



# Inspire, innovate, and influence

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Let's work together to tackle public health issues.

WITH NATIONAL NURSES WEEK coming soon, we'll be publicly recognized for our many positive contributions to healthcare at the bedside and beyond. While celebrating and looking back on all that we've accomplished, I also encourage you to look ahead to see how we can work together to have an even greater impact.

One area where nurses' advocacy and influence has and can make a difference is addressing the critical public health issues that lie before us. We've had great success in the past when public health nurses and RNs in various roles and settings collaborated to improve the health of our nation: promoting tobacco-use cessation, preventing the spread of tuberculosis and other communicable diseases, and responding to disasters. We rely on each other to identify, assess, report, educate, and intervene.

Right now it seems as if our advocacy and interventions are needed more than ever.

## Public health issues

One major public health issue that needs our continued attention and action is the opioid epidemic, which according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), claimed on average 115 lives a day in the United States in 2016. Many of you have witnessed the devastating effects of this crisis on your patients, in your communities, and perhaps on a more personal level. Although Congress has added \$6 billion to the federal budget for the next 2 years to combat the deadly epidemic, much more is needed for a truly comprehensive approach at local, state, and federal levels.

Another critical public health concern revolves around our readiness and response to emerging and other infectious diseases. As I write this, seasonal influenza has been taxing our healthcare system and prompting questions about the nation's ability to adequately handle a future crisis akin to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. In that infamous pandemic, tens of millions of people died worldwide, including some 675,000 in the United States. A related concern is the recently announced downsizing

of the CDC's global support next year to help countries prevent infectious disease threats that could become epidemics. New funding is needed to maintain momentum to prevent future pandemics.

Significant population-specific public health issues also need to be addressed, including polypharmacy among older adults that can lead to greater morbidity and mortality; the rise in maternal deaths in this country (while it's declined in other developed countries); and the estimated 24.6 million people, including 6.2 million children, with asthma. Nurses know that race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and a lack of access to healthcare contribute to these and other critical problems.

## We can do it!

This year, the American Nurses Association (ANA) selected the theme "Nurses: Inspire, Innovate, Influence" for National Nurses Week, May 6 to 12, to capture the extent of our impact on healthcare and to reinforce efforts surrounding the association's designated "Year of Advocacy."

Because of nurses' wide-ranging roles and our sheer numbers, we are well positioned to identify and help solve many public health problems in the course of providing individual care to our patients and their families. In addition, we can leverage the public's trust in nurses to influence practices and policies at our own facilities, as well as at the community, state, and national levels. ANA has many resources and avenues to help you advocate.

Looking back, we know we've successfully used our voices and expertise to inspire, innovate, and influence to advance the health of our nation. I urge you to become passionate about public health and to advocate for the causes you feel strongly about, such as the opioid crisis, clean air and water, or reducing gun violence. We can follow in the footsteps of nurse and humanitarian Lillian Wald, a pioneer and founder of modern public health nursing. She reached out to communities to improve conditions in the environment to benefit health. Times may be tough, but we can (still) do it!



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