



## Statewide Strategic Plan to Address the Nursing Shortage in West Virginia

### Recruitment

Challenge: Ensuring that middle and high school students view nursing as a potential and clear career path option to further increase the number of new nurses entering the workforce in the state.

- Strategy: Encourage students interested in nursing to take dual credit and advanced placement classes that count towards their pre-requisite requirements for their nursing programs, and communicate the different nursing career pathways to students so they may better understand what they need to do to achieve each, ensure high school counselors understand the difference between CNA certifications and nursing degrees to better counsel students on their career options.
  - Measure: Increased utilization of the strategies listed above by high school counselors and secondary education entities to aid in furthering the nursing career pathway.

Challenge: Many West Virginians who are in the middle of their careers and looking for a change might consider looking into nursing as an option but do not know when and where to start.

- Strategy: Ensure these individuals who are interested in making a mid-career change into a nursing pathway are easily able to obtain entry information into nursing programs across West Virginia. Schools of nursing should provide programs that are flexible for these students who may be required to work while obtaining their nursing degree.
  - Measure: The West Virginia Center for Nursing will work on aggregate and disseminate program guidance targeting individuals who are interested in making a mid-career change. Schools of nursing should work on implementing programs that are flexible for these students using things like online classes and clinical experiences in the evening.

Challenge: Nursing faculty recruitment continues to be a barrier to the expansion of nursing programs in West Virginia. Low salaries in comparison to both in-state clinical practice and out-of-state schools of the nursing make recruiting qualified nurses into faculty positions difficult.

- Strategy: Schools of nursing should explore creative partnerships with healthcare facilities to increase nursing faculty salaries. They also could emphasize schedule flexibility and work with nurses employed at healthcare facilities who might also want to teach part-time.
  - Measure: Schools of nursing will deploy strategies like those listed above to help recruit more nursing faculty to their schools.

Challenge: Students not accepted into nursing programs need opportunities to find seats in other programs where they may meet the application requirements.

- Strategy: Nursing programs should work together to work on a universal application system to be deployed statewide so that students who may not be admitted to one program may find a seat in another whose program is not yet full.
  - Measure: The West Virginia Center for Nursing will conduct a workgroup to examine the feasibility of deploying such an application process, will pursue legislative action if needed, and work with schools to better understand the application process and challenges that exist.

Challenge: In the future, more nurses will be needed to deliver care at home. Nurses working in community nursing cannot be recruited directly from nursing school: they work more independently and need experience, but many have little or no experience working in the community or with an interdisciplinary team

- Strategy: Nursing curricula should focus on community nursing, care of the family, and more practical community care experience to reflect the changing needs of the health care system. Clinical rotations in the community should be expanded. Nurses must be trained as educators. Inter-professional learning opportunities must be increased.
  - Measure: Employers will report nurses can be on-boarded in a shorter time and nurses will have increased competencies for employment in post-acute care.
- Strategy: Pipeline programs in schools must focus on the diverse areas of nursing and the flexibility of a nursing career. More male nurses should visit schools to promote a nursing career. Nursing should be promoted as a second career for unemployed graduates in other fields.
  - Measure: More students will understand nursing career paths and will enter nursing schools. WV will develop a more diverse nursing workforce.

Challenge: Schools of nursing and interprofessional partners do not partner enough to help the recruitment pipeline of nurses entering the workforce.

- Strategy: Convene groups of academic stakeholders and interprofessional partners to identify a way to collaborate and work together.
  - Measure: More partnerships between academic stakeholders and interprofessional partners.

Challenge: Rural hospitals continue to struggle to recruit newly graduated nurses.

- Strategy: Nursing employers should consider partnerships with local schools of nursing to foster a pipeline of new employees. Nursing employers should also explore adding incentives to encourage new graduates to consider their facilities for employment like tuition assistance programs, loan forgiveness, bonuses, flexible work schedules, housing stipends and allowances, increased benefits, wellness programs, and concierge services.
  - Measure: Nursing employers in rural areas will increase the use of incentives and partnerships to help recruit newly graduated nurses.

## Retention

Challenge: Turnover is a problem for the nursing community. It is difficult for smaller employers to compete with larger healthcare systems and neighboring states regarding pay. Nurses are retiring earlier and options for part-time work are limited. Experienced nurses are vitally important to mentor younger nurses and for leadership roles.

