

THE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION FOR HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS ACT

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Violence against nurses and other health care workers in hospitals and other health care facilities is a growing epidemic across the United States. Nurses report being punched, kicked, bitten, beaten, choked, and assaulted on the job — and some have faced stabbings and shootings. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the hazard of workplace violence, with nurses reporting an increase of violent incidents on the job since the beginning of the pandemic. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act would mandate OSHA to promulgate a standard that would require all covered employers to develop and implement prevention plans to reduce workplace violence incidents. The Workplace Violence Prevention bill passed the House of Representatives in both the 116th and 117th Congress with significant bipartisan support.

Health care workers frequently experience dangerous workplace violence incidents

- » In 2022, health care and social service workers reported nearly five times the rate of injuries due to workplace violence than workers overall.¹
- » A 2022 study found that on average, two nurses are assaulted every hour.²
- » A 2024 nationwide survey conducted by NNU found that 8 in 10 nurses (81.6 percent) have experienced at least one type of workplace violence within the past year. Nearly half of nurses (45.5 percent) reported an increase in workplace violence on their unit in the previous year.³
- » Employers fail to implement proven measures to even track and investigate violent incidents. In NNU's 2024 survey, only about one in three nurses (31.7 percent) reported that their employer provides a clear way to report incidents.⁴
- » Workplace violence is underreported by hospital employees. Nurses shared in NNU's survey and focus groups that they often do not report workplace violence incidents due to unclear reporting mechanisms, lack of action from the employer, fear of employer retaliation, and lack of training on what is workplace violence.⁵

Workplace violence is bad for patients and hospitals

- » Workplace violence experienced by nurses has been associated with decreased productivity⁶ and increased employee turnover.⁷
- » Workplace violence also reduced the quality of patient care.⁸

To prevent and reduce the frequency and severity of violent incidents in health care settings, a comprehensive workplace violence prevention standard must, among other things

- » Broadly define workplace violence to include threats and the use of physical force, including incidents involving the use of firearms or dangerous weapons.
- » Require employers to develop unit-specific and facility-specific prevention plans rather than one-size-fits-all plans.⁹
- » Actively involve employees in developing, implementing, and reviewing the plan, and provide robust training programs for employees.¹⁰
- » Ensure that employers assess hazards and provide correction procedures, including staffing, trained security personnel, environmental risk factors, patient specific risk factors, alarm systems, and job design and facilities.

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- » Require that employers establish effective reporting processes and policies to ensure that employees can report workplace violence without fear of retaliation; systems for communicating between coworkers, shifts, emergency services, and law enforcement about risks for violence; and Violent Incident Logs to track all incidents and threats.¹¹
 - » Mandate effective and prompt response to all workplace violence incidents as well as appropriate follow-up, including providing prompt treatment to injured employees and investigating whether any measures could prevent similar incidents in the future.
- 10 A 2002 study found that interactive, hands-on workplace violence recognition and intervention training can be effective in reducing violence incident rates and, importantly, that refresher trainings are needed to maintain those effects. Fernandes, C. et al. The Effect of an Education Program on Violence in the Emergency Department. *Annals of Emerg. Medicine*. 2002; 39(1):47-55.
 - 11 A 2009 study showed that one inpatient psychiatric Veteran's Affairs Medical Center reduced rates of violence on the day shift — by 89 percent during treatment and 57 percent from pre-treatment to post-treatment — after real-time incident recording tools and regular twice weekly meetings on violence prevention were implemented. In the night shift where continuous involvement of staff in risk assessment and prevention was not implemented, rates of violence did not show significant change. Lanza, M. et al. Reducing Violence Against Nurses: The Violence Prevention Community Meeting. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*. 2009; 30:745-50.

Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-2021-2022.htm>.
- 2 Press Ganey, "On average, two nurses are assaulted every hour, new Press Ganey analysis finds." Sept. 8, 2022. <https://www.pressganey.com/news/on-average-two-nurses-are-assaulted-every-hour-new-press-ganey-analysis-finds/>.
- 3 National Nurses United. February 2024. "High And Rising Rates Of Workplace Violence And Employer Failure To Implement Effective Prevention Strategies Is Contributing To The Staffing Crisis." Available at: https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/sites/default/files/nnu/documents/0224_Workplace_Violence_Report.pdf.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Gates, D. et al. Violence Against Nurses and its Impact on Stress and Productivity. *Nursing Economic\$*. Vol. 29:2, 2011, pp. 59-67.
- 7 Sofield L, Salmond SW. Workplace violence: a focus on verbal abuse and intent to leave the organization. *Orthop Nurs*. 2003;22:274-283.
- 8 Arnetz JE, Arnetz BB. Violence towards health care staff and possible effects on the quality of patient care. *Soc Sci Med*. 2001;52:417-427.
- 9 A 2017 study found that rates of violent incidents were 60 percent lower in hospital units with unit-specific, comprehensive intervention plans compared to units that did not have such plans. Arnetz, J. et al. Preventing Patient-to-Worker Violence in Hospitals: Outcome of a Randomized Controlled Intervention. *Journal of Occup. and Environ. Medicine*. 2017; 58(1):18-27.