

The Future of Nursing 2020-2030

Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity

REPORT BRIEF



Paying for Health Equity

The Challenge

Improving the health of all people should drive how the U.S. pays for health care and public health. But the current system is designed to pay for quantity, not quality, of care; to treat existing illnesses but not prevent them; and to prioritize hospital and specialty care over primary and preventative care.

In doing so, the payment system undervalues the care that nurses provide and underestimates the critical role that they play in addressing obstacles to good health, such as poverty and discrimination, and in expanding access to care. For example, payment systems often only reimburse for physicians' services—excluding services of other care providers, including nurses, and team-based care.

School nurses are a prime example of the important role the profession plays in bridging health and social needs and filling gaps in access to primary care. A school nurse can build relationships with students, connect them with resources they need, and address the root causes of poor health. One study in Massachusetts found that each dollar invested in school health services yielded \$2.20 in savings per student in avoided medical procedures and lost productivity of teachers and parents. But funding for school nurses, particularly in low-income and underserved communities, is lacking—about 25 percent of U.S. schools don't employ a school nurse and 35 percent only employ one part-time.

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>

Limited scope of practice for nurses and advanced practice registered nurses, chronic underfunding of public health and school nurses, and underuse of telehealth also hinder nurses' ability to advance health equity. For the United States to provide everyone what they need to be healthy, public and private payment systems must support and incentivize health care and public health organizations to enable nurses to perform these roles.

The Solution

The committee recommends that public and private payers and public health agencies establish sustainable and flexible payment mechanisms to support nurses in both health care and public health, including school nurses, in addressing social needs, social determinants of health, and health equity.



Each dollar invested in school health services yielded \$2.20 in savings per student in avoided medical procedures and lost productivity of teachers and parents.



1 in 4 U.S. schools don't employ a school nurse

Federal, tribal state, local, and private payers and public health agencies should champion payment reforms that allow nurses to fully address social needs, improve community health, and advance health equity, including:

- **Reforming and embracing payment models**, such as accountable care organizations (ACOs), accountable health communities (AHCs), and value-based payment (VBP), which can give health care organizations the flexibility to pursue these goals.
- **Enabling nurses to bill for telehealth services** so they can reach people anywhere.
- **Centering performance measures on health equity** to incentivize nursing roles and functions that address the social determinants of health.
- **Allowing nurses to practice to the full extent of their education and training**, and ensuring they can bill for these services.
- **Investing in diversifying the nursing workforce and reforming nursing education** so that nurses at all levels and in all settings are prepared to advance health equity and represent the communities they serve.
- **Adequately funding school and public health nurses** to expand their reach and help improve health for all. This includes reimbursing for the care that school nurses provide.



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



Share what you've learned with your network