

**Talking Points: Mandatory Nurse to Patient Ratios** April 2023

Pennsylvania, along with the rest of the country, is experiencing an unparalleled nursing crisis. The crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, record level resignations, an aging and retiring workforce, low number of graduates from colleges and universities, scarcity in qualified faculty, and escalating health care needs across our population. Pennsylvania Hospitals report a 31% vacancy rate of staff RNs in 2023, with 84% identifying the major barrier as finding enough qualified candidates.1

**There are simply not enough professional nurses to meet demands and legislated nurse-patient ratios would only worsen existing conditions.**

* Legislated ratios attempt to distill staffing into a one-size-fits-all formula; however, the “right” ratio is not proven in research or practice. Mandated ratios do not guarantee safe or quality care.
* Pennsylvania has a variety of hospital sizes and patients’ acuity (level of illness) varies within these hospitals. Same staffing levels for all hospitals is not appropriate and makes no sense.
* Nursing staff and nurse leaders in each facility need to have flexibility to address continuing changes in patient needs. Nursing staff and nurse leaders are in the best position to determine patient care needs – not legislators and special interest groups.
* Guidance for best staffing levels for Pennsylvania hospitals is achieved through Patient Acuity Systems, staffing benchmarks established by nursing professional specialty organizations, and the [National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators](https://www.nm.org/about-us/quality/quality-measures/sites-of-care/northwestern-memorial-hospital/national-comparisons/ndnqi-national-database-of-nursing-quality-indicators) (NDNQI).
* The Pennsylvania Department of Health and [The Joint Commission](https://www.jointcommission.org/) have rigorous standards related to hospitals’ organizational staffing plans.

**What Can and MUST be Done? Invest in the Nursing Pipeline!**

* Offer reasonably priced nursing education at all levels, particularly in underserved areas.
* Provide loan forgiveness and scholarships for entry level nursing education from community college to baccalaureate degree progression, and for advanced degrees in nursing.
* Support increased numbers of qualified faculty through grants and loan forgiveness.
* Permit qualified international nurses to take Pennsylvania Registered Nurse exam (NCLEX-RN)
* Operationalize [Act 68](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2021&sessInd=0&act=68), signed into law in Pennsylvania on July 1, 2021, making Pennsylvania the 36th member of the 39 states allowing the Nurse Licensure Compact. This would allow Pennsylvania’s nurses to practice in all compact states. Action to make this functional is stagnate.
* Promote nursing and other health care careers throughout Pennsylvania’s elementary, middle and secondary schools, particularly with minorities and in underserved areas .
* Support programs to enhance nurse resilience and good mental health thereby strengthening nursing’s workforce both now and in the future.
* Enact measures that ensure workplaces are safe for all health care workers.

*PONL ASKS LEGISLATORS TO SUPPORT, TEACH, ATTRACT, RETAIN, PROTECT & VALUE OUR PENNSYLVANIA NURSES!*

1HAP’s [Addressing Member Hospital Workforce Needs](https://www.haponline.org/Resource-Center?resourceid=766), 2023