



2024 Health Equity and Nursing Innovations Fund *Nursing Workforce and Healthy Work Environments*

Request for Proposals

SUMMARY

This request for proposals seeks innovative solutions that create systemic change, strengthen and diversify the nursing workforce, expand nurse recruitment and retention strategies, and create and sustain healthy work environments. Proposals must support the advancement of one or more of the recommendations in the National Academy of Medicine report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity* and implement one or more of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN Critical-Care) *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*. Grants of up to \$25,000 each will be awarded for one-year projects. Projects require 1:1 matching funds. This program is designed and funded by AARP, AACN Critical Care, and the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*, an initiative of AARP Foundation, AARP and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

BACKGROUND

The state of health care and the profession of nursing need systemic and sustainable changes. Nurses have a critical role and responsibility to advance health equity in our country. At 4 million strong, nurses are the largest and most trusted provider of health services, and they practice throughout multiple care settings: in health systems, homes, nursing homes, schools, workplaces and more. Nurses are in the best position to help consumers and communities overcome socio-economic barriers to health and well-being.

Establishing and sustaining healthy work environments in all care settings where nurses practice is essential for creating a strong and diverse nursing workforce, closing the workforce gap, and transforming care delivery settings. Unhealthy and toxic work environments significantly threaten the quality and sustainability of human interactions fundamental to patient and caregiver well-being. Healthy work environments promote a sense of belonging for patients, families, and health care team members, generating respect for each person's unique perspectives and needs. Efforts are being made to address challenges faced by health care workers. However, if health equity is to be realized, ongoing support will be required to ensure a strong nursing workforce and healthy work environments across all care settings where nurses practice.

Additionally, the stress of the work environment has taken an enormous toll on nurses. Nurses are leaving the profession at alarming rates; common causes include stressful working conditions and unhealthy work environments. The results from the 2021 National Nurse Work Environment Status Report, conducted by AACN Critical Care, demonstrated a decline in the health of nurses' work environments. However, further analysis of this data offers a path forward. Nurses who work in units that are actively working on implementing any of the six AACN Critical Care *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments* reported higher satisfaction with their job and the profession, better quality of care, more shifts

with appropriate staffing and less intent to leave their current positions. Healthy work environments are crucial to nurse well-being across the care continuum.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated pre-existing conditions in the American health care system that profoundly affect the health care workforce. These conditions include increased workload and stress, workforce shortages, higher rates of attrition, changing roles and responsibilities, and threats to well-being. Changes to ensure the quality, viability and effectiveness of the nation's health care system and workforce are imperative. Changes must work to eliminate structural racism in nursing, create and sustain healthy work environments, and identify and scale nursing workforce recruitment and retention strategies. As stated in the National Academy of Medicine report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*, "Nurses, then, have a critical role to play in achieving the goal of health equity. But to take on the pursuit of that goal, they need robust education, supportive work environments, and autonomy." (page 4)

Our nation cannot address and dismantle structural racism and eliminate health disparities without the partnership and innovation of nurses. Nor can nurses optimally contribute to care delivery across the continuum without healthy work environments. This program is designed to support innovative solutions to recruit, retain, strengthen, and diversify the nursing workforce. The awards will be administered by the AARP Center for Health Equity through NursingSM (A-CHEN). This initiative is designed and funded by AARP, AACN Critical Care, and the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*.

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment.

AACN Critical Care is the world's largest specialty nursing organization, with more than 130,000 members and nearly 200 chapters in the United States. To achieve its vision of a health care system driven by the needs of patients and families, where nurses make their optimal contribution, AACN Critical Care's advocacy priority is to establish and sustain healthy work environments that support nursing excellence.

The *Campaign for Action*, through its state Action Coalitions, works with policymakers, health care professionals, educators, and business leaders to respond to the country's increasing demand for safe, high-quality, and effective health care. The *Campaign's* vision is that everyone in America can live a healthier life, advanced by equity-minded nurses as essential and valued partners in providing care and promoting health equity and well-being.

DESCRIPTION

The one-year program will award funds to creative, replicable, and promising solutions that create systemic change, strengthen and diversify the nursing workforce, expand innovative nurse recruitment and retention strategies, and create and sustain healthy work environments.

