



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2026 QUARTER 2

# Opportunity and Impact Conference 2026

Kathleen W. Neal, PhD, RN

### Summary of the 2026 ANA Opportunity & Impact in Nursing Summit

The 2026 American Nurses Association (ANA) Opportunity & Impact in Nursing Summit

brought together nurse leaders, innovators, educators, and policymakers with a shared purpose: to transform insight into action. The Summit emphasized advancing health equity, strengthening the nursing profession,

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and equipping nurses with the tools, knowledge, and networks necessary to lead meaningful changes in healthcare systems.

Attendees, including Christopher E. Otto and myself, engaged in a dynamic, multi-faceted program focused on leadership development, policy advocacy, innovation, diversity, and collaboration. The Summit served not only as a learning environment but also as a call to action — urging participants to bring back actionable strategies to their respective organizations, including the Delaware Nurses Association (DNA).

## Core Themes and Strategic Focus Areas

### 1. Empowering Leadership in Nursing

A central pillar of the summit was the development of strong, diverse, capable nurse leaders prepared to meet evolving healthcare challenges. Sessions emphasized practical leadership strategies, career development pathways, and strengthening the bridge between education and clinical practice.

#### Key takeaways included:

- The importance of integrating leadership training early in nursing education.
- Enhancing workplace readiness through mentorship, experiential learning, and cross-sector collaboration.
- Creating clear and accessible leadership pathways for nurses at all stages of their careers.
- Encouraging collaboration between academic institutions and healthcare organizations to ensure alignment between education and practice needs.

#### Action Items for DNA:

- Expand leadership development opportunities for members.
- Foster partnerships between educational institutions and healthcare systems.

- Promote mentorship programs connecting experienced nurses with students and early-career professionals.

### 2. Policy Impact on Equity in Nursing

Policy discussions highlighted the ongoing effort to classify advanced nursing degrees as “professional degrees” at the federal level. This designation has significant implications for access to federal student loans and financial aid.

#### Key concerns included:

- The exclusion of nursing from the “professional degree” category may reduce financial support for advanced education.
- This limitation could discourage nurses from pursuing higher degrees.
- There is a potential disproportionate impact on minority and underrepresented populations, further affecting diversity in advanced nursing roles.

#### Action Items for DNA:

- Actively monitor federal policy developments regarding educational classifications.
- Advocate for equitable funding opportunities for nursing education.
- Collaborate with state and federal legislators to influence policy decisions.
- Educate members on how policy changes may affect their educational and career pathways.

### 3. Data on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) and Voter Trends

A session led by Chrissie McHenry explored how voter demographics and attitudes toward diversity and equity may influence future healthcare funding and policy decisions.

#### Key insights included:

- Political climates significantly impact healthcare funding, grants, and social support systems.
- Understanding voter behavior is critical for anticipating changes in healthcare policy.

- Healthcare leaders must remain informed and adaptable to shifting political and social landscapes.

#### Action Items for DNA:

- Stay informed on voter trends and their implications for healthcare policy.
- Continue efforts to understand and address inequities in patient populations.
- Strengthen advocacy initiatives that promote equitable healthcare access and funding.

### 4. Advancing Equity Through Action-Oriented Strategies

The Summit emphasized moving beyond discussion to implementation. Real-world stories and case studies illustrated the urgent need for equitable healthcare solutions.

One particularly impactful story described a maternal health crisis in which a woman, after being turned away from a hospital, gave birth on the roadside. This example highlighted systemic barriers, bias and disparities in maternal care.

#### Other sessions focused on:

- Workforce development in behavioral health through targeted programs and partnerships.
- Reducing barriers for vulnerable populations.
- Using storytelling as a powerful advocacy and educational tool.

#### Action Items for DNA:

- Highlight and promote maternal and child health initiatives within Delaware.
- Encourage members to share impactful stories and successful interventions.
- Use storytelling to advocate for policy change and raise awareness.
- Support programs that address workforce shortages and healthcare disparities.

## 5. Networking and Collaboration

The Summit provided valuable opportunities for networking across generations and professional levels. Notably, students from Howard University College of Nursing participated, demonstrating the importance of engaging future nurses early in their careers.

### Key observations included:

- Students benefit greatly from exposure to professional networks.
- Personal connections can open doors to mentorship and career opportunities.
- Engagement with professional organizations can influence students' decisions to connect with the ANA and State Organizations after graduation.

### Action Items for DNA:

- Actively include students in events, committees, and initiatives.
- Position DNA as a welcoming and valuable resource for emerging nurses.
- Strengthen outreach efforts to nursing schools and student organizations.
- Create pathways for student involvement that lead to long-term membership and engagement.

## 6. Innovation in Nursing Education and Healthcare Delivery

Innovation was a major theme, with sessions showcasing creative approaches to improving healthcare access and outcomes.

### Highlights included:

- A case study from Louisville, Kentucky, where a new healthcare system was designed with community input to restore access in underserved areas.
- Leadership frameworks focused on resilience, intentionality, and purpose.
- Discussions on the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare, emphasizing the need for equity, transparency, and community accountability.

### Key concerns regarding AI:

- AI has the potential to reduce dispar-

ities but also risks exacerbating them if not implemented thoughtfully. Bias can be a major concern.

Ethical guardrails and inclusive design are essential.

