



UNAC/UHCP

United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals
UNAC/UHCP is affiliated with NUHHCE, AFSCME and the AFL-CIO

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Nurses Union Calls for Half-Billion-Dollar Intervention in Nurse Staffing Crisis

550 Union RNs rallied at the State Capitol in Sacramento today calling for an ambitious package of state budget investment and legislation

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SACRAMENTO - The registered nurses and health care professionals of UNAC/UHCP are calling on California lawmakers to intervene in the chronic nursing shortage with a half-billion-dollar package of investments and legislation to open the bottlenecked pipeline in nursing education, double California's capacity to graduate new RNs, and bring transparency and accountability to the enforcement of California's lifesaving nurse-to-patient ratios.

"We are proposing the biggest nurse workforce initiative ever seen in California and in the United States," said **Charmaine Morales, RN, and UNAC/UHCP President**. "For the sake of nurses at the bedside and the patients we care for, we must boost the ranks of new nurses and enforce our leading California nurse-to-patient ratios."

On Tuesday, May 9, 550 members of the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP) rallied on the Capitol Mall and then made personal visits to their elected representatives—where they called for urgent intervention to save nursing in California. Legislators and union allies, including Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the California State Assembly; Lorena Gonzalez, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California Labor Federation—daughter of a nurse; Leo Perez-Ferrer, president of nurses' union SEIU 121RN; took turns on the stage to praise nurses and voice their support.

Three bills sponsored by UNAC/UHCP were voted out of committee with bipartisan support in late April and are next headed for votes in the full Assembly.

A Facebook Live stream of the rally can be accessed [here](#).

Video and photos of the rally and other materials are available at www.unacuhcp.org/savenursing.

UNAC/UHCP research report [The Dangerous Impact of the National Nursing Shortage](#)

Stories From the Front Line

Lateefah Khabeer, a registered nurse at Lakewood Medical Center, says staffing has gotten worse since she started her career in 1984:

“Right now, it's very painful and sad. You're left wondering whether you're able to fulfill your patients' needs because there's always a shortage.

“I cannot count the number of young nurses I see crying on the floor. One was crying uncontrollably the other day. I tried to soothe her. And she just kept saying ‘I just want to take care of my patients.’

“Nurses with experience often teach the newer nurses. But today, it's harder because many of the experienced nurses have burned out and left. The newer nurses are put in a spot where they must be on the floor and do what they think they know. It shouldn't be like that.”

Maria Nunez, a registered nurse at St. Francis Medical Center, says poorly enforced nurse-to-patient ratios put RN careers and patient care at risk:

“We hoped that after COVID things will go back to normal and we would get our ratios back.

“Employers really don't obey the California-mandated staffing ratios for nurses and that's impacting patient care.

“I've been fortunate enough that I haven't had a situation that has compromised my license. But I've been a nurse for over 20 years, so I'm very aware of what I can and cannot do. I know who I need to call to get that help that I need. It has taken me 20 years of experience to learn that.”

Jennifer Wong-Swanson, a registered nurse at Kaiser Permanente, says staffing is worse now than during the pandemic:

“Nursing is at a crossroads right now. Health care is truly in a state of crisis.

“We have so many excellent, dedicated nurses leaving the field or at least the bedside because of what they experienced during the worst of the pandemic: the lack of resources, lack of staffing, lack of safe environment to work, and the lack of ability to do their best for their patients through no fault of their own.

“If we don't right this ship, we are going to lose more nurses.

“After a decade of inpatient bedside nursing, I had to make the difficult decision to leave the bedside and go to the clinic—for my own personal and emotional health. If there had been a serious effort to improve staffing, I likely would not have left the bedside. And staffing is worse now than it was during the worst of the pandemic. We're working short-staffed all the time. There are often no charge nurses. Nurses are working without breaks, without lunch, without time to nourish themselves. Twelve hours is a long time to work without a break while taking care of patients and trying to save lives.

“We need help enforcing staffing ratios while ensuring there's a pipeline of nurses ready to join the workforce. Those two things go hand-in-hand. You can have plenty of nurses educated and ready to go, with the heart and skill to join this profession. But unless staffing and working conditions are improved, we're just going to be a revolving door in health care. We'll just keep burning through nurses, which is disastrous for patients and the nursing profession.”

Hard Facts

There's a severe nurse staffing crisis in this country—and it can be solved. The U.S. health care system will be short a million nurses by 2030 unless we act now. One third of the 3 million registered nurses in the U.S will leave the bedside in the coming decade. Baby boom RNs have hit retirement while nurses are quitting in record numbers due to burnout, exhaustion, and trauma. Meanwhile, available slots in nursing programs are far below the number of qualified applicants.

Developing crisis

- By 2025, our country's health care system will need about 1.1 million more nurses to meet the needs of older and sicker patients
- By 2030, 37 states will have serious nursing gaps, with California and two other states at the top of the list
- 1 in 6 hospitals in the U.S. report a serious shortage of nurses
- To meet the expected demand by 2030, the number of graduating nurses in California needs to increase 60% immediately

Source: [*The Dangerous Impact of the National Nursing Shortage*](#)

High cost of nurse turnover

- The average cost of turnover for a bedside RN is \$46,100.
- The typical hospital lost between \$6.6 million and \$10.5 million due to RN turnover.
- Nurses in step down, telemetry, and emergency services had the highest turnover rates.

Source: [*NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Survey*](#)

Nursing Education Backlog

- Enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs fell 1.4 percent last year, ending a 20-year period of enrollment growth.
- Meanwhile, four-year colleges and universities turned down more than 78,000 qualified applications (not applicants, as people may apply to more than one program). Thousands of qualified applicants were turned away "due largely to a shortage of faculty and clinical training sites."

Source: [*American Association of Colleges of Nursing*](#)

Bold Visionary Solutions

UNAC/UHCP members are coming to Sacramento with bold, visionary solutions to the crisis. We're calling for:

- The governor and legislature to invest half a billion dollars from 2025 to 2030 in California's 77 community college nursing schools. We can double our capacity to graduate new nurses in five years.

- 1. **Community Nursing:** Assembly Bill 1695 will open the nursing pipeline by creating a high school level Nursing 101 course with automatic admission toward an associate degree in nursing (ADN) at the nearest community college. Bringing nurses from underserved communities into those same communities will foster cultural competency and awareness to improve patient care locally throughout the state.
- 2. **Clearing the Bottleneck:** Nursing students need clinical placement hours to graduate. Assembly Bill 1577 will compel more clinical placements from hospitals.
- 3. **Staffing Law Enforcement:** Assembly Bill 1063 will bring transparency, accountability, and RN input into the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) enforcement of nurse staffing ratios.

All three bills were voted out of committee with bipartisan support in late April and are headed for votes in the full assembly.

These efforts are just the beginning. The staffing crisis is a systemic national problem in need of systemic national solutions.

Where California leads, the nation follows. When these solutions work, UNAC/UHCP will take them nationwide.

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United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP) represents more than 35,000 registered nurses and health care professionals in California and Hawaii, including optometrists; pharmacists; physical, occupational and speech therapists; case managers; nurse midwives; social workers; clinical lab scientists; physician assistants and nurse practitioners; hospital support and technical staff. UNAC/UHCP is affiliated with the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO.

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