

## Strategy 21

### Explore opportunities for nurses related to National Provider Identifier (NPI) numbers

**Strategy 21.1** All NC RNs should obtain an NPI to elevate and recognize them as clinicians providing vital services to patients.

#### Desired Result

Elevate the recognition and visibility of RNs within the health care system by enabling accurate tracking of their contributions to patient care.

#### Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Increased use of National Provider Identifier (NPI) numbers for RNs could facilitate more direct billing for nursing services, potentially opening new avenues for nurses to contribute to patient care. While possession of an NPI number would not change reimbursement within the current system, it is an important first step. Having an NPI number could streamline the process of documentation and communication across health care systems, improving efficiency and reducing administrative burdens. Ultimately, this recognition supports the professionalization of nursing, acknowledges nurses' critical role in patient care, and can lead to broader opportunities for nurses in various health care settings, enhancing workforce flexibility and the overall quality of patient care.

#### Context

NPI numbers serve as unique identifiers for health care providers, facilitating efficient data transmission and tracking across health care systems.<sup>13</sup> These 10-digit numbers are utilized by a wide range of relevant parties, including health care organizations, insurance companies, and government agencies. NPIs are available for registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), physicians, dentists, chiropractors, and psychologists, among others. They are crucial for billing, claims processing, and maintaining accurate patient records. Importantly, NPIs are standardized across health care professionals and are transferable across state lines, ensuring seamless integration into national databases. Currently, very few RNs have an NPI, however participation in this data system "would enhance our understanding of the nurse workforce and its contributions to safe, effective, high-quality care".<sup>14</sup>

**"In the current healthcare climate, invisibility in data equals invisibility, period."**

-Chan et al. An overview and policy implications of national nurse identifier systems: A call for unity and integration. *Nursing Outlook*. 71(2), March 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2022.10.005>

Applying for an NPI is a straightforward process that is free, fast, and easily accessible. Nurses can either apply individually or have their organization apply on their behalf. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) oversees the enrollment process through the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES), and applications are typically processed within 1 to 20 days. Additionally, nurses can begin the application process while still students, streamlining the transition to professional practice.

In a health care landscape where data visibility is paramount, obtaining an NPI can be an effective way for nurses' contributions to be recognized and valued. By having unique identifiers, nurses' individual and collective contributions to patient care outcomes can be accurately tracked and acknowledged. This aligns with the recommendations of the **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine**, which underscore the importance of tracking nurses' contributions for achieving health equity.

**"[H]ospitals and health systems need the ability to identify nurses in the EHR [electronic health record] enterprise resource planning system (ERP), and other health IT systems for documentation, education, research and training purposes; nursing documentation in the EHR, ERP, and other health IT systems can demonstrate nurses' value as healthcare transitions to a value-based reimbursement model; nursing documentation can demonstrate nurses' value and impact on improving patient/population outcomes, patient safety, operational efficiency and clinical effectiveness; nurses and employers need a mechanism to track nursing licensure across job and location changes; institutions need the ability to verify licensure status for their nurse employees."**

-University of Minnesota. *Nursing knowledge: 2018 big data science. Conference conducted at the University of Minnesota, June 13–15, 2018.* [https://www.nursing.umn.edu/sites/nursing.umn.edu/files/nkbs\\_proceedings\\_2018.pdf](https://www.nursing.umn.edu/sites/nursing.umn.edu/files/nkbs_proceedings_2018.pdf)

While specific examples may vary, numerous nurses across different specialties and settings have successfully obtained NPIs. For instance, nurses working in federally funded programs, home health, long-term care, and research within health care systems are among those who benefit from NPI enrollment. **The following are some possible use case scenarios for RNs with NPIs.**

#### Attribution of work to understand quality of care, the value and contributions of nursing, and reimbursement models

- "Any of the services nurses can provide in ambulatory, community, and primary care settings are billable if nurses have an NPI. There is a growing body of evidence highlighting the potential roles of RNs in primary care, including preventive care, chronic illness management, practice operations, care management, and hospital transition care. Needleman, 2017 points out that RNs practicing in primary care can bring significant income into this practice setting, far above the cost of RN employment. Further, RNs in the outpatient community, and primary care settings are practicing more autonomously, leading case management, managing patient panels, and coordinating complex care."<sup>15–17</sup>



- “[A] nurse identifier would allow the nursing profession to expand its impact in the context of interdisciplinary teams in various types of practice settings. Using common, consistent, and accessible identifiers across provider types allows employers, researchers, and policymakers to understand specific team configurations in relation to specific types of population needs and could lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness. The NPI allows nursing to join an interprofessional identifier system, one that would enhance visibility in healthcare and health services research and increase the likelihood of future models of interprofessional care optimizing the scope of nursing practice.”<sup>14</sup>

### Evaluation of the impact of federal dollars, grants, scholarships, and loans on the nursing workforce to support future funding

- “The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is supportive of the expansion of NPIs to nurses because it would allow them to track clinicians over time and assess the impact of grants/loan/scholarship programs. This would help them build links between education, training, and healthcare service in various types of practice settings. Such linkages would empower HRSA and the nursing community to demonstrate the value and reach of these workforce programs and support future funding.”<sup>14</sup>

### Credentials and privileges to understand scope of services and scope of practice

- “Attribution data cross-referenced with workforce data can help articulate the scope of services and scope of practice of nurses and advanced practice registered nurses to inform policy and education in various types of practice settings.”<sup>14</sup>

### KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Employers of nurses can help increase awareness of RNs about how to obtain an NPI.



This effort may require organizations such as the Board of Nursing, nursing associations, schools of nursing, and NC AHEC to partner in a campaign encouraging RNs to obtain NPIs.