



## Strategy 5

Enhance the preparation of nursing students through more inclusive educational environments and curriculum

**Strategy 5.4** NC AHEC should contribute to the advancement of mentorship programs by:

- Completing an environmental scan to identify effective mentorship programs that support the development of underrepresented groups in nursing.
- Partnering with North Carolina's community college and university nursing programs, employers of nurses, and state trade associations to identify opportunities and strategies to replicate or tailor programs to different schools/communities.

### Desired Result

Nursing education programs will have a resource to learn from existing mentorship programs and will have tools to help replicate or tailor mentorship programs for their student population. Serving as a nurse mentor will be considered a valuable and necessary role for a professional nurse.

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

Mentorship programs within nursing education are pivotal for the professional development and retention of nurses, especially for those from underrepresented populations. These programs offer guidance, support, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. For underrepresented groups in nursing—including people of color, Spanish speakers, males, and people with disabilities—mentorship can be particularly empowering, providing role models who share similar backgrounds and experiences. This representation helps in breaking down barriers to advancement and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion within the nursing community. While many mentoring relationships are informal, effective mentorship requires organization and effort. Nursing programs in North Carolina offer a spectrum of mentorship experiences for their students. However, there has not been a comprehensive description and evaluation of existing formal mentorship programs. NC AHEC can contribute to the advancement of nursing mentorship by conducting an environmental scan of mentorship programs, especially those that support the development of underrepresented groups, and by partnering with colleges and universities, nursing employers, and state trade associations to develop tailored mentorship programs for nursing education.

### Context

#### BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP IN NURSING EDUCATION

Mentorship is defined as “the support provided by a mentor, who offers a nurturing relationship that involves sharing knowledge and experience, providing emotional support, advice, feedback, role-modeling, and guidance that extends over time” and has been shown to improve student success and retention.<sup>68,69</sup> Nursing mentorship is often beneficial to both the mentee and the mentor:

- Student mentees** receive guidance from someone currently working in the nursing field, discover diverse nursing roles and specialties, refine their problem-solving skills, and expand their professional network.<sup>70,71</sup>
- Nurse mentors** can enhance their communication skills, acquire a fresh perspective on the latest nursing education trends, gain personal fulfillment through service, and re-energize their own passion for the nursing profession.<sup>72</sup>

Mentoring is also an important strategy to support the professional development of underrepresented groups in nursing, increasing student retention, academic success, satisfaction, and NCLEX passage rates among students of color. A lack of mentorship has been consistently cited as a barrier for male nursing students.<sup>73–75</sup> Male students and students of color may be more likely than other students to:

- Balance work and family commitments during their education.<sup>75–78</sup>
- Experience isolation due to having fewer faculty and peers with whom they can relate.<sup>74,79</sup>

### Related Recommendations from Other Groups

#### North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Action Areas

**Initiative #1:** Establish academic coaches for community college students.

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

#### MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS AND TRAINING

Effective mentorship programs are developed and implemented with intentionality. **The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program** provides a comprehensive mentorship toolkit that includes guides to assessing existing mentorship, if any, within nursing programs and designing a new mentorship program that offers core components, including a:

- Definition of mentoring
- Clear mentoring process
- Identification of learning goals
- Opportunities for ongoing reflection and evaluation
- Guidance on closing the mentoring relationship.<sup>80</sup>

## CHAPTER 2 - PREPARING FUTURE NURSES

**Mentorship is a skillset.** In addition to having the requisite professional experience, mentors are often expected to actively listen, express clear written and verbal communication, manage professional boundaries, and provide emotional support. Professionals and advanced students will approach the mentor role with a diverse array of previous experiences. Thus, organized mentorship programs will **clearly outline responsibilities for both mentors and mentees**, while also allowing the parties in each mentoring relationship to set their own expectations related to communication and learning goals.<sup>80</sup> Programs may even train mentors prior to connecting them with student mentees. For example, **Campaign for Action**, a national campaign to transform health and health care through nursing, hosted mentor trainings for representatives from over 100 nursing programs across the country and convenes monthly mentorship learning collaborative meetings.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, as the profession strives to diversify its workforce, it is imperative that nurse mentors are trained to guide students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.<sup>82</sup> This may include education about racial equity, implicit bias, and cultural humility—concepts that are also necessary for advancing health equity.<sup>82,83</sup>

### MODELS FOR MENTORSHIP IN NURSING EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

Some programs in the state are tailored to underrepresented groups.

**Duke University School of Nursing Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging** offers three mentorship programs. The Mentoring to Increase Access to Health Professions (MAP) program is designed to provide ongoing mentorship by faculty and health professionals to facilitate undergraduate students' integration and completion of a health profession program.<sup>84</sup> The Mentoring Black Nurses Towards Success program matches undergraduate Black nursing students with Black clinical staff nurses employed by the Duke University Health System.<sup>85</sup> The Leading to Equitable Access to Health Professions (LEAHP) seeks to increase undergraduate nursing students' readiness for successful entry into advanced practice nursing programs through mentorship relationships with advanced practice nursing faculty and students.<sup>86</sup>

Some programs offer mentoring as part of wraparound student support services. For example, the **Western Carolina University School of Nursing PEN Scholars program** provides a learning cohort, tailored academic advising, mentoring, and coaching for undergraduate nursing students from disadvantaged groups.<sup>87</sup> **North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T)** offers a residential learning community for first-year nursing students, assigning each student a junior-level peer mentor.<sup>88</sup>

State community colleges have also created opportunities for students to be mentored by nurses. For instance, **Durham Technical Community College (Durham Tech)** and the **Duke University Health System (DUHS)** have partnered in support of a nursing talent pipeline, with DUHS providing clinical instruction and mentorship for Durham Tech nursing students.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, **Carteret Community College and Carteret Health Care** have partnered to create a certified nursing assistant apprenticeship program, offering paid training for four to six weeks while connecting nurse assistants with a nursing mentor in a comprehensive acute care setting.<sup>90</sup> These opportunities align with the North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Council recommendation to provide academic coaches for community college students.

### KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



NC AHEC will need additional financial resources to complete the environmental scan.



North Carolina's community college and university nursing programs, employers of nurses, and state trade associations can partner to replicate programs and develop communications strategies and dissemination plans to help target audiences to learn about these programs.