

Strategy 4

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

Strategy 4.2 North Carolina's community college and university nursing programs, employers of nurses, and state trade associations should partner to develop more opportunities for immersive experiences or internships in nursing during the learning process that provide financial compensation for participating students.

Desired Result

More students with financial need will be able to access paid employment that contributes to their successful completion of nursing school and provides important experiences in health care settings.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Providing paid internship or employment opportunities to nursing students—especially those needing to work during their studies—enables students to gain valuable hands-on experience in their field, enhancing their clinical skills and professional readiness while also alleviating financial pressures that can distract from academic and clinical training. Such opportunities can significantly improve students' academic success and retention rates by reducing the need to seek unrelated part-time work, thus allowing them to focus more on their studies and clinical experiences. This approach supports a more seamless transition into the nursing workforce, addressing the critical demand for well-prepared nursing professionals.

Context

Internships are focused, hands-on learning experiences. For nursing students, these opportunities are essential to developing clinical judgment and learning the roles and responsibilities of a nurse. Two nursing internship examples come from the Mayo Clinic:

- The Summer III Student Nurse Internship is a 10-week full-time paid program that is skills-based. Junior nursing students at Mayo Clinic's campus in Rochester, Minnesota, are provided with the opportunity to gain clinical experience while working alongside nurses in a variety of settings. The Rochester, MN, campus is home to 60 different specialties, two hospitals, 10 intensive care units, and approximately 130 operating rooms.
- In Wisconsin, the Mayo Clinic Health System Nurse Internship Programs also serve as paid full-time clinical opportunities for nursing students. Lasting 11 weeks, these programs are skills-based and focus on students gaining clinical experience by working alongside nurses.⁴²

Externships are clinical programs where nursing students work in a health care setting under the supervision of an experienced nurse. Externships typically occur toward the end of a nursing program, offering students the opportunity to enhance their competencies and prepare for their future roles as nurses. In North Carolina, UNC Health offers a 10-week program for rising senior ADN and BSN nursing students.⁴³ The Student Nurse Externship provides students with an opportunity to work with a preceptor to practice physical assessments and engage in hands-on learning. Nurse Externship Units include emergency care, intensive care, step-down, and acute-care units, as well as psychiatric and mental health care, women's health, and pediatric care.

Nursing **apprenticeships** have been described as the “earn while you learn” model. Nursing students in both practical and registered nurse programs can start their careers working in various health care facilities while simultaneously completing their respective nursing education programs.

Example from North Carolina

In 2020, Davidson-Davie Community College partnered with Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist to develop and launch a nursing apprenticeship program. Staffing shortages at Lexington Medical Center (Davidson County) and Davie Medical Center (Davie County) prompted development of the apprenticeship program. As of fall 2023, the program had admitted 11 students. Five students graduated with their RN license, with four earning employments in the Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist System. The program anticipates seven students to be admitted to the next fall cohort of apprenticeships.

Source: EdNC. Case study: A community college and health care system partnered to launch the first registered nursing apprenticeship program in North Carolina. <https://www.ednc.org/case-study-a-community-college-and-health-care-system-partnered-to-launch-the-first-registered-nursing-apprenticeship-program-in-north-carolina/>



KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Financial support will be needed to sustain the administration and staffing of these programs.



The NC Board of Nursing should be consulted as a resource in the interpretation of rules and knowledge of how others have successfully implemented internship programs.