



# Developing a Pipeline of Future Nurses: Expanding Program Capacity

This [series of briefs](#) highlights the key issues that postsecondary institutions and states in the West are facing in developing a nursing workforce that meets current and future needs. One key strategy for addressing the nursing workforce shortages is to grow the pipeline of well-prepared graduates entering the field, yet a major constraint to growing nursing programs is the availability of qualified faculty. In 2023, WICHE held roundtable discussions with a range of stakeholders from across the region, including nursing school faculty and administrators, state nursing workforce center directors, hospital administrators, and directors of boards of nursing and nursing associations, to learn more about what states and institutions are doing to address this issue.

 Visit [wiche.edu/nursingworkforce](https://wiche.edu/nursingworkforce) for more information and resources on the nursing workforce in the West.

## The Issue

To develop the next generation of nurses, legislatures, and employers are asking nursing programs to expand opportunities and educate more work-ready graduates to address [critical nursing shortages](#). Nursing schools face several constraints in their ability to expand educational opportunities for students. A key issue described by roundtable participants was limited access to clinical placements. Clinical placements are a foundational component of nursing education and a requirement for all prelicensure and advance practice students. Common reasons for limited access to clinical placements were competition across disciplines, particularly for nurse practitioners, and [limited availability of clinical preceptors](#). It was noted that some postsecondary institutions may be able to provide financial resources to secure clinical spots for students, while most public colleges and universities are not positioned to utilize constrained fiscal resources in this manner resulting in increased competition for spots.

## Approaches in the West

*States and institutions across the region are investing in innovative programming to expand capacity for nursing students and ensure students have access to high quality clinical learning opportunities that support the development of work-ready graduates.*

### Strategies for Supporting Clinical Placements

Clinical placements are limited throughout the region and many states are implementing strategies to develop clinical placement schedules and partnerships, adopting an interdisciplinary approach to clinicals, and expanding scheduling for clinicals to support students and educators beyond traditional weekday hours.

*(continued)*



In AY 2021-22, **over 90,000** **qualified applications were turned away** from nursing schools due to limited clinical spots, faculty shortages, and limited resources to expand class sizes.

*Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing*

## Approaches in the West *(continued)*

- ▶ [Hawai'i](#) and [California](#) utilize a centralized clinical placement system. Wyoming is looking to adopt a centralized model as well.
- ▶ [The Arizona Clinical Education Consortium \(AzCEC\)](#) is a community resource to support the complex scheduling demands of students participating in clinical education experiences in Maricopa County.
- ▶ An [interdisciplinary approach](#) to clinical education provides nursing students with the required interprofessional skills while potentially providing an opportunity to share resources within the clinical education setting.
- ▶ When available, expanded hours and days for clinical placements (i.e., weekends and evenings) could expand clinical capacity and remove some barriers for students looking for a flexible learning model.
- ▶ A pilot of [expanding Graduate Nurse Education funding](#) found that the funds helped streamline the processes for clinical placement coordination and ability to more effectively evaluate clinical education sites.
- ▶ A report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office focused on the views of [expanding Graduate Medical Education \(GME\) funding](#) to Nurse Practitioners (NP) shared that several NP stakeholder groups stated that GME funding could provide funding for clinical preceptors as well as provide more stable funding for graduate nursing education.

### Dedicated Education Units

[Dedicated Education Units \(DEU\)](#) are an innovative model for clinical education that is built on collaboration and partnership between postsecondary institutions and clinical partners to provide a clinical education model that is focused on peer learning and immersive teaching and learning practices. Dedicated Education Units are intended to better prepare nurse students and mitigate clinical placement and faculty shortages.

- ▶ The [University of Portland](#) pioneered this model in the early 2000s and currently offers DEU in areas of community health, acute care, post-acute care, school-based nursing, ambulatory care, and mental health settings. [Research on the University of Portland model](#) found students viewed DEU as a high-quality learning environment with advantages over a traditional clinical setting.
- ▶ A review of the [University of Nevada Las Vegas School of Nursing Dedicated Education Unit](#) found positive outcomes for students and staff in the first five years of the community partnership.
- ▶ [Boise State University](#) has worked in partnership with St. Luke's Hospital to redesign its collaborative DEU model to support students and will add an additional focus on measuring the effectiveness of DEU.

### Investments for Expansion

While improving efficiency is an important approach, expanding capacity often requires direct state investment. Several states in the region have prioritized expanding nursing programs through funding in the past several years.

- ▶ In 2022, the [University of Utah](#) announced it would increase its prelicensure nursing student population by 25% through an investment of public and private funding.
- ▶ In 2022, [New Mexico](#) awarded \$15 million to institutions to expand nursing across the state, with a focus on increasing the number of nursing students admitted in the state each year.
- ▶ In 2022, the [Arizona](#) legislature passed HB 2691, which allocated \$15 million for the Nurse Education Investment Pilot Program to increase capacity at nursing schools across the state.

## Forward Thinking

The nursing profession is foundational to our society, and it is imperative that the nursing workforce is equipped to handle current and future needs. These innovative strategies to develop the pipeline of future nurses came from WICHE's roundtables and offer promising approaches for states, systems, and institutions.

### Clinical Site Opportunities

- ▶ Expand partnerships for clinical sites in underutilized areas and provide financial and non-financial incentives for students to participate in these sites.
- ▶ Increase interprofessional education and clinical opportunities.
- ▶ Develop “super preceptors,” who are expert clinicians that can supervise teams of students Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), NP, and Registered Nurse (RN) students simultaneously.
- ▶ Develop academic schedules that accommodate 24/7 clinicals (frontloading content; short intense didactic; intersession non-nursing courses).
- ▶ Engage in mutually beneficial [academic-practice partnerships](#) that support student learning and support shared resources and knowledge.

### Competency based education

- ▶ The expansion of [competency-based education models](#) has potential to help students progress more rapidly through nursing programs and enter the workforce having demonstrated the knowledge and skills to be a career-ready nursing graduate.
- ▶ The [American Association of Colleges of Nursing toolkit](#) on competency-based education demonstrates ways that nursing programs can be used as framework to support faculty effectiveness and student learning.



## Further Reading

- ▶ [Competency-Based Education for Practice-Ready Nurses](#)
- ▶ [Academic Practice Partnerships: Building the Post Pandemic Nursing Workforce](#)
- ▶ [Demonstrating a Nurse-Driven Model for Interprofessional Academic-Practice Partnership](#)

Authors:

Colleen Falkenstern,  
Senior Research Analyst  
Nancy Ridenour, PhD,  
APRN, FAAN

Western Interstate  
Commission for Higher  
Education (WICHE)

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[policy-info@wiche.edu](mailto:policy-info@wiche.edu)

[www.wiche.edu](http://www.wiche.edu)

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