

Celebrating
20 Years
of
Distinction



ANNUAL REPORT

*A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE
CERTIFIED CNL*

FISCAL YEAR 2026

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

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A Historical Review of the Certified CNL

Fiscal Year 2026 marked a significant milestone for the Commission on Nurse Certification as we proudly celebrated 20 years of administering the Certified Clinical Nurse Leader Certification Examination. In recognition of this important milestone, CNC leadership and staff documented the legacy of CNL certification. In doing so, we joined Certified CNLs around the nation to celebrate the Commission's contributions to the evolving field of nursing.

Since 2006, CNC has remained the sole certifying body for the CNL credential. To date, more than 10,450 nurses have earned CNL certification, reflecting the lasting impact and significance of the credential. Moreover, the strong rate of certification renewals demonstrates the professional value Certified CNLs place on the credential.

This report provides an overview of CNC's commemorative campaign, *Celebrating 20 Years of Distinction*, which was marked by a special observance of *Certified CNL Day*, and the release of an anniversary video documenting CNC's history. Read more about CNC's 20th anniversary celebration on [page 13](#).

As in past years, CNC continued to facilitate information-sharing among CNLs. In doing so, the Commission hosted an online session that examined best practices for integrating CNLs into practice settings. The webinar, *Improving Patient Care through an Effective CNL Program*, attracted more than 100 registrants. The discussion brought together healthcare executives, hospital administrators, and nursing directors who shared insights on optimizing the use of CNLs on medical teams and nursing units. For an overview of the discussion and a list of panel speakers, see [page 12](#).

CNC's 20-year anniversary underscores the impact CNL certification has had on nurse leaders who serve on the frontlines of healthcare delivery systems. With sincere gratitude, we extend our thanks to all who have contributed to building CNC's impactful legacy.



Zach Perpetua, DNP, RN, CMSRN, CNL
Zach Perpetua
DNP, RN, CMSRN, CNL
Chair, CNC Board of Commissioners



Lynn M. Gardner
Lynn Gardner
Director, Commission on
Nurse Certification

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON NURSE CERTIFICATION

Established in 2007, the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC), an autonomous certifying body of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), administers Clinical Nurse LeaderSM (CNL) certification. It is the only certifying body for the Clinical Nurse Leader. CNC's mission is to oversee CNL certification activities to assure communities of interest that certificants have met accepted standards of practice.

The CNC Board of Commissioners (CNCBOC) governs the CNL certification process. The CNCBOC and staff are solely responsible for the policies and administration of the CNL Certification Program. Since 2006, some 10,450 nurses have earned the CNL credential. The CNL certification program is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).



Mission

To govern the CNL certification activities and promote CNL practice.



Vision

To establish a collaborative environment with CNL stakeholders to improve healthcare delivery, promote certification and professional development and keep abreast of healthcare issues.



Core Values

- Leadership
- Certification Standards
- Professional Development
- Collaboration

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

CNC's Promise to CNL's

GOAL 1 *Maintain a Fair, Reliable and Defensible Certification Exam*

Objectives

- Maintain CNC's position as leader of the Clinical Nurse Leader Certification Program
- Optimize the certification exam's reliability and student/faculty participation
- Provide relevant certification exam content that reflects professional standards
- Enhance the initial certification exam and renewal application process
- Increase certification program renewal rates and promote professional development

GOAL 2 *Promote the Value of Certification*

Objectives

- Promote the value of CNL certification and professional development
- Maintain a strong collaborative relationship with CNL stakeholders
- Enhance awareness of the CNL to the public, patients, and other healthcare disciplines
- Provide ready-made marketing tools on CNL certification to attract prospects
- Provide resources for CNLs to publish best-practice outcomes in national journals

GOAL 3 *Provide Mentoring Opportunities*

Objectives

- Provide orientation packet on mentoring CNLs
- Develop an education pamphlet on what a novice CNL can expect
- Increase mentor/mentee networking opportunities at conferences
- Collaborate with CNLA on mentoring programs

GOAL 4 *Manage Fiscal Operations*

Objectives

- Maintain an effective governance structure and staff to oversee CNC operations
- Develop fiscal year budget to meet year-end projections
- Maintain at minimum three months of operational costs in long-term reserves
- Monitor and address confidentiality issues in the certification process

CNL ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE



PROUD MEMBER

In FY26, CNC achieved reaccreditation with the National Commission for Certifying Agencies through 2029.

