

Moving Toward a More Highly Educated Nursing Workforce

A Regional Approach to Increasing BSN-Prepared Nurses in Florida

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Prepared by



A regional coalition of the Florida Action Coalition comprised of hospital, nursing school and community leaders, the Suncoast Nursing Action Coalition is committed to advancing the nursing profession by increasing the number of BSN-prepared and higher-degreed nurses for continued access to safe, high-quality health care.



| OBJECTIVE

This white paper is intended to highlight the shortage of BSN nursing programs in regions throughout Florida and the associated consequences on Florida's healthcare delivery system, patient outcomes and nursing workforce. In order to meet the complexities and demands of today's health care delivery system, it has become essential for newly graduating nurses to attain, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) before entering the nursing workforce. Despite a national imperative to increase the number of BSN-prepared nurses, the majority of nurses completing nursing programs in Florida are earning associate degrees, often due to a limited availability of prelicensure BSN programs, to meet current workforce demands.

Although mounting evidence clearly demonstrates BSN-prepared nurses in hospitals result in better patient outcomes and more efficient, cost-effective care, the persistent nursing shortage and escalating employer needs continue to exacerbate the situation. In this urgent call-to-action, the Suncoast Nursing Action Coalition is putting forth a regional approach that is helping to increase the percentage of BSN-prepared nurses on the Suncoast (Sarasota-Manatee-Charlotte-Desoto counties) and calling upon all Florida hospitals, nursing schools, academic and community leaders and legislators to collaborate, create and strengthen Florida initiatives to meet the national imperative and increase the proportion of BSN-prepared nurses to 80 percent by 2020.



| OVERVIEW

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM), formerly known as the Institute of Medicine (IOM), recognized the important role nurses play in managing patient care in its 2010 landmark report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health.” The organization outlined the essential competencies nurses need to deliver safe, high-quality care and recommended, among other goals, that the proportion of U.S. nurses educated at the baccalaureate level be increased to 80 percent by 2020.

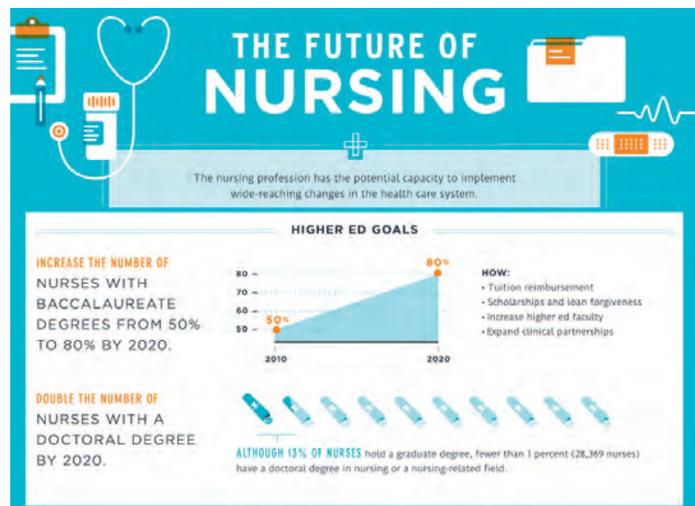
The Tri-Council for Nursing, which includes the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Nurses Association, American Organization of Nurse Executives and National League for Nursing, has also united in the view that a more highly educated nursing workforce is critical to meeting the nation’s nursing needs and delivering safe, effective patient care. “The increasing complexity of technology, medical therapies and treatments, and chronic health conditions underscores the need for nurses to be more highly educated. Increased education and advanced degrees will better prepare RNs to develop process improvements that address medical errors, reimbursement issues, navigating multiple systems of care, and other challenges in the healthcare delivery system,” the Tri-Council emphasized in its October 2010 consensus statement.

The situation is most critical in Florida, where baseline forecasts show that the state will face a shortage of RNs by 2025 capable of crippling its healthcare system and reducing access to care for Floridians.

Fueled by the aging Baby Boomer population, rising incidence of chronic disease, retiring nursing workforce and limited capacity of nursing schools, the nursing shortage in Florida has reached a critical tipping point. Even though decades of research validates

the link between BSN-prepared nurses and better patient outcomes and care, roughly half of all nurses graduating today are unable to obtain prelicensure bachelor’s degrees and becoming licensed RNs through faster, more accessible associate degree (ADN) programs.

