

Study discusses how and why nurses can develop their advocacy skills to build influence among policymakers

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Nurses advocate on behalf of their patients in health care settings every day but often hesitate to speak up in other settings, especially when

policy and politics are involved. A nurse-turned-legislator says it's crucial for nurses to develop the confidence and competence to add their voices to important discussions on issues facing their patients, communities and the nursing profession.

In the [article](#) "Built for Advocacy," author North Carolina Senator Gale Adcock, MSN, FNP-BC, discusses her [personal experience](#) as a nurse now serving as a state senator and offers lessons learned during her career journey from registered nurse to nurse practitioner to elected official. The article is published in *AACN Advanced Critical Care*.

In her first election in 2007, Adcock won 55% of the vote, avoiding a runoff in a three-way race for an open seat on her local town council. After seven years, she won a competitive seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives, the first advanced practice nurse elected to the state's General Assembly. Eight years later, she was elected to the state senate, the first nurse to serve in that chamber. She is currently the only member of the state senate who is also a health care professional.

"Nurses need to speak out and improve outcomes outside of health care settings, especially in the [policy](#) areas of local, state and [federal government](#)," she said. "Despite [nurses](#)' being the largest segment of the health care workforce, our voices are often missing from crucial conversations about access to care, health inequities and upstream problems affecting people's health."

She notes that nurses have several advantages to prepare to engage in policy discussions, including being able to connect easily with others and use common language instead of jargon.

In the article, she offers eight specific steps nurses can take to position themselves to influence policymakers, beginning with getting involved in specialty nursing organizations, such as the American Association of

Critical-Care Nurses (AACN), as well as their state nurses' association.

"Nursing must be present and vocal at health care policy tables, and it is on us to get there. We cannot expect an invitation to participate," she said.

She also offers nurses a variety of policy and advocacy resources to learn more.

More information: Gale Adcock, Built for Advocacy, AACN *Advanced Critical Care* (2024). [DOI: 10.4037/aacnacc2024964](https://doi.org/10.4037/aacnacc2024964)

Provided by American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN)

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