NCCA is the authority on accreditation standards for professional certification programs. The agency helps ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the public through the accreditation of programs that assess professional competency. Based on sound principles, NCCA standards are optimal and comprehensive criteria for organizational process and performance. They are broadly recognized, objective, and set current benchmarks for certifying bodies to achieve and operate.

Maintenance of CNC accreditation involves the submission of documentation and policies demonstrating compliance with NCCA standards. Achieving and maintaining NCCA accreditation demonstrates CNC's commitment to adding value to the CNL Certification Examination and verifies that Certified CNLs and the CNL program adhere to the highest certification standards.



CNL CERTIFICATION

The pool of Certified CNLs continues to grow each year. Since 2006, 10,450 nurses across the United States and its territories have earned the CNL credential. At the state level, California boasts the largest number of certificants with 2186 Certified CNLs. In FY26, 283 candidates successfully passed the CNL certification examination. Among those examinees, the pass rate among first timers was 71 percent.

FY26 CNL Certification Examinations

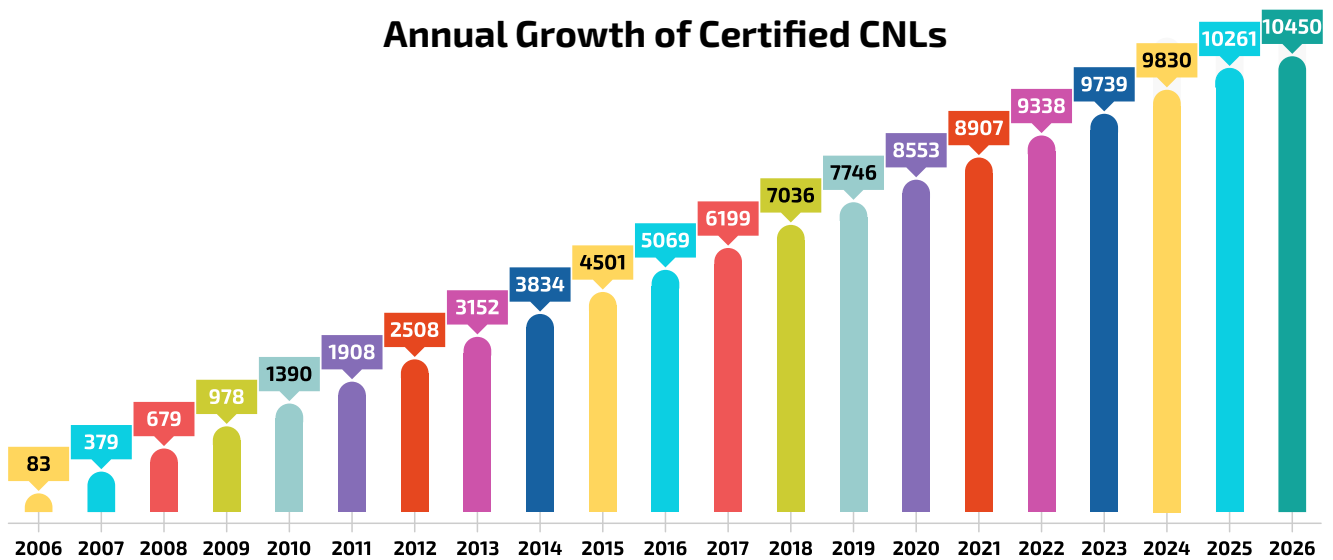
In FY26, 401 exam candidates sat for the CNL examination. The following is a breakdown of examinees for each exam period.

Examination Period	Examination Date	Number of Candidates
Summer 2025	Jul. 14 – Aug. 10	151
Fall 2025	Nov. 17 – Nov. 28	89
Winter 2026	Jan. 20 – Feb. 6	37
Spring 2026	Apr. 13 – May 12	124