- Strategy: To retain older experienced nurses, WV should incentivize larger employers to offer pro-rated benefits for part-time employees. Phased-in retirement should be promoted. Self-scheduling or flexible scheduling must be encouraged to ensure work-life balance and time for caregiving (children or elders).
  - Measure: WV will increase the number of older nurses working in community settings and younger nurses will be retained due to support from experienced peers.

Challenge: The network and support system for nurses can be decentralized in different parts of the state, leading to some nurses not knowing about scholarship opportunities, professional development, and other activities that support nurses in the state.

- Strategy: Engage in the promotion and public dissemination of scholarship opportunities, professional development, and other activities to support networking among nurses within the state and ensure a dependable and consistent support system.
  - Measure: Increased dissemination of nursing networking resources regarding scholarships, professional development, and other activities.

Challenge: Bedside nurses continue to leave their jobs for other nursing opportunities or leave nursing altogether due to dissatisfaction with their jobs.

- Strategy: Nursing employers should ensure that nurses are provided consistent and valued feedback, employ strategies to eliminate any workplace bullying, deploy strategies that ensure nurses are safe and not abused, provide education to ensure new hires are adequately oriented to the facilities, and ensure safe nursing care environments to make sure nurses are not overworked and overwhelmed.
  - Measure: Increased deployment of the strategies identified above by nursing employers leading to increased retention of nurses at their facilities.

Challenge: Nursing salaries at all levels in most healthcare facilities across the state continue to lag both nationally and in border states. Nurses seeking higher salaries can easily commute to the neighboring state, decreasing the number of nurses working in West Virginia.

- Strategy: Nursing employers should conduct market surveys of nursing salaries to ensure their salaries are competitive with the nature of the market in West Virginia.
  - Measure: Increased number of nurses in West Virginia.

Challenge: During the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses and other healthcare professionals faced shortages of vital personal protective equipment which made doing their jobs during this time more difficult.

- Strategy: Nursing employers should ensure nurses are adequately protected and have access to the necessary equipment to do their jobs both during a pandemic and under normal circumstances.
  - Measure: Nurses feel safer doing their jobs and end up remaining in nursing.

Challenge: Nurses often face bullying in the workplace from fellow nurses and other healthcare professionals which leads to poor mental health and a higher propensity to leave nursing altogether.

- Strategy: Nursing employers and nursing advocacy organizations should work together to employ strategies to address bullying in the workplace. Nursing employers should utilize strategies that create bullying-free healthcare facilities and establish protocols when bullying is observed or reported.

- Measure: Nurses will feel more safe reporting bullying to the administration and will remain in the nursing profession.

Challenge: Since nurses work directly with the public when they are in vulnerable states, often patients lash out against nurses leading to violence being waged against them. The threat of workplace violence concerns nurses and may lead some nurses to leave the profession.

- Strategy: Nursing employers should have clear and defined protocols in instances when patients are volatile. These protocols should prioritize both the protection of the nurse and the protection of the patient.
  - Measure: A reduced number of volatile instances between nurses and patients.

## Data

Challenge: Healthcare facilities do not respond to data requests about demand data due to concerns that the collection of data will allow their facilities to be identified. Without this data, in-depth analysis of what kind of nursing shortages might exist in specific kinds of workplaces is difficult and only general data on the existence of a shortage of nurses across the state is available.

- Strategy: The WV legislature might enforce responses to the collection of this data and responses to surveys requesting turn-over and vacancy information to allow specific shortage information to be identified and used for workforce planning purposes.
  - Measure: Passage of legislation mandating healthcare facilities report specific demand data with enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure reporting.
- Strategy: The West Virginia Center for Nursing and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission might consider deploying a more qualitative collection of demand data among healthcare facilities that are willing to participate in a twice-per-year survey. Qualitative data requested would allow facilities to provide demand data without reporting their specific numbers to alleviate concerns.
  - Measure: Creation of a networking group of healthcare facilities for the express purpose of collecting and aggregating nursing workforce data qualitatively.

Challenge: Nursing education programs do not consistently report data in a way that can be publicly accessed to allow for the analysis of the state of nursing education programs across the state. While the West Virginia Center for Nursing does conduct an annual faculty survey, it does not collect information on class sizes, demographic breakdowns of students, retention rates, etc. This level of information is also not available from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission because they primarily collect data on a more macro level about West Virginia's nursing programs.

- Strategy: The West Virginia Legislature might enforce responses to the collection of this data and responses to surveys requesting nursing education data to allow more information about the state of nursing education to be available.
  - Measure: Passage mandating nursing schools report specific education data with enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure reporting.