

WISCONSIN PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Assure safe and healthy people by monitoring progress on the state health plan and on the readiness for public health emergencies.



October 4, 2024

Resolution Requesting Recruitment and Retention Initiatives to Address the Public Health Nurse Workforce Shortage in Wisconsin

Whereas as a key member of the public health team, public health nurse **recruitment and retention** challenges are well established, particularly for underserved rural and metropolitan areas, illustrated by an overall decline of 4.3% of public health nursing positions¹, due in large part to unfilled positions, exacerbated by retirements and lack of qualified applicants, and

Whereas public health nurses are the first line of defense against disease outbreaks and other health threats as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted the critical role of public health nurses in communicable disease surveillance, management and clinical interventions² and, the decline in public health nurses revealed in the WI Center for Nursing RN survey prior to the pandemic potentially contributed to challenges observed in the state's pandemic public health response,¹ and

Whereas, Governor Evers [Health Equity Council](#)³, the [Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan 2023-2027](#),⁴ and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [Future of Nursing 2020-2030](#)⁵ report, have recognized there are structural and systematic barriers that hamper effective [preventative](#) care needed to manage Wisconsin's population health and that these factors continue to result in suboptimal health outcomes, inequities, and rising health care costs for the population of the state of Wisconsin⁶, and

Whereas a goal of the State Health Improvement Plan⁴ (SHIP) and Governor Evers Equity Council³ is to ensure that the public health and healthcare workforce is more representative of the populations served⁶, and

Whereas nursing students from underserved populations are less likely to seek public health nurse positions due to disparities in salaries that can be earned in larger health systems and are more likely to require loans to complete their education⁷, and

Whereas, as an essential member of the public health team, public health nurses promote and protect the health of populations, via health promotion, disease and disability prevention strategies using knowledge from nursing, social, and public health sciences^{8,9}, and

Whereas Public Health Nursing is a specialty that focuses on the community and populations as the client and all baccalaureate nursing programs are required to include unique training including population health, culturally responsive care, interprofessional partnerships, and systems-based practice¹⁰, and

Whereas successful financial incentive programs exist in the state of Wisconsin to expand the number of nurses seeking a graduate degree in order to become nurse faculty¹¹, and

Whereas current available federal loan forgiveness programs exist, (e.g., HRSA Nurse Corp Loan forgiveness program¹² and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program¹³) but have proven difficult for PHNs to access due to geographic and population-based constraints for the HRSA program and eligibility criteria for PSLF.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Public Health Council and key public health stakeholders enter into meaningful conversations with the Governor, the Legislature, and Wisconsin DHS to support creative solutions to address the public health nurse workforce shortage, and diversify and support the public health nurse workforce to better represent the population they serve, with particular emphasis on areas of the state that are experiencing critical recruitment issues/needs.

Be it further resolved that the Public Health Council supports the Governor's Task Force on the Healthcare Workforce Report fostering Public Health Nurse recruitment and retention in areas of need. This includes salaries, educational pathways, expansion of workforce and prevention resources to improve the health and wellness of communities and,

Be it further resolved, the Public Health Council respectfully requests that the Governor and the Legislature allocate funds to local and Tribal health departments to support public health nurse recruitment and retention strategies (e.g., loan repayments, provider stipends, education grants, position-sharing between local health departments and nursing schools, preceptor tax credits, professional development)

Lastly, be it resolved that copies of this resolution will be shared with the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, the Governor, and the Legislature.

In addition, the following organizations and others will be invited for collaborative discussions to advance and support this resolution over the next year:

- the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
- the Wisconsin Public Health Association, PHN Section
- Administrator of Nursing Education (ANEW) of Wisconsin Nursing
- Leaders of Wisconsin's Federally recognized American Indian Tribes and Bands
- The Wisconsin Nurses Association and its Organizational Affiliates
- Wisconsin Association of Organizational Leaders (WONL)
- The Wisconsin Center for Nursing

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2. Trust for America's Health (2024). Ready or Not: Issue Report March 2024. Protecting the public's health from diseases, disasters, and bioterrorism. Trust for America's Health. <https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-ReadyOrNot-FINAL.pdf>
3. Governor Evers Executive Order #220 Relating to the creation of the Governor's Task Force on Healthcare Workforce. https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/WIGOV/2024/01/29/file_attachments/2763489/EO220-HealthcareTaskForce_unsigned.pdf
4. Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2023). Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan, 2023-2027. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01791-2023.pdf>
5. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2021). The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/download/25982#> .
6. Wisconsin Hospital Association. (2023). Wisconsin Health Care Workforce Report. [https://www.wha.org/MediaRoom/DataandPublications/WHARports/Workforce/2023/Report/WHA-Workforce-Report-2023-web-\(1\)](https://www.wha.org/MediaRoom/DataandPublications/WHARports/Workforce/2023/Report/WHA-Workforce-Report-2023-web-(1))
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8. American Public Health Association, Public Health Nursing Section. (1996).
9. American Nurses Association (ANA) (2022). Public health nursing: Scope and standards of practice (3rd ed.). (pp 97-98).
10. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2021). The Essentials: Core competencies for professional nursing education. <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Publications/Essentials-2021.pdf>
11. WI Nurse Education Program. (2023). <https://nurseeducatorswi.com/>
12. National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment (2024). <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/nhsc/loan-repayment/lrp-application-guidance.pdf>
13. U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). Public service loan forgiveness (PSLF). <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>