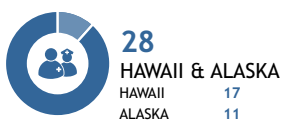
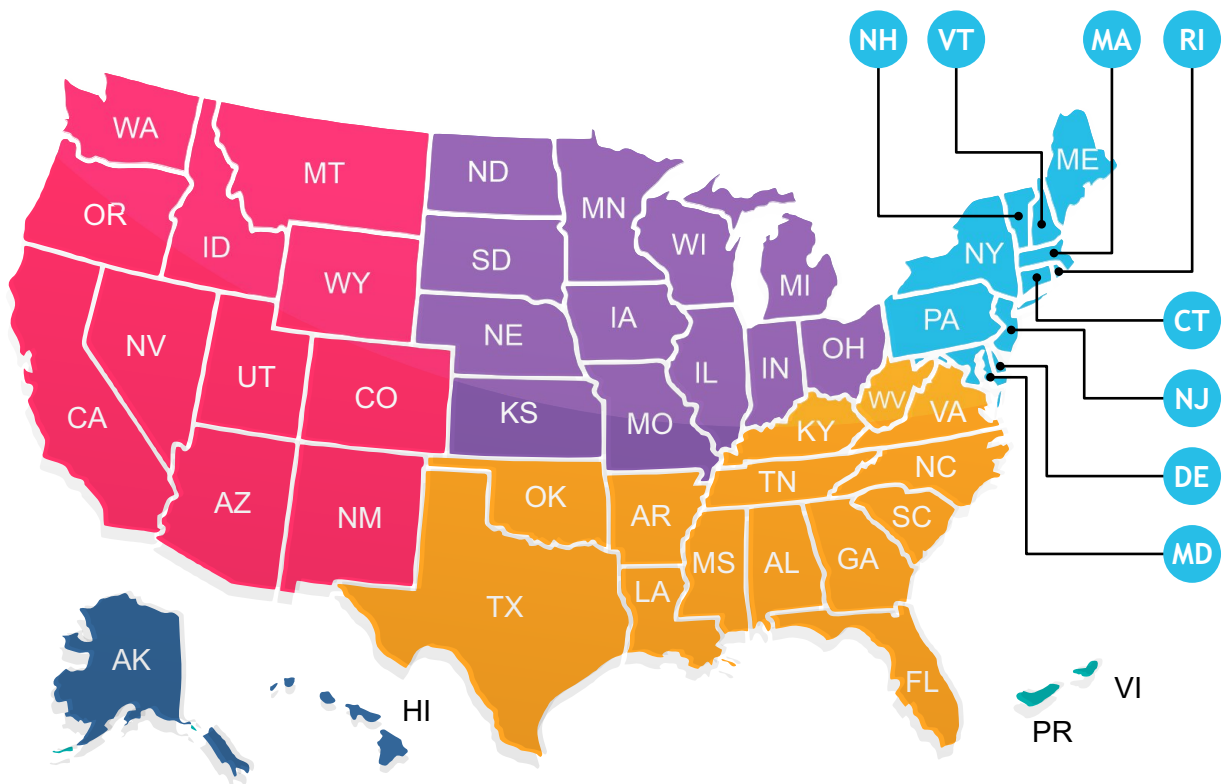
A photograph of three healthcare professionals in a hospital setting. On the left, a male doctor in a white lab coat with a red stethoscope around his neck holds a black clipboard. In the center and on the right are two female nurses in light blue scrubs. They are all smiling at the camera. The background shows a staircase with a glass railing. The entire image has a green color overlay.

