



State Position Paper



Nurse Staffing Based on Each Patient's Condition and Care Needs

“Nurse staffing is a complex issue. Matching the right nurse to the right patient at the right time requires an understanding of the individual patient’s need for care, nurse characteristics, workflows, and the context of care, including organizational culture and access to resources.” American Nurses Association

Determining the appropriate care and staffing of the clinical care team for each patient must be based in part on the patient’s “acuity” – including the severity of the patient’s condition and the intensity of nursing care required to meet the patient’s specific needs. An acuity-based staffing system coordinates the number of nurses on a shift with actual, specific patients’ needs, not according to raw patient numbers, as patients’ needs often change throughout their hospital stay.

Nurse staffing by patient acuity allows flexibility at the unit level so patients with the greatest needs are cared for by the most experienced nurses or those with specialized skills and knowledge. Nurse staffing by patient acuity has been shown by studies to improve patient outcomes and enhance nurse satisfaction.

Studies have also evaluated nurse staffing ratio mandates in California:

- Nurses say they were not able to respond to and address situation-specific patient needs and that the system created a rigid uniformity that did not promote professional growth or innovation in patient care.
- Direct care nurses working under mandated staffing ratios reported greater dissatisfaction compared with nurses working in administrative roles.

Illinois Nurse Staffing By Patient Acuity Act

Unanimously passed by both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly in 2007, Illinois’ Nurse Staffing by Patient Acuity Act ([Public Act 95-0401](#)) was a groundbreaking initiative that addresses the concerns of direct care nurses and hospitals to best serve and deliver safe, quality care to patients.

Features of the Act

- Promotes quality patient care consistent with professional nursing standards supported by evidence-based studies.
- Assures that direct care nurses have a significant voice in the hospital’s staffing process. Mandates that at least 50percent of nurse committee members are direct care staff to address the hospital’s staffing plan.
- Allows hospitals and their nurses to plan staffing and then adjust that plan as patients’ needs change to account for a wide range of considerations, including: the number of patients; the severity of their illness; and the available staff skills mix.
- Balances requirements for a written plan with a very dynamic process involving direct care staff in each hospital to promote best patient outcomes.
- Aligns staffing considerations based on patient needs and nursing resources.
- Allows Illinois’ 200 hospitals and their nurses to specifically tailor their staffing plans to meet the unique needs of patients in each of their hospitals.

Optimal nurse staffing is more than just numbers. Patients are more than just numbers.