



# Nurses are essential, trusted professionals—and Oklahomans deserve nothing less

Jane Nelson, CAE, CEO, Oklahoma Nurses Association

## Celebrating Trust

Happy 2026! We're starting the year strong with great news: for the **24th consecutive year**, nurses have been ranked as the **most trusted profession**. Congratulations! This trust is powerful—it's why lawmakers listen when nurses speak. But to protect our profession, we need your voice.

## Why Your Voice Matters

The Oklahoma Legislature convenes on **February 2**, and critical issues are already on the table: nursing workforce shortages, workplace hazards, patient safety concerns, immunizations, funding for nursing education, and oversight of nursing practice.

ONA's legislative priorities focus on these issues, and you can find the full list on our website. While ONA advocates for you and the profession, advocacy doesn't stop there—your stories and experiences make the difference when speaking to legislators.

## The Loan Cap Crisis

We're deeply concerned about the U.S. Department of Education's proposed rules excluding nursing from the definition of "professional degree" programs. This decision is wrong—and dangerous.

Here's what it means: loan limits for nursing graduate students would drop to **\$20,500 per year and \$100,000 total**, regardless of degree level. Advanced degrees for nursing faculty, nurse practitioners, and clinical leaders would become harder to afford. This puts the nursing profession at risk, limiting nurses' access to advanced degrees for much-needed nursing faculty, advance practice nurses, and clinical and executive leadership. Oklahoma's severe nursing shortage would worsen, threatening patient care.

The argument for these caps is that nursing education costs too much. But the **average cost of graduate nursing education exceeds \$30,000 per year**, far above the proposed cap. Limiting access to education will harm workforce development and health outcomes nationwide.

## Stand With Us

ONA advocates relentlessly for nurses—but we need you to raise your voice. We support that every nurse practice to the full extent of their education, training, and expertise. We support that nurses deserve safe workplaces free from hazards, the ability to provide safe, quality care to patients, and that they have the tools and support needed to provide that care.

Here's how you can help today:

- **Sign the petition** on RN Action, joining over 250,000 others in urging the U.S. Department of Education to include nursing in its "professional degree" definition. <https://ana.quorum.us/campaign/professionaldegreepetition/>
- **Volunteer as Nurse of the Day at the Capitol**. This program provides you with an opportunity to discuss issues firsthand with legislators. Sign up on the ONA Website under Events.
- **Attend Nurses Day at the Capitol on March 3**. Registration is available on the ONA website under events.
- **Get involved with ONA**—your voice matters now more than ever! ■

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## NURSING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



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