



Royal College  
of Nursing

**INVEST IN NURSING**

**INVEST IN PATIENTS**

**INVEST IN SOCIETY**

**RCN UK GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024**

# THE SCALE OF THE NURSING CRISIS

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**25,000**

people left the nursing register last year

**2,470**

fewer people applied for a nursing degree course

**45%**

of nursing staff are actively planning or thinking of leaving their jobs

**12%**

are due to retire

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# IT TAKES A REMARKABLE PERSON TO WORK IN NURSING

**Nursing staff are with us from the moment we enter the world, to the moment we leave it. They are with us throughout our lives, providing care when we need it most, showing extraordinary dedication and professionalism.**

That's why **the public trusts nursing staff more than any other profession.** They understand our value, our commitment, and our expertise.

Yet, the profession continues to be understaffed. There are **tens of thousands of nursing vacancies** across the UK and several thousands in social care.

Nursing staff are stretched to their limit. **Overworked, underpaid, at breaking point.**

That's why this must be a nursing election. **When you invest in nursing, you invest in patients, you invest in society.** We're asking political parties and candidates for their passion and political will to bring our health and social care services back from the brink.

The Royal College of Nursing is proud to represent more than half a million members across the UK. **We can't stand by and accept more broken promises** or inaction.

Unprecedented strikes over the past two years have emboldened our members. We're ready to make sure our voices, and those of our patients and communities, are heard loud and clear.

Nursing staff are rightly angry, but **we have the solutions to provide the profession with the fresh start it needs.** During this election campaign, we won't hold back in speaking up for our members and the people they devote their working lives to care for.

**The public values nursing staff. Patients value nursing staff. We ask you to do the same.**

# OUR TOP 12 PRIORITIES

## WE WANT:

- 1.** A substantial pay rise for all nursing staff and automatic band 5 to 6 pay progression for NHS nurses.
- 2.** Safety-critical nurse-to-patient ratios in all care settings.
- 3.** Legal protection for people raising concerns about unsafe staffing.
- 4.** Funded mental health support for all nursing staff provided by every employer.
- 5.** Corridor care eradicated including forced reporting of it.
- 6.** Government-funded nursing degrees with a job guarantee for graduates.

- 7.** Legislation restricting the right to strike revoked.
- 8.** The 'nurse' title protected in law.
- 9.** An end to exploitation of health and social care workers.
- 10.** Sufficient funding for continuing professional development.
- 11.** Support for internationally educated nursing staff by ending punitive immigration policies.
- 12.** Overseas aid spending increased to tackle global nursing shortages.

# THE POLITICAL CHANGE WE NEED

## Value nursing staff

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**The health and care sector is in crisis. The NHS can neither recruit nor retain enough nurses, while nursing staff working in the independent health and care sector are too often employed on second-rate contracts with lower pay and poorer terms and conditions compared to nursing staff working in the NHS.**

Nursing is a majority female profession and one of the most ethnically diverse professions too. That makes the injustice of nursing pay a gender and race issue. Many of our members are part of the global majority. The nursing profession and the health of the nation can't afford to lose another single nurse.

Nursing staff deserve to be equipped with a robust framework of workplace rights, one that mirrors the gravity of the responsibilities they shoulder. They should be able to enter into their place of work with their heads held high, confident in the knowledge that they will be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

An empowered nursing workforce is good for patients, the very individuals whose wellbeing RCN members tirelessly advocate for every day.

Little over a year ago, RCN members voted for historic strike action in every part of the UK and it was for more than just a pay rise. Their fight was for patient safety and to protest against chronic staff shortages, long working hours, unsustainable workloads and limited opportunities for career progression. In response, there has been a further erosion of the right of nursing staff to take part in lawful industrial action in England, Scotland and Wales.

## **WE WANT:**

- A fully funded, substantial, restorative pay rise for all nursing staff and automatic band 5 to 6 pay progression for registered nurses working in the NHS on Agenda for Change contracts.
- The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 and Trade Union Act 2016 to be revoked, every section, without exception.

# Guarantee safe and effective care

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**Nurses provide highly skilled and life-saving care. It takes a remarkable person to do this day in, day out. The dedication, professionalism and expertise of nursing staff is the foundation of our health and care system. Without them there is no health service.**

But increasing demand, rising workloads, and a workforce shortage means nursing staff have little choice but to provide care in unsafe conditions, including the unacceptable practice of treating patients in inappropriate places such as corridors, waiting rooms and store cupboards.

The evidence is clear. The relative risk of death increases by 3% each day a patient experiences a registered nurse staffing shortage on a hospital ward. We need staffing levels that protect nursing staff and patient safety.

Minimum staff-to-patient ratios are necessary for safety in other professions, including childcare and veterinary care. The same protection must be provided to nursing staff and the people they care for. Governments should be ultimately responsible for ensuring patient care is provided in safe conditions by the appropriate number of nursing staff.



