

NYSNA'S 2020 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



Nursing has always been about more than just healing individual patients. And as a union of healthcare professionals we've always addressed the broader social and economic issues that drive the public's health, in addition to the concrete working conditions and practice issues that shape how we deliver care at the bedside.

Even before the pandemic, 2020 was going to be a pivotal year for New Yorkers, indeed, for the whole country. But the COVID crisis has exposed staggering shortcomings in our healthcare system, and the deep racial disparities in our society. Frontline nurses have shouldered the burden for the lack of preparation by hospital administrators, public health officials, and elected leaders. But despite these challenges, nurses and other frontline healthcare workers have saved the lives of over 76,000 New Yorkers. As we prepare for a likely resurgence this fall, we need bold action from Washington and Albany to ensure we're never put in this position again.

ORGANIZING IN OUR WORKPLACES AND OUR COMMUNITIES

That's why our action plan starts with organizing in our workplaces and our communities. This is how we turn the potential strength of NYSNA's 42,000 members into actual power, and secure the working conditions and staffing necessary to deliver the healthcare that New Yorkers truly deserve.

An immediate priority is **taking care of all the nurses who fell ill during the COVID-19 surge**. This includes securing the same paid sick time benefits available to all New Yorkers, and forcing employers to honor every COVID-related workers' compensation claim.

Nurses need a seat at the table in order to prepare for a second wave and **fortifying the frontlines is a top priority**. We must ensure our hospitals are safe for our patients and for ourselves, with enhanced PPE standards, robust environmental controls, hospital-wide health and safety precautions, and a much higher standard for employer reporting and transparency. Because of our experience on the frontlines of COVID-19,



nurses must lead the way in developing these new safety standards, ensuring we have the tools needed to enforce them.

We also have to **address the COVID-19 staffing crisis**. The pandemic demonstrated that safe staffing can make the difference between life and death. But employers are dragging their feet when it comes to honoring our contracts.

Last year, a majority of NYSNA members secured a process for creating and enforcing staffing standards. It's past time to **make these staffing ratios and grids a reality** at the bedside. Hospitals must also respect contract provisions around floating, and ensure that every RN has the training she needs to work in different specialty areas.

Employers have enjoyed the "flexibility" this crisis created, and whether its Shore Memorial, Hudson Valley Hospital, Montefiore-New Rochelle Montefiore-Mount Vernon, or Albany Medical Center, we've seen how resistant hospitals are to settling a fair contract in COVID times. That's why it's more important than ever to organize unit by unit on issues that matter to our co-workers. Whether its pushing for proper PPE, standing up to furloughs and layoffs, confronting abusive managers, or fighting for safe staffing member-to-member organizing is the key to building a strong union. It's also the best way promote **concrete solidarity across hospitals and between geographic regions**.

And we'll need all the solidarity we can get if we're going to **keeping hospitals open for care**. Before COVID-19, NYSNA members from Mount Vernon to Massena were working with our community allies to defend our safety net hospitals. Now these struggles are multiplying, and nurses from the Hudson Valley to Long Island are organizing against employers using COVID-19 as a pretext for **cutting critical, but poorly remunerated services** such as mental health, detox, and dialysis. These cuts are creating an epidemic of workplace violence, and leaving some of our neediest patients without access to care.

That's why NYSNA members across the state are speaking out, and using our credibility as the go-to public health experts to push alternatives to austerity and **deepen our community connections**.

This pandemic has also illustrated why **lifting standards for nurses across New York state is such a key issue** for our union. Upstate employers have taken full advantage of the COVID crisis, implementing major restructuring and trying to erode NYSNA's hard-won gains. In this climate, we will have to fight even harder to win everything upstate nurses deserve, from better pay to improved staffing, to participation in NYSNA's pension and benefits funds.

There is no way to secure these kinds of gains upstate without strengthening NYSNA's presence in the region and continuing **organizing new non-union RNs into NYSNA**,

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like we did with our successful campaign this summer at St. Anthony's in Warwick. We also need to ensure every new organizing victory ends with a strong contract, including the successful conclusion of bargaining at Albany Medical Center, the key to our success in the Capital District and beyond.

Finally, we must aggressively **defend our practice** from numerous threats posed by COVID-19, whether it's the explosion of telemedicine, the paint-by-numbers approach to bedside care that comes with Electronic Medical Records and other new technologies, or efforts by hospital administrators, and the lawmakers who do their bidding, to shift more care to unlicensed, and less expensive, staff.

BUILDING POLITICAL POWER

COVID-19 has upended New York politics and devastated state and local budgets. Albany already approved \$2.4 billion in Medicaid cuts in April, and Governor Cuomo has warned of a 20% across-the-board cut to close the \$13 billion state shortfall if Congress doesn't act.

We know that moves New York in the wrong direction, and we must leverage our position as a trusted voice during this public health crisis to **push for bold solutions**. Budgets are moral documents that should reflect our values, which is why we can't accept cuts that will deepen disparities and discrimination across the state.

New York has always led the nation when it comes to policies that protect workers and working-class communities, and whether it's enforceable infection control standards or relief for the millions of unemployed New Yorkers **we certainly can do better than Washington**.

But all this requires revenue, which means **reversing a generation of tax cuts** for corporations and the wealthiest New Yorkers. **Taxing the ultra-rich** is the only way

to **protect our healthcare system**, so we can keep hospitals open for care, help the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers recover from COVID-19, and truly prepare for a resurgence of this virus or other disasters stemming from climate change and years of neglect of our public health infrastructure.

New revenue is also key to **rebuilding New York's safety net, starting with our public hospitals and county health departments**. COVID-19 demonstrated how critical these institutions are to protecting the public's health, and we'll need billions in new investment in order to ensure facilities like Westchester Medical Center, New York City Health + Hospitals, and Erie County Medical Center can continue providing care for the millions of New Yorkers who depend on it.

