ESN
EUROPEAN SPECIALIST NURSES ORGANISATION

POSITION PAPER

ELEVATING **VALUE-BASED NURSING CARE** IN EUROPEAN HEALTH SYSTEMS – A CALL TO ACTION

POLICY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SANT COMMITTEE

Brussels 24-06-2025

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PREFACE

This position paper on 'Value Based Nursing Care' builds on the European Union's strategic direction toward **Value-Based Health Care (VBHC)** by emphasizing the critical contribution of the nursing profession in achieving sustainable, patient-centred, and outcome-driven health systems. As the largest and most distributed professional group in healthcare, nurses are central to the continuity, efficiency, and quality of care, yet their potential remains underutilized and insufficiently embedded in policy, digital infrastructure, and leadership frameworks.

The paper is also a direct continuation of the ESNO Hackathon on Nurse Retention and Value-Based Care, held prior to the ESNO Annual Congress in May 2025 in Zagreb, and follow up of the Report on Nurses-365, with emphasis on Education Rectification and Recognition. And last, it also contributes to the call for action in the WHO-European and EU commission '**Nursing Action Plan'** Insights from these gatherings of nurses, researchers, and policy experts have been translated into five key recommendations that support a stronger nursing contribution to VBHC implementation across Europe. It's not only about nursing but the contribution to invest in a sustainable European health systems.

Aligned with the call for action stressing that "nurses must be part of the solution", this paper addresses structural challenges such as fragmented nursing education, lack of standardized data, weak digital inclusion, underrepresentation in governance, and gender inequity. It presents actionable EU-level strategies in the areas of standardisation, recognition, leadership, and financing, positioning nurses as essential partners in advancing high-value healthcare for all Europeans. This declaration will be made available online for both public and professional endorsement through an accessible digital tool. Individuals, organisations, and institutions are invited to show their support and join a growing community committed to advancing specialist nursing across Europe. Every endorsement adds strength to this collective call for action. Importantly, the insights and signatures gathered will help shape the agenda of the high-level event on 4 November 2025 at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), where policymakers, healthcare professionals, and civil society will translate these priorities into concrete policy commitments and actions.

Lastly, we consider this declaration a mid-term action plan for the period 2025–2030, forming part of the broader ESNO **'Decade of the Specialist Nurse 2020-2030'** initiative. We anticipate that by the end of this year, a concrete programme outlining clear steps and milestones will be proposed."

INTRODUCTION

The European Union stands at a critical point in shaping the future of its health systems. Confronted by persistent workforce shortages, challenges on retention, escalating healthcare costs, and the rising burden of chronic conditions, the need for sustainable and high-quality care has never been more urgent. Nurses, who constitute the largest group of healthcare professionals, are uniquely positioned to address these challenges. However, the full potential of nursing remains underutilized, undocumented, and underappreciated. This position paper calls upon the EU to recognize and institutionalize Value-Based Nursing Care as a pillar of its healthcare strategy care that improves patient outcomes while lowering overall costs and delivering person-cantered services.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

This position paper on 'Value Based Nursing Care' builds on the European Union's strategic direction toward **Value-Based Health Care (VBHC)** by emphasizing the critical contribution of the nursing profession in achieving sustainable, patient-centred, and outcome-driven health systems. As the largest and most distributed professional group in healthcare, nurses are central to the continuity, efficiency, and quality of care, yet their potential remains underutilized and insufficiently embedded in policy, digital infrastructure, and leadership frameworks.

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BARRIERS TO ADVANCING VALUE-BASED NURSING

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To truly harness the value of nursing, the European Union must take immediate and coordinated policy action across five key areas

1 Standardization and Digital Integration of Nursing Language

The EU should mandate a common nursing taxonomy, incorporating classifications such as ICNP, NANDA-I, NIC, NOC, and ICP across all Member States. Integrating nursing documentation into EU-wide digital health platforms is essential to achieve a unified system of care. Key nursing organizations, including the European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO), their members and their Associates organisations, must be active partners in this process. Simultaneously, funding should be directed toward research that links nursing language with health outcomes and reimbursement mechanisms.

