



## *Strategies to Successfully Provide Floridians an Adequate, Qualified Nurse Workforce*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Assuming that healthcare reform is implemented as currently planned, the Florida Center for Nursing (FCN) estimates that by 2025 Florida will have a shortage of at least 50,300 registered nurse (RN) FTEs (full-time equivalents), or 56,000 RNs and 12,500 licensed practical nurse (LPN) FTEs. The economic recession delayed the emergence of a severe nursing shortage, as nurses have returned to work in response to a spouse's loss of work, increased their working hours from part-time to full-time, and delayed retirement to remain in the workforce. However, an aging population needing more care, an aging nurse workforce (47% of Florida's RNs are age 51 or older), an improving economy and the resultant decreases in the number of hours nurses work, nurses beginning or restarting retirement, and increased access to care from the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, will combine to bring about a large nursing shortage in Florida. Essential to meeting the needs of all Floridians are continued commitment to nursing and purposeful interventions to strengthen the nurse workforce by key stakeholders.

In order to address nurse supply and demand for the future, the Florida Center for Nursing Board of Directors has identified four (4) primary areas in need of action: (1) education, (2) work environment, (3) research, and (4) policy. **Education** relates to both the academic and health industry settings and opportunities for nurses to achieve education progression. **Work Environment** relates to the culture of the work place, retention issues faced by nurses, and supply and demand challenges faced by employers. **Research** serves as the foundation on which actions are built and outcomes evaluated. Research relates to the collection of nurse workforce data, analysis of trends, identification of implications for the future, and evaluation of program effectiveness. **Policy** relates to the processes that will strategically guide planning to meet future needs through evidence based decision making, engaging nurses in leadership opportunities, and promoting interprofessional collaboration. The ability to provide a sound strategic plan to address Florida's nursing shortage is the result of the Florida Center for Nursing's commitment to its research agenda and understanding of relevant current and future issues to be faced.

### **STRATEGIES**

**EDUCATION:** This focus area addresses education issues in both academic and industry settings.

**What are the issues?** For the Florida nurse workforce, shifting employment patterns are evident as shown by an increase in the number of nurses employed in hospitals, long-term care, and home health care settings. The Center's Workforce Demand Report revealed that these fields had a strong current and future need for registered nurses (RNs). Additionally, when asked about difficult to fill positions, employers representing six industry settings report the need for nurses with advanced education and/or practical experience. As the nurse population at large and, specifically, the faculty workforce retires, the need for appropriately educated nurses to move into faculty roles is essential. An anticipated challenge with implementation of the Affordable Care Act is adequacy of the supply of primary care providers to meet the increasing demand. Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioners (ARNPs) can assist in meeting this need.

What are the solutions? Florida must continue to enhance production of new nurses, promote educational advancement, and develop models of incumbent worker education and training to meet the diverse needs of Florida's health industry. Adoption of evolving technology and learning methods will attract youth into the field and the use of simulation technology can enhance clinical training while providing a completely safe environment for learning. In Florida's increasingly competitive health industry environment, nurses must be incentivized to enter graduate education programs with the trajectory of becoming nurse faculty.

- Current and future technology education
  - New methods of education, clinical and didactic, should be developed to accommodate the style of younger generations, address the critical shortage of clinical capacity and prepare newly licensed RNs to work in non-traditional settings.
- Incumbent worker training
  - Continue to enhance production of new nurses while developing models of incumbent worker education and training to meet the diverse needs of Florida's health industry.
- Advancement of Education/ Career pathway
  - Promote and facilitate educational advancement of all nurses.
    - Increase the number of baccalaureate prepared registered nurses.
    - Increase the number of ARNP's working in primary care.
    - Increase the number of master's and doctoral prepared nurses qualified to teach.
    - Increase the number of doctoral prepared nurses to perform research.
  - Develop pathways to facilitate transition from nursing assistant to licensed practical nurse to registered nurse to advanced practice nurse and into roles for doctoral nurses.
  - Develop career pathways in employment settings consistent with, and to reap the benefit of, each nurse's education, expertise, and experience.
- Affordable and accessible
  - Provide affordable and accessible educational opportunities to individuals interested in nursing education.

WORK ENVIRONMENT: This focus addresses workplace issues in all settings where nurses are employed.

What are the issues? Multiple workforce trends are evident in Florida related to the shifting workforce and population demographics as well as the continued economic difficulties facing the state. The supply of nurses in the state has steadily risen with an increase from December 2007 to December 2011 of nearly 20,000 RNs. Accordingly, the number of licensees actually working in nursing has also increased. An increase in workforce participation was expected during the recession, as nurses who worked part-time or had left the field returned to work and others delayed retirement. Conversely, it is important to note that an increasing pattern of loss of nurses is emerging. Analysis of licensure data from the past two renewal cycles revealed that 3,701 more nurses left the potential workforce in the most recent cycle (2010-2011) than in the prior cycle (2008-2009). The aging nurse workforce continues to point toward a future critical occurrence of a large group of experienced nurses leaving the workforce at the same time as Florida's aging population needs more nursing care. Almost 17 percent of working RNs are over age 61, and this group will presumably be reducing their hours of work and/or retiring within the next 5 to 10 years. Recent studies identified that although the number of separations compared to that reported in 2009 is essentially unchanged; the rate of turnover for nurses has either stayed the same or increased in the past two years. The nurse education system tends to reinforce the adage that new graduates should

start working in a hospital setting, both from clinical exposure and through faculty influence. However, when asked if they would hire new graduates, more than 45% of responding psychiatric hospitals, public health departments, skilled nursing facilities, and hospitals said “yes”. And, we know that employers’ need experienced, educated nurses to fill vacant positions.

