



Strategy 3

Increase the number of North Carolinians graduating with nursing degrees by addressing faculty shortages

Strategy 3.1 Employers and educators of nurses, in partnership with the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers and the NC Health Talent Alliance, should collaborate to develop plans to align the demand for nurses with the ability of local institutions to educate nurses. These collaborations should identify shared investments and shared strategies to increase numbers of faculty to support education of nurses and increase graduation rates.

Desired Result

There will be a reduction in nurse faculty shortages with increased opportunities for hybrid roles in academic and practice settings.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

With an increased demand for health care for a growing and aging population, building capacity to educate the next generation of nurses is essential.¹⁷ According to the 2022 National Nursing Workforce Survey, the median age of RNs and LPNs is 46 and 47 years, respectively, and more than one-quarter of nurses in the survey report a plan to leave nursing or retire within the next five years.¹⁸ In North Carolina, projections from the Program on Health Workforce Research and Policy at the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research estimate a gap in the supply of RNs at over 12,000 positions by 2033.¹⁹ The largest shortage is projected to occur in nursing home, extended care, and assisted living facilities, which are essential to meeting the needs of older adults. These long-term services settings also employ the greatest number of LPNs in the state, and projections forecast a nearly 50% shortage of LPNs within the decade. To fill the growing gaps in the nursing workforce, we will need to simultaneously work to retain current nurses and educate more new nurses. However, increasing nursing program enrollment will first require serious efforts to address the nursing faculty shortage. Partnerships with employers of nurses can help to create more opportunities for hybrid roles in practice and academic settings to increase interest in serving as nursing faculty.

Related Recommendations from Other Groups

North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Initiative #2: Enhance and invest in clinical partnerships - AHEC should secure additional funding to support the expansion of the existing NC AHEC Nursing Clinical Instructor Partner (CIP) program. Dedicated funding is essential for supporting new partnerships, training nurses to become faculty, marketing the program, and identifying additional stakeholders to participate in the program.

<https://www.ncdhs.gov/investing-north-carolinas-caregiving-workforce-recommendations-strengthen-north-carolinas-nursing/download?attachment>

Context

The North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NC AHEC) is a statewide initiative to address health care professional workforce issues. NC AHEC consists of nine regional AHECs.²⁰ The mission of NC AHEC is to provide educational support, activities, and services to recruit, train, and retain health care professionals within the state. A critical focus has been supporting primary care health care professionals in rural communities. Through NC AHEC programming, health care providers within the state receive affordable training and continuing education to stay informed on emerging technologies, best practices, and the latest advancements in research. The total number of NC AHEC participants trained annually is over 215,000.

The NC Health Talent Alliance is an innovative partnership between the NC Chamber Foundation and the North Carolina Center on the Workforce for Health to address the statewide health care professional shortage.²¹ The aim of the NC Health Talent Alliance is to eliminate this shortage by developing a sustainable talent pipeline through regional collaborations. Through use of the Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) approach, the Alliance manages employer-led initiatives to identify gaps in training availability, create systems of support to help individuals join the health care workforce, and organize public and private partnerships to recruit and retain local talent. Next steps by the NC Chamber Foundation and the NC Center on the Workforce for Health include launching phase-one implementation through coalition-building, training employers on the TPM approach, and further supporting this talent pipeline framework.

Nursing School Admissions

In the 2020–2021 academic year, 15,055 applicants were qualified to attend pre-licensure nursing programs in North Carolina.²² Among the applicant pool, 9,048 (60%) were admitted to nursing programs, and just 7,763 (51%) of applicants enrolled. For every 100 additional nursing enrollees at a University of North Carolina (UNC) system institution, 86 become new graduate nurses.²³ At a North Carolina Community College System institution, for every 100 additional enrollees, 56 become new graduate nurses based on historical attrition data.²³

A limitation to the number of students admitted to nursing education programs is the shortage of nursing faculty. In the 2022–2023 academic year, there were 1,041 full-time faculty, 446 part-time faculty, and 934 adjunct clinical faculty.¹³ At that time, the total number of faculty vacancies across nursing education programs for both full and part-time positions was 273 positions, a decrease of 31 vacancies compared to the prior year.¹³

"I normally work Monday through Friday with my teaching job. We all know how poorly teachers are paid... I have my highest degree but am getting paid the least... something needs to change. I am scheduled to work every Saturday until December to make up for the salary loss. Yes, I still want to work bedside, but I am actually only required to work two shifts a month. I have to work over to make bills."

-North Carolina nurse faculty member

Contributors to the Nursing Faculty Shortage

Significant salary disparities between clinical nursing and academic positions have substantially contributed to the nursing faculty shortage.²³ Average faculty salaries are significantly less than clinical practice salaries, with master's level nurses earning an average of \$57,454 in the academic setting compared to more than \$100,000 in practice.²⁴

Increasing rates of retirement among the current nursing faculty workforce also contribute to the shortage. Currently, the average age of a doctoral-prepared professor is 62.5 years, whereas associate professors and assistant professors average 56.7 years and 50.6 years, respectively.²⁵ A looming "brain drain" is imminent, as up to one-third of the current nursing faculty workforce in baccalaureate and graduate programs could retire by 2025.²⁶

Academic-practice partnerships serve as a potential solution to challenges in recruiting and retaining nursing faculty. These dual-role joint appointments help bridge academic learning into clinical practice.²⁷

Examples of Academic-Practice Partnerships

The **NC AHEC Nursing Clinical Instructor Partner (CIP) program** aims to increase the number of nursing faculty by bridging together academic nursing programs across North Carolina with clinical practice organizations. As an innovative clinical education model, the CIP program prepares qualified RNs to serve as clinical instructors to students without leaving their clinical nursing role. Through a combination of online modules, live webinars, and one shadowing experience in a peer cohort, the CIP program provides essential knowledge and skills to be a clinical instructor and a supportive network to new educators. The CIP program has also already been approved by the North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) to meet the 45-hour teaching and learning requirement for new faculty members.

Source: NC AHEC. Nursing Clinical Instructor Partner Program. <https://www.ncahec.net/nursing-clinical-instructor-partner-program/>

The **UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing and UNC Health** have developed a program for nurses on hospital units to support the education of nursing students given one day per week. They have piloted this approach and are growing it for the future. The program has had positive outcomes, giving practicing nurses an opportunity to serve in a new role, and provides clinical faculty for the nursing school.

Source: Personal communication with task force member. March 29, 2024

Grand Valley State University Kirkhof College of Nursing (KCON) in Michigan was awarded a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Advancing Nursing Education Workforce grant and a HRSA Nursing Workforce Diversity grant in 2022. This funding provided financial support to 29 McLaren HealthCare (MHC) nurses to complete the BSN-to-DNP program at KCON, funded four nurses as the inaugural cohort for the Interprofessional Healthcare Informatics Certificate, helped with development of the Preceptor Resources Network, enhanced KCON's Holistic Admission process, and aided the development of a student retention plan to address social determinants of health and education.

Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Academic-Practice Partnership Exemplars. <https://www.aacnnursing.org/our-initiatives/education-practice/academic-practice-partnerships/academic-practice-partnership-exemplars>