CERTIFIED CNL STATISTICS

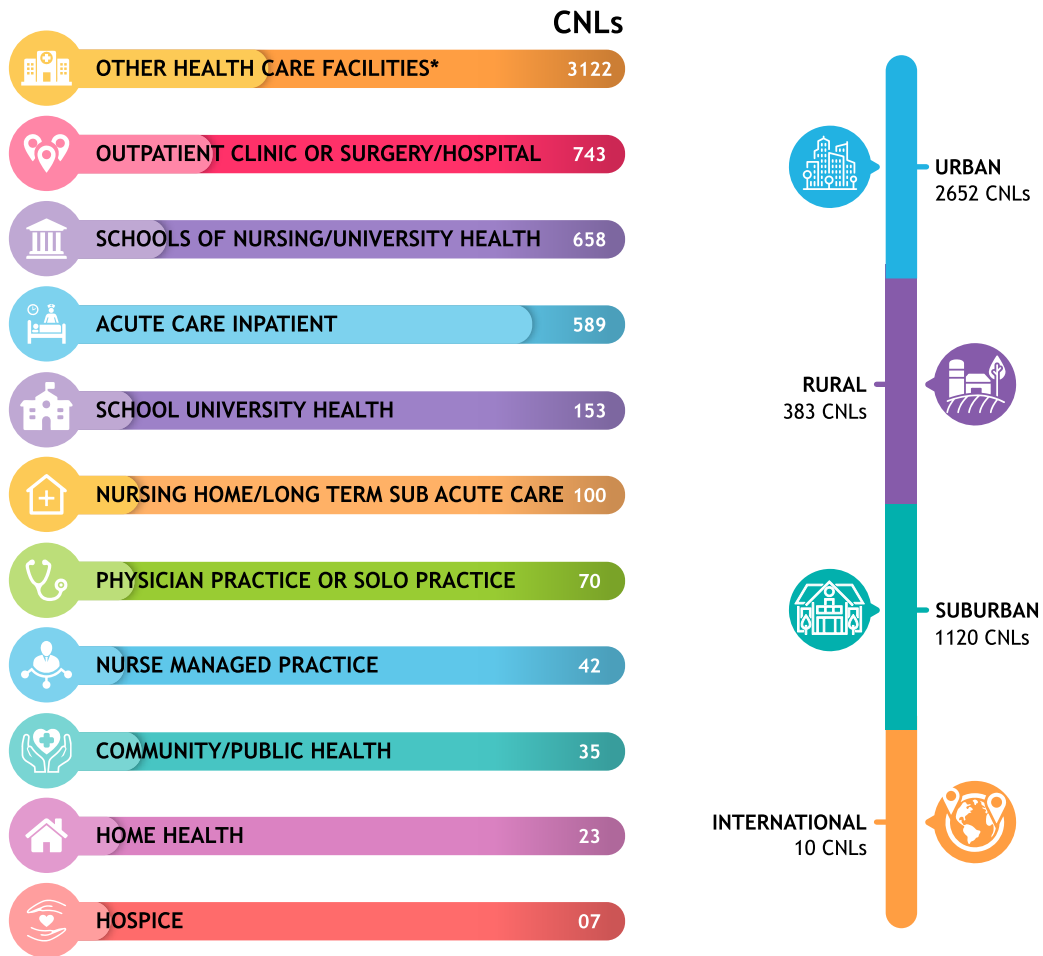
Annual Growth of Certified CNLs



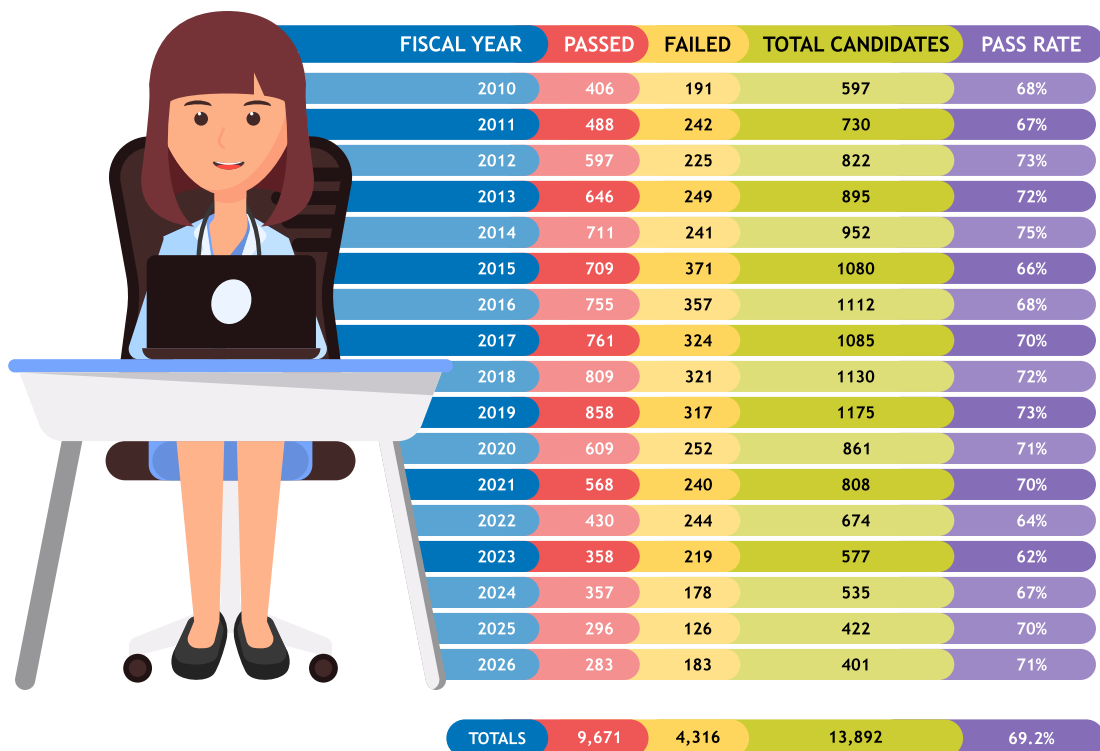
CNLs by Region



CNLs by Employment Settings



CNL Certification Exam Data





Digital Badging

CNC's digital badge program continues to attract widespread participation. Since the program's inception in Dec. 2007, 9,711 digital badges have been issued via the Credly's Acclaim platform. In FY26, 245 digital badges were issued.

Digital badges are valuable professional tools as they enable CNLs to list verified qualifications on email signatures, digital resumes, and social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. [Click here](#) to learn more about the CNL Badge program.

CNL Practice Exam

CNC's Clinical Nurse LeaderSM Practice Exam continues to gain interest among CNLs. In FY26, 120 one-month and 63 three-month subscriptions were purchased. Developed in collaboration with Clinical Nurse Leaders and Gray Matter Publishing, Inc./TestRun, this exam is an insightful tool for CNLs preparing for CNC's certification exam.



CNLs are able to take multiple practice tests, a full practice exam or multiple short 10 question quizzes, and view progress reports that help CNLs identify areas of strengths and weaknesses.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the CNL Practice Exam.

CNC WEBINAR

Improving Patient Care through An Effective CNL Program

As healthcare delivery systems continue to evolve, there is a growing need for CNLs who serve at the point of care. These nurse leaders are instrumental in directing care, bridge multi-disciplinary teams, and ensuring the safe delivery of patient care.

