



# RN-to-Patient Ratios

## Helping to Solve Nursing Shortage

**Strong, effective ratio laws are a critical factor in helping to mitigate the effects of the nursing shortage. California, which adopted the first ratio law in the U.S., and Victoria, Australia, offer two good case studies.**

### California

- **The number of actively licensed RNs in California increased by nearly 86,000** following enactment of the staffing ratio law, from 246,068 as of June 30, 1999 to 332,043 as of January 31, 2008. (*Board of Registered Nursing data*)
- **Since the ratio law was signed, the number of actively licensed RNs has grown by an average of more than 10,000 a year, compared to under 3,000 a year prior to the law.** (*BRN data*). At the time the law was passed, the BRN was predicting the annual increase would be just 2,000 a year in the coming years.
- **Vacancies for RNs at Sacramento area hospitals have plummeted 69% since early 2004** when the ratios were first implemented. (*Sacramento Business Journal, January 11, 2008*) Throughout the state many of California's biggest hospital systems have seen their turnover and vacancy rates fall below 5%, far below the national average.
- **The ratios have helped fuel a dramatic growth in student interest in nursing.** California nursing programs have expanded greatly in the years since the ratio law was enacted, as the profession has become more attractive, and due to the successful lobbying of CNA/NNOC for increased funding. In the last six years, the number of RN graduates has jumped by 45%, and the number of nursing programs has grown by 20 (2005-2006 Annual School Report, Board of Registered Nursing).
- **The increase in the number of actively licensed RNs in California was almost seven times more than the total number state health officials said would be needed for the ratios for general medical/surgical units.**
- **A sharp reversal in the trend of RNs entering and leaving California.**
- **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.**
- **A 60% increase in RN applications in the years following enactment of the law.**

**"We had 10 months of experience with the (improved) ratios and there seems to be no negative impact on the healthcare system. Our data shows that hospitals have been able to meet the lower ratios,"** Sabrina Demayo Lockhart, spokeswoman, (California) Health and Human Services Agency — *Los Angeles Times, November 12, 2005, after the Schwarzenegger administration dropped efforts, encouraged by the hospital industry, to overturn parts of the ratio law.*

### Victoria, Australia

**Victoria, Australia, which adopted nurse-to-patient ratios in 2000, experienced a 24.1% increase in the number of employed nurses with ratios.**