Strategy 1
Expand early pathways to develop a nursing workforce that is representative of the population of North Carolina

Strategy 1.1 The North Carolina Nurses Association, North Carolina Future of Nursing Action Coalition, trade organizations representing employers of nurses, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Area Health Education Centers, the North Carolina Workforce Credentials Advisory Council, and health-related philanthropies in the state should collaborate to identify opportunities to partner with middle and high school counselors, career centers, and students to share information about health professional career paths—including the variety of pathways, degrees, and work settings for nursing.

Desired Result
North Carolina's middle and high school students will have reliable and accurate information about careers in nursing, the educational pathways to those careers, financial resources for education, and the benefits of these careers to both individual economic stability and to the overall health of the state.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?
To meet North Carolina's nursing workforce needs, we must use a variety of strategies, beginning with identifying and educating young people interested in a career in health care, all the way to retention and career development strategies for established nurses. Interest in careers in health care, or a general interest in finding a career that helps people, can be identified early for many children. Understanding the variety of roles and educational pathways into nursing can be confusing, particularly for families without experience working in the field of health care. It is important that middle and high schoolers have access to adults in their educational space who can help them learn about educational and career opportunities in nursing, and the ways their secondary education may be able to prepare them for these careers. Many partners are called on for this recommendation due to their unique role or expertise in the nursing and educational spaces and the potential for existing and new resources they may be able to bring to this work.

Context
Although there are no data indicating student interest specifically in nursing as a career option, a 2022 survey of high school and undergraduate students identified the number one intended career path as medicine or health-related fields:

- 34% said that health care or health-related issues were ones they are most interested in "impacting in [their] world"
- 27% said they expect to work in a medicine/health-related field in future
- 35% of women compared to only 17% of men were considering medicine/health-related fields[3]

Further, a 2022 report summarizing data on aptitude and interest in different career fields among high schoolers found that students have more aptitude for health sciences careers, including nursing, than interest in them:

- Students showed 1.8 times the aptitude for health sciences careers than interest in those careers.
- This gap was more pronounced for male students, who showed 2.2 times more aptitude for health science careers than interest, compared to female students, who showed a gap of 1.5 times.[4]

The gender gap displayed in responses to these surveys is an indicator of the disparity we see in the nursing workforce, which is over 90% female.[5]

Spotlight on North Carolina

The North Carolina Healthcare Association (NCHA) is developing a workforce campaign designed to get teenagers interested in health care jobs. The "I Do Care" campaign will inform high school and middle school students about the variety of careers available at hospitals. A website will be part of this campaign and NCHA is working with hospital public relations officers to gather opportunities from across the state where teens can engage with their local hospital (e.g., teen volunteer programs, med camps, apprenticeships, etc.).

KEY RESOURCE NEEDS

Responsible parties will need to identify strategies for educating guidance counselors and resources that guidance counselors can continue to refer to (e.g., database or repository of resources).