What are the solutions? Partnerships between industry and academia should be forged to address entry level education needs and to develop models for preparing members of the existing nurse workforce to assume the difficult to fill roles. Such strategies will open up opportunities for new graduates to consider. It is critical that employers improve retention of all nurses and address work environment challenges faced by older nurses in an effort to extend their work life.

- Work culture
  - Promote the inclusion of nurses in governance and decision-making.
  - Promote a positive culture in the work place that recognizes the value of diversity.
  - Promote a commitment to life-long learning.
  - Utilize nurses to the fullest extent of their education and experience.
- Retention
  - Develop strategies to minimize nursing workforce turnover.
  - Implement strategies to retain new graduates in the nursing workforce.
  - Implement strategies to accommodate the effects of aging on the nurse workforce.
- Supply and demand
  - Support production of new nurses by providing clinical education opportunities, joint appointments of faculty and shared resources.
  - Develop models of incumbent worker education and training to meet the diverse hiring needs of Florida’s health industry.
  - Provide incentives for employees to seek advanced education or training.

**RESEARCH:** This focus addresses the significance of research on the adequacy of the supply of nurses.

What are the issues? The Center’s data collection, analysis, and reporting provides an extremely valuable source of information for use by legislators, academics, industry representatives, nurse executives, workforce policy drivers, and other stakeholders. The Center is a state entity with an unbiased perspective, thereby increasing the value of the results for use by stakeholders. In 2010 alone, the nursing programs at Florida’s state universities brought \$10,000,000 in federal grants into the state. The breadth, depth, and quality of state specific data can only improve the likelihood of a successful grant application. By conducting studies annually and biennially, the Center provides trend analyses which allow stakeholders to gauge the effect of economic recovery, implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and the effects of changes in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates. The Center’s status as a state entity brings with it access to data collected by other agencies and increased credibility that may not be available to an independent entity or one supported by a proprietary organization. However, fiscal support of the ongoing program is critical to sustain this rich resource for Florida.

What are the solutions? A consistent, long-term data collection, analysis, and reporting system must be in place and adequately funded. Support from health industry and education partners must be demonstrated by their participation and completion of survey instruments. Support of the Center’s research effort and analysis of workforce trends can help to assure the adequacy of supply of all types of nurses while maximizing use of limited fiscal resources.

- Data driven decision making
  - Support the Center’s research effort and analysis of workforce trends to assure adequacy of supply of all types of nurses while maximizing use of limited fiscal resources.
  - Critically assess the quality and impact of new programs and expansion of existing programs to determine whether or not the value proposition has been met.
  - Revise the forecasting models to reflect current population demographics and economic influences.
- Analysis of workforce trends
  - Adequately fund the Center’s long-term data collection, analysis, and reporting system.

**POLICY:** This focus addresses the process that strategically guides planning to meet future needs.

**What are the issues?** The scarcity of resources – be they fiscal or human – to assure that all Floridians have access to quality health care are well known. The needs for successful implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act are less well known. There continues to be evidence of struggles in achieving truly collaborative partnerships among and between health professions.

**What are the solutions?** The information reported from the analysis of the survey results is critical for strategic health workforce planning, policy development, and funding decisions. The Center is able to predict accurate forecasts of Florida’s RN and LPN supply and demand. With this information, health policy and industry experts can plan appropriately to assure the adequacy of the nurse workforce. The value of information is increased when there is evidence of repeated measures demonstrating consistent outcomes and the ability to identify trends. Strategic decisions assist in the appropriate use of scarce resources. Using a collaborative approach in problem solving adds to the strength of the results.

- Strategic planning to meet future needs
  - Support the Center’s research effort and analysis of workforce trends to assure adequacy of supply of all types of nurses while maximizing use of limited fiscal resources.
  - Use the Center’s trend analyses and projections of nurse supply and demand in Florida to inform decision making in health policy and resource allocations.
- Leadership
  - Promote inclusion of nurse leaders in health policy discussion and planning.
  - Appoint nurses to serve in leadership positions that set policy for health care in Florida.
  - Implement programs of leadership development for nurses.
- Strategic collaboration/ cooperation
  - Require interagency collaboration to improve efficiency and reduce redundancy.
  - Encourage collaboration among public and private leadership in planning and decision making.

The Florida Legislature established the Florida Center for Nursing to address issues related to the nursing shortage in Florida, in part by developing a strategic statewide plan for nursing manpower in this state. To achieve this mandate, the Center needs fiscal resources and the authority to collect appropriate data. Florida’s legislature must put in place a sustainable funding mechanism for the Center to accomplish its statutory mandate and require nurse education programs within the state to provide appropriate data for analysis. The shared goal is to address nurse workforce issues for the health of all Floridians.