For employers, healthcare executives and administrators looking to establish a CNL program, there are important issues to be considered. In this online discussion, CNLs from public and private facilities examined key factors in developing CNL programs, how to effectively engage CNLs, and recruitment strategies for attracting qualified CNLs.



Specifically, panelists discussed:

- CNL skill sets and competencies instrumental in delivering improved patient care;
- Components of successful CNL programs;
- Integrating CNLs into practice settings and multi-disciplinary teams;
- Making the business case for developing a CNL program;
- Potential challenges in launching a new CNL program; and
- Strategies for recruiting and retaining Certified CNLs.

Webinar panelists included:



Moderator, Sonya Curtis

DHA, DNP, MBA, RN, CNL, CPHQ, VHA-CM
Nurse Manager & Quality Management
Department of Veterans Affairs
Crowley, TX



Veronica Rankin

DNP, RN-BC, AGNP-C, CNL, NE-BC
Director of Nursing & Nurse Leader Program
Administrator
Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center
Charlotte, NC



Maria Thomas

DNP, RN
Chief Nurse, Research, EBP, PI, Nursing
Informatics, Data, CNLs, CR & Patient Safety
VA North Texas Healthcare System
Dallas, TX



Kimberly Hill

DNP, RN, CNL, CCRN
Manager Continuous Process Improvement
Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center
Wilmot, NH

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

20th Anniversary of CNL Certification

For two decades, CNC has elevated the role of the CNL, built awareness of the CNL's impact on healthcare delivery systems, and highlighted CNL influence across the healthcare continuum. In FY26, CNC celebrated 20 years of administering the CNL Certification Examination. Launched by AACN as an initiative to develop and institutionalize the CNL skill set, CNC has built an impactful history achieving major milestones along the way.