COVID-19 has also spotlighted the staffing crisis in New York's hospitals and nursing homes, and demonstrated that safe staffing can be a matter of life or death for COVID patients. We will **continue to push safe staffing legislation** as a key element in New York's COVID-19 response, alongside other COVID-related legislative priorities such as a moratorium on hospital closures.

The pandemic also makes passage of the **New York Health Act** at the state level and **Medicare for All** at the federal level even more urgent priorities, revealing the fatal shortcomings of employer-based health insurance and a profit-driven healthcare system.

But doing this will require more than effective lobbying, **we need to build a movement**.

The June primaries make it clear that **voters are hungry for exactly this kind of bold action** addressing the urgent needs of working-class New Yorkers. We need to capitalize on this opening, and harness the power of our 42,000 members by building **political action teams across the state**. Hand-in-hand with our organizing, it's important to expand our internal political education, so leaders are clear why political engagement is a strategic imperative for our union.

We also need to deepen the strategic alliances we've forged with our partners in the labor movement and in the community to move this work forward. Together, we can make the difference for **candidates who share our values and will champion our vision**, and replace elected leaders who are roadblocks to our agenda, or lack the courage to lead.

The tide is turning in Albany, and we look forward to working with progressive legislators to **set a new political agenda for New York**, one that puts patients over profits.

ADVANCING SOCIAL, RACIAL, AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

This pandemic has laid bare the deep economic and racial disparities in our state's healthcare system, with African Americans and Latinos dying from COVID-19 at twice the rate of white New Yorkers.

Decades of research have made it clear these health disparities are not solely—or even primarily—the product of individual choices, but the accumulated impact of factors embedded in the very fabric of our communities and stemming from the legacy of segregation and racial discrimination.



Addressing these social determinants of health must be part of New York's COVID response, and a top priority for our union. We will continue to educate our members and the general public about how factors like access to healthcare, employment and housing, as well as the availability of nutritious, healthy foods and exposure to pollution and other environmental toxins, drive racial health disparities.

And we'll continue to organize with our community allies to **center recovery efforts in our hardest hit communities**, and reverse decades of disinvestment. We know the economic collapse from COVID-19 has only intensified pre-existing disparities, with massive unemployment in communities of color, the threat of large-scale evictions and rising homelessness, nearly a quarter of households reporting not having enough food to eat, and too many families left behind when face-to-face education is not safe and schools are shut down.

Although COVID-specific disparities remain a central concern, we will also address other longer-standing disparities, such as sickle cell disease, maternal mortality, childhood asthma, mental health, stroke, heart disease, nearly all cancers, and deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolisms.

This pandemic has also revealed just how much racism is a threat to the public's health. Since May, a nationwide movement has been reignited, demanding an end to the systemic racism in policing and throughout the criminal justice system. Nurses have organized across the state to make it clear that **Black Lives Matter**, and everyone deserves to live free from state-sanctioned violence and discrimination.

But we must go further, and **make anti-racism part of NYSNA's DNA**, through widespread member education and a continued commitment to showing up for racial justice. First and foremost, **we must challenge racial discrimination in our workplaces** and hold our employers to their newfound commitment to equity. We must also stand in solidarity with other essential workers, since we know a disproportionate number are workers of color, and we are all essential not expendable. Another concrete task is mak-

ing sure our **hospitals are welcoming to all New York residents**, especially immigrants and others who have been the targets of hate crimes and discriminatory policy-making.

During this pandemic, we've witnessed the way public institutions from the CDC to the U.S. Postal Service have been politicized, so we will need to work especially hard to **protect the integrity of the 2020 Census**, which will have a direct impact on billions of dollars of public funding.

Although COVID-19 has forced us to suspend **medical missions** for the foreseeable future, NYSNA will continue to draw attention to the urgent environmental problems stemming from **climate change**, both locally and in countries hard hit by natural disasters. We will also extend solidarity and support in whatever ways we can to those actively struggling to **put people over profits** in other parts of the world.

STRENGTHENING OUR UNION THROUGH OUR LOCAL BARGAINING UNITS AND ONLINE ORGANIZING

This pandemic demonstrated that the only way to make any headway on important issues is through on-the-job organizing, and even under a state of emergency we managed to **connect NYSNA's education and training with workplace activity around the state**. Throughout the COVID crisis we hosted hundreds of virtual townhall meetings, trainings, and education programs, and ramped up our digital communications, including email, texting, and social media.

We also provided organizing building blocks to hundreds of NYSNA members, including training leaders how to **tackle widely and deeply felt issues** through escalating campaigns, and how to **identify issues and recruit leaders** on every unit and every shift. We built COVID Action Teams in dozens of hospitals, to fight for better PPE and to speak out about conditions during the COVID-19 surge.

We know that everyone learns the most by connecting with our peers, and although the first wave of COVID-19 has subsided, it's essential we continue using these new digital technologies to build the union. Though no substitute for one-on-one face-to-face communication, they have nevertheless boosted participation, and **expanded opportunities for NYSNA members from different hospitals to meet one another**, share strategies, and provide concrete solidarity and support.

These connections will make it easier to prepare for NYSNA's future, as we **examine any changes to our structure** that might be necessary to maintain NYSNA's democratic representation in the face of recent growth.

Of course, we can't do any of this without you—NYSNA's rank-and-file members—leading the way.

This pandemic has been the most challenging time in our professional lives, but frontline nurses have met these overwhelming obstacles head on and save countless lives. **Our solidarity and professionalism pulled New York through this crisis**, and now we need to channel this determination and unity to address the pandemic's social and economic fallout.

New Yorkers everywhere are counting on us.



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