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ICN says nurses have a professional responsibility to be vaccinated because of their status as role models and key sources of health advice

Geneva, Switzerland, 10 February 2022 – The International Council of Nurses’ (ICN) new board of directors has issued a statement on COVID-19 vaccinations, highlighting nurses’ professional responsibility to be vaccinated, the continuing and lamentable inequality of access to vaccines, and the need for nurses to be protected from harm.

In the new vaccine [statement](#) ICN affirms its belief in the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, and its conviction that nurses have a fundamental role in enhancing public trust in vaccines and encouraging people to have them. It says nurses have a professional responsibility to follow public health measures, including getting vaccinated, to protect themselves, the public they serve and health systems they work in.

The statement also urges governments to do more to ensure vaccine equity around the globe, especially for vulnerable people and nurses and others who care for them, and calls for better protection of nurses against the abuse and violence that they have suffered while conducting their health education and vaccine administration roles.

ICN President Dr Pamela Cipriano said: “Nurses have consistently been voted the most trusted professionals on the planet, and they have a vital role in providing up-to-date, evidence-based healthcare advice to their patients and the communities they serve. Nurses are great role models, and the positive advice they give about COVID-19 vaccines can only be effective when they themselves take advantage of the protections the vaccines provide.”

Since the start of the pandemic ICN has consistently called for the prioritization of the vaccination of healthcare workers and reported on the disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable populations and remains deeply concerned at the slow speed of the roll out, especially in Africa.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said: “Progress in vaccinating in Africa continues to be painfully slow, with 85% of the population still to receive a single dose, and less than half of healthcare workers being fully vaccinated. What is also alarming is that only 0.1% of the total African population have been given boosters. This is a moral, health and rights crisis, and we are urging governments to take immediate and sustained action to ensure equitable global vaccine access for people of all nations. This will require countries to step up their sharing of vaccines, and for companies to waive their patents to maximise the efficiency of financing and support for manufacturing, distribution and delivery of vaccines.

‘We must not fall into the trap of thinking that the end of the pandemic is in sight. There must be no false sense of security because individual nations alone will not be able to boost the world out of the pandemic.’

At the recent [World Health Assembly meeting](#), Dr Tedros said that 34 WHO Member States, most of them in Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean region, have not been able to vaccinate even 10% of their populations, and 85% of the population of Africa is yet to receive a single dose. ICN is concerned that all of this will mean that the WHO target of having 70% of the world’s population fully vaccinated by the middle of 2022 is extremely unlikely to be met.

The inequity is plain to see in the [United Nations Development Programme's data](#), which suggests that while nearly 68% of people in high-income countries have had at least one dose of the vaccine, in low income countries that figure is less than 12%.

Referring to the abuse nurses have faced during the pandemic, Dr Cipriano said that she and her board colleagues are extremely concerned that much of it is linked to incorrect and misleading vaccine information: "Nurses have faced abuse and even physical attacks during the pandemic, and the toxic environment around vaccinations in some situations has further put them at risk. We all know that nursing can be a challenging profession, but to have to face violence and aggression on top of the rigours of the job is totally unacceptable. The physical and mental toll of the pandemic on nurses is being made worse when irresponsible lies about vaccinations are spread, and people take out their fears and anger on the very people who are there to help them. The violence and abuse must be stopped, and it is up to governments to make sure their nurses are protected and kept safe."

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Note to Editors

The **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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