

## **At a pivotal moment for global health and NCD goals, ICN brings strong messages to the UN General Assembly in New York**

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) will make the global nursing voice heard at the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 80) with **strong and clear messages on key issues including noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health**. ICN's delegation is led by CEO, Howard Catton, who will attend High-Level Meetings and speak at several important side events, including a session co-hosted by ICN and New York University (NYU) Rory Meyers College of Nursing, "[Shaping Global Health Policy through Nursing Leadership](#)". The ICN delegation will ensure that the world's 30 million nurses are represented in critical discussions shaping global health policy and sustainable development.

### **Background**

UNGA 80 takes place amidst unprecedented global crises. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized in his opening remarks, the world faces urgent issues including deepening geopolitical divides, rising conflicts, the worsening climate crisis, and growing inequalities. With only one-third of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently on track for 2030, UNGA 80 is crucial for revitalizing international cooperation. This year's UNGA also sees unprecedented pressure on multilateral and global health institutions, with the UN facing budget cuts; the World Health Organization (WHO) restructuring in response to huge financing constraints; and major international development aid programmes dealing with drastically reduced funding.

**Fourth High-level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) and Mental Health (HLM4):** The major health focus of UNGA is HLM4, which will take place on 25 September. Progress towards achieving the SDG target to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one third is currently far off track. ICN views the High-Level Meeting as a crucial moment to focus the world's attention on the urgent and growing global burden of noncommunicable diseases and for UN member states to commit to a strong outcome document with tangible commitments to accelerate action on NCDs, which must centre the vital role of nurses and health professionals.

**Urgent need to invest in the health care workforce for *all* UN goals:** As ICN has highlighted, we currently have a grave shortage of 5.8 million nurses, a projected shortage of 11 million health professionals by 2030, and many nurses have inadequate working conditions, compensation, and protections. Investing in nurses and strengthening the health care workforce is the foundation for progress towards the world's health and development goals.

While the core health focus of UNGA80 is the NCDs meeting, health is essential to *all* issues on the agenda, including women's rights, climate change, development financing, and digital transformations (under discussion at the High-level Meeting on the 30th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women focusing on gender equality; the Climate Summit; the first Biennial Summit for financing development; and the High-level Meeting to Launch the Global Dialogue on AI Governance).

**Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery renewed at World Health Assembly:** ICN enters UNGA80 with strengthened momentum following significant progress on nursing at this year's World Health Assembly. Based on the strong data in the State of the World's Nursing 2025 report, co-chaired by ICN, all WHO member states voted to renew the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery – and called to accelerate progress. We have the commitments, and ICN will advocate for accelerated implementation and investment to strengthen the nursing workforce and achieve our global health goals.

## **ICN's key messages**

Based on [ICN's Charter for Change](#), the [State of the World's Nursing report 2025](#), the Global Strategic Directions, and other critical policy, ICN brings six strong messages to UNGA80.

### **1. Investing in a regulated health workforce is the only way to address NCDs and achieve all health goals**

To achieve our global goals of reducing premature mortality and quality-of-life reductions from chronic conditions, **ICN is bringing the clear message that next week's High-Level Meeting must commit to ambitious NCD action on NCDs and must urgently centre action to strengthen the health and nursing workforce.** Nurses promote wellness – beyond only treating illness – across the entire care continuum and entire lifespan. Nurses are the

foundation of primary and preventive health care which WHO has affirmed is critical to addressing NCDs. Without a strong, safe, and competent workforce, commitments in the Political Declaration of the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs cannot translate into effective action or sustainable primary health care and universal health coverage.

Yet the current draft Political Declaration makes only a brief reference to health workers and does not acknowledge the need for highly skilled, licensed, and regulated professionals. As ICN has outlined, WHO's recent report on NCDs also fails to acknowledge the vital contributions of nurses and health professionals to NCD action.

*ICN is calling for:*

- ➔ **Urgent, strong, and sustainable investment in the nursing and health workforce**, including in safe, decent working conditions and compensation.
- ➔ Clear commitments to **ensuring a well-educated, licensed, and regulated health workforce** and warning against over-reliance on unregulated health workers in addressing NCDs.

