

UNGA 2026 Pandemic Statement

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 140 national nurses associations, representing millions of nurses worldwide and serving as the global voice of nursing.

As the international community considers how to better prevent and prepare for future pandemics, we must not lose sight of a fundamental lesson from COVID-19: pandemic preparedness is workforce preparedness.

The world is changing. Populations are ageing rapidly, chronic diseases are increasing, and older people can be particularly vulnerable during infectious disease outbreaks. At the same time, communicable diseases have not disappeared. Outbreaks and emerging infectious diseases continue to threaten communities, while climate change is creating additional pressures on health systems and health workers.

We therefore cannot allow the end of the COVID-19 emergency to become the end of our investment in preparedness.

Nurses are the backbone of health systems and are essential to prevention, surveillance, vaccination, infection prevention and control, emergency response, primary care, long-term care and community resilience. Strong health systems require nurses who are sufficiently staffed, protected, supported and prepared before the next crisis arrives.

As we look toward the appointment of the next UN Secretary-General, we urge future UN leadership to recognize that health workers are essential to keeping societies functioning—not only during pandemics, but across the broader challenges of our time, from healthy ageing and climate change to humanitarian crises, sustainable development and peace.

If we want resilient societies, we must invest in the people who keep them running. Nurses must be at the centre of that investment. Preparedness begins before the crisis, and it begins with the workforce.