

# The Future of Nursing 2020-2030

## Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity

### REPORT BRIEF



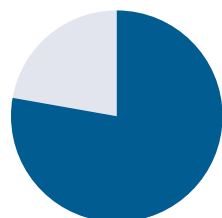
## Preparing Nurses to Respond to Disasters and Public Health Emergencies

### The Challenge

In the last decade, 2.6 billion people globally have been upended by earthquakes, floods, wildfires and other natural disasters. And now, the global coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 3 million people worldwide. All these crises disproportionately affect people of color, those with low incomes, those experiencing housing insecurity, and those with limited access to health care and transportation, ultimately exacerbating health disparities.

Nurses—whether working in a hospital during a disease outbreak or a shelter after a hurricane—serve on the frontlines of these emergencies helping people and communities cope and recover. For instance, a school nurse was the first to notify the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about the H1N1 outbreak in 2009.

Though nurses heed the call, the U.S. nursing education, health care, and public health systems do not educate, prepare, equip, and support nurses at all levels and in all settings to fully respond to disasters and public health emergencies through an equity lens.



# 78%

of nurses had little or no familiarity with emergency preparedness and disaster response

### 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.<sup>1</sup>

### 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.

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

- A survey of more than 5,000 nurses revealed that 78 percent had little or no familiarity with emergency preparedness and disaster response.
- Nursing schools' curriculum varies and does not always teach students thoroughly about health care emergency preparedness.
- Students who have learned about the topic report low confidence in their competency.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has starkly revealed, responding to crises also takes a serious mental health toll on nurses at all levels. Throughout the crisis, many nurses did not feel protected, supported, safe, or prepared. The pandemic has revealed the critical importance of protecting the mental health and well-being of nurses so that they can respond to disasters effectively, safely, and with equity at the forefront.

Whether during a hurricane or an infectious disease outbreak, nurses can help build community resilience by understanding how disasters affect people's health and restrict access to resources like transportation, medical care, food, shelter, and jobs. With the right training and support, nurses can play a role in everything from distributing vaccines equitably to ensuring evacuees in shelters receive the physical and mental health care they need to recover.

## The Solution

**The committee recommends that federal agencies and other stakeholders within and outside the nursing profession strengthen and protect the nursing workforce to respond to public health emergencies and natural disasters.**

Bold actions need to be taken now to transform nursing education, practice, and policies across health care and public health systems and organizations so the nursing workforce is prepared to respond to future crises through an equity lens, including:

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention establishing a National Center for Disaster Nursing and Public Health Emergency Response**, along with regional centers, to act as a hub to prepare the nursing workforce. The CDC and the center should create a national action plan to address gaps in nursing emergency preparedness.
- **Federal agencies supporting efforts to develop and support the knowledge base** of the workforce on these issues.
- **Nursing schools and employers expanding disaster preparedness educational and training opportunities** for nurses at all levels and in all settings, while working across sectors to develop emergency response plans.



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



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