

Pan American Health Organization, 63rd Directing Council

September 28 –2 October 2026

Item 8.7 Plan of Action on Worker's Health: Final Report

I speak on behalf of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 30 million nurses worldwide.

ICN believes every worker has the right to a safe and healthy working environment. Nursing remains one of the most hazardous occupations with occupational risks including exposure to infectious hazards, musculoskeletal injury, long working hours and violence. ICN calls on the countries without comprehensive health and well-being programmes in the health sector to implement these. We also support the call to protect health professionals through safe and healthy working conditions and to adopt and effectively implement necessary measures to achieve this.

Women are identified as a vulnerable group in this context and, as nurses are predominantly women, a gender-responsive approach to workers' health is essential. ICN supports universal systems of social protection and health coverage that prioritize populations in situations of vulnerability.

Workplace violence is widespread in health settings and has serious consequences for nurses, their families, patients and care quality and safety. ICN has documented high levels of stress, burnout and moral injury among nurses, with consequences for individual nurses, workforce retention and health system capacity. ICN commends the eighteen countries with psychosocial risks and workplace violence programmes, but stresses that programmes alone are not enough. Nurses need safe staffing, prevention of and zero tolerance for violence, effective reporting mechanisms and access to respite and mental health support.

As a major part of the primary health care workforce, nurses are critical to integrating occupational health into primary health care to expand coverage. ICN urges countries to invest in continuing professional development in occupational health competencies for nurses and enable nurses to practice to the full scope of their competence. ICN urges Member States to translate the lessons from this Plan

of Action into sustained investment, effective regulation and accountability for safe and healthy working environments for all.

Delivered by Sarah E. Gray