



# Advocacy for Social Issues

Editorial by Dr. Echo Koehler DNP, RN

**NURSES**, as members of the American Nurses Association (ANA), have a professional and ethical obligation to advocate for social issues that impact public health, even when these issues are politically polarizing. Here's why:

1

## **Nursing Ethics**

The ANA Code of Ethics explicitly states that nurses must advocate for the dignity, rights, and health of all individuals. This means ensuring access to equitable care, including for marginalized populations. Issues like gender-affirming care and reproductive rights are not just political—they are essential healthcare concerns that directly affect patient well-being.

2

## **Legal and Policy Engagement is Part of Professional Duty**

Healthcare policies shape nursing practice, and nurses are in a unique position to influence legislation that affects patient care.

Engaging in advocacy ensures that laws are informed by medical expertise rather than political ideology, leading to better outcomes for both patients and the nursing profession.

3

## **Public Health is Not Partisan**

While certain issues may be politically controversial, the underlying principle of public health advocacy transcends party lines. The ANA's role is not to engage in partisan politics but to ensure that science, ethics, and patient welfare drive

healthcare policy decisions. Ignoring these issues due to political controversy would mean failing to uphold nursing's core mission.

4

## **Nurses Serve a Diverse Population**

Nurses care for patients from all backgrounds, beliefs, and identities. Advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups does not mean endorsing a political stance—it means ensuring that all patients receive safe, evidence-based, and ethical care. Supporting healthcare access for transgender individuals or advocating for reproductive rights aligns with the profession's commitment to serving diverse communities.

## 5

**Health Outcomes Depend on Social Policies**

Social issues such as access to abortion, transgender healthcare, and discrimination protections have direct health consequences. Restricting reproductive rights can lead to unsafe abortions and increased maternal mortality, while denying transgender individuals access to safe spaces can contribute to mental health crises and increased suicide risk. Nurses, as healthcare professionals, must advocate for policies that protect and improve patient outcomes.

## 6

**Historical Precedents—Nurses Leading Social Change**

Throughout history, nurses have advocated for social issues that were once highly controversial but are now

widely accepted as essential to healthcare. Lillian Wald and Mary Breckinridge championed public health initiatives, including maternal and infant care, which were once seen as radical government overreach but are now fundamental to modern healthcare. Florence Nightingale's push for sanitation and hygiene in hospitals was initially dismissed yet became the foundation of infection control today. More recently in the mid-20th century, nurses played a critical role in advocating for HIV/AIDS patients, despite widespread stigma and fear. They fought for compassionate, science-based care at a time when many healthcare providers refused to treat those affected. These examples demonstrate that nursing advocacy often challenges societal norms but ultimately leads to improved health outcomes and evidence-based practice.

Advocating for social issues is not about pushing a political agenda, it is about upholding nursing's ethical responsibilities, improving health outcomes, and ensuring equitable care for all patients. Continuing this tradition is essential to protecting public health, regardless of political controversy. 🔥

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