

# RN Staffing Ratios



## The real story on the nursing shortage

California's ratio law, coupled with improvements in RN salaries, retirement security, and patient care conditions, especially in CNA-represented hospitals, produced dramatic results.

- **The number of actively licensed RNs in California increased by more than 48,000—a 20% gain—following enactment of the staffing ratio law, from 246,068 (as of June 30, 1999) to 294,362 (as of October 30, 2004) on the eve of the Governor's emergency order overturning key portions of the law. (*Board of Registered Nursing data*)**
- **Since the law was signed, the increase in the number of actively licensed RNs in California is nearly seven times more than the total number state health officials said would be needed for the ratios at 1:5 for general medical units.**
- **A sharp reversal in the trend of RNs entering and leaving California. In 1995-1996, 4,168 more RNs left the state than those who entered from out-of-state. In the first eight months of fiscal year 2003-2004, for instance, the BRN projected a net gain of 1,492 RNs.**
- **Big gains in the number of new graduate and foreign trained applicants who take and pass the RN exam and become new licensees each year in California, for example, 9,197 just in fiscal year 2002-2003.**
- **Following implementation of ratios on January 1, 2004, RN licensure applications skyrocketed; 220 RNs showed up for licenses the first week alone (*Sacramento Business Journal, January 19, 2004*). Overall, there has been a 60% increase in RN applications the last three years.**
- **After years of cuts in nursing education, California has increased capacity in its nursing programs the past two years and can now admit 6,600 students per year (of the 10,000 annual applicants for nursing school).**
- **National data also shows an increase in the number of RNs. Since 2001, hospitals nationally have added 183,000 RNs to their workforce, a 7.4% increase. Most of the increase was attributed to economic improvements. (*Health Affairs, November 17, 2004*).**
- **Victoria, Australia, which adopted nurse-to-patient ratios in 2000, has experienced a 24.1% increase in the number of employed nurses with ratios.**



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