According to the Florida Center for Nursing, demand for nursing personnel is projected to increase dramatically as Florida’s large Baby Boomer population reaches retirement and begins to require more care for age-related conditions, and as healthcare reform increases the demand for more services.



| PROBLEM

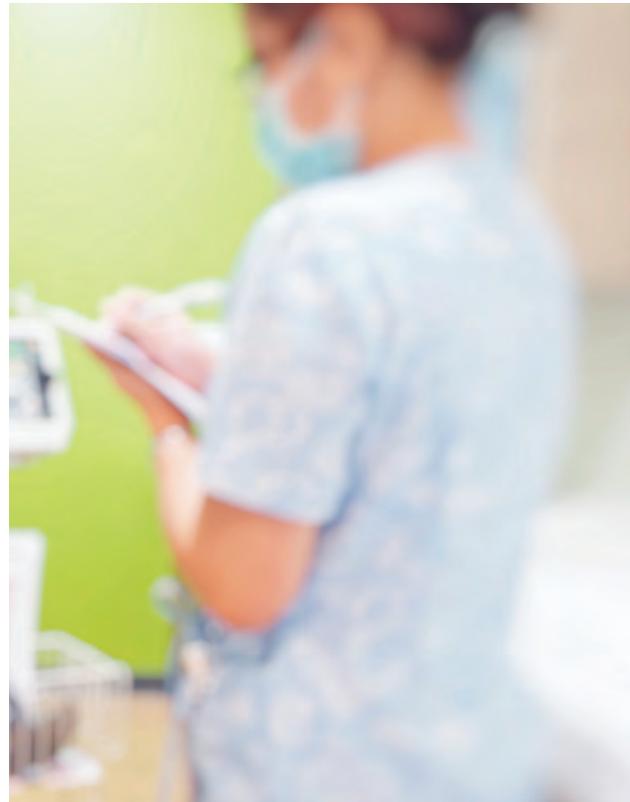
In Florida, the limited access and number of pre-licensure BSN programs are resulting in entry-level nurses who lack the additional education, preparation and critical thinking skills necessary for the nursing workforce to address the complexities of today's health care delivery system.

It's a dangerous trend that not only threatens the quality of patient care, but also undermines the expertise and leadership potential of the nursing profession itself.

As point-of-care providers, nurses constitute the primary surveillance system for early detection of complications and problems in care and are in a pivotal position to initiate actions that minimize adverse outcomes for patients.

At least two decades of research demonstrates that BSN-prepared nurses in hospitals result in:

- Decreased mortality and complication rates
- Reduction in infections and other hospital-acquired conditions.
- Reduced lengths of stay
- Decreased hospital readmission rates
- Improved critical decision-making skills
- Higher job satisfaction and employment retention rates
- Greater interest/pursuit of graduate education



Although the evidence behind the NAM/IOM's recommendations is well established, it remains a daunting challenge, as only half of our nation's nurses hold BSN or higher degrees.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Association for Retired People launched "The Future of Nursing Campaign for Action" to guide nationwide efforts to help meet the NAM/IOM goals, and led to the creation of 51 action coalitions, one in every state and the District of Columbia.



Current State of Nursing Pre-licensure Education in Florida Regions

In Florida, the Florida Action Coalition (FL-AC) and Suncoast Nursing Action Coalition (SNAC), a grassroots team established to assess and tackle the regional needs in southwest Florida, have been among the most active coalitions in the nation – but also the most challenged.

Despite progress made by the FL-AC and SNAC, Florida continues to lag behind other states in meeting the NAM/IOM goals due to an insufficient number of pre-licensure BSN programs and abundance of associate degree nursing programs.

While the rate of working RNs with a BSN in Florida has increased in recent years (reaching 41 percent in 2017), nearly half (48 percent) are filling the demands of today’s employers through faster, more accessible associate degrees in nursing.

In the four counties of Charlotte, Desoto, Manatee and Sarasota served by SNAC, only 33.5 % of RNs hold a bachelor’s or higher degree, according to the latest licensing data from the Florida Board of Nursing (2014-2015) and Florida Center for Nursing Workforce Survey (July 2016). That rate increases to 38% when including ARNPs. The result: The small percentage of BSN-prepared nurses in communities without financially and geographically accessible pre-licensure BSN programs leaves hospitals with no choice but to hire less prepared nurses (RNs with only associate degrees) to meet their staffing needs.



