



LSNA Mission Statement
*To foster high standards for professional nursing practice
 for all Registered Nurses and
 advocate for quality healthcare for the citizens of Louisiana*

POSITION STATEMENT

EFFECTIVE DATE:	
CATEGORY:	Public Policy
SUBJECT:	Healthcare Access for the Underserved
ORIGIN	Health Policy Work Group

PURPOSE: To advocate for quality healthcare for the citizens of Louisiana.

POSITION STATEMENT:

The Louisiana State Nurses Association supports the availability of comprehensive, cost effective, quality healthcare which has been enhanced through the expansion of Medicaid funding for the low income, underserved Louisiana population with poor health.

BACKGROUND/FACTS:

According to Kaiser Foundation facts on Louisiana Medicaid (2017):

- 37% of Louisiana citizens are low income
- 22% of the population of Louisiana suffers high rates of poor health – 69% Obesity, 35% mental health issues, 13% diabetes, and double the US average for HIV
- From 2013 to 2016 healthcare coverage was expanded to 400,000 citizens

As stated by ANA President Pamela F. Cipriano, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, cuts in Medicaid funding could “dramatically increase premiums on seniors, restrict millions of women from access to health care, weaken the sustainability of Medicare, and repeal income-based subsidies that have made it possible for millions of families to buy health insurance.”

The Urban Institute study found that “the financial benefits of Medicaid expansion on hospitals’ profit margins were strongest for small hospitals, for-profit and non-federal-government-operated hospitals, and hospitals located in nonmetropolitan areas”. This translates into sustainability of small rural hospitals that provide care to vulnerable populations with few health care options.

As stated by Louisiana Governor, John Bell Edwards, as he spoke at the 2017 Health Summit: Advancing Policy for a Healthy Louisiana - “We’re saving lives, we’re improving lives, we’re making people healthier, we’re saving money as the state of Louisiana,” Edwards said. “The health care sector has never employed more people in Louisiana than it does right now”

ANA’s principles on *Health System Transformation* includes ensuring universal access to a standard package of essential health care services for all citizens and residents. This includes expansion of Medicaid as a safety net for the most vulnerable, including the chronically ill, elderly and poor.

The *Campaign for Action* advocates for changes that would allow nurses to practice to the full extent of their education and training which would allow more Americans to have increased access to high-quality, affordable health care, including in rural and other underserved areas of the country.

IMPACT ON DELIVERY SYSTEM:

- There is a societal bias toward “Medicaid”; this service is perceived to be for the uneducated, nonworking population. Unfortunately, there are thousands of “working poor” in all industries, including healthcare, that receive minimal salaries and cannot afford healthcare coverage. Continued expansion will help these workers.
- Because of shortages in primary care, and heretofore, a lack of medical coverage, individuals frequently seek medical care through emergency rooms because care cannot be denied. Care is sought for conditions that are not appropriate for that setting, resulting in hospital overflow and misuse of services needed for critical conditions. Expanded health care coverage provides the opportunity to seek care outside the emergency room.
- Typically, individuals that have not had healthcare coverage present with multiple illnesses requiring a more complex level of care and more frequent visits. Care coordination among service providers is essential to assure continuity, avoid replication of services which decreases healthcare costs, and achieves improved health outcomes. Coverage with lifetime caps or annual limits jeopardizes ongoing treatment and long-term wellness of individuals with chronic disease.
- More individuals and families are seeking health care; more providers are accepting new clients and not declining care. This trend has an impact on the availability of a sufficient supply of a skilled workforce dedicated to providing high quality health care services. There is a need for more providers that are willingly to treat the underserved.
- Advanced Practice Nurses have the knowledge, skills and legal authority to deliver medical care equal to physicians. Studies have indicated that the quality of care is equal to and often exceeds the care of doctors and there is increased consumer satisfaction with delivery of care by nurses. Furthermore, Advanced Practice Nurses are willing to treat the underserved populations that are being denied healthcare. Allowing nurses to practice to the full extent of their knowledge and skills provides better access to quality, cost-effective healthcare.

STRATEGIES:

Nurses have the power and influence to effect change individually and collectively:

1. Encourage the “working poor” that are our patients, friends and coworkers to seek Medicaid coverage.
2. Educate those seeking inappropriate ER services. Explain the appropriate use, help to establish a primary care provider. Encourage use of Urgent Care over ER.
3. Educate clients on high risk/chronic care and promote health maintenance. Promote care coordination; advocate for health coverage for pre-existing conditions.
4. Advocate for increased funding (grants, loan repayment plans) to encourage young people to choose nursing as a career. Advocate for expansion of nursing school enrollment to accept more of the qualified applicants; this requires adequate budget for faculty and training space. Support care delivery to the underserved by working in rural health clinics and through advocacy for funding.
5. Campaign for the use of advance practice nurses. Seek physicians to champion the cause with their colleagues. Encourage funding for nurses interested in returning to school to become an advanced practice nurse.
6. Become politically active by campaigning for healthcare and contacting elected representatives.

REFERENCES:

1. January 2017: Henry Kaiser Family Foundation Fact Sheet – Medicaid in Louisiana. ANA website.
2. ANA News release/ANA Website
3. Urban League Study: www.rwjf.org and www.healthpolicycenter.org.
4. Louisiana Center for Health Equity