

## ***Solving the Nursing Shortage through Higher Wages*** **Key Research Highlights**

America's health care system, and most importantly the quality of care patients receive, depends on nurses. The following are key highlights of research conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research on the current nursing shortage—the report was commissioned by the Nurse Alliance of SEIU. A copy of the full report and additional information is available at [www.valuecarevaluenurses.org](http://www.valuecarevaluenurses.org).

### **The Issue**

The IWPR report examines trends in nurse employment and wages and how low pay and poor working conditions are driving nurses from the bedside and making it harder for patients to get the care they need.

- The average patient is attended by a nurse for 6.3 hours of every day. (Patients with more acute care needs get even more nursing attention—7.8 hours a day.) More nursing care per patient leads to a higher quality of care including shortened hospital stays and lower rates of death from complications in surgical patients.
- Between 2004 and 2014, the number of employed nurses will grow by 29 percent, from 2.4 million to 3.1 million.
- During the 10-year period that started in 2004, more than 1.2 million nurses will be needed to fill new positions and replace current workers.

### **Working Conditions and Wages**

Hospitals have sounded the alert about a nurse shortage for years while at the same time engaging in practices that devalue nurses and drive them from the bedside:

- From 1996 through 2000, wages for nurses remained unchanged, even as many hospitals were citing a nursing shortage.
- The median hourly income for hospital nurses was lower in 2000 than in 1996.
- 33 percent of hospital nurses report they are dissatisfied with their job.
- 35 percent of employed nurses who are not working in nursing are in positions of higher pay and 46 percent of them find better hours in their current work environment.
- When wages for nurses increased in 2001–2003, hospitals added 186,500 nurses. But when wages began to fall in 2004 and the number of nurses working in hospitals dropped as many hospitals continue to rely on mandatory overtime, contingent workers, and understaffing.

### **Impact of a Collective Voice**

Wages for nurses, both union members and nonmembers, are higher in cities with a strong union presence.

- Nurses who are union members enjoy a 13 percent wage boost.
- Nurse/patient ratios are 18 percent higher in the most unionized cities as compared to cities with the lowest levels of nurse unionization.
- 19 percent of the nurse workforce is covered by collective bargaining agreements.