Implications for Meeting the Demands of Population Health

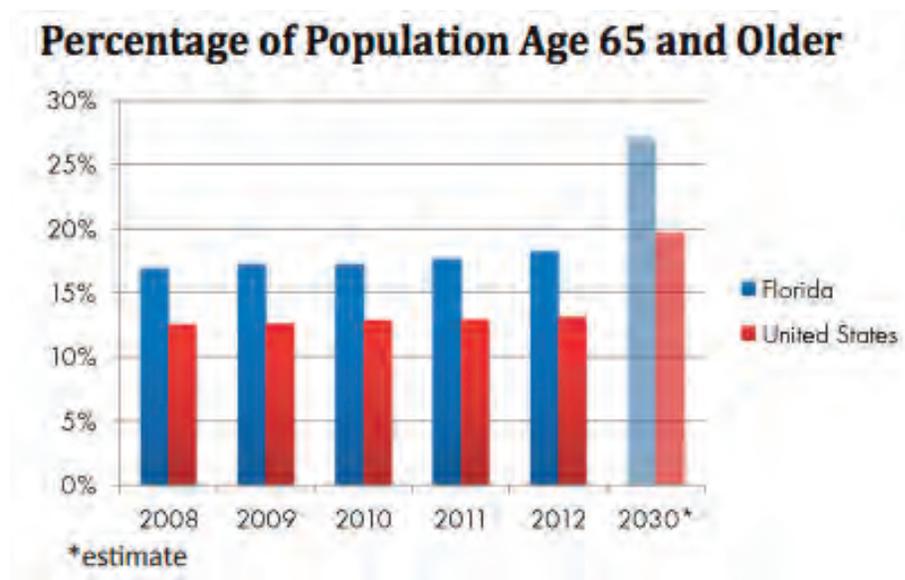
Of the top 25 fastest-growing metro areas in America, 10 are in Florida, according to an U.S. Census Bureau update for the period July 1, 2015-July 1, 2016.

But the population isn't just growing in Florida – it's also getting older, according to Florida State University's Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy. With 17 percent of residents over age 65, Florida now holds the title for the "oldest" state in the nation, which places even greater demands on the state's healthcare system.

SNAC serves the North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton metro region, which claims the No. 10 spot in the nation's "fastest-growing" list, with twice as many people over age 65 as the national average. Indeed, in the 2016 U.S. Census update, 34.6 percent of the region's population was 65 or older, compared to just 14.9 percent who fit into that age bracket in the nation.

Nursing colleges across the state simply don't have the resources or capacity to keep up with the statewide demand. Even the most reputable university-based programs routinely turn away qualified applicants because they lack staffing and resources to expand their programs.

A corresponding shortage of master's and doctorally prepared nursing faculty has been a key deterrent to creating new pre-licensure BSN programs and expanding associate degree nursing programs into BSN programs.



Source: FSU's Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy

Florida's population is expected to grow by almost 5.1 million between 2010 and 2030 and the growth of Florida's older population will account for most of this growth. By 2020 the number of Florida residents aged 65 and older is expected to reach 4.6 million.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

SNAC, a voluntary network of about 20 community leaders, created a powerful triad to tackle the challenges in its region. Led by FL-AC member and former Chief Nursing Officer Jan Mauck, the coalition brought together key leaders needed to identify barriers inhibiting the rate of BSN-prepared nurses and implement strategies to increase the proportion of nurses with BSNs in SNAC's four-county region.

Triad Approach to Increasing Pre-licensure BSN Nurses

The triad consists of:

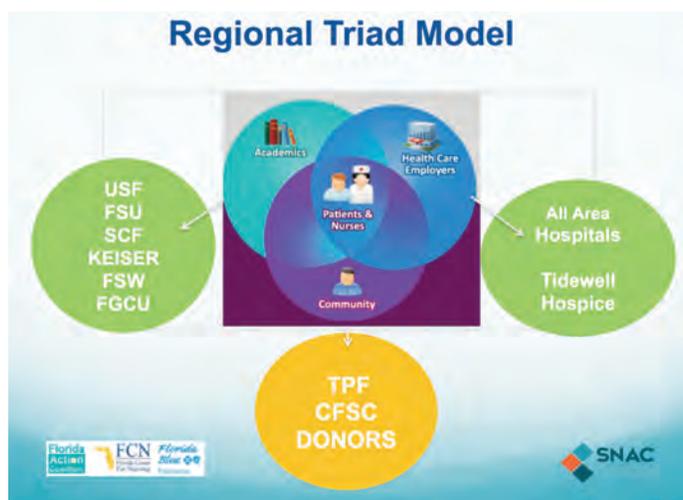
Nurse Employers/Hospital CNOs – Chief Nursing Officers from all of the region's hospitals, as well as employer representatives from a regional hospice organization: Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Lakewood Regional Medical Center, Manatee Memorial Hospital, Blake Medical Center, Doctors Hospital, Venice Regional Bayfront Health and Tidewell Hospice.

