

78th Session of the Regional Committee for the South East Asia Region, 13 – 15 October 2025.

Delhi Declaration on strengthening primary health care as a key element towards achieving universal health coverage (SEA/RC76/R3)

Honorable Chair, distinguished representatives, esteemed colleagues,

The International Council of Nurses welcomes the Delhi Declaration's strong commitment to strengthening primary health care as the foundation for achieving universal health coverage in the South-East Asia Region.

We emphasize that the nursing profession is indispensable to this goal. Nurses form the largest health workforce group globally and across this region, often serving as the first—and sometimes only—point of contact in primary health care settings. Without a strong, well-supported nursing workforce, the promise of UHC will remain out of reach.

The WHO's *State of the World's Nursing Report 2025* and ICN's *Nursing and Primary Health Care 2024* report underscore this reality. Evidence shows that investing in nurses improves access, equity, and health outcomes—particularly in underserved rural and remote areas. To that end, we call on Member States to implement the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery and to align national action with its four policy areas: education, jobs, leadership, and service delivery.

Furthermore, ICN's *Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies* report affirms the economic return of nursing investment—through improved health system resilience and social development.

Progress must be deliberate and transformative. Nurses must be empowered as leaders, with Chief Nursing Officers granted the authority, resources, and influence to shape policy at every level. Education systems must expand and innovate to meet growing demand while maintaining the highest standards of quality. At the same time, robust regulatory frameworks are essential to safeguard the public, uphold professional standards, and enable effective, flexible service delivery. Finally, nurses must be supported to practice to the full extent of their education and expertise within

multidisciplinary primary health care teams, maximising their contribution to health outcomes and system resilience.

In sum: achieving UHC through PHC requires not only political will—but bold investment in nursing.

Thank you.

Links

- International Nurses Day 2024 is: “Our Nurses. Our Future. The economic power of care” - <https://www.icn.ch/resources/publications-and-reports/international-nurses-day-2024-report>
- International Nurses Day 2025 is: “Our Nurses. Our Future. Caring for Nurses Strengthen Economies” - https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2025-04/ICN_IND2025_report_EN_A4_FINAL_0.pdf
- Nursing and Primary Health Care – Towards the realization of Universal Health Coverage - <https://www.icn.ch/resources/publications-and-reports/nursing-and-primary-health-care-towards-realization-universal>