

## **World Health Day: ICN applauds progress in vaccinations but obstacles to vaccine equity still exist**

*ICN also warns proposed global treaty on pandemic preparedness risks being ineffectual - a paper tiger - if investment in healthcare and nurse shortages not addressed*

**Geneva, Switzerland, 7 April 2020** - The International Council of Nurses (ICN) says that ensuring all countries are vaccinated against COVID-19 is an essential part of achieving this year's [World Health Day](#) goal of building a fairer, healthier and more equitable world. ICN remains concerned that not all countries have begun rolling out the vaccines and, where they have, there is still slow, unequal and uneven progress. While many countries are now at the start line, it is the finish line which is most important and there are still many obstacles to overcome. No one will be safe from COVID-19 until all nations have fully vaccinated their populations.

In relation to the theme of equity highlighted by the World Health Organization on today's World Health Day, ICN has been vocal about the unacceptable gender inequalities exposed by the pandemic for nurses and women in general. ICN President Annette Kennedy is on record saying that the year of the pandemic has highlighted that the calls for better protection, decent pay and acceptable work conditions for nurses, a 90% female workforce, are being ignored by governments and policy makers. (See [ICN statement](#) from 17 March).

However it is positive to see that in many of the countries that have started vaccinating their people, nurses and other healthcare workers are being treated as a priority group, alongside older people and those who are vulnerable because of pre-existing medical conditions.

Despite this progress, ICN's National Nursing Associations report that there are still delays in healthcare workers being vaccinated as well as unfairness in the vaccine roll outs that are slowing the process down and putting lives at prolonged and unjustifiable risk.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said:

"I welcome the progress made in the roll out of the vaccination programmes as an important step towards a more equitable post-COVID era and we must do all that is possible to overcome the significant hurdles that remain.

'This time last year, on World Health Day, we were celebrating the publication of the first [State of the World's Nursing report](#), which provided an accurate snapshot of the global nursing workforce and revealed the true size of the global nursing shortage. This year, we are sending out a much more sombre message as we mourn the many people who have died from COVID-19 and face the realisation that we still have a long battle ahead of us to address gender, racial and health inequities.'

'Today, and every day, we should remember those who have lost their lives in the pandemic, and the nurses and other healthcare workers who are counted among them. We must also think of the hundreds of thousands of nurses who have cared for the sick and the dying during the pandemic, often at great personal cost. Many of them are exhausted, and with no end to the traumas in sight, they have been left feeling burned out, anxious or depressed. For them, and for those among them who will experience post-traumatic stress disorder, there is a long road of recovery ahead.'

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton added:

“The race to get the global population vaccinated is now underway, but we hear from our National Nursing Associations that nurses are still facing a number of obstacles. The roll out of the vaccines has been slow, uneven and unfair in some areas, and there have been reports in some instances of queue-jumping. This situation has been compounded by uncertain supply lines, staff shortages and inadequate training. We are also seeing some countries starting to vaccinate younger and less vulnerable people as well as looking at plans to allow people to take holidays abroad, whilst in other countries nurses and the vulnerable could still be waiting for the vaccination until 2022 or even 2023. It is vital that the roll out gathers momentum over the next few months because, as in any race, it is only when everyone crosses the finish line that it will truly be over. Let’s be clear this is not a national race but a global one against a virus that won’t stop mutating.”

Commenting on the proposal by 20 world leaders and the WHO for a pandemic preparedness treaty, Mr Catton said:

“It is good that governments have recognised that the world was not ready for the pandemic, and that cooperation and collaboration on a worldwide scale are needed to prepare for future global health emergencies. ICN will be writing to the G20 leaders to tell them that the true test of their treaty will be whether it delivers the changes needed to protect and invest in nurses and other healthcare workers.

‘It was gratifying to hear WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros last week echoing ICN’s call that the proposed treaty should include a specific commitment to the protection and investment in the health workforce. The treaty must clearly set out how governments will invest in health systems and strengthen nurse education, jobs and leadership. Without such commitments, and the follow up actions to implement them, any such treaty will risk being ineffective, a paper tiger, full of empty promises and devoid of the power necessary to make things happen.’

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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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