Projects that are awarded will be required to use the Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT) as a pre- and post-measure. The HWEAT helps teams assess and measure progress in establishing and sustaining a healthy work environment. Awardees will have three

weeks after project initiation, and three weeks after project conclusion to complete the HWEAT and review results. [See the frequently asked questions](#) for additional information.

A 1:1 match is required for each dollar awarded, and applicants must demonstrate that they have secured the matching funds. In-kind donations are welcome and valued but will not be considered matching funds.

Working with community partners will enable awardees to impact systems change more effectively. Strategies to help broaden community partnerships include:

- leveraging the AARP Center for Health Equity through Nursing's network of *Campaign for Action* state Action Coalitions, Champions Coalition, health systems, schools of nursing, employers, and nurse executives
- collaborating with partners that have a proven track record of implementing solutions and/or similar goals
- working with non-nursing community partners that have a mutual interest in ensuring a diverse and strengthened nursing workforce

There are many resources available for advancing health equity and creating healthy work environments in all care settings, including the *Campaign for Action's* Health Equity Toolkit and AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*. See the [frequently asked questions](#) for more information and a list of resources mentioned in this request for proposals.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Proposals must:

- offer innovative solutions that create systemic change, strengthen and diversify the nursing workforce, expand innovative nurse recruitment and retention strategies, and create and sustain healthy work environments
- support the advancement of one or more of the recommendations in the National Academy of Medicine report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*
- describe how the project will implement one or more of AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*
- confirm the project will use AACN Critical Care's HWEAT as a pre- and post-measure
- show evidence of the project's potential replicability and sustainability
- clearly explain the role of each partner identified for this project
- show evidence of diverse and genuine community partnerships
- describe how the following outcomes will be impacted, monitored, and evaluated during the project's one-year timeframe:
 - number of nurses impacted by the program or project over the grant period
 - retention of RNs as indicated by RN vacancy and turnover rates in the care setting at the beginning and end of the project
 - change in HWEAT scores
- secure 1:1 matching funds (a maximum of \$25,000 to be awarded)
- comply with application details and formatting requirements

Applications submitted by a *Campaign for Action* state Action Coalition, or an approved organization affiliated with the state Action Coalition, will be viewed more favorably. Applicant organizations affiliated with a state Action Coalition must also submit a letter from the Action Coalition supporting their application to lead the project and describing how the Action Coalition will participate.

Preference will be given to applicants that are either public entities or tax-exempt nonprofit organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. If your organization does not qualify, we encourage you to partner with a community organization that is a public entity or a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

AWARD DETAILS

Awards of up to \$25,000 will be given for projects that will be completed in one year. A 1:1 match is required for each dollar awarded. In-kind donations are welcome and valued but will not be considered matching funds.

Funds may be used for personnel, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and contractors or consultants. Funds may not be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, for political activities, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

Awardees must report on the impact of their Health Equity and Nursing Innovations Fund project at the funding period's end. A reporting template will be provided by AARP.

Leveraging AARP's and AACN Critical Care's communication channels and networks, we will share learnings and results from the projects so others can use these models to create systems change in health care organizations, academic institutions, and communities.

HOW TO APPLY

Complete the [application template](#) and submit via email to NursingInnovations@aarp.org no later than 10 p.m. ET on April 5, 2024. In fairness to all applicants, the program will not accept late submissions. All funding decisions will be made by a review team consisting of AARP and AACN Critical Care leadership, staff, and advisers.

For more information on the Health Equity and Nursing Innovations Fund and proposal requirements, please contact:

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AARP Center for Health Equity through Nursing
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Phone: (202) 434-2148
Email: NursingInnovations@aarp.org
Website: <https://campaignforaction.org/2024-innovations-fund/>

PROGRAM SUPPORT

The AARP Center for Health Equity through Nursing will provide technical assistance and direction for those who receive awards. An informational webinar will be held for all interested applicants. The webinar will be recorded for those who cannot attend.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

February 20, 2024 (3 p.m. ET)	Webinar for interested applicants
April 5, 2024 (10 p.m. ET)	Applicant submission deadline
May 2024	Finalists notified of funding recommendations
June 2024	Awards finalized
July 1, 2024	Projects initiated