

## The Pandemic Exposed an Ugly Truth About Health Care Worker Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis of epic scale for health care workers, and especially for emergency nurses. Crowded emergency departments, long hours, equipment shortages, risk of infection and transmission, and the stress caused by just navigating their lives amidst the lockdowns and restrictions took its toll. The levels of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout increased and some even succumbed to suicide.

However, even as the pandemic has wound down, we continued to see high rates of distress among health care professionals. According to the CDC, 46 percent of health care workers reported feeling burnt out in 2022, up from 32 percent in 2018.

Today, staffing shortages, ED boarding, workplace violence and other factors continue to negatively impact emergency nurses and other health care workers. They need our support in work environments characterized by high stress, where mental health concerns are often met with invasive questions and potential job loss.

## Registered Nurses are



# 28%

more likely to

# die by suicide

than non-healthcare workers.

Source: Olfson, M., Cosgrove, C. M., Wall, M. M., et al. (2023). Suicide Risks of Health Care Workers in the US. *JAMA*. 2023;330(12):1161-1166. doi:10.1001/jama.2023.15787

## As Nurses Suffer, So Will Patient Care

Data from the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System indicates that nurses die by suicide at significantly higher rates than non-nurses. Moreover, health care professionals, including emergency nurses, often feel stigmatized or that their professional future will be at risk if they seek assistance for mental health issues.

Clearly, more needs to be done to promote the mental and behavioral well-being of health care workers risking their lives to care for their communities. By fully supporting these professionals, they are better able to serve their patients and their communities.

## Reauthorize the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act

Enacted in 2022, this bipartisan legislation is helping to reduce and prevent mental and behavioral health conditions among emergency nurses, as well as helping to increase access to evidence-based treatment for nurses, physicians, medical students and other health care professionals. To ensure continued patient access to health care, it is vital that we work to preserve and protect the health of our medical workforce.

**H.R. 929/ S. 266** will reauthorize for five years the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act which provides for:

- Grants for training health professionals, nursing or medical students, and residents to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout, substance use disorders, and other mental health conditions;
- The dissemination of best practices for reducing and preventing suicide and burnout among health care professionals;
- Support for a national education and awareness campaign to encourage health care workers to seek support and treatment;
- Grants for employee education, peer-support programming, and mental and behavioral health treatment; and
- A federal study on health care professional mental health and burnout, as well as barriers to seeking appropriate care.

In addition to the Emergency Nurses Association, the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act is supported by more than 50 national health care organizations including the American College of Emergency Physicians, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American Psychiatric Association, and National Alliance on Mental Illness.

## House Request: Cosponsor and Support Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Reauthorization Act (H.R. 929).

H.R. 929 was introduced by Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) on February 4, 2025. The legislation has been referred to the House Energy & Commerce Committee.

## Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Reauthorization Act (S. 266).

S. 266 was introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) on January 28, 2025. The legislation has been referred to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.