

Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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Noe Ortega
Commissioner
Chris Gabrieli
Board Chair

Charge: BHE Task Force on Nursing Education and Workforce Development December 2023

Problem Statement

Massachusetts faces the challenge to address the Health Care sector's dynamic demand for licensed nurses who serve patients across the spectrum of care delivery (acute care, ambulatory, long-term care) with a balanced and agile supply of educated, skilled and credentialed nurses.

Students enroll in pre-licensure Registered Nurse (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programs at public and independent colleges and universities, as well as in post-licensure programs when seeking advanced credentials. The near and future capacity and curricula of nursing programs across Massachusetts' higher education system must align with the projected needs for new graduates, mid-career advancements, and pathway transitions including practice-to-education (faculty).

Over the past decade (and more) there has been a call to address what is often characterized as a "nursing shortage". While too few nurses is certainly a factor in the supply/demand imbalance, the root cause is deeper, intertwined with health care system policies, practices, and regulation. Higher education must collaborate with healthcare providers (employers), state agencies, advocacy organizations and other partners to ensure a systemic, comprehensive, and sustainable approach to nurse education and workforce development that will meet the commonwealth's future health care needs.

Nursing Education and Workforce Task Force

The Board of Higher (BHE) forms and charges a task force to:

- 1) Establish guiding principles for governance of Massachusetts nurse education and workforce development system, consistent with BHE statutory mandates, regulatory authority, and BHE strategic plans, including:
 - a) Strategic Plan for Racial Equity
 - b) Strategic Public Higher Education Financing (SHEF)
 - c) Support Services for Student Success Framework
- 2) Explore current and projected future conditions of Massachusetts' higher education nurse preparation pathways, curricula, and delivery models, relevant health care system voluntary agreements, regulations, and policies that influence the supply of nursing services and therefore, nurse education programs.
- 3) Characterize the scope and scale of the nursing education and workforce development challenge.

- 4) Present recommendations on how to strengthen existing policies, procedures, and regulations to address the need for new and incumbent nurses with the aim of improving health outcomes for all residents and to enhance support for Massachusetts' health care sector.

The task force will:

- 1) Convene stakeholders and partner organizations to frame the scope and scale of the nursing education and workforce challenge, through development of a comprehensive supply/demand model.
- 2) Draw on academic and industry sector research and best practices within the commonwealth, and nationally, to characterize and identify transformative solutions.
- 3) Identify gaps or opportunities in nursing higher education programming for which current or new resources can be directed to leverage system-wide change.
- 4) Propose policy changes and allocation of resources in support of its recommendations.

Membership

BHE Nursing Task Force Co-Chairs

- William (Bill) Walczak
- Francesca Purcell

DHE staff membership and support

- David Cedrone, Associate Commissioner for Workforce Development

External Stakeholders

- The BHE Chair, in consultation with the Task Force co-chairs, will appoint up to 12 task force members to represent, inform, influence, and engage key constituencies, and develop recommendations for consideration by the Board of Higher Education.

Members may include representatives of:

- Legislative committee that inform health care and higher education oversight
- Health care providers and employers spanning the continuum of care and geographic regions of the state
- State agencies/departments that regulate nurse licensure and education programs
- Massachusetts system of public higher education and independent colleges and universities
- Industry sector advocates

Meeting Frequency

The Nursing Task Force will meet five times from January through June and once in September. The task force will submit its report for consideration at the first meeting of the BHE for FY25.

Milestones

- Recruit Task Force – December 2023
- Launch Meeting – January 2024
- Environmental Scan – Jan-Mar 2024
 - Data/Research, Best Practices, Current Initiatives
 - Partner and Stakeholder Network
- Transformative Solutions – Apr-Jun 2024
- Recommendations – Jul-Sep 2024