In the midst of WWII, a severe shortage of trained nurses threatened the nation's ability to meet domestic and military health care needs.

In response, Congress established the Cadet Nurse Corps, an integrated, uniformed service of the Public Health Administration, in 1943. The Cadet Nurse Corps provided young women with expedited nursing education in exchange for "service in essential nursing for the duration of the war." In 1944, the Federal Security Agency identified "national recognition for rendering a vital war service" as a privilege of service in the Corps.

In total, nearly 120,000 women completed the Corps' rigorous training. Cadet Nurses served in military hospitals, VA hospitals, Marine hospitals, private hospitals, public health agencies, and public hospitals until the program ended in 1948.