

Fact Sheet:

Nursing Faculty Shortage

Faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country are limiting student capacity at a time when the need for professional registered nurses continues to grow. Budget constraints, an aging faculty, and increasing job competition from clinical sites have contributed to this crisis.

To minimize the impact of faculty shortages on the nation's nursing shortage, the **American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)** is leveraging its resources to secure federal funding for faculty development programs, collect data on faculty vacancy rates, identify strategies to address the shortage, and focus media attention on this important issue.

Scope of the Nursing Faculty Shortage

- According to AACN's report on *2019-2020 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing*, U.S. nursing schools turned away 80,407 qualified applications from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2019 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints. Most nursing schools responding to the survey pointed to faculty shortages as a top reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into their programs.
- According to a [*Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions*](#) released by AACN in October 2019, a total of 1,637 faculty vacancies were identified in a survey of 892 nursing schools with baccalaureate and/or graduate programs across the country (87.5% response rate). Besides the vacancies, schools cited the need to create an additional 134 faculty positions to accommodate student demand. The data show a national nurse faculty vacancy rate of 7.2%. Most of the vacancies (89.7%) were faculty positions requiring or preferring a doctoral degree.

Factors Contributing to the Faculty Shortage

Faculty age continues to climb, narrowing the number of productive years educators teach.

According to AACN's report on *2019-2020 Salaries of Instructional and Administrative Nursing Faculty*, the average ages of doctorally-prepared nurse faculty holding the ranks of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor were 62.6, 56.9, and 50.9 years, respectively. For master's degree-prepared nurse faculty, the average ages for professors, associate professors, and assistant professors were 57.1, 56.0, and 49.6 years, respectively.

A wave of faculty retirements is expected across the U.S. over the next decade.

According to an article published in *Nursing Outlook* on [*Retirements and Succession of Nursing Faculty in 2016-2025*](#) by Drs. Di Fang and Karen Kesten, one third of the current nursing

faculty workforce in baccalaureate and graduate programs are expected to retire by 2025. This finding underscores the urgency for the nursing education community to address the impending exodus of senior faculty and to develop younger faculty for succession.

Higher compensation in clinical and private-sector settings is luring current and potential nurse educators away from teaching.

According to the [American Association of Nurse Practitioners](#), the average salary of a nurse practitioner, across settings and specialties, is \$110,000. By contrast, AACN reported in March 2020 that the average salary for a master's-prepared Assistant Professor in schools of nursing was \$79,444.

Master's and doctoral programs in nursing are not producing a large enough pool of potential nurse educators to meet the demand.

Efforts to expand the nurse educator population are frustrated by the fact that thousands of qualified applicants to graduate nursing programs are turned away each year. In 2019, AACN found that 8,471 qualified applicants were turned away from master's programs, and 3,157 qualified applicants were turned away from doctoral programs. The primary reasons for not accepting all qualified students were a shortage of faculty and clinical education sites.

Strategies to Address the Faculty Shortage

- Many statewide initiatives are underway to address the shortage of nurse educators. For example, in June 2020, the Maryland Higher Education Commission [announced \\$29.3 million in funding to 14 schools of nursing](#) to support efforts to increase the number of nurse faculty and educational capacity. In June 2018, Hawaii became the fourth state in the nation to pass a [law aimed at helping the U.S. to reduce its chronic shortage of preceptors](#), with an innovative solution that uses the tax code to try to bolster their numbers. The Hawaii legislation allocated \$1.5 million per year to provide up to five \$1,000 tax credits per preceptor. Other states with similar programs include Georgia, Maryland, and Colorado.
- In October 2012, the Jonas Philanthropies announced that its [Jonas Nurse Leaders Scholar Program](#) has expanded nationally and now provides funding and support to 198 doctoral nursing students in 87 schools across the US, making it one of the largest programs addressing the nation's dire shortage of doctorally prepared nursing faculty. AACN has worked with Jonas to facilitate this program's expansion to all 50 states and is administering the program for the new cohort of scholars that includes both PhD and DNP students.
- In September 2010, AACN announced the expansion of [NursingCAS](#), the nation's centralized application service for RN programs, to include graduate nursing programs. One of the primary reasons for launching NursingCAS was to ensure that all vacant seats in schools of nursing are filled to better meet the need for RNs, APRNs, and nurse faculty. In 2018, more than 18,000 vacant seats were identified in master's and doctoral nursing programs alone. NursingCAS provides a mechanism to fill these seats and

maximize the educational capacity of schools of nursing.

- In July 2010, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) released its *Charting Nursing's Future* newsletter focused on "[Expanding America's Capacity to Educate Nurses: Diverse, State-Level Partnerships Are Creating Promising Models and Results.](#)" This policy brief describes the capacity innovations of 12 partnerships that are effectively addressing the nursing and nurse faculty shortages. Among the policy recommendations advanced in this brief are requiring all new nurses to complete a BSN program within 10 years of licensure and enhancing the pipeline into baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs.
- In the July/August 2009 *Health Affairs*, Dr. Linda Aiken and colleagues call for adapting federal funding mechanisms (i.e. Title VIII and Medicare) to focus on preparing more nurses at the baccalaureate and higher degree levels. This policy emphasis is needed to adequately address the growing need for faculty and nurses to serve in primary care and other advanced practice roles. The researchers reported that new nurses prepared in BSN programs are significantly more likely to complete the graduate level education needed to fill nursing positions where job growth is expected to be the greatest.
- In the November/December 2008 issue of *Nursing Outlook*, Dr. Janet Allan and Jillian Aldebron assess a variety of efforts underway nationwide to alleviate the nursing faculty shortage, a primary driver of the larger nursing shortage. In the article, titled [A Systematic Assessment of Strategies to Address the Nursing Faculty Shortage, U.S.](#), the authors highlight the most promising strategies in four domains - advocacy, educational partnerships, academic innovation, and external funding - and identify exemplars that are sustainable, and replicable.
- In February 2008, AACN and the Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future announced the first scholarship recipients for the newly created Minority Nurse Faculty Scholars program. Created to address the nation's shortage of nurse educators and the need to diversify the faculty, this program provides financial support to graduate nursing students from minority backgrounds who agree to teach nursing after graduation.
- In August 2005, the U.S. Secretary of Education designated nursing as an "area of national need" for the first time under the [Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need \(GAANN\) program](#). As a result of AACN's lobbying effort, a new funding stream for PhD programs in nursing was created. In April 2006, \$2.4 million in grant funding through the GAANN programs was awarded to 14 schools of nursing.
- In June 2005, AACN published an updated white paper titled [Faculty Shortages in Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs: Scope of the Problem and Strategies for Expanding the Supply](#). This publication summarizes the faculty shortage issue, identifies factors contributing to the shortfall, and advances strategies for expanding the current and future pool of nursing faculty. The white paper includes an appendix with examples

of successful strategies to address the faculty shortage suggested by schools at an AACN Hot Issues Conference.

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