## **2. Urgent action is needed to support nurses and health professionals in addressing mental health**

Mental health is a key focus of the NCDs meeting. As outlined in ICN's [Guidelines on Mental Health Nursing](#), nurses are vital in promoting community-based, person-centred mental health care. However, there is a **severe shortage of mental health nurses**, who make up just 1% of the nursing workforce. Furthermore, the current draft Political Declaration on NCDs does not acknowledge the significant **challenges of stress and burnout that are affecting nursing and health workforces**, while the 2025 State of the World's Nursing report showed an alarming lack of mental health supports for nurses.

*ICN is calling for:*

- ➔ Investment in **building a strong, well supported mental health nursing workforce** enabled to deliver person-centred, primary health care.
- ➔ Commitment to **address the root causes of health workforce stress and burnout**, including inadequate and unsafe working conditions, understaffing, and lack of mental health supports.

### 3. Enabling nurses is vital to accelerate transformations to primary health care and nurse-led models

**Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are central to expanding access to primary and preventive care**, particularly in underserved and rural areas. ICN's [Primary Health Care report](#) demonstrates that deploying APNs in primary care is a proven, cost-effective strategy to for NCD prevention, management, and care.

*ICN is calling for:*

- ➔ **Policy empowering APNs to practice to their full scope** to maximize their impact in comprehensive NCD services including early diagnosis, health education, chronic disease management, and community-level prevention.
- ➔ Urgent action to **transform health systems from illness models to wellness-focused, preventive, primary-care-based models**, including by expanding and enabling the nursing workforce.

### 4. Nurses are critical to all UN development goals: peace, climate, gender equity, financing for development, AI/digital transformation

ICN brings the message to UNGA80 that investing in nurses as health care leaders supports the UN's key agenda across key topics including:

**Gender equity:** Investing in nursing, as a profession that is 85% women, directly advances gender equity, and must include leadership opportunities.

**Peace:** Supporting nursing ensures healing care during conflicts and promotes peace and recovery.

**Climate:** Nursing is key in treating the health harms of climate change and advocating for planetary health.

**Ethical AI:** Nurses are essential leaders in ensuring AI and digital health technologies are ethically designed and implemented and in empowering communities with digital health.

**Financing:** Financing for development must include strategic investment in nurses, who are essential to strong, resilient health systems, and must ensure that health care is not only accessible but affordable to achieve Universal Health Coverage and bring health to all people.

## 5. Tackling inequitable health worker migration and international recruitment is vital for equity and development

The 2025 SOWN report demonstrated that the world's nurses are extremely unequally distributed, with 80% of the world's nurses in countries representing just 50% of the world's population. This imbalance is exacerbated by inequitable international migration patterns and ongoing recruitment of nurses from vulnerable low-income states.

A new [WHO EURO region report](#) once again reveals the scale of the problem, showing **increasing health worker migration to high-income European countries**. As well as leaving populations with insufficient access to care, this also leaves low-income countries to bear the costs of training nurses and other HCWs for wealthier nations.

ICN is bringing a strong message to UNGA 80 that **immediate action is needed to address inequitable migration patterns** and protect health care workforces and systems in low- and middle-income countries. This includes the need for a strengthened WHO Global Code of Practice on International Recruitment as well as fair and ethical practices, including **meaningful compensation for source countries losing their nursing workforce**.

## 6. Strengthening global cooperation is essential to achieve shared health goals

ICN supports UNGA80's theme, "Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights", emphasizing the urgent need to strengthen multilateral cooperation to address our world's growing health and other challenges.

ICN is also **bringing the strong message that uniting across civil society is essential to ensure that non-governmental organizations have a meaningful voice in shaping global policies**.

Representing over 140 National Nursing Associations worldwide, ICN exemplifies the power of collaboration across borders. **ICN's "Shaping Global Health Policy through Nursing Leadership" side event, co-hosted with NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing, will bring together nursing leaders, national nursing associations, and international nursing organizations**. Together, we will collaborate to advance the role of nursing in global health and increase the impact of our advocacy at UNGA80.

*[Register here](#) for ICN's event, "Shaping Global Health Policy through Nursing Leadership: Partnerships and Solutions for a Healthier World".*