Nursing School/Academic Leaders – Executives and managers from all of the region's nursing schools/programs: University of South Florida, Florida State University, State College of Florida, Keiser University; Florida Gulf Coast University; Florida SouthWestern State College in Charlotte County.

Community Leaders – Influential business, strategic planning and community representatives who shared SNAC's mission to enhance the education of nurses in the region.

Through local surveys and a forecasting toolkit provided by the FL-AC, SNAC researched and analyzed opportunities and challenges that faced its region, looking at, among other things:

- Education level of existing nursing workforce.
- Percentage of BSN-prepared nurses needed to meet NAM/IOM goals for 2020.
- Challenges and barriers.



Among its challenges, SNAC's analysis revealed:

- In order to meet the NAM/IOM goals in 2020, the state of Florida would need in excess of 13,000 RNs with a BSN degree in 2020 (Florida's Demand for Nurses: 2015 Employer Survey, January 2016).
- Currently highly-qualified students who want to enroll in a four-year BSN degree program are unable to do so due to the limited number and capacity of four-year BSN programs offered in the four-county region served by SNAC.
- The nursing education programs in the region do not allow individuals to progress easily from an ADN certificate program to BSN without repeating courses; consequently, nursing students are entering the workforce without completing their BSNs.
- Once in the workforce, many barriers make it difficult for nurses to attain their BSN. According to SNAC surveys, the biggest barriers revolve around the time and cost to complete bridge programs (challenging work schedules, repeat coursework, expenses related to books, travel, childcare, time off work).
- Nursing schools/programs in the area lack the infrastructure, support and doctoral-prepared nursing faculty needed to create more effective BSN programs.





| KEY STRATEGIES/SOLUTIONS

While the SNAC region remains challenged by a lack of BSN programs and the growing demands on the nursing profession, the regional collaborative is achieving incremental success. A goal to educate the community about the need for BSN prepared nurses and prospective nursing students about the importance of a BSN is an overarching tenet. Following are successful strategies and key approaches SNAC has implemented through its triad approach:

CNOs/Nurse Employers

As major employers of nurses, the region's CNOs developed an executive steering committee that now includes all major employers of nurses in the region. This group meets regularly to assess and address opportunities and challenges in the region and set goals for a BSN-prepared workforce.

Key strategies implemented by the group include:

- Developing a toolkit and employer guide to encourage and assist nurses in pursuing BSNs.
- Adopting and investing in career ladder programs that promote and support current licensed ADN nurses obtaining their BSNs through financial and professional incentives for local workforce opportunities.
- Strengthening tuition reimbursement and other employee benefits to remove barriers preventing nurses from completing their BSNs (including career counseling/mentoring, flexible scheduling and childcare subsidies).
- Promoting a more highly educated nursing workforce in the region through more selective hiring practices and pay differentials that prioritize employing nurses with BSN and graduate degrees.



Academic Partners

As key producers of bachelor-prepared nurses, academic leaders representing diverse nursing education programs in the region are working collaboratively on short- and long-term solutions to recruit and prepare more BSNs and address the related faculty shortages limiting enrollment in baccalaureate and graduate programs.

Key strategies implemented by the group include:

- Creating a groundswell of support and collaboration among legislative, academic, healthcare, and philanthropic leaders to successfully establish new and expand the capacity of existing 4-year BSN programs in our region.
- Working collaboratively to fast-track improvements to existing BSN career pathways, including streamlining models of progression from RN to BSN and promoting BSN and higher degree completion for current practicing RNs.
- Adapting programs, degrees offered, and educational capacity to create space for more BSNs to be trained. A wide variety of education options exist to further the preparation of today's nursing workforce, including degree-completion, online, accelerated, and part-time degree programs.
- Administering a new grant-supported scholarship program created by SNAC to reduce the financial barriers needed for academic progression and encourage more nurses and faculty members to earn their BSN and higher degrees.
- Collaborating with partnering institutions to offer graduate students more flexible work/class schedules and develop articulation agreements to facilitate a seamless pathway for nurses to obtain BSN and graduate nursing degrees.
- Working with SNAC coalition to create a new pre-licensure program for students with a BS/BA or higher for admission (program approved and is currently in the design/planning stage).

Community Partners

Underlying all of these efforts are community leaders, granting agencies and funders committed to SNAC's mission who have generously supported initiatives to help educate and retain more nurses with a BSN.

Key strategies implemented by the group include:

- Securing a fiscal sponsor and grant funds to support SNAC initiatives and expand community education and outreach. The Community Foundation of Sarasota County became SNAC's fiscal sponsor and a key administrative support for facilitating grants and donations.



