The ANSR Alliance (Americans for Nursing Shortage Relief) appreciates the opportunity to submit written comments for the record regarding funding for nursing workforce and research programs in fiscal year (FY) 2006. ANSR is a coalition of 48 nursing organizations representing a diverse cross section of healthcare and professional organizations, healthcare providers, and friends of nursing that have united to address the ever-growing nursing shortage.

To ensure that the nation has a sufficient and adequately prepared nursing workforce to provide quality care to all well into the 21st century, ANSR and the nation’s 2.7 million registered and advanced practice registered nurses (RNs and APRNs) advocate at least $210 million for the nursing workforce programs within Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as well as $160 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in FY 2006. ANSR stands ready to work with policymakers at the federal level to advance policies and programs that will sustain and strengthen the nation’s nursing workforce.

Nursing Shortage Background

Nursing is the nation’s largest healthcare provider group with an estimated 2.7 million licensed nurses. Nurses play a critical role in the health care system because they represent approximately 54% of all health care workers and provide patient care in virtually all locations in which health care is delivered. Our ability, as a nation to meet these projected workforce needs is complicated by a number of factors:

- The total nursing workforce is aging. By 2010, the average age of RNs is forecasted to be 45.4 years, an increase of 3.5 years over the current age, with more than 40 percent of the RN workforce expected to be older than 50 years.
- Approximately half of the RN workforce is expected to reach retirement age within the next 10 to 15 years. The average age of new RN graduates is 31 years; RNs are entering the profession older and will have fewer years to work than nurses traditionally have had.
- For the first time, registered nurses top the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics list of occupations with the largest projected 10-year job growth. Nurses have been on the list for some time but never as number one. The Bureau's latest projections put the demand for registered nurses at 2.9 million in 2012, up from 2.3 million in 2002.
- The national nursing shortage also is affecting our nation’s 7.6 million veterans who receive care through the 1,300 Veterans Administration (VA) health care facilities.
- Nearly 1,800 faculty members leave their positions and fewer than 400 potential faculty candidates receive doctoral degrees each year.
- For the 2003-2004 academic year, an estimated 125,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing programs at all levels due largely to a faculty shortage.
Adequate Nursing Workforce: Homeland Security

Homeland security efforts try to prevent harm to our country, and nurses play a critical role. These efforts involve the health system, and nurses represent the largest group of health care providers who will be called on to respond to an emergency, disaster, or mass-casualty event. The estimates for the nurse workforce demand in 2010 do not take into account the healthcare system’s ability to meet the healthcare needs of a surge of patients that could be expected from a mass-casualty event, whether natural or man-made. Given the findings of the bipartisan 9-11 Commission, it seems particularly relevant now to ensure an adequate supply of all levels of nurses, who are often front-line, first-responders in the case of tragedy. Unless steps are taken now, the nation’s ability to respond to a natural or intentional disaster will be impeded by the growing nationwide nursing shortage. An investment in the nurse workforce is a step in the right direction to re-build the public health infrastructure and increase our nation’s healthcare readiness and emergency response capabilities.

Growing Unmet Need

Fortunately—after years of failing to have enough interested individuals to pursue nursing—our nation is finally seeing a slight upturn in nursing school applications. Many Americans, who have lost their jobs due to the economy, and others interested in a second career, find nursing attractive because of the job security, sufficient pay, and the opportunity it affords to help others. However, nursing organizations are hearing from prospective nursing students that they face waiting periods of up to three years before they can matriculate because there is not enough teaching faculty available. In many cases, students who have been accepted into programs face long waits to matriculate in nursing school due to these challenges. For example, in 2004, U.S. nursing schools turned away more than 32,000 qualified applicants to entry-level baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs due to insufficient faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints, including almost 3,000 students who could potentially fill faculty roles. When nursing programs of all levels are considered, the number of qualified applicants turned away during the 2003-2004 academic year grows to more than 125,000. Without sufficient support for current nursing faculty and adequate incentives to encourage more nurses to become faculty—our nation will fail to have the teaching infrastructure necessary to educate and train the next generation of nurses we need so desperately to care for our family and friends, neighbors, colleagues, and ourselves.

Enacted in 2002, the Nurse Reinvestment Act included new and expanded initiatives, including loan forgiveness, scholarships, career ladder opportunities, and public service announcements to advance nursing as a career. Despite the enactment of this critical measure, HRSA fails to have the resources necessary to meet the current and growing demands for our nation’s nursing workforce. For example, in FY 2003, HRSA received 8,321 applications for the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program, but only had the funds to award 7% (602) of all applications. Also in FY 2003, HRSA received 4,512 applications for the Nursing Scholarship Program, but only had funding to support a mere 2% (94) of all applications.
Therefore, the ANSR Alliance strongly urges Congress to provide HRSA with a minimum of $210 million in FY 2006 to ensure that the agency has the resources necessary to fund a higher rate of Nurse Education Loan Repayment and Nursing Scholarship applications as well as implement other essential endeavors to sustain and boost our nation’s nursing workforce.

**Sustain and Seize Nursing Research Opportunities**

The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) supports basic and clinical research to establish a scientific basis for the care of individuals across the life span - from management of patients during illness and recovery to the reduction of risks for disease and disability and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. These efforts are crucial in translating scientific advances into cost-effective health care that does not compromise quality of care for patients. Additionally, NINR fosters collaborations with many other disciplines in areas of mutual interest such as long-term care for older people, the special needs of women across the life span, bioethical issues associated with genetic testing and counseling, and the impact of environmental influences on risk factors for chronic illnesses such as cancer. The ANSR Alliance supports a FY 2006 appropriation level of $160 million for the NINR at the National Institutes of Health.

**Conclusion**

The ANSR Alliance stands ready to work with policymakers to advance policies and support programs that will sustain and strengthen our nation’s nursing workforce. We thank you for this opportunity to discuss the funding levels necessary to ensure that our nation has a sufficient nursing workforce to care for the patients of today and tomorrow.

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<tr>
<th>Programmatic Area</th>
<th>Final FY 2005</th>
<th>President's Budget FY2006</th>
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<td>Nurse Workforce Development Programs</td>
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American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, Inc.
American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
American College of Nurse Practitioners
American Nephrology Nurses Association
American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses
Association of periOperative Registered Nurses
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing
Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Emergency Nurses Association
Infusion Nurses Society
National Association Nurse Massage Therapists
National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Council of State Boards of Nursing
National League for Nursing
National Nursing Centers Consortium
National Student Nurses' Association
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Oncology Nurses Society
Society of Trauma Nurses
Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates