ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and its member national nurses associations (NNAs) advocate for the development of national health care systems that provide a range of publicly funded essential and universally accessible and equitable health services to the population.

People have a right to equitable health services: promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative. ICN believes that these services should be patient- and family-centred, evidence-based and continually improving in quality measured by agreed benchmark standards and indicators.

Where such services are not publicly funded, ICN believes that governments have a responsibility to ensure accessible health services to the population with focus on vulnerable groups especially those from low socioeconomic groups.¹

ICN supports efforts by national nurses associations to influence health, social, education and public policy that is based on the health priorities for the nation, equity, accessibility of comprehensive and essential services, efficiency (including productivity), cost-effectiveness, and quality care.

ICN views primary health care as the preferred means of delivering essential health services at a cost that governments and communities can afford.²

Accessible, cost-effective and quality services, appropriate regulatory principles and frameworks, standards and mechanisms, and positive practice environments need to be established and applied equally to both private and public health services.

Nurses and NNAs have a responsibility to advocate for such health services, monitor their effectiveness, and drive health policy development, decision-making and implementation to ensure that all people have access to nursing and quality health services.

ICN supports efforts by NNAs to ensure that government policy for publicly funded and accessible health services does not downgrade the level of nursing education required by the complex demands of these services since evidence shows that registered nurses achieve better care outcomes.³
Background

A healthy nation is a vital national resource. A prime goal of each nation must be to achieve the best health status possible for the population within the resources available.

All people should have access to competent nurses who provide care, supervision and support across the range of settings. Health systems need to scale up nursing capacity and encompass a range of strategies that address workforce planning, education, skill-mix, regulatory frameworks and career pathways to ensure effective, efficient and safe health systems.

ICN and member associations need to maintain effective networks with relevant stakeholders to help ensure resource allocation and availability of services are based on needs and priorities, promote primary health care, and consider quality and costs. This includes advocacy for the resources needed to prepare the nursing workforce for the growing burden of chronic and noncommunicable diseases, injuries, disasters and other health challenges facing nations and populations worldwide.

Adopted in 1995
Reviewed and reaffirmed in 2001
Reviewed and revised in 2012