

Nurses on Boards

Nurses on Boards Coalition: Celebrating the Magic of Collaboration

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It is not often that coalitions of national organizations not only form, but gain breadth and depth, as they work together to continue to achieve their collective goals over time. Nearly 11 years ago, a group of 21 highly committed leaders of nursing and health care organizations across the nation came together in Washington, D.C., to discuss the possibility of working together to achieve the goal of improving health care through nurses serving on boards. Collectively, they united on their goal, ultimately forming the national Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC). The rest is not only history, but an amazing story to tell outlining collaboration at its finest.

The 2011 *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* report included a call for nurses to serve in leadership positions. The report suggested: “Nurses, nursing education programs, and nursing associations should prepare the nursing workforce to assume leadership positions across all levels, while public, private, and governmental health care decision-makers should ensure that leadership positions are available to and filled by nurses” (Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 14). The report further recommended that nurses become involved in decision-making at all levels of organized boards, commissions, and task forces, stating: “Public, private, and governmental healthcare decision-makers at every level should include representation from nursing on boards, on executive management teams, and in other key leadership positions,” clearly indicating that nurses could and should bring the patient perspective to the conversation before healthcare decisions were made rather than after (IOM, 2011, p. 14).

With initial funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the Center to Champion Nursing in America, these leaders spawned the idea of all 21 national nursing and

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The Nurses on Boards Coalition celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2024. As the Coalition moves into the future, it reflects on its past achievements and looks ahead to expanding its national and global reach in all areas of health care and business outcomes.

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health care organizations working together for one single mission. That mission, which still directs the work of NOBC today, is: “To improve the health of communities through the service of nurses on boards and other bodies” (NOBC, 2025). Over the last 10 years, the only wording change of the NOBC original mission created in 2014 has been removing the wording and focus on “in our nation” to make clear that this work is imperative around the globe and not just in the United States.

This last year, NOBC celebrated its 10-year anniversary during its Board of Directors meeting in June 2024, with over 100 members and supporters gathered in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the many successes of the Coalition. It was a time of looking back to recall the initial conversations that brought about the creation of NOBC and to honor the leaders whose vision and passion brought it to life, many of whom are still involved with the work of the organization today. With a powerful original vision to improve health in communities across the nation and a very lofty

strategy that 10,000 board seats would be filled by nurses serving on boards outside the nursing profession, by 2020, the vision of the founders of NOBC has resonated far and wide. To date, NOBC has never strayed from that vision. In the beginning, the concept of “Nurses on Boards” meant little, if anything, to nursing colleagues across America, and even less to those outside the profession of nursing. But today, the phrase and concept of “Nurses on Boards” is well known and valued by many around the globe.

Through hundreds of local, regional, national and international presentations, article publications, book chapters, and even inclusion in the curriculum in many nursing education programs across the United States, the concept is now very much a part of the dialogue and known to many throughout health care. Today, the concepts of “Nurses on Boards” is not only all across the United States, but even beyond, as led by Board Chair Emeritus and a founding board member of NOBC, Kimberly Harper, MS, RN, FAAN. NOBC is now actively collaborating with Health Governance International, the Nursing Council of Kenya, Strathmore University in Nairobi, and many nursing organizations and educational institutions across Kenya on what is expected to be only the first in what will become a Global Nurses on Boards outreach project.

The Nurses on Boards Coalition’s progress within the last 10 years includes many areas of programming, research, philanthropy, and scholarship. Examples include the following.

- NOBC led the placement of 263 nurses on boards since 2020, with its role in gathering board opportunities and promoting them to those registered in the NOBC database. The majority of NOBC board placements to date focused on three social determinants of health: education and development (16%), health literacy (14%), and access to health care and primary care (11%). These placements drive the mission to improve the health of communities through the service of nurses on boards.
- The NOBC has demonstrated significant philanthropic success, including just recently reaching the \$3.5 million mark in total funding since inception.

- Today, NOBC has 27 member organizations, 46 strategic partners and sponsors, 26 health care leadership organization strategic partners, and 7 member affiliates, with the number of partners continuing to grow each year.
- The NOBC has a very large social media network that spreads around the globe where its followers on each platform increase every month.
- The Coalition has well over 28,000 individual nurses and midwives registered in its NOBC database, with a national reach of almost 40 million people, including members of NOBC’s member organizations and millions more outside that group, if one counts those connected to all NOBC partners and sponsors!
- Two recent significant accomplishments of NOBC in 2024 include the creation and adoption of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement, and the creation of a Research Consortium that completed a recent large sample (3,905 participants) study regarding the value of nurse trustees, with plans to further measure and report the impact of nurses serving on boards and how this creates value for stakeholders as well as for the communities they serve.
- The NOBC, in partnership with the National League for Nursing, just launched *Language and Communication in the Boardroom: Linguistic Strategies to Make Your Seat Count*, its first micro-credential program, to support board-aspiring nurses, nurses who are serving on boards, as well as a broader interprofessional audience. The link to this new credential can be found at <https://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org/language-and-communication/> (NOBC, 2025)
- In spring 2025, the NOBC Board of Directors will update its strategic plan, to be published in June. This new plan will position NOBC for growth and greater value over the next decade.

Reflecting on the most recent events of NOBC, at the end of 2024, NOBC bade farewell to its original and long-term Executive Director Emeritus, Laurie Benson, BSN, after 8 years leading NOBC. Along with the Board of Directors, Laurie created structure and processes for what was once a fledgling organization, and the entire Board and

all “Friends of NOBC” wish her all the best in the next chapter of her life.

Now, NOBC warmly welcomes Cole Edmonson, DNP, RN, FAAN, as the Chief Executive Officer. His visionary leadership and dedication to the nursing profession will be instrumental in driving the mission forward, and ensuring nurses not only have a voice in boardrooms but are able to demonstrate their value and impact. With Dr. Edmonson at the helm, NOBC is poised to make significant strides in achieving its goals and expanding its impact through research, communication, and service.

Nancy Manion, DNP, RN, CEN, FAEN, Board Chair of the NOBC stated:

NOBC is at a turning point where we bid farewell to our Executive Director, Laurie Benson, BSN, and offer our welcome to Cole Edmonson, DNP, RN, FAAN, as our new Chief Executive Officer. If ever there were two people who were a perfect match for leading NOBC, it is these two remarkable and accomplished individuals. We are grateful and blessed to have their expertise, passion, and leadership at NOBC. (NOBC, 2025)

Conclusion

As NOBC moves into the next decade of impact, it foresees many great opportunities to partner with new organizations, deepen its relationship with its current partners, and expand into new areas and solutions. As the Coalition begins to frame this brave new future, it recognizes three important issues. First, that the public wants more nurses to be leading and driving health care transformation. Secondly, nurses are best positioned to do this for health care for a myriad of reasons. Third, NOBC will be there to help identify, prepare, and support nurses who serve in these roles, tell the stories that must be told, and measure the impact of the service of nurses on boards and other entities, not only in social determinants of health, but in other areas of health care and business outcomes. \$

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Authors' Note: The Nurses on Boards Coalition wishes to thank its partnership over the years with *Nursing Economic\$* and all its readers for the part each has played in joining efforts with Nurses on Boards Coalition to carry the message of the importance of having the nursing voice in all conversations involving health. Only through the continued growth of collaborations such as this can health equity truly be obtained across our globe.

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Additional Reading

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