

Fact Sheet:

Enhancing Diversity in the Nursing Workforce

Nursing's leaders recognize a strong connection between a diverse nursing workforce and the ability to provide quality patient care. Though nursing has made great strides in recruiting and graduating nurses that mirror the patient population, more must be done before adequate representation becomes a reality. The need to attract students from underrepresented groups in nursing – specifically men and individuals from African American, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, and Alaskan native backgrounds - is a high priority for the nursing profession.

Diversity in the Nursing Workforce & Student Populations

- According to a [Brookings Institution analysis](#) of 2020 U.S. Census Bureau data, more than 40% of the U.S. population now identify as people of color. With [projections](#) pointing to minority populations becoming the majority by 2045, professional nurses must demonstrate a sensitivity to and understanding of a variety of cultures to provide high quality care across settings.
- In March 2024, the Health Resources and Services Administration released findings from the latest [National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses](#), which found increasing diversity within the profession. In terms of race/ethnicity, the nursing workforce is now comprised of 67% White; 11% Black; 9% Asian; 9% Hispanic; 4% Pacific Islander or multiple races; and less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native nurses. Men now account for 12% of all RNs.
- According to the [2022 National Nursing Workforce Survey](#) conducted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, RNs from minority backgrounds are more likely than their white counterparts to pursue baccalaureate and higher degrees. Data show that while 69.5% of White nurses complete nursing degrees beyond the associate degree, the number is significantly higher for minority nurses, including Hispanic (73.9%), Black (75.6%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (84.0%), and Asian (87.6%)

nurses. RNs from underrepresented groups clearly recognize the need to pursue higher levels of nursing education beyond the entry-level.

- According to AACN's report on [2023-2024 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing](#), nursing students from minority backgrounds represented 46.7% of students in entry-level baccalaureate programs, 42.8% of master's students, 38.1% of students in research-focused doctoral programs, and 42.1% of Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students. In terms of gender breakdown, men comprised 13.0% of students in baccalaureate programs, 12.0% of master's students, 12.4% of research-focused doctoral students, and 15.4% of DNP students. Though nursing schools have made strides in recruiting and graduating nurses that reflect the patient population, more must be done before equal representation is realized.
- The need to attract diverse nursing students is paralleled by the need to recruit more faculty from minority populations. Few nurses from racial/ethnic minority groups with advanced nursing degrees pursue faculty careers. According to 2023 data from AACN's annual survey, only 22.0% of full-time nursing school faculty come from minority backgrounds, and only 9.1% are male.

Recognizing the Need to Enhance Diversity

- All national nursing organizations, the federal Bureau of Health Workforce hospital associations, nursing philanthropies, and other authorities within the healthcare community agree that recruitment of underrepresented groups into nursing is a priority for the nursing profession in the U.S.
- AACN serves on the [National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing](#), a coalition of nursing organizations focused on understanding the impact of systemic racism on nurses of color. Led by the American Nurses Association, National Black Nurses Association, National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations, and National Association of Hispanic Nurses, the commission is developing an action-oriented approach to addressing racism in education, practice, policy, and research. To amplify its work, the commission released a series of [action reports](#) in June 2022 to generate greater awareness about the impact of racism in nursing and society, including a report titled *How Does Racism in Nursing Show Up in the Education Space?*
- Besides adding new clinicians to the RN workforce, a diverse nursing workforce will be better equipped to serve a diverse patient population. According to a [2013 report by the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice](#) (NACNEP), a diverse nursing workforce is

essential for progress towards achieving health equity in the United States. NACNEP also found that nurses who are members of underrepresented minority (URM) groups or disadvantaged populations are more likely to advocate for services and programs in their communities. When nurses are members of the populations they serve, they are better able to improve communication and trust among URM groups. They may also be more likely to work in resource-poor communities facing a shortage of healthcare professionals, which can improve access to healthcare.

- Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to return to and serve their underrepresented communities, bridge the cultural and linguistic gaps in patient education, and provide a broad and diverse cultural perspective to all conversations within nursing ([Adams & Price-Lea, 2004](#)). The positive impact of increasing nursing workforce diversity reverberates across education, research, and clinical areas.
- According to the [National Center for Health Statistics](#), a lack of diversity in the healthcare workforce is one factor that has contributed to poorer health and higher mortality rates among URM groups. Some patients feel more comfortable when their healthcare providers share their ethnicity, race, and language. Improving nursing diversity strengthens the trust between patients and nurses, which can lead to patients more strongly adhering to nurses' recommendations.
- We also need to think of the importance of diversity in leadership, A [2020 Nursing Forum](#) article on the barriers to career advancement highlighted the benefits of URM nurses' ascending to executive roles in senior leadership. Specifically, representation at the executive level can give URM nurses the ability to influence the overall structure of the healthcare environment to reduce health disparities and improve patient outcomes.
- A growing body of research links diversity to enhanced healthcare delivery and financial outcomes. [Research](#) published in the August 2019 *Journal of the National Medical Association* found that a more diverse healthcare workforce was linked to improved patient care quality and cost savings.
- A groundbreaking report, titled [Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions](#), which was released by the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce in September 2004 stated: "The fact that the nation's health professions have not kept pace with changing demographics may be an even greater cause of disparities in health access and outcomes than the persistent lack of health insurance for tens of millions of Americans. Today's physicians, nurses, and dentists have too little resemblance to the diverse populations they serve, leaving many Americans feeling excluded by a system that seems distant and uncaring."

Strategies to Enhance Diversity in Nursing Education

A lack of minority nurse educators may send a signal to potential students that nursing does not value diversity or offer career ladder opportunities to advance through the profession. Students looking for academic role models to encourage and enrich their learning may be frustrated in their attempts to find mentors and a community of support. Academic leaders are working to address this need by identifying minority faculty recruitment strategies, encouraging minority leadership development, and advocating for programs that remove barriers to faculty careers.

AACN has taken the following steps to enhance diversity in the student pipeline and workforce:

- With funding from Johnson & Johnson, AACN launched the [Building a Culture of Belonging in Academic Nursing](#) in January 2022 to assist nursing schools in creating more inclusive learning environments. This work entailed scaling up the use of AACN's [Leading Across Multidimensional Perspectives \(LAMPSM\) Culture and Climate Survey](#), which is now available to all nursing schools looking to assess the experiences of diverse students, faculty, and staff. Informed by the latest pilot administration of the LAMP survey, AACN published a monograph in February 2024 titled [Building a Culture of Belonging in Academic Nursing](#), which features practical strategies that schools can use to foster more inclusive learning environments.
- In keeping with AACN's strategic goal to serve as a "resolute leader for diversity, equity, and inclusion in nursing," the association provides a variety of programs and services to help member schools thrive in their efforts to advance DEI. This programming includes an annual [Diversity Symposium](#) which brings thought leaders together with academic nursing leaders to share insights and advancement strategies; an information-rich [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Faculty Tool Kit](#); and a quarterly [Diversity Digest](#) highlighting school-sponsored DEI initiatives, AACN resources, and new funding opportunities.
- In July 2021, AACN launched [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Network \(DEILN\)](#) to supports the efforts of nursing schools to identify effective strategies for advancing inclusive excellence in academic nursing. Members explore an array of priority issues, including enhancing diversity in student and faculty populations, addressing the social determinants of health, ending structural racism, and advancing health equity. DEILN offers opportunities for members nationwide to share evidence- based practices, pose questions, disseminate information about available resources, and learn from each other.

