



# Empowering Advocacy: Why Nurses Must Lead in the Legislative Arena

John Berry | FNA Director of Labor Relations

Nurses are the backbone of our healthcare system, playing a critical role in improving patient outcomes and community well-being. Their work extends beyond administering care; it embodies advocacy for the health and dignity of every individual they serve. Yet, many nurses underestimate their power to shape the broader healthcare system through involvement in the legislative process.

The legislative arena is where policies that govern healthcare are crafted, refined, and enacted. Laws affecting staffing ratios, workplace safety, public health funding, and patient rights are often decided by individuals who may lack the day-to-day understanding of how these decisions impact care delivery. Nurses, with their frontline experience, hold invaluable insights into the practical effects of these policies. By lending their voices to legislative discussions, they can bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring decisions reflect the realities of patient care.

## Why Should Nurses Engage?

The healthcare system is heavily influenced by legislation, whether it's decisions about funding Medicaid and Medicare, mandates for infection control protocols, or policies addressing the nursing shortage. Nurses are uniquely positioned to highlight the challenges they face daily and advocate for meaningful solutions.

For example, safe staffing laws have been a key focus for many nursing advocacy groups. These laws ensure that patient care is not compromised by overworked and under-resourced teams. Nurses who participate in advocacy efforts have been instrumental in passing such legislation in various states, improving not only patient outcomes but also nurse satisfaction and retention.

Similarly, public health initiatives such as vaccination campaigns, mental health

services, and opioid crisis interventions are often shaped by state and federal laws. Without nursing input, these initiatives may miss critical nuances that can make or break their effectiveness. Nurses, as trusted professionals, can provide testimony, share data, and offer real-world insights that policymakers need to craft impactful laws.

## How Nurses Can Get Involved

Engaging in the legislative process might feel intimidating, but it's more accessible than many realize. Here are some practical steps:

1. **Stay Informed:** Follow legislative updates relevant to healthcare at the local, state, and federal levels. Organizations like the Florida Nurses Association (FNA) and the American Nurses Association (ANA) regularly provide resources and updates on key legislative priorities.
2. **Build Relationships with Legislators:** Policymakers value input from constituents, especially experts in their fields. Writing letters, making phone calls, or attending town hall meetings are simple yet impactful ways to build these connections.
3. **Participate in Advocacy Days:** Many nursing organizations host advocacy days, providing nurses with the opportunity to meet legislators, share their perspectives, and discuss important issues affecting healthcare.
4. **Share Your Story:** Personal stories carry immense power. Whether testifying in a legislative hearing, speaking at public forums, or engaging on social media, nurses can bring a human face to the policy issues under debate.
5. **Join Professional Organizations:** Membership in nursing organizations not only connects you with advocacy efforts but also provides training and support to help you amplify your voice.

6. **Run for Office:** For nurses passionate about systemic change, serving as an elected official is a direct way to influence policy. Many nurses have transitioned from caregiving roles to policymaking, proving that their expertise is both transferable and essential.

## The Stakes Are High

The healthcare challenges of today—ranging from workforce shortages to public health emergencies—demand informed, compassionate leadership. If nurses do not advocate for their profession, others without firsthand knowledge will shape the policies that affect nurses, patients, and the entire healthcare system. Nurses' involvement ensures that policies are not only well-intentioned but also grounded in reality.

Engagement in the legislative process also strengthens the profession. It demonstrates to lawmakers and the public that nursing is not just a job but a critical voice in the broader conversation about health and equity. Advocacy empowers nurses to drive change, advance their profession, and ensure their patients receive the care they deserve.

## A Call to Action

Involvement in the legislative process is not just a professional duty; it is a moral imperative. Nurses are natural advocates, and their expertise is needed now more than ever. By stepping into the policy arena, nurses can help shape a future where healthcare policies prioritize patients and empower caregivers.

Every nurse has the power to make a difference. Whether by writing a letter, speaking out, or running for office, your voice matters. Together, we can ensure that the healthcare system works better for all of us. ■