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## **ICN calls for establishment of HERO funds to place health education at the heart of COVID-19 economic recovery plans**

***Job losses related to the COVID-19 pandemic provide an opportunity for governments to strengthen their healthcare workforce and address the world's six million shortage of nurses***

**Geneva, Switzerland; 3 December 2020** – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is calling on governments to make available dedicated additional funding and resources to increase health education and retraining opportunities. Governments could achieve this goal by supporting current education providers to increase their capacity and also to support individuals who have lost their jobs to transition into the health and care workforce.

All countries are having to address the economic shocks of COVID-19, and we are seeing sectors such as transport, retail, and hospitality losing significant numbers of jobs. At the same time COVID-19 has exposed the severe shortages of health and care workers in many countries including the six million shortage of nurses highlighted in the first ever *State of the World's Nursing* report published this year by the World Health Organization (WHO) and co-chaired by the ICN.

Governments should seize the opportunity to strengthen their health workforces, reduce their reliance on recruiting healthcare professionals from overseas and provide new opportunities for people who are facing unemployment through the establishment of health, education and retraining opportunity (HERO) funds.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“Governments must place health at the heart of their post COVID-19 economic recovery plans. This is an opportunity to address both growing levels of unemployment and invest in much needed strengthening of the health and care workforces. The pandemic has shown us that spending on health is not a cost, but an investment, and it will also accelerate economic growth.

“We also know from a nursing perspective that wealthier countries are actively seeking to address their nurse shortage through international recruitment. This is short-termism. Targeting countries who can ill afford to lose the nurses they have paid to educate has serious consequences for the availability of healthcare to their populations and raises significant ethical concerns. By establishing their own ‘HERO’ funds, richer countries could start now to become more self-sufficient in the supply of their own health and care workforce as well as offering hope and new opportunities to the millions who are losing their jobs in other sectors.

“To be clear, the funds we suggest would be created to maintain the highest standards for health education as well as providing more opportunities through long-term investment, creating a stronger and more resilient and pandemic prepared health and care workforce for the future. On a

global scale, the roll-out of such funds could make the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and Healthcare for All, an achievable and reachable reality, as well as creating a stronger more robust economy.”

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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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