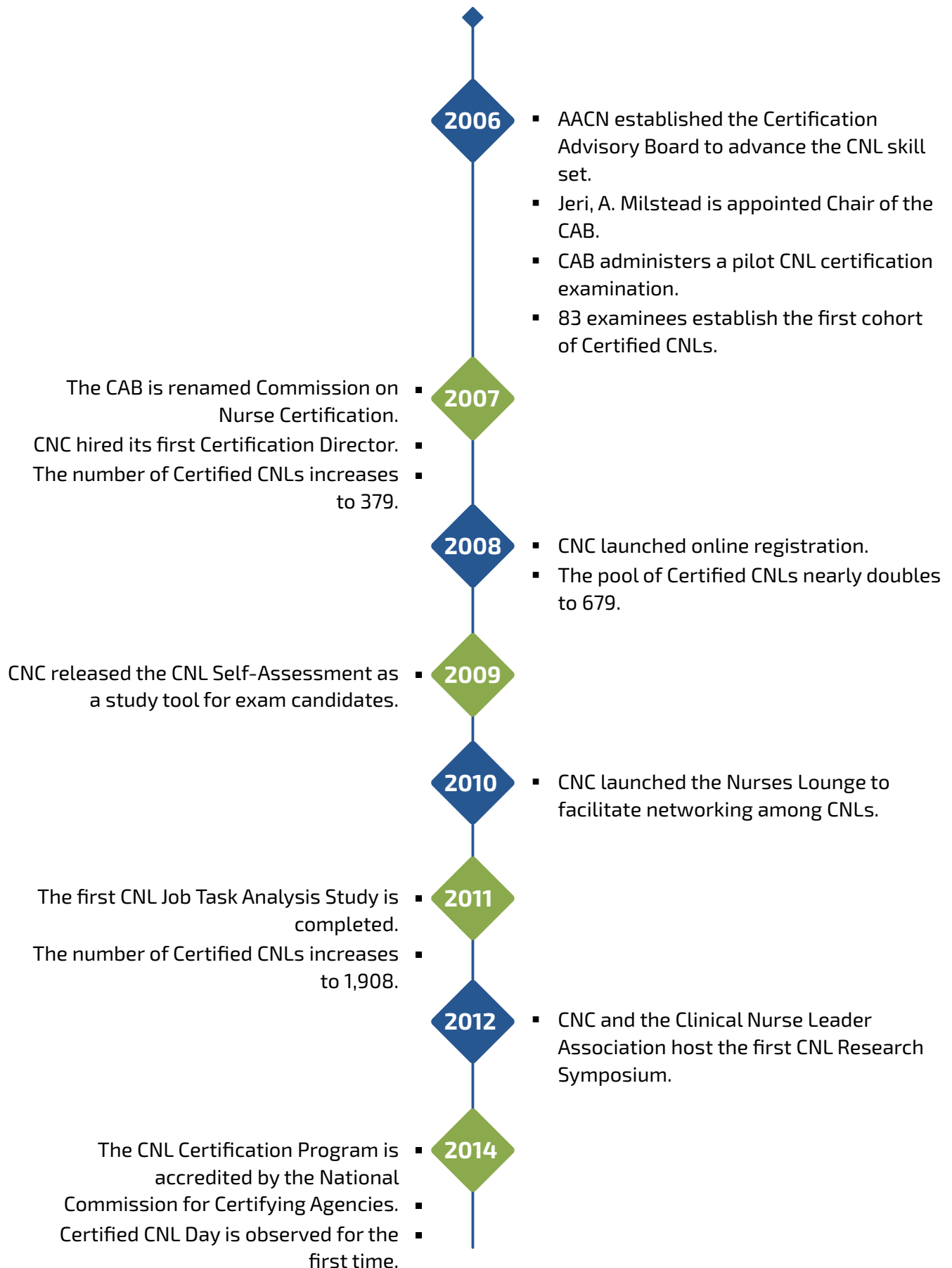
CNC Anniversary Video. To commemorate CNC's 20th anniversary, the Commission released a promotional video that chronicled major milestones in the organization's history. [Click here](#) to view the CNC 20th Anniversary video.

2026 Certified CNL Day. On Mar. 19, *Certified CNL Day*, CNC leadership, staff and Certified CNLs celebrated CNC's legacy of advancing the CNL skill set. In doing so, CNLs used their social media platforms to promote their certified status, tell peers how CNL certification has impacted their career, and congratulate CNC on reaching its 20-year anniversary.

