



Strategy 4

Improve retention and graduation rates of nursing students by supporting economic and material needs and enhancing academic supports

Strategy 4.1 University and community college nursing programs should develop connections to NCCARE360 and other resources specific to addressing nursing student material supports and needs.

Desired Result

Nursing students will have the material supports they need to maintain good health and reduce stress to successfully graduate, thereby increasing graduation rates from nursing education programs.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Nursing students grappling with inadequate financial and material supports such as insufficient access to food, stable housing, and affordable child care face significant barriers to their academic success and mental well-being. These challenges can lead to increased stress, decreased focus on studies, and higher dropout rates. The lack of essential supports not only affects students' ability to concentrate and perform academically but also undermines their capacity to complete their education, thereby impacting graduation rates and contributing to the broader issue of nursing shortages in the health care workforce. Nursing education programs can capitalize on existing services in North Carolina to help connect students to needed resources.

Related Recommendations from Other Groups

North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Initiative #4: Invest in social resources and NCCARE360 expansion - To support nursing students both at community colleges and 4-year institutions, additional investment is needed for social services such as transportation, child care, food security, and housing. The state should invest in the expansion of unmet social needs. In addition, to deliver these services in a more streamlined and effective manner, the state should invest in a tool such as NCCARE360, which is the nation's first statewide coordinated care network that connects individuals to local services and resources through a shared technology platform. This closed loop referral system tracks the outcome of that referral and connection to resources.

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

Context

FINANCIAL NEEDS IMPACT GRADUATION RATES

Financial circumstances can be a barrier for students in North Carolina nursing education programs. Financial barriers to remaining in programs range from inadequate tuition support to financial commitments related to family and household needs. For many students pursuing their degree, working full-time is a necessity to meet these various financial obligations. Working long hours while enrolled in an intensive nursing program creates

challenges to balancing both academic and employment responsibilities. Students from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups have cited lack of financial support as a major barrier to not only retention and graduation in nursing education programs, but also initial enrollment.³⁹ Students working while pursuing their degrees have higher drop-out rates compared to those who are not working.

Child care, housing, transportation, utilities, groceries, and educational equipment needs place significant strains on students who are in nursing education programs full time. Nursing students need a sustainable and comprehensive safety net with early access to financial support.

ADDRESSING NEEDS

Nursing education programs have addressed financial factors through pilot projects that paid direct stipends to students, from \$200 per month to \$3,000 per semester. Other programs provide scholarship options for students, while some support material needs through the purchase of laptop computers and required course textbooks. Examples of efforts to address needs in North Carolina's nursing programs include:

- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Nursing hosts a food pantry and student-led clinical uniform donation drive.
- University of North Carolina at Wilmington has the Student Success Center for students interested in health and human services careers. Assistance is provided to prospective and current nursing students. Admissions counseling, academic advising, scholarship support, and career planning are offered by the Student Success Center.⁴⁰

Nursing students in community college and university settings can use accessibility resources as well as counseling and psychological services through their institutions. These services meet some needs of students, but not all. To improve retention and graduation rates, students of nursing education programs require robust academic support, mentoring, and success coaching as well as resources dedicated to addressing issues such as food security, housing stability, child care services, and financial assistance. NCCARE360 is a resource platform that was developed for health care professionals and social service organizations to connect North Carolinians with local community resources needed to maintain well-being and promote healthy living. It also serves as a web-based resource and referral platform for North Carolinians struggling with food insecurity, housing instability, transportation, and interpersonal safety needs. Currently, all 100 counties in North Carolina have been activated in NCCARE360, and over 2,800 organizations and over 49,000 users have been onboarded.⁴¹

KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



An investment of around \$122,500 per year would allow for a pilot program with Unite Us to provide resource coordination services tailored to the needs of nursing students. This investment could be made by the North Carolina General Assembly or a health care philanthropy.