



American Health Care Association

## ISSUE BRIEF



National Center For Assisted Living

## Address the Shortage of Nurses &amp; Critical Caregivers for Long Term Care

**Action for Congress:** Amend the *Nurse Reinvestment Act* to include educational financial assistance to caregivers in all healthcare settings, establish a national nursing database, and increase the number of nurse educators.

AHCA/NCAL has long recognized that high quality long term care and services depend upon a stable, well-trained workforce. However, America's long term care system is facing a chronic labor force shortage. Promoting and passing sound fiscal policies designed to strengthen our workforce and facilitate the continued improvement in seniors' care quality is imperative and should be a top national priority.

The United States will need between 5.7 million to 6.5 million nurses, nurse aides, and home health and personal care workers by 2050 to care for the 27 million Americans who will require long term care, up more than 100 percent from the 13 million requiring such care in 2000, according to estimates from the Department of Health & Human Services and the Department of Labor.

While the demand for long term care is growing, the population of workers to provide that care, is not. A recent report by the National Commission for Quality Long-term Care highlighted this impending catastrophe noting that, "even if we set the somewhat conservative goal to maintain the current ratio of paid long-term care workers to the current population of 85-year-olds, the long-term care workforce would have to grow by two percent a year – to the tune of 4 million new workers – by 2050."

The ongoing shortage of nurses and nurse faculty has further exacerbated the situation. Studies indicate that the supply of well-trained nursing staff is a key factor in the quality of care in long term care, since vacancies and turnover can compromise quality as well as increase costs. Nationally, more than 15 percent of registered nurse (RN), 13 percent of licensed practical nurse (LPN), and eight percent of certified nursing assistant (CNA) positions – nearly 100,000 vacancies overall – have been identified in the long term care setting. The current shortages are only projected to get progressively worse in the coming years, for the current annual turnover rate for RNs is 49 percent and 71 percent for CNAs. The cost incurred by long term care facilities due to staff turnover is over \$4 billion a year, according to one recent study.

In 2002, the *Nurse Reinvestment Act (NRA)* was enacted to address the existing national nursing shortage by increasing funding, redesigning existing nursing workforce development programs, and creating new programs under Title VIII of the *Public Health Service Act*. The *NRA* authorized funding for several initiatives, including scholarships, nursing education loan repayment programs, loan repayment programs for nurses practicing in facilities with a critical shortage of nurses or with underserved or high risk groups such as the elderly, and career advancement efforts for all levels of nursing personnel (such as RNs, LPNs, and CNAs) in a variety of settings.

To help alleviate long term care nursing workforce shortages, it is imperative that the *NRA* be amended to:

1. Permanently remove the for-profit exclusion on loan repayment for nurses working in for-profit health care settings;
2. Identify funding to create a national nursing database to forecast future supply and demand changes. The database should include workforce data across all care settings, including nursing educators, for trend analysis and to create a pipeline/educational model to forecast workforce needs; and
3. Ensure that grant awards include a provision mandating that *NRA* grantees report the number of nurse educators and nurses produced and/or hired, the increase in the number of nurse education slots, and the decrease in the number of qualified applicants turned away from nursing programs.

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*AHCA/NCAL is the nation's leading long term care organization whose member facilities are committed to enhanced quality through initiatives including Quality First, Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes and the Center for Excellence in Assisted Living. AHCA/NCAL represents nearly 11,000 non-profit and proprietary facilities who employ millions of caring employees and provide care and services to millions of frail, elderly and disabled citizens in nursing facilities, assisted living residences, subacute centers and homes for persons with developmental disabilities. For more information on AHCA/NCAL, please visit [www.ahca.org](http://www.ahca.org) or [www.ncal.org](http://www.ncal.org).*