

2026 Legislative and Public Policy Agenda

AWHONN represents the interests of 350,000 nurses working in women's health, obstetric, and neonatal nursing across the United States. The items listed below represent our legislative and policy priorities for 2026.

The following Legislative and Public Policy Agenda applies to the AWHONN population. This includes nurses and the people they serve across the lifespan, including women, transgender people, non-binary people, birthing people, and newborns

Empower and support nurses

- Advocate for strong nursing representation by a culturally, racially, and gender diverse group of nurses on state, federal, and other policy-making bodies, task forces, advisory boards, working groups, and maternal mortality review teams that address women, transgender people, non-binary people, birthing people, and newborns and birthing health, neonatal health, and obstetric issues, especially by nurses who are Black, Indigenous, people of color, and gender diverse.
- Support efforts to eliminate the scope of practice barriers for advanced practice registered nurses (nurse practitioners, certified nurse midwives, clinical nurse specialists, and certified registered nurse anesthetists) to practice to the full extent of their education and training to meet the increasing demand for primary care and health services to women, transgender people, non-binary people, birthing people, and newborns
- Support efforts to increase and enhance a diverse nursing workforce and promote nursing as a profession that better reflects and represents the communities they serve. These efforts should also support staff retention and eliminate financial barriers to undergraduate, graduate, and advanced practice nursing education.
- Support for training and equipment to protect nurses on the job and their patients, such as funding for personal protective equipment, workplace violence prevention training, and interventions.
- Protect clinicians by opposing legislation and regulations to limit the compensation of nurses. Efforts to adequately staff hospitals should focus on meeting the market pay necessary to attract and retain qualified staff, including a qualified nursing workforce
- Oppose legislation allowing prosecution of providers, patients, and others for providing health care or assisting people seeking abortion

Caring for AWHONN's Population:

- Advocate for health equity to improve outcomes and access to high-quality, equitable, and necessary services for AWHONN's patient population, including those who are:
 - Incarcerated or detained, including those who are pregnant
 - Living in poverty or low income
 - Affected by a substance use disorder
 - Black, Indigenous, LatinX, immigrants (regardless of legal status), and members of historically marginalized groups
 - Military members or veterans
 - Currently trafficked or are at risk for human trafficking
 - Excluded for their gender or sexual identities, relationship status, or religious affiliation
 - Disabled
 - Young or advanced age
- Advocate for unrestricted and fully funded access to healthcare services such as:
 - annual well visits including gynecologic care;
 - counseling for reproductive life planning;
 - immunizations;
 - breast cancer screening, including mammograms;
 - STI and cervical cancer screenings;
 - pre- and inter-conception care;
 - prenatal care;
 - ante-, intra-, and postpartum care;
 - menopause care;
 - screenings for intimate partner violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, substance use, human trafficking, and mental health;
 - smoking cessation programs
- Support comprehensive Medicaid coverage of substance use disorder and mental health care for the AWHONN patient population.
- Advocate for access to all reproductive services, including reproductive life planning, infertility and conception care, contraception, and abortion care to include treatment for ectopic pregnancy and spontaneous, missed, therapeutic, or elective abortion.

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- Support initiatives to allow access to a wide range of evidence-based contraceptive options for those who seek them, including
 - Unrestricted access to all contraceptives that are available to people of all ages
 - Full contraception coverage by all insurance payers, including Medicaid, with no out-of-pocket expense
- Support initiatives to reduce maternal and infant morbidity and mortality and improve the physical and mental health status of all AWHONN patient populations, as well as policies designed to increase funding to address racial health disparities, structural and social determinants of health, and resolve health inequities contributing to these issues. Support legislation and funding to address the effects of systemic racism and environmental factors on maternal health and outcomes, including supporting innovative programs and interventions
- Support legislation aimed at establishing mandatory parental family paid leave in recognition of the positive impact of family leave on human milk feeding outcomes, parental-child bonding, gender equity, and retaining parents in the workforce. This includes leave for reproductive loss, miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal loss. Support legislation that protects, promotes, and supports human milk feeding, including access to no-cost prenatal breastfeeding education and no-cost postpartum lactation support, including support for pumping protections for lactating families who return to the workplace
- Support expanding comprehensive Medicaid coverage to a full year postpartum for the AWHONN patient population.
- Support improving the reimbursement rate by all insurers, including Medicaid, for care of the AWHONN patient population, so that birth centers and hospitals can afford to keep birthing units open, especially in rural communities and other obstetrical deserts
- Support efforts to reduce gun violence and improve gun safety to decrease morbidity and mortality of AWHONN populations.
- Support for access to adoption counseling services for parents who are considering adoption and post-adoption counseling services for parents who place their children for adoption

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- Support for legislation that would prohibit workplace and employment discrimination against, while also requiring reasonable accommodations for the AWHONN population in the workplace