2 Harmonisation of Education and Professional Scope

A pan-European framework for nursing education should be developed, based on minimum competency standards and aligned with scientific evidence and practice-based learning. This framework should include recognition of advanced nursing roles, promote digital and informatics training, and encourage the use of nurse-led data and scientific publications in research and development. Cross-border mutual recognition of nursing specialization is essential to support mobility and address regional shortages.

3 Recognition of Nurses as Independent Healthcare Providers

Nurses must be empowered to practice to the full scope of their education and expertise. Rather than being viewed as extensions of physicians or 'added value', they must be recognized as autonomous professionals who lead care models in community, chronic, and health settings. IN this autonomy, this also implies contribution in the prescribing domain such as in medication, nutrition and clinical pathways. This requires appropriate funding structures that enable nurse-led models to flourish across all Member States.

4 Embedding Nurses in Policy and Leadership Structures

Nurses should be appointed to strategic decision-making bodies at both EU and national levels, including advisory roles to Chief Nursing Officers, representatives of National Nursing organisation in the full spectrum and representative of well establish Specialist Nursing Organisation, with often a decades of existence in parallel with science and academic levels, embedded in well-established universities across Europe. Investment in leadership development and mentorship pipelines is essential to prepare the next generation of nursing leaders. Gender-equity measures, including fair pay, equitable parental leave policies, and access to leadership training, must be systematically embedded in all workforce development policies.

5 The Health System as well balance between advanced care and Safe Haven for Mental Wellbeing and Gender Equity

Health systems must undergo a paradigm shift, one that redefines them not merely as institutions for treatment and advanced recovery, but as holistic spaces where the core mission is to promote health in its fullest sense with mindfulness and self-care practices. This includes offering comfort, support, and preventive care alongside clinical expertise. Mental wellbeing and gender equity should be central pillars of this transformation, addressing persistent imbalances and ensuring inclusive, person-centered care. In this reimagined health ecosystem, sustainability and environmental awareness must also be prioritized, creating space for nurses to practice

innovation, knowledge exchange, and effective implementation with recognition and support in forward-thinking. With these elements, we truly believe in regaining trust in the health systems, public and private.

6 Bridging Innovation and Belonging – A Culture of Collaborative Health

Redefining interprofessional collaboration must also create space for innovation grounded in psychological safety and belonging. When healthcare professionals feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute beyond their job title, collaboration deepens and innovation flourishes. This requires cultivating inclusive team cultures that recognize diverse talents, embrace reflective dialogue, and allow experimentation without fear of blame. Fostering a sense of shared mission across professions—anchored in equity, climate responsibility, and patient co-creation—generates more resilient systems. Breaking silos is not just structural, but cultural: a transformation in how people connect, learn, and lead together within healthcare environments.

7 Alignment of Health Financing with Value-Based Outcomes

The financing of care must shift toward models that reward prevention, continuity, and team-based delivery, led by professionals in the nurses domain where appropriate. Research funding should prioritize studies that demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of nursing interventions, and the EU should encourage public-private partnerships aimed at developing innovative, nurse-led digital tools.

FINAL DECLARATION: A SYSTEM FOR HEALTH – NOT FOR ILLNESS

The time has come for the European Union to lead boldly in rethinking what constitutes value in healthcare. A truly value-based system is one that recognizes the full scope of nursing practice, integrates its data into health technologies, supports advanced and harmonized education, and ensures gender equity and professional autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The position paper “Elevating the Value Based Nursing Care in European Health Systems” is not only aligned with the concerns raised in EU health eco-system at level of commission but also at EU Parliament level. It is a system-wide policy contribution to bridging vision and mission to life. By translating shared concerns into actionable recommendations, this document aims to equip the European Commission and Parliament with a roadmap for embedding nursing at the heart of a truly value-based, digitally enabled, and person-centred European healthcare system.

