvements in work environments, patient outcomes and mortality, job satisfaction, work engagement, and nurse burnout and retention.

Skills and Competencies Essential for Nurse Leadership

- Visioning for health equity
- Leading multisector partnerships
- Leading change
- Innovating and improving
- Teaming across boundaries
- Creating a culture of equity
- Creating systems and structures for equity
- Mentoring and sponsoring

The Solution

The committee recommends that:

- Nurse leaders acknowledge the history of racism within the profession and help dismantle structural racism and discrimination based on identity, place, and circumstances.
- Nurse leaders mentor and sponsor nurses from traditionally underrepresented communities to build a more diverse nursing workforce and increase the number of underrepresented nurses in leadership positions.
- Employers support nurses at all levels and in all settings with financial, technical, educational, and staffing resources to help them play a leading role in achieving health equity.

To advance equity nationwide, nurses at all levels and in all settings should take on leadership roles that:

- Engage communities to understand their strengths and needs, facilitate opportunities, work with partners to address community needs, and work with national coalitions to address structural and systemic barriers.
- Represent and communicate the nursing perspective with colleagues and communities, as leaders of organizations, in multisectoral collaborations, and in high-level leadership roles via boards, expert panels, political appointments, and c-suite positions.
- Advocate for themselves, others, organizational policies and structures, and legislative and regulatory changes that promote equity.
- Improve equity through direct care, establishing inclusive workplace cultures, leading with a health equity lens, and working to dismantle structural racism and discrimination.
- Improve health care by providing quality care to people, encouraging workplace innovation and improvements, implementing programs and using evidence-based approaches that improve quality of care and address structural barriers, and promoting policies that ensure access to quality care for all.



Read *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*



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