- In February 2021, AACN released a video titled [10 Ways Academic Nursing is Addressing Systemic Racism](#) as part of its [Gallery of Leadership](#) series. Featuring deans and directors from member schools of nursing, this video compilation highlights specific ways academic nursing leaders are moving to redesign systems and foster more inclusive learning environments. The Gallery features individual videos from 50 schools focuses on addressing this critical issue.
- In January 2021, AACN hosted the inaugural [Diversity Leadership Institute](#), which is designed to prepare academic nursing leaders with the skills needed to advance initiatives that foster DEI. Under the direction of subject matter experts, participants enhance their leadership capacity and apply current diversity research to develop DEI initiatives tailored to their own institution's needs. Click [here](#) to explore the work of AACN's Diversity Leadership Institute Fellows.
- In December 2020, AACN issued a new white paper titled [Promising Practices in Holistic Admissions Review: Implementation in Academic Nursing](#), which outlines how recruitment and admissions practices can be adapted to ensure that prospective students are considered on a broad range of factors reflecting an applicant's academic readiness, contribution to the incoming class, past work and life experiences, and potential for success.
- Since 2016, AACN has provided technical assistance program to nursing schools receiving funding through the Nursing Workforce Diversity (NWD) program offered by the Health Resources and Services Administration. This federal funding is awarded to schools looking to provide staff training related to [Holistic Admissions Review](#). AACN's assistance includes an assessment of admissions practices, an on-site Holistic Admissions Review workshop, student recruitment and retention strategies, and models for building a successful mentoring program.
- Since February 2018, AACN has partnered with the National Institute of Health to administer a mini-grants program to support the [All of Us Research Program](#). This NIH initiative is working to extend precision medicine to all diseases by building a national research cohort of one million or more participants reflecting the diversity of the U.S. population. With a focus on schools serving communities that have been historically underrepresented in biomedical research (UBR), funding awarded through this program will be used to increase awareness of the program and the importance of participation of UBR members. To date, more than \$400,000 in grant funding has been disbursed to 48 AACN member schools through this initiative.

- In March 2017, AACN's members voted to adopt the [Position Statement on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Academic Nursing](#). In this statement, AACN recognizes diversity, inclusion, and equity as critical to nursing education and fundamental to developing a nursing workforce able to provide high quality, culturally appropriate, and congruent health care in partnership with individuals, families, communities, and populations. The position further states that AACN is committed to preparing a community of scholars, clinicians, educators, and leaders who fully value the importance of diversity, inclusion, and equity to promote the health of the nation and the world.
- AACN collaborates with a variety of national nursing organizations to advocate for more federal funding for Nursing Workforce Development Programs, including funding for [Nursing Workforce Diversity Grants](#). This program provides funding for projects to increase nursing education opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities underrepresented among nurses.
- In 2013, AACN and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) initiated the [Doctoral Advancement in Nursing](#) (DAN) Project to enhance the number of minority nurses completing PhD and DNP degrees. DAN's expert committee developed a white paper featuring successful student recruitment and retention strategies that can be used by schools of nursing; comprehensive approaches to leadership and scholarship development for students; suggestions for model doctoral curriculum; and more. Though the DAN Project is no longer active, the resources created through this program, including a self-assessment for doctoral study and faculty and student tool kits are still accessible [online](#).
- In 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation joined with AACN to launch the RWJF New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) Scholarship Program to help alleviate the nation's nursing shortage by expanding the pipeline of students from minority backgrounds in accelerated nursing programs. Scholarships in the amount of \$10,000 each were awarded to more than 3,000 nurses in entry-level baccalaureate and master's programs through NCIN. Preference was given to students from groups underrepresented in nursing or from disadvantaged backgrounds. The NCIN program was sunset in 2017.
- AACN and the Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future launched the Minority Nurse Faculty Scholars Program in 2007, which was modeled after a successful AACN collaboration with the California Endowment. In addition to \$18,000 in scholarship funding, the program featured mentorship and leadership development components to assure successful completion of graduate

studies and preparation for a faculty role. By the time the program closed in 2019, [63 scholars](#) received funding through this program with many graduates now holding in teaching and leadership roles at schools nationwide.

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