



# Developing a Pipeline of Future Nurses: Supporting Student Access and Success

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

**Roundtable participants noted students face structural and financial barriers to enrolling and completing nursing school.** For example, the traditional academic model requires didactic courses and clinical work, which typically occur Monday through Friday and may be challenging for students already in the workforce. Just as all higher education has costs for students, nursing students face tuition costs and, in some cases, nursing courses are priced at a higher per-credit rate than other programs. In addition to tuition and fees, students may have to forgo wages to fit their courses and clinicals into their schedules. Students in remote areas of the West also face transportation barriers, such as the cost and time associated with long commutes. Lastly, a typical Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree in nursing takes four years to complete, which can be a deterrent for students to enroll, particularly those that are returning to school to advance their career.

## Approaches in the West

*States and institutions across the region are investing in innovative programming to support the recruitment and retention of nursing students, developing school to career pathways, and supporting the clinical education experience for nursing students.*

### Apprenticeship Programs

Many states in the region have developed apprenticeship models to expand their healthcare workforce while also providing students the opportunity to learn and earn. In many cases, these examples are focused on certified nursing assistants and medical assistants and target entry-level professionals who can then seek a pathway to being a Registered Nurse (RN) or other nursing credential. It is important to note that ensuring that a stackable pathway works for students is a key component of this strategy.

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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)*

- ▶ Utah developed a [nurse apprenticeship license](#) to help support the nursing workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. This apprenticeship licensure became permanent through the passage of SB 101 during the 2022 legislative session.
- ▶ Nevada's [Nurse Apprentice Program](#) is eligible to pre-licensure Practical Nurse (PN) and RN students and provides students the opportunity to earn valuable on-the-job training while receiving financial compensation.
- ▶ Colorado's [CO-HELPS Healthcare Apprenticeship Program](#) is intended to help develop the state's healthcare workforce through apprenticeships in entry-level positions and supports a student's ability to enter a pathway to a registered nursing position.
- ▶ Wyoming has a statewide [Certified Nursing Assistant](#) apprenticeship program.
- ▶ [HealthCARE \(Creating Access to Rural Education\) Montana](#) is a collaborative project to recruit and retain healthcare professionals in rural Montana, including the development of apprenticeships.

### Supporting nursing students in rural and underserved communities

Several states and institutions support the recruitment and retention of nursing students in rural and underserved communities by providing financial resources and other types of support.

- ▶ [The University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Center's College of Nursing](#) and [Fort Lewis College](#) forged a partnership to develop the CU Nursing Fort Lewis College Collaborative. This collaborative model brings together the two postsecondary institutions to develop a four-year nursing degree to Fort Lewis College in southwest Colorado that is focused on providing a nursing curriculum aligned to rural, Indigenous healthcare perspectives.
- ▶ Montana State University's [Caring for Our Own Program](#) is a student support program for American Indian/Alaska Native nursing students. The program provides supplemental support for MSU students through culturally competent advising, access to a network of American Indian/Alaska Native nursing students and nurses, and resume and job search support.
- ▶ The [New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium](#) is a statewide prelicensure nursing curriculum that offers Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs across the state and includes community college and university partnerships to offer dual enrolled Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) and BSN degree pathways. This collaboration expands educational opportunities across all regions of the state and supports the development of the rural healthcare workforce in New Mexico.
- ▶ [Montana State University Mobile Clinics](#) provide nursing students with training and experience working in high-need rural communities and support students through clinical travel reimbursements and participation in rural health-focused elective courses.
- ▶ The [Health Resources and Human Services Advanced Nursing Education Workforce \(ANEW\) Program](#) provides grants to support Nurse Practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and nurse midwives to be academically and clinically prepared to transition from nursing school to practice in rural and underserved communities. These grants support clinical partnerships and tuition assistance for students enrolled in the program. [Montana State University](#), [University of New Mexico](#), [University of Utah](#), and [Washington State University](#) have received ANEW funding.

### Financial Support for Students

Most states in the region have a loan repayment program in place for nurses with specific requirements for eligibility based on nursing credential, work setting, and other factors. There are also state and federal loan programs that support enrolled nursing students.

- ▶ The [Wyoming Investment in Nursing \(WyIN\)](#) is a loan paid to students currently enrolled in nursing programs at any of the state's higher education institutions to be paid back through their continued employment within the state.
- ▶ The [National Health Service Corps \(NHSC\) Loan Repayment Programs and Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program](#) provide funding to nurses and other future healthcare professionals committed to serving in communities of need.

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## Approaches in the West *(continued)*

### Interprofessional Education Opportunities

An interprofessional approach to clinical education provides nursing students with the interprofessional skills required in the field while potentially providing an opportunity to share resources within the clinical education setting.

- ▶ [University of San Francisco's Program for Interprofessional Practice and Education](#) and [University of Utah's Interprofessional Education Program \(IPE\)](#) are examples of collaborative research and curriculum across healthcare fields in and out of the clinical setting.
- ▶ Interprofessional student run clinics provide an opportunity for students to gain necessary interprofessional skills while engaging in a clinical learning environment. Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Arizona collaboratively developed the [Student Health Outreach for Wellness \(SHOW\)](#), a student run clinic serving homeless populations in the Phoenix area. The model is being expanded to serve adults with substance abuse disorders.

### Forward Thinking

The field of nursing is an essential occupation of our society and, as our nation faces a shortage of nurses, it is imperative that institutions, states, and hospitals and other clinical settings are working together to implement effective strategies that expand the pool of qualified nursing students, especially from underserved populations, and ensure that learning opportunities provide students with the necessary skills to enter the workforce. These strategies to expand opportunities for future nurses emerged from WICHE's roundtables and offer promising approaches for states, systems, and institutions.

### Opportunities for Students to Earn While in School

- ▶ Expand opportunities like apprenticeships that support students' work-ready skill development and provide income to students.
- ▶ Develop partnerships with clinical sites that offer employment for students completing their clinical practicum experience to support the transition from school to career.

### Opportunities to Support Student Learning

- ▶ [Competency Based Education](#) models can support student learning and potentially reduce time to completion for students.
- ▶ Ensure that pathways exist across higher education institutions to support students' ability to build on their credentials within the field of nursing (i.e., [Associate Degree Nursing and Bachelors Science Nursing dual enrollment](#)) and reduce barriers for students to progress through credentials.



### Further Reading

- ▶ [Newly Licensed Nurses' Transition During the Pandemic After Participating in Nurse Apprenticeship Program](#)
- ▶ [A New Era: Registered Nurse Resident Apprenticeships](#)
- ▶ [Benefits of Interprofessional Learning in Healthcare](#)

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