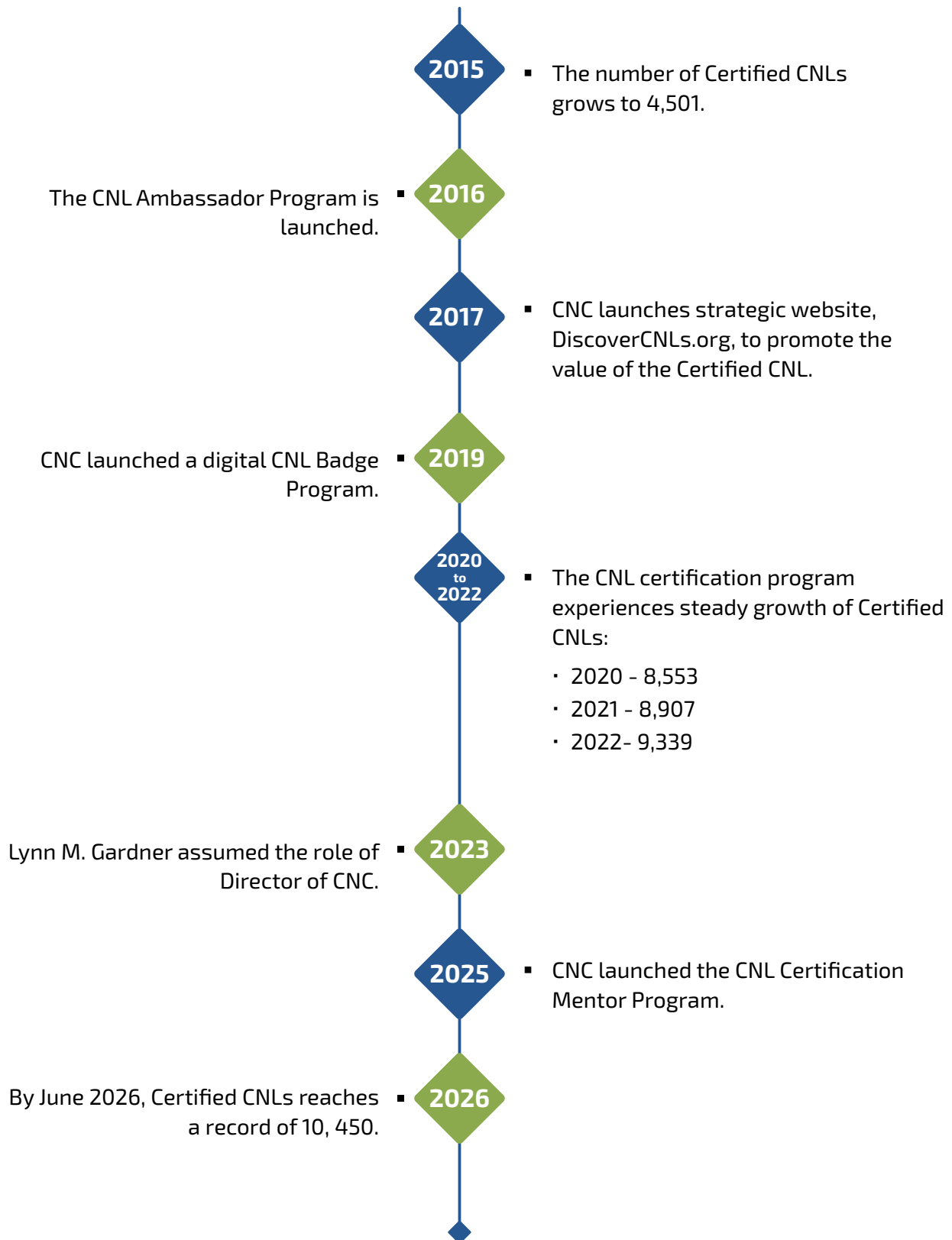
CNC staff was excited to see the large number of certified CNLs who posted the CNL Day social card, *I'm Proud to Be a Certified CNL*, on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.



MILESTONES IN CNC'S 20-YEAR HISTORY



MILESTONES IN CNC'S 20-YEAR HISTORY



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

In FY26, CNC's total revenue earned was \$534,800, which is comprised of exam registration fees, renewal fees, and miscellaneous income. Expenses totaled \$515,700, which included program expenses, organizational management, and general expenses. These activities resulted in a fiscal year net asset of \$19,100.





APPENDIX

- Board of Commissioners
- Committee Rosters
- CNL Certification Ambassadors
- CNL Certification Mentors

CNC BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

CNC is governed by the CNC Board of Commissioners, which is comprised of nine members from across the country. Four of the commissioners represent academia and another four represent practice. One public member, a non CNL, also serves on the CNCBOC. The following individuals served on the CNCBOC from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026.



