



## **SEVENTY-FOURTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

Provisional agenda item 17.1

### **COVID-19 response**

May 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of nurses in emergency response and the essential work they do in public health and beyond. The world has seen very clearly that nurses have been leading the response, with 90% of care undertaken by them, and it is nurses who have seen at close quarters the weaknesses, the fragilities and the fault-lines that must be addressed both in the continued response and for the design of future healthcare systems.

The COVID-19 Effect, caused by ongoing demands placed on nurses and other healthcare workers, is having a profound effect on the mental and physical health of the health workforce. The International Council of Nurses' (ICN) reports show that in every region of the world nurses are reporting extremely concerning and rising rates of mental distress. This rise is the result of issues including poor working conditions, PPE shortages, lack of mental health support, understaffing, fear of spreading the virus to family and an increase in violence and discrimination against nurses.

A recent ICN report indicates that 90% of its national nursing associations are concerned that these conditions are the cause of increasing reports of intention to leave the profession. The COVID-19 Effect combined with existing nursing shortages and ageing populations, could cause the need to replace at least 13 million nurses in the coming years.

The World Health Assembly, in resolution WHA73.1, expressed its highest appreciation of, and support for, the dedication, efforts and sacrifices, above and beyond the call of duty of health professionals and health workers. Yet the numbers of infections and deaths, unacceptable and unsafe working conditions and unfair pay for nurses sends a different message. ICN calls on Member States to urgently intensify actions to protect, support and invest in nurses and the health workforce, to end this pandemic and make it the last.