FINAL DECLATION FOR PUBLICATION AND ENDORSEMENT

Zagreb Declaration – A Turning Point for Specialist Nursing in Europe: Shaping the Future of Nursing in Europe: Five Priorities for Systemic Change

At the midpoint of the Decade of the Specialist Nurse (2020–2030), the European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) calls for bold and coordinated action to elevate nursing, reinforce healthcare systems, and enhance patient outcomes across Europe. The Zagreb Declaration presents five strategic priorities for policymakers, educators, and healthcare leaders. These are not mere ambitions—they are essential actions. Let this declaration mark the turning point toward a sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready healthcare system.

1 Reinvent Nurse Retention – Safeguarding the Future of Care

Retention is not a cost—it is an investment in professional safety and sustainability but also quality in European health systems. Nurses continue to leave their professions due to burnout, inadequate pay, limited professional development, and a lack of recognition in decision-making. Health systems must urgently adopt safe staffing laws, establish lifelong career pathways, offer accessible mental health support, ensure competitive remuneration, and promote nurse leadership in strategic decisions. Without decisive investment in retention, European healthcare systems risk collapsing under their own weight.

2 Structure Mentorship in Nursing – Building Confidence and Continuity

Structured mentorship is the foundation for professional confidence, competence, and growth. Too often, mentoring is left informal or undervalued. We must train mentors through accredited programs, formally recognise and reward their contributions, expand digital mentoring tools, and create a European-wide mentorship roadmap. Embedding peer support in daily practice not only strengthens individual careers but fosters collective excellence and long-term retention. Mentorship is not optional, it is critical infrastructure for nursing.

3 Advance Value-Based Nursing Care – Recognising What Really Matters

Healthcare must shift from volume-based outputs to value-based outcomes, with nursing at the centre of this European health system transformation. Nurses provide essential, often invisible, contributions to patient care. Standardising the nursing language (e.g. ICNP, NANDA-I), digitally capturing care data, empowering nurses as independent providers, with autonomy of prescribing medication and clinical pathways, harmonising educational standards, and aligning reimbursement models with nursing-led outcomes are all necessary. Value-based nursing strengthens both the patient experience and the sustainability of care systems.

4 Break Down Silos in Healthcare – Embracing Interprofessional Collaboration

In today's complex healthcare landscape, siloed professional cultures hinder teamwork, innovation, and patient-centred care. Breaking these silos is both an ethical and operational necessity. Interprofessional education must be embedded in all healthcare curricula, supported by immersive training models like Clinical Education Wards (CEWs). Collaboration with patient organisations is a crucial asset to regain trust in health systems. Nurses should co-lead interprofessional collaboration initiatives, drawing on their strengths in care coordination and patient advocacy. Lessons from other sectors, such as agile teamwork in IT, climate, business, can guide structural support for more cohesive interdisciplinary practice.

5 Prioritise Mental Health in Nursing – Protecting the Workforce from Within

Mental health and wellbeing are not workplace perks, they are professional rights and will also

reflect patients wellbeing and safety. Nurses operate under constant pressure, often without the emotional or psychological support they need. Training must include communication, resilience, and stress management, while workplaces should be designed for psychological safety and work-life balance. Daily self-care tools, peer reflection models, and inclusive well-being strategies must be embedded at every level of the system. Caring for nurses means caring for the quality and future of care itself.

FINAL STATEMENT

“To build a resilient and future-ready health system, Europe must act now. Nurse retention must be anchored in professional support, fair recognition, and real career prospects. Mentorship should be a formalised, funded, and valued part of the professional journey. Nurses must be fully integrated into value-based care strategies, with their outcomes transparently measured and rewarded. Interprofessional collaboration must be redefined by equity and partnership, not hierarchy. And finally, the mental wellbeing of nurses must be recognised as a core responsibility of the system—not left to individual coping. Let the Zagreb Declaration serve as our shared commitment to this transformative agenda.”

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ABOUT ESNO

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organizations.

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