## WE WANT:

- The introduction of professionally and legally enforceable nurse-to-patient ratios, with a safety-critical maximum number of patients per registered nurse in every health care setting.
- Legislation to protect the 'nurse' title in law.
- Legal protection for people raising concerns about unsafe staffing.
- Corridor care to be eradicated including mandatory public reporting of each incidence.
- A commitment to introduce or maintain government-funded nursing degrees with investment in higher education and a job guarantee for all registered nurse graduates, reducing the reliance on international recruitment.
- Government-level accountability for nursing workforce planning and supply in law, with ministers accountable for having enough staff to meet the health needs of the population based on transparent assessments which address inequalities.

# Better health for everyone

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**Health inequalities run deep in the UK. These are seen in lower life expectancy, increased risk of long-term health conditions, and sickness absence.**

Good health is vital to supporting people in work and for the benefit of the wider economy.

If people are unhealthy and impacted by poor health due to deep-rooted inequalities, they're unable to work and contribute to the economy.

The spike in poor health is also putting the sustainability of health and care services at serious risk – this will increase unless health inequalities are properly addressed.

Nursing staff don't just work in hospitals or health centres, they work in the heart of communities, often using innovative ways to promote good health and look after some of the most marginalised groups.

Care must also be there for people with complex needs and the ageing population. A long-term approach for adult social care services which recognises that complex health needs are increasingly being met in social care settings is now critical.

## WE WANT:

- Greater prioritisation for the prevention of poor health through sustainable investment in health care services that reduces health inequalities.
- Nursing staff to be at the vanguard of solutions and interventions that promote better health outcomes in their communities.
- Immediate action to improve the delivery and availability of adult social care, including a nursing workforce that reflects increasing levels of complex health needs.
- Legislation banning all LGBT+ conversion therapy practices.

# Safe and supportive workplaces

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**Reports of nursing staff being attacked at work are commonplace. The number of calls the RCN receives from distressed members in these circumstances continues to rise. Nurses are being hit, punched, and spat on while working long 12-hour shifts with few breaks. They're overworked, under pressure, and left broken with little care shown to them as they care for others.**

Nursing is a majority female profession, with a racially diverse workforce. Misogyny, gender-based violence, and racism continue to be daily experiences for many nursing staff. There should be zero tolerance of discrimination in any form. No matter where a nurse goes to work – whether that be in a hospital, in the community, or a care home, wellbeing support and resources should be available.

Exploitation that targets internationally educated nursing staff and their colleagues must be stamped out. Staff report being tied into contracts through hefty penalty fees and paying extortionate sums to rogue recruitment agencies to find work. These practices have no place within our health and care system.

## WE WANT:

- Action to tackle violence and abuse, including racist and other discriminatory language or behaviour, towards nursing staff.
- Funded mental health and wellbeing support for all nursing staff working for every health and social care employer, with access to occupational health services.
- Support for the delivery of race equality strategies, including specific actions for public sector bodies and services to root out bias, racism and wider discrimination for people with protected characteristics.
- Health and social care employers to comply with labour standards, with rogue employers and agencies held to account for non-compliance. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority should be granted powers to regulate the care sector.
- Sufficient funding for continuing professional development (CPD) based on projections of future service and population needs. CPD should be factored into paid hours for nursing staff with funds to cover the shifts of those training.

# Be a global health leader

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**Cuts to international development spending to support countries in other parts of the world have come at a time when investment in the global nursing workforce is critical in post-pandemic recovery and to achieve global health goals.**

At the same time, countries, including the UK, have been deliberately seeking to entice nurses from countries with shortages to plug the gaps in the domestic workforce.

Internationally educated nursing staff continue to make an invaluable contribution to the nursing profession here, but hostile immigration policies make the UK an increasingly unattractive place to live and work.

For people seeking safety in the UK, there must be a system that allows them to claim asylum in a way that upholds their human rights and is underpinned by compassion and fairness.

## WE WANT:

- An end to punitive immigration policies, which, among other things, make internationally educated nursing staff without indefinite leave to remain unable to claim most state benefits.
- An end to the UK's reliance on overseas recruitment from countries with a shortage of nursing staff.
- The overseas aid budget to be reinstated to tackle global nursing shortages, increasing official development assistance spending to 0.7% of gross national income in line with United Nations targets.
- An asylum and immigration system to be established that upholds international human rights obligations and ensures access to health care.

## STAY INFORMED, GET INVOLVED, BE ACTIVE

For more information, visit  
**[rcn.org.uk/general-election](https://rcn.org.uk/general-election)**  
or scan the QR code.





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**EVERY POLITICIAN**

**NEEDS THE**

**NURSING VOTE**

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