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## **ICN highlights crucial role of nurses at United Nations High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage**

**New York, United States; Geneva, Switzerland, 25 September 2019** – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) welcomes UN member states’ commitment to address worldwide shortage of nurses and provide Health for All.

ICN represented the voices of the world’s 20-plus million nurses at the UN’s first ever High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage in New York, held earlier this week.

During the meeting Heads of State and Government adopted a political declaration, ‘Universal Health Coverage: moving together to build a healthier world’, in which they reaffirmed their commitment to Health for All and to scaling up the global effort to achieve it.

ICN welcomes the commitment made by UN member states to immediately address the global shortfall of 18 million health workers, half of whom are nurses and midwives, through educating, building and retaining a skilled health workforce, ‘including nurses and midwives who are an important element of strong and resilient health systems...’.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

‘It is right and proper that the WHO is calling for healthcare systems to be “strengthened” and have “increased capacity,” and as its latest report, [Primary Health Care on the Road to Universal Health Coverage 2019](#), clearly states, what is required are “Bold and innovative approaches to training and retaining health workers and, above all, a major increase in the investment in budgets for health workforce salaries” (p89).

‘Let’s be clear here: if you want Nursing Now, we’ve got to have investment NOW.

‘We need more funding to provide better pay and working conditions for nurses. As ICN has said in its many reports and publications, nurses are ready, willing and able to make a difference right around world. But unless there are sufficient numbers of them who are properly educated,

supported and rewarded, countries will not achieve readily achievable improvements in their populations' health, and that will be unforgiveable.'

The declaration recognises that primary health care (PHC) is the most inclusive, effective and efficient approach to safeguarding people's physical and mental health and social wellbeing. PHC is the cornerstone of a sustainable health system for UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals.

ICN was represented at the meeting by its Senior Advisor Erica Burton, who said:

'Nurses are the principal healthcare providers in primary health care systems, and they are leading the development of innovative primary health care initiatives worldwide. Health systems are shifting towards primary health care as their foundation for achieving universal health coverage, and nursing has a powerful and unique opportunity to position the needs of patients, families and communities at the core of health systems.'

#### **Note for Editors**

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all, and sound health policies globally.

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