# Academic–Practice Partnership Overview
# From Bedside to Bench and Beyond: An Integrated Partnership Empowering Nursing Excellence at Every Level

### Virginia Commonwealth University School of Nursing and VCU Health System Partnership

## The Partners

**VCU Health System (VCUHS)** is an 837-bed urban academic medical center and Virginia's largest safety-net hospital (VCU Medical Center, Community Memorial Hospital, Tappahannock Hospital), serving high volumes of underinsured and uninsured patients. **VCU School of Nursing (VCU SON) BSN** program consistently ranks in the top 6% nationwide, ranking No. 40 in 2026 (U.S. News & World Report), and is a research-intensive school offering BSN, DNP, and PhD programs.

## Alignment with All 8 AACN/AONL Guiding Principles & the 2021 AACN Essentials

Curricula and clinical placements are aligned to the 2021 AACN Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education, and this partnership explicitly embodies all eight AACN/AONL Guiding Principles: **(1)** senior-level formalized governance with shared vision; **(2)** mutual respect via joint accountability and transparency; **(3)** shared knowledge through joint research, grand rounds, and interprofessional education; **(4)** maximizing nurses' scope of practice via shared governance; **(5)** evidence-based transition programs through the 10-year CCNE-accredited NRP; **(6)** academic achievement structures with faculty practice embedded in APT criteria (5 faculty promoted); **(7)** collaborative QI models redesigning practice environments via DNP projects; **(8)** joint workforce data infrastructure through quarterly RN Talent Acquisition meetings and the APPRAISE workforce study.

## Sustained, Innovative Governance (Est. 2021)

Governance spans 20+ quarterly strategic meetings (SON Dean, CNOs, ACNOs, AVP of APPs), 50+ monthly faculty practice meetings, and monthly ACNO–Dean meetings. Seventy stakeholders participated in 14 focus groups to co-design the advanced practice leadership structure. Fifteen SON faculty are embedded across VCUHS; faculty practice is integrated into APT criteria; and 237 NP/PA/MD preceptors have been engaged, generating 77,890 NP clinical hours since inception.

| > 90% | 513+ | 77,890 | 6→55 | $5.6M+ | 30+ | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NRP Retention Rates | BSN Students | NP Clinical Hours | DNP Projects | QI Savings | Presentations | Publications |

## Measurable Impact Across the Nursing Continuum (2021–2026)

VCU SON and VCUHS have intentionally designed an organizational ecosystem in which education, practice, scholarship, and service are fully integrated, creating reciprocal value for the faculty, the school, the health system, and the communities they jointly serve. Rather than treating any single element in isolation, the partnership ensures that clinical practice generates scholarly inquiry, scholarship informs workforce development, and both drive improved patient outcomes.

**Education & Workforce Pipeline:** BSN cohort doubled with 513+ students jointly trained (88 in 2021, 140 in 2022, 125 in 2023, 160+ in 2024). 727 NP/DNP students precepted through the faculty practice, generating 17,899 clinical hours. 92 nurses completed jointly created transition-to-practice plans. 71 NP workforce members trained. Guaranteed BSN and DNP admission pathways created for VCUHS employees with waived fees and tuition support. Enterprise-wide Nurse Residency Program earned 10-year CCNE accreditation with SON representation on the advisory board and curriculum.

**Nurse Residency Program:** Enterprise-wide NRP earned 10-year CCNE accreditation with SON representation on the advisory board and curriculum. The Nurse Residency Program (NRP) demonstrates strong performance in supporting early-career nurse transition, retention, and advancement. In CY2025, total enrollment was 318 participants, including 32.4% from the VCU School of Nursing. Outcomes indicate high effectiveness, with 1-year program completion retention exceeding 87% (87.1% in CY2025, up from 86% in CY2024) and nearly 90.5% of participants advancing to Clinical Nurse II within 24 months.

**Quality Improvement & DNP Integration:** DNP student projects that align with VCUHS strategic priorities grew from 6 (Spring 2023) to 55 (projected Fall 2027), with 18 projects directly sponsored through the faculty practice. Six projects alone yielded an estimated $5.6 million in savings from reductions in length of stay, ventilator days, falls, hospital-acquired infections, and hospital-acquired pressure injuries, with increases of 9–17 points in the HCAHPS score. Appointment of the first APP as Associate Chief of Quality and Safety reflects the partnership's integration into health system leadership.

**Scholarship & Dissemination:** The partnership has produced 30+ presentations at local, national, and international conferences; 7 peer-reviewed manuscripts in journals including JAANP, AJCC, and The American Surgeon; and 6+ jointly funded grants totaling $128,320+ in collaborative research (plus HRSA funding). Faculty practice is now formally integrated into VCU SON's Appointment, Promotion, and Tenure criteria, with 5 faculty promoted through this pathway. 46+ grand rounds sessions create a sustained culture of knowledge sharing.

**Professional Recognition & Development:** The annual APP Awards received 250+ nominations across 7 categories. 15 clinical experts are embedded across VCUHS. APP Fellowship, Mentorship (doubled from 4 to 8 pairs), the published APPRAISE recognition model, and interprofessional teaching clinics in Diabetes, Pulmonology, and Complex Care sustain professional growth. The Council on Clinical Inquiry and Innovation (C2I), Office of Nursing Research & Innovation, and PROC/IROC committees scaffold scholarship from novice to expert across the Professional Advancement Program (Clinical Nurse I–V).

**Community & Health Equity:** Through the HRSA-funded Mobile Health and Wellness Program (2022–2026) in partnership with Capital Area Health Network, 428 undergraduate] undergraduate and 520 nurse practitioner students were trained across four rural underserved communities using an innovative faculty practice model that integrates community-based care, digital health, and interprofessional education. The success of this HRSA-funded care and education model led Virginia Commonwealth University Health System and the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Nursing to establish "Community-Connected Care," a sustainable model that expands faculty practice and student learning while improving access to care and health outcomes for medically underserved populations. Students conduct remote monitoring visits using Health Recovery Solutions telehealth devices, gaining hands-on digital health competencies aligned with the AONL Digital Transformation Guiding Principles and strengthening student learning outcomes, technology proficiency, and patient health outcomes.

Grounded in the AACN Essentials (2021) and aligned with the Future of Nursing 2020–2030 call for health equity, VCU SON and VCUHS have built a fully documented, replicable, adaptable framework presented at the AACN Doctoral Education Conference (2026) and the National Academies of Sciences where education fuels practice innovation, practice drives scholarship, and both advance health equity for Virginia's most vulnerable communities.