



## Enact the Nurse Licensure Compact

### Background

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Washington State is facing a nursing shortage. A 2018 WSHA survey revealed that in nearly one-third of responding hospitals, it was taking longer than three months to hire for a vacant nurse position. The average number of open positions across all responding hospitals was 27, with several hospitals reporting more than 50 vacant positions.

Fast forward to the COVID-19 pandemic and the nurse shortage has only grown. This is especially evident for specialty nurses – including intensive care, emergency room and those providing telemedicine. However, when a qualified nurse moves to Washington with a license to practice nursing in another state (or wants to practice in Washington through telemedicine), it takes several weeks – if not months, even with expedited processing – to get licensed to practice here.

Thirty-four states have addressed this problem by enacting the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC). This allows nurses who meet uniform licensure requirements to practice in all participating states without obtaining an additional license. This means a nurse who relocates from one compact state to another may start work that same day.

Not only is the NLC especially vital during a pandemic, but it is also helpful for military families and for communities that border adjacent states. Idaho and several other states with military bases have already enacted the NLC. It is also a vital tool to attract nurses from across the country. **From February 1 - May 31, 2020, 59% of qualified nurses who applied for a Washington endorsement license were from an NLC state.** The top states were Texas, Florida and Arizona.

### WSHA Position

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WSHA strongly supports our state joining the NLC. It increases patient access to nursing care while maintaining the state's enforcement authority over nurses to protect public safety. The NLC would help alleviate the current nursing shortage and help improve access to telemedicine services provided by nurses.

### Key Messages

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- During a pandemic, the NLC helps the health care system meet the rising demand of specialized nurses.
- Nursing unions' opposition to the NLC is preventing this important tool from being implemented, though it would address staffing shortages and significantly reduce their work-associated stress.
- The NLC expands the use of telemedicine because a nurse must be licensed where the patient is located.
- Washington still retains enforcement authority over a multistate NLC licensed nurse and would have immediate access to enforcement activity on nurses from other states practicing in Washington.
- Washington nurses would still be able to apply for a single-state, Washington-only license if they chose. Enacting the NLC only means nurses will have the flexibility of opting for a multi-state license too.

### Contact Information

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