

# AHEC Update



## The NC Nursing Shortage: Under Close Examination

North Carolina has a shortage of nurses—a situation that is expected to continue as the state’s elderly population grows. The solution to the shortage is not as simple as recruiting more nursing students. This shortage requires the best efforts of state leaders to understand factors that contribute to the shortage and to create programs that increase the supply of nurses in demand. The NC AHEC Program joined these leaders to form the **Task Force on the NC Nursing Workforce**, a consortium of nursing educators, employers, and professional support agencies from across the state convened by the NC Institute of Medicine. Together we are working on solutions that will assure a nursing workforce ready to meet the health care needs of the people of North Carolina.



## NC AHEC: Part of the Solution to the Nursing Shortage

**Understanding the Demand:** North Carolina’s elderly population will double by 2020, creating huge demands for both highly-skilled nurses and nursing assistants. Concurrently, the average age of the NC nurse is rising, with 24 percent of the workforce expected to retire within 10 years. NC AHEC works with the NC Center for Nursing and the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at UNC-Chapel Hill to conduct ongoing studies that monitor the quantity and skill level of nurses needed in North Carolina.

### AHEC Recruitment Strategies:

- ◆ AHEC improves the diversity and cultural competence of the health care workforce, helping to create a supply of nurses and other health care providers that more closely reflects the diversity of the state’s population.
- ◆ School-aged children from every NC county participate in AHEC health careers activities. Programs include shadowing and mentoring experiences, summer health careers camps and health careers fairs, with a focus on math and science enrichment.
- ◆ Since 2004, AHEC has distributed 285,000 copies of the NC Health Careers Manual, a reference guide to health careers in the state. This publication offers young people and adults career information, educational requirements, financial aid resources, and listings of health science education programs.

**Supporting Retention Initiatives:** Nurse retention is increased in workplace settings with progressive management practices, where nurses feel empowered in the decisions that are made, and when education is valued.

### AHEC Retention Strategies:

- ◆ AHEC and its statewide partners in nursing leadership have developed a Nursing Management Institute. This continuing education program offers working nurses the education they need to become effective managers, a fundamental element in workforce retention.
- ◆ AHECs help community hospitals implement mentorship programs where nursing leaders are matched with new RN graduates. Mentoring programs increase job satisfaction for mentors and reduce turnover rates for first-year nurses.
- ◆ AHECs offer RN Refresher programs for registered nurses who wish to update their clinical knowledge and skills and return to the workplace after time away from clinical practice.
- ◆ AHECs support retention strategies such as magnet hospital models and career progression initiatives that improve the workplace and make nursing an attractive career choice.

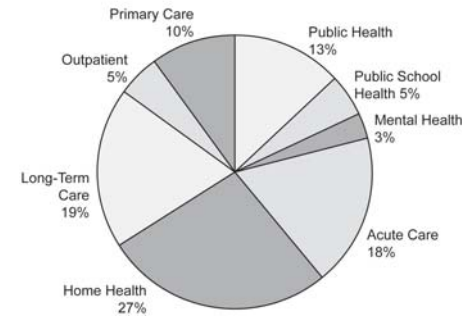
**Preparing a Highly-Skilled Workforce:** North Carolina continues to require more nurses prepared at the baccalaureate level and above. In particular demand are masters programs to prepare future nursing faculty for community colleges and schools of nursing. In addition to faculty shortages, health care agencies throughout the state report significant nursing shortages in critical care, emergency rooms, operating rooms, and long-term care settings.

**AHEC Education Support Strategies:**

- ◆ AHEC nurse faculty collaborate with schools of nursing to develop and operate off-campus RN-to-BSN, MSN, and FNP programs in underserved areas of the state. Students say the programs meet their needs for flexible distance education formats that allow them to advance their training while continuing to work in their communities.
- ◆ AHECs offer a variety of continuing education programs and technical assistance services to practicing NC nurses. Last year AHEC offered 620 CE programs in nursing, attended by more than 19,920 nurses.

- ◆ In 1989, the NC legislature allocated funds to the NC AHEC Program with the intention to expose nursing students to new clinical training sites in rural, long-term care, and critical care settings. Since then, AHECs have worked with NC community colleges and nursing schools to identify new clinical sites for development, assist with funding, and consult on areas related to student use of clinical sites.

**Distribution of NC AHEC Clinical Training Sites by Type**



## North Carolina Area Health Education Centers

**Area L AHEC**

David Webb, EdD, President & Director  
 Brenda Martin, MSN, Nursing Education  
 Rocky Mount, NC  
 Tel: 252.972.6958  
 www.arealahec.dst.nc.us

**Charlotte AHEC**

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 Olivia Bahemuka, MSN, Nursing Education  
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 www.charlotteahec.org

**Coastal AHEC**

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**Northwest AHEC**

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**Wake AHEC**

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 Kathryn Clark, MS, Nursing Education  
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