



Jeri Milstead

# Powering policy with nurse expertise

Jeri Milstead is inducted into the ANA Hall of Fame.

“  
Most  
policymakers  
don't  
understand  
what nurses  
do! Help them  
understand  
what it takes  
to be a nurse.”

**JERI MILSTEAD**, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, has built her legacy on advocating for nurses' involvement in local, state, and national political systems. She's the founding editor and senior author of *Health Policy and Politics: A Nurses Guide*, which has been published in 22 countries, as well as co-author of *Handbook of Nursing Leadership: Creative Skills for a Culture of Safety*. Milstead served as an advisor on nursing and health policy to U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye and as a staff liaison to the Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. Milstead chaired the Ohio Nurses Association (ONA) Health Policy Council for several years and was awarded the ONA Excellence in Political Action Award in 2011 in recognition of her mentorship of colleagues in political advocacy. Milstead continues to advocate for the future of nursing by working with a broad array of organizations and policymakers to transform healthcare.

## What do you feel is your greatest achievement?

My greatest achievement has been inspiring nurses to embrace the powerful influence they can have on health policy by making their voices heard by public policy officials. I've done that through my book [on health policy and politics] and through the policy chapters I've written about vulnerable populations and global health issues for other textbooks. But mainly it's been through my mentorship to students, RNs, and advanced practice RNs around the country.

Additionally, on a professional level, I've served on legislative and health policy committees at ONA, the South Carolina Nurses Association, and the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association. On a personal level, I'm proud to have served on campaigns to get nurses elected to office.

## Do you have advice for nurses who want to get involved in policy?

First, you have to be the one to initiate contact with policymakers. Get to know them and establish a relationship *before* you need to ask them for something. Find research on the issue that's important to them and bring it to them. But don't just hand them a packet of information or an article. Interpret the research so you can tell them why it's important. And educate them on the role of the nurse. Most policymakers don't understand what nurses do! Help them understand what it takes to be a nurse: We're college educated. We have master's and doctoral degrees. We have clinical and research expertise, we're nurse administrators, and we're leaders in public health.

## How do you feel your accomplishments have made an impact on nursing?

My real contribution to the nursing profession, and a lasting effort, is that so many nurses now fully understand the importance of policy. For many years, it wasn't even considered that nurses would be at the table when policy decisions were made. We were almost invisible. Many nurses themselves didn't understand what policy practice was.

Today, effective policymakers include nurses as they debate and decide policy; they seek out nurses for our expertise. We see things from a broad scope, the big picture, and I've always said real nurse leaders have the ability to take the conceptual and bring it down to the very implementable, practical piece. We understand healthcare jargon and interpret it to patients so that they understand. I think I've also been able to do that in the policy realm, and I'm happy with that.

I truly am deeply honored that ANA has inducted me into the Hall of Fame.

AN