



## **Building a Healthier Nation: Public Health Nurses at the Forefront Leading the Change**

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In the last several years, significant transformations have occurred to the US healthcare system as a result of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Changes in the healthcare landscape have called for improved cost-effective strategies and a renewed commitment to better meet the needs of the nation while leaving no one behind. The health of our nation matters. Health disparities, an aging population, a diverse population, more insured people, higher rates of chronic diseases, high rates of preventable deaths, and the skyrocketing health costs are just a few of the reasons why we cannot continue to maintain the status quo.

Public health nurses (PHN) are uniquely and well-positioned to lead and meet these evolving needs of the healthcare system. Nurses are the most trusted profession and the largest segment of the healthcare workforce. PHNs have an independent scope of practice and well-developed roles in supervision, delegation, and training other health workers. PHNs are trained to consider social determinants of health (SDH) in addition to medical concerns. They are adaptable to change and promote health and wellness. PHNs are already engaged in an array of population health-focused activities - mother-baby home visits, school-based clinics, wellness programs, care coordination and transitional care, and end-of-life care. PHNs provide population-focused services to entire communities and are often the face of healthcare in many underserved areas. PHNs also have the knowledge and skills to provide population health services and to collaborate across and within disciplines and sectors. However, if PHNs are not fully engaged in decision making and in showcasing their value and impact, they will be unable to provide leadership based on their education and experience.

There are several ways nurses can be engaged in leading the transformation of our healthcare system to build a healthier nation from the bedside to the boardroom - enhancing academic curriculums to promote SDH, population health, interdisciplinary collaborations, and leadership; developing innovative models of care; community health advocacy; fostering collaborations across disciplines and sectors; promoting health as a shared value in the communities nurses live, work, and play; creating healthier more equitable communities; strengthening integration of health services and systems; advancing nursing leadership by participating in boards/taskforces/advisory councils to influence policy and decision making; and nurses being champions, role models, and mentors for change.

The Action Coalition's "Campaign for Action: Future of Nursing" provides a forum for building nurses' capacity and galvanizing action through the implementation of the Institute of Medicine's "Future of Nursing" recommendations and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Framework. As a part of these two initiatives, Maryland's RWJF Public Health Nurse Leader (PHNL) will be engaged in a project that aims to enumerate and characterize the public health nursing workforce in Maryland; to identify initiatives where Maryland PHNs are engaged to determine which ones are scalable and replicable; and to identify new initiatives that could be implemented to improve health outcomes across the lifespan. This presentation will describe the RWJF culture of health framework and the PHNL's project plan.