



Protect Patient Safety & Access:

Allow Washington State to Join the Nurse Licensure Compact

Background

Washington is not immune to the nationwide nursing workforce crisis. According to the Washington Center for Nursing, only 1.1% of licensed RNs in Washington are unemployed and seeking employment as a nurse and only 2.3% have jobs outside of nursing. Nevertheless, Washington hospitals have over 6,000 RN job vacancies. The thousands of licensed nurses we need to fill these vacancies simply do not exist in our state. Educating new nurses is necessary but not sufficient to solve our workforce crisis. We also need to attract more already-trained nurses to Washington state.

In 2015, the State Boards of Nursing developed the [Nurse Licensure Compact \(NLC\)](#) and an accompanying [model law for state adoption](#). The NLC allows for nurses to meet uniform license requirements to practice in all states participating in the NLC without obtaining an additional license. This means that a nurse who relocates from one state participating in the NLC to another can start working immediately. Currently, there are 37 states and two jurisdictions that have adopted the NLC – totaling more than 2 million NLC nurses.

The NLC is especially helpful for military families and communities that border adjacent states, with Idaho and many other states with military bases having already adopted the NLC. Being a compact state is an important consideration for the Federal Base Realignment and Closure process. As a state with a large military presence, this should be a strong consideration for our Legislature.

To respond to the increased need for health care personnel, Gov. Inslee issued a [COVID-19 emergency proclamation](#), the Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act, which allowed the state Department of Health (DOH) to activate emergency volunteer health care providers licensed out of state. Volunteers who were in good standing in their home states were allowed to practice in Washington without a state license. The success of the act demonstrates that out-of-state licensed health care staff can be successfully integrated with proper oversight in Washington. The act expired with the state of emergency, and we have no help from the state to quickly bring in needed staff.

WSHA Position

WSHA strongly supports Washington State joining the Nurse Licensure Compact. Joining the NLC will help to alleviate the current nursing shortage by attracting more fully trained nurses to the state. It will increase patient access to nursing care while maintaining the state's enforcement authority over nurses. The NLC will also help improve access to essential telemedicine services nurses provide.

Key Message

There are nurses licensed in compact states who are willing to move but are more likely to move to a compact state to avoid a time-consuming and administratively burdensome state licensure process.

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