### Action Items for DNA:

- Create platforms for sharing innovative practices across Delaware.
- Encourage research and dissemination of new ideas and best practices.
- Facilitate discussions on emerging technologies like AI and their impact on healthcare equity.
- Promote continuous learning and adaptation among nursing professionals.

## Cross-Cutting Insights

Throughout the Summit, several overarching themes emerged:

- **Nurses as Leaders:** Nurses are uniquely positioned to lead change across educational, clinical, policy, and community settings.
- **Equity as a Priority:** Achieving health equity requires intentional, sustained effort across all aspects of healthcare.
- **Collaboration is Essential:** Progress depends on partnerships among nurses, policymakers, educators, and communities.
- **Storytelling Drives Change:** Personal narratives are powerful tools for advocacy and awareness.
- **Adaptability is Key:** The healthcare landscape is constantly evolving, requiring flexibility and ongoing learning.

## Recommendations for the Delaware Nurses Association (DNA)

Based on the Summit's insights, several strategic priorities emerge for DNA:

### 1. Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

- Monitor and respond to legislative changes at state and federal levels.
- Advocate for equitable education funding and healthcare policies.

- Engage members in advocacy initiatives.
- Recruit and retain members at all levels.

### 2. Promote Leadership Development

- Offer training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities.
- Support career advancement pathways for nurses.

### 3. Advance Health Equity

- Focus on addressing disparities in maternal health, behavioral health, and access to care.
- Encourage data-driven and community-informed approaches.

### 4. Engage and Support Students

- Increase student participation in DNA activities.
- Build strong connections with nursing schools.
- Foster a sense of belonging and professional identity.

### 5. Encourage Innovation and Knowledge Sharing

- Create forums for sharing research, ideas, and best practices.
- Highlight successful initiatives within Delaware.
- Support publication opportunities, such as contributions to the DNA Reporter.

### 6. Leverage Storytelling and Communication

- Collect and share stories that illustrate impact and challenges.
- Use narratives to advocate for change and inspire action.

## Looking Ahead: Sustaining Momentum

The 2026 Summit reinforced the idea that meaningful progress requires ongoing commitment. The insights gained must translate into tangible actions within organizations like DNA.

- There is a clear opportunity to:
- Build stronger communities within the nursing profession.
  - Elevate the voice of nurses in policy and decision-making.
  - Drive innovation that improves patient outcomes and professional satisfaction.

The enthusiasm and inspiration generated by the Summit should serve as a catalyst for continued growth and transformation.

**Everyone is invited to attend next year's ANA Opportunity & Impact in Nursing Summit.** Participation offers a chance to gain new perspectives, contribute to important conversations, and

bring back ideas that can shape the future of nursing in Delaware and beyond. Attending the Summit is not just a professional development opportunity—it is an investment in the future of healthcare, the nursing profession, and the communities we serve. ■

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

# Celebrating the Power of Nurses During Nurse's Week 2026

## Honoring Delaware's Nursing Workforce and the Delaware Nurses Association's Leadership



Nurse's Week 2026 offers Delaware a moment to pause, reflect, and celebrate the extraordinary power of nurses — professionals whose expertise, compassion, and leadership sustain the health of every community in the state. This year, the Delaware Nurses Association (DNA) elevated the celebration with a robust slate of activities that highlighted the profession's impact, strengthened the nursing workforce, and brought visibility to the essential role nurses play across all care settings.

At the heart of the week are statewide proclamations from the Governor's Office and Delaware General Assembly recognizing the indispensable contributions of Delaware's nurses. DNA's advocacy ensures that these proclamations are not symbolic gestures but public affirmations of the profession's value. By securing recognition from state leaders, DNA reinforces the message that nursing is central to Delaware's health system, economy, and future workforce stability.

Complementing these proclamations is DNA's signature "Nurse's Day

at Legislative Hall," where nurses from across the state gather to engage directly with policymakers. This year's event focused on workforce development and modernizing nursing education pathways—issues that shape the daily realities of Delaware's nurses. Nurse's Day at Legislative Hall empowers nurses to use their voices, share their expertise, and influence decisions that affect patient care and professional practice. It also underscores DNA's role as the unified voice for all Delaware nurses at both the state and national levels. This year, we had a special guest, Robyn Peacher from the American Nurses Association. Robyn serves as Director of State Government Affairs and provided Delaware nurses with federal updates and key strategies for successfully engaging with legislators.

Professional growth remains a cornerstone of DNA's mission, and Nurse's Week 2026 featured free continuing education opportunities designed to meet the evolving needs of the workforce. These sessions offered evidence-based insights, emerging best

practices, and leadership development content that nurses can immediately apply in their roles. By removing financial barriers, DNA ensures that every nurse—regardless of setting, specialty, or career stage—can access high-quality learning.

Connection and community are equally essential to a thriving profession. DNA's networking events throughout the week bring nurses together to build relationships, share experiences, and strengthen the statewide nursing community. These gatherings foster mentorship, collaboration, and a sense of belonging that sustains nurses through the challenges of modern healthcare. Special thank you to Christopher Malmstrom of Point to Point Wealth Planning for sponsoring this year's happy hours in each county!

A highlight of the week is the celebration of Delaware Today's Top Nurses, an annual recognition program that honors excellence across specialties. DNA proudly supports and

*(Continued on page 12)*