- Enlisting support from The Patterson Foundation, which provided an initiative consultant to contribute to the cultivation of an environment for success of the coalition. The consultant, bringing expertise in the collaborative process, serves as a “guide on the side,” providing strategic and tactical expertise.
- Creating a Nursing Education Navigator (NEN) to serve as an advisor and mentor to those considering a nursing career. Florida Blue recognized SNAC’s efforts to improve quality and patient care and awarded it a three-year Florida Blue Foundation grant to support the NEN position. Since 2015, the NEN role has provided a personalized, one-stop research and referral source for people interested in nursing education programs, degree alternatives and financial assistance, for more than 1,000 potential students. Of these potential students, 820 have been referred to one or more nursing programs in the region. As of October 2019, the NEN has successfully facilitated 255 students accepted and enrolled in accredited nursing schools.
- Building a Nursing Scholarship program to support nurses pursuing BSN and higher degrees. Since its scholarship program began in 2016, SNAC has granted \$264,000 in nursing scholarships to 72 local recipients. Many have already graduated, and others are slated to graduate in the next two years, with BSN degrees and plan to work in the Suncoast region. Seven scholarships were dedicated to nurses pursuing doctoral degrees with plans to become nursing professors at local nursing schools. Foundations supporting SNAC include the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Patterson Foundation, Burruss Foundation, Florida Blue Foundation, Lela D. Jackson Foundation, Janice S. Kelly Memorial Foundation, Rita B. Lamere Memorial Foundation, Sarah Greer Mayer Fund of the Community Foundation, Manatee Community Foundation, Charlotte Community Foundation, and CareerEdge.

Partnership with Community Foundation Sarasota County





| CONCLUSION

SNAC is demonstrating that collaborative models at the community and regional levels can yield incremental and statewide progress. The Suncoast region has seen a 2% increase in BSN-prepared nurses in recent years, from 31.4% to 33.5%, bolstered in large part by SNAC support and initiatives that have led to new and expanded academic programs providing direct and accelerated pathways for pre-licensure BSN nursing students at Florida Southwestern State College, Keiser University, State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, and the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee.

Still, achieving the NAM/IOM's "80% by 2020" goal is not feasible given the limitations and barriers associated with the state's limited BSN programs. Urgent action is needed across the state to meet the needs in the years ahead, especially as the demand for bachelor-prepared nurses and the faculty to train them continues to rise.

A robust pipeline of nurses with baccalaureate degrees are needed at the bedside, while those with doctorates are needed in research, faculty and leadership roles to ensure optimal patient care today and improve nurses' ability to positively influence the outcomes of patients and enhance the health of Florida communities in the future. As a regional workgroup of the Florida Action Coalition, SNAC is committed to taking the lead in working with nursing schools, policy leaders and employers to remove barriers to a highly educated nursing workforce and address the workforce needs regionally and beyond.



The table below outlines regional challenges and strategies adopted by SNAC.

Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Financial Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition reimbursement • Timeliness of reimbursement • Lack of full-time benefits for students working part-time while pursuing BSN • Lack of salary increase for obtaining BSN 	<p>Employers, Academia & Community: Support and provide nursing scholarships/scholarship information.</p> <p>Regional CNOs: Support NAM/IOM recommendations, commit to increasing BSN rates, support tuition reimbursement for full, part-time and per diem; evaluate pay practices for BSN and higher degrees.</p>
<p>Lack of knowledge regarding how/where to start a nursing program</p>	<p>Nurse Education Navigator: Provide education, outreach</p> <p>Employers & Academia: Provide information sessions and contacts to navigate process; summary of program offerings and tuition costs/discounts.</p>
<p>Lack of interest in returning to school/nearing retirement and do not see value of BSN</p>	<p>Employers, Academia & Community: Communicate the importance of BSN degrees; share evidence of improved outcomes; use SNAC and FL-AC toolkits, resource guides (available on FL-AC website).</p>
<p>Personal concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family demands • Lack of time • Scheduling work around demands of school 	<p>Employers and Academia: Communicate the value and professional growth associated with BSN degrees; support study groups/cohorts pursuing BSNs.</p> <p>Employers: Support flexible scheduling; provide emotional support from leaders.</p>
<p>Lack of comfort with online courses (vs. classroom environment) and computer skills</p>	<p>Academia: Provide technical support for online learning.</p> <p>Employers: Provide computer room or medical library with tutoring support.</p>

Reference: Duffy, M. T., Friesen, M. A., Speroni, K. G., Swengros, D., Shanks, L. A., Waiter, P. A., & Sheridan, M. J. (2014). BSN completion barriers, challenges, incentives, and strategies. *The Journal of Nursing Administration, 44*(4), 232-236. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000054

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