



Strategy 12

Evaluate the current state of efforts to address equity in the nursing workforce

Strategy 12.1 Philanthropies (e.g., health care philanthropies) should provide funding to conduct an analysis of the current state of efforts to address equity in the nursing workforce in North Carolina's nursing schools and practice settings. Organizations to complete this analysis could include a school or schools of nursing in partnership, a nursing association, the Center on the Workforce for Health, Future of Nursing Action Coalition, or other organization with a concentration on the nursing workforce.

Strategy 12.2 The Sheps Health Workforce Research Center should conduct a statewide analysis of nurse pay differentials across and within practice settings and geographic areas of the state, and among different demographic groups. Results from this analysis should be used to inform employers and policymakers of pay disparities and opportunities for pay equity. Partners for this work may include the Department of Commerce and the Department of Labor.

Desired Result

Nursing workforce researchers, advocates, and others will have a comprehensive understanding of current efforts to address equity in nursing education and practice. This will inform plans for additional efforts to make nursing education and practice welcoming and inclusive for all nurses.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Addressing equity in the nursing workforce is paramount to ensuring that health care organizations can provide culturally relevant and inclusive care to diverse patient populations. Equity within nursing not only pertains to offering equal employment opportunities irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation but also involves equitable access to competitive pay, mentorship, professional development, and leadership roles. A diverse nursing workforce can better understand and meet the varied health care needs of the communities it serves, leading to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction. By prioritizing equity and competitive pay, health care organizations can attract and retain a diverse and talented group of professionals, enriching the nursing field with a wide range of perspectives and expertise that reflect the complexities of patient care. Many nursing education programs and health care organizations have implemented programs and policies toward these efforts. It is vital to understand these efforts and their successes and challenges to share best practices with others in the state.

Context

EQUITY EFFORTS IN NURSING EDUCATION

Nursing education programs have undertaken a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing equity and diversity among their student bodies. These include:

- **Holistic admissions processes** - Rather than relying solely on academic metrics such as GPA and test scores, nursing programs are increasingly considering applicants' life experiences, community service, leadership qualities, and overcoming adversity. This approach acknowledges the value of diverse perspectives and backgrounds in enriching the nursing profession.
- **Development of targeted recruitment strategies** - By reaching out to communities and groups with historically low representation in nursing, programs can encourage individuals from these groups to consider nursing as a career. This might involve partnerships with schools or community organizations or the use of scholarships specifically for underrepresented students.

- **Support systems and mentorship programs** - Recognizing that students from underrepresented backgrounds might face unique challenges, many programs offer mentorship, tutoring, and counseling services tailored to their needs. These support systems aim to improve retention rates and ensure all students can succeed.
- **Curriculum changes** - Nursing programs are revising their curriculums to include more content on cultural humility, social drivers of health, and health disparities. By educating future nurses on these critical issues, programs aim to prepare graduates who can provide empathetic, informed care to all patients, regardless of background.
- **Faculty diversification** - Nursing programs are making concerted efforts to recruit and retain faculty members from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Diverse faculty can serve as role models and mentors for students, contributing to a more inclusive educational environment.

EQUITY EFFORTS BY EMPLOYERS OF NURSES

Employers of nurses have also undertaken a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing equity and diversity of their nursing staff. These include:

- **Development and implementation of diversity policies** - Many health care organizations have established clear policies to promote diversity and inclusion within their workforce. These policies often include specific goals for recruitment, retention, and promotion of nurses from underrepresented groups.
- **Bias training and cultural competency education** - Recognizing that unconscious biases can influence hiring, promotion, and daily interactions, employers have increasingly required staff to participate in bias training and cultural humility education. These programs aim to raise awareness about personal biases and teach strategies for providing care that respects patients' cultural, religious, and personal values.
- **Mentorship and career development programs** - To support the career advancement of nurses from diverse backgrounds, many employers have established mentorship and career development programs. These initiatives pair less experienced nurses with seasoned professionals who can provide guidance, support, and advocacy. This not only aids in the professional growth of individual nurses but also helps to create more diverse leadership within nursing departments.

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- **Flexible work arrangements** - Understanding that work-life balance can be a significant barrier to entering and remaining in the nursing profession, especially for those with family or community obligations, employers have begun to offer more flexible scheduling options. This includes part-time positions, varied shift options, and telehealth roles, making the nursing profession more accessible to a broader range of individuals.
- **Recruitment and retention initiatives** - Employers have also focused on recruitment and retention strategies specifically designed to attract and keep nurses from underrepresented groups. This might include partnerships with nursing schools that serve diverse populations, offering scholarships or internships to students from these programs, and creating a workplace culture that celebrates diversity and inclusion.

COMPETITIVE PAY AND PAY EQUITY

Pay equity within nursing—ensuring that wages are fair across genders, races, and roles—is crucial for fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce. Such measures contribute to job satisfaction, reduce turnover rates, and enhance the overall morale among nursing staff. When nurses feel valued and fairly compensated, they are more likely to stay in their roles, pursue further education, and provide the high-quality care that patients deserve.

Little data are available on the average salary for LPNs and RNs in different practice settings, geographic areas, and by race and ethnicity in North Carolina. See below for average annual salary for LPNs and RNs across all settings in North Carolina compared to the United States and neighboring states.

Average Annual Salaries for North Carolina Nurses (2022)

	LPN/LVNs	RNs
North Carolina 	\$53,010 Ranked 30th in US	\$77,420 Ranked 33rd in US
United States 	\$55,860 US average	\$89,010 US average
Virginia 	\$52,790	\$81,860
South Carolina 	\$51,060	\$74,330
Georgia 	\$50,830	\$85,180
Tennessee 	\$46,540	\$72,480

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics.
<https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/occGeo/One%20occupation%20for%20multiple%20geographical%20areas>