Zach Perpetua

DNP, RN, CMSRN, CNL (Chair)

- Advanced Clinical Education Specialist
- UPMC Passavant
- Pittsburgh, PA



Tymeeka Davis

DNP, RN-BC, CNL

- Clinical Nurse Leader: 7A & 7B, Acute Care
- Durham VA Healthcare System
- Durham, NC



Megan Williams

MSN, RN, CNL (Vice Chair)

- Project Manager, ONE Health Complex CARE
- Regional One Health
- Memphis, TN



Dr. Leigh Williams

MSN, EdD, CNL

- Program Director, Allied Health Short Term Training Programs
- Ozarks Technical Community College
- Springfield, MO



Richard O. Foote

MSN, RN, CNL, CEN, FACHE (Finance Chair)

- Director, Reserve Medical Directorate
- United States Air Force, Pentagon
- Washington, DC



James L. Harris

PhD, MBA, RN, PMHCNS-BC, CNL, FNAP, FAAN

- Professor
- College of Nursing
- University of South Alabama
- Mobile, AL



Cathy Coleman

DNP, MSN, RN, CNL, CPHQ (Secretary)

- Associate Professor
- University of San Francisco SON and Health Professions
- San Francisco, CA



Kathy Oliphant

DNP, RN, CNL, NEA-BC

- Assistant Professor
- Director, Systems Leadership Program
- College of Nursing
- University of Cincinnati
- Cincinnati, OH



Schvonna M. L. Brown

MSM, MHCL, LSSBB (Public Member)

- Chief of Health Administration Service (HAS)
- VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System
- Harlingen, TX

CNC Staff



Lynn M. Gardner

Director, Commission on Nurse Certification



Ruby Karar

CNC's Certification Assistant

CNC COMMITTEES

The following CNCBOC members were appointed to committees effective July 1, 2025, with terms ending June 30, 2026.

Appeals Committee

- **Col. Richard O. Foote**, MSN, RN, CNL, CEN, FACHE
- **Dr. James Harris**, PhD, MBA, RN, PMHCNS-BC, CNL, FNAP, FAAN
- **Megan Williams**, MSN, RN, CNL

Bylaws Committee

- **Dr. Kathy Oliphant**, DNP, RN, CNL, NEA-BC
- **Dr. Leigh Williams**, MSN, EdD, CNL
- **Schvonna M. L. Brown**, MSM, MHCL, LSSBB

Finance Committee

- **Col. Richard Foote (Chair)**, MSN, RN, CNL, CEN, FACHE
- **Zach Perpetua**, DNP, RN, CMSRN, CNL
- **Dr. James Harris**, PhD, MBA, RN, PMHCNS-BC, CNL, FNAP, FAAN

Item Writing Committee

- **Elizabeth Davis**, DNP, CNL
- **Reni Mattathil**, DNP, MSN, RN-BC, CNL
- **Sharlene Parmley**, MSN, RN, CNL
- **Mamta Thapar**, RN, MSN, CNL
- **Jehan R. Ellis**, DNP, RN, CNL, C-REC
- **Kathryn May Gallanosa**, DNP, RN, FNP-BC, CNL
- **Nadine A. Kassity-Kritch**, MBA, BSN, RN, PHN, CNL
- **Laury Westbury**, EdD, RN, CNL, NI-BC, CHSE, CNOR, RNFA (she, her, hers)

Marketing Committee

- **Dr. Tymeeka Davis**, DNP, RN-BC, CNL
- **Dr. Cathy Coleman**, DNP, MSN, RN, CNL, CPHQ

CNL CERTIFICATION AMBASSADORS

- **Sonya Curtis**, DNP, MBA, MSN, RN, CNL, VHA-CM
- **Cheryl Green**, PhD, DNP, RN, CNL, LCSW, CNE, ACUE, MAC, FAPA
- **Mariah Hockin**, DNP, RN, CNL, CMSRN, Gero-BC
- **Zach Perpetua**, MSN, RN, CMSRN, CNL
- **Leigh Williams**, RN, MSN, CNL, ACCNS

CNL CERTIFICATION MENTORS

- **Sonya Curtis**, DHA, DNP, MBA, RN, CNL, CPHQ, VHA-CM
- **Madalyn Frank-Cooper**, RN, MS, CNL
- **Kimberly Hill**, CNL, CCRN
- **Brooke Kwiatkowski**, DNP, DHA, MBA, RN
- **Julia Scavotto**, MSN, RN, CNL
- **Nicole Schlask**, MSN, RN, CNL, CNOR



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