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## **LOCAL COLLEGES ROLL OUT BOLD & NEW INNOVATIONS TO BRIDGE THE NURSING CLIFF**

### ***Training More Nurses Potentially Saves Lives as Pennsylvania Faces “Worst Nursing Shortage in the Nation by 2026”***

(Harrisburg, PA) – An August survey by AICUP, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania, highlights multiple innovations that member colleges are implementing to meet Pennsylvania’s critical nursing needs. The Hospital and Health System Association of Pennsylvania estimates that PA will experience “the worst nursing shortage in the nation by 2026.”<sup>1</sup> In response, 43 AICUP nursing schools are engaging in bold and innovative programs and new partnerships to train more nurses, grouped within four categories:

1. **Encourage** new age groups to consider a career in nursing (including K-12 and retirees).
2. **Scale up** facilities, increase offerings, and build new spaces for more nursing students.
3. **Expedite** graduation time, through new dual enrollment and accelerated programs.
4. **Assist** students in making nursing school affordable and accessible through new transfer agreements and increased institutional aid and grants.

Here are just a few of the innovative projects underway in Pennsylvania to bridge the looming “nursing cliff,” including: Youngsters at local **grade schools** who are asked “what do you want to be when you grow up” are now more likely to reply “nurse,” thanks to one experimental outreach effort. An emeritus program welcomes **retired nurses back into the workforce**. High school students get a leg up on their nursing career through **dual enrollment**. Nursing students are trained in emerging technologies including robotics and even **hyperreal VR** made by the same lab that collaborated on a rap star’s metaverse concert. **Partnerships** with hospitals and accelerated academic programs expedite the time between classroom and career, transforming students into nurses faster than before.

“You can’t just put a Band-Aid on this, hoping it will get better, we need to take substantive action now. That’s why our nursing teachers and students are rolling up the sleeves on their scrubs, willing to do what it takes to come up with real solutions,” said Thomas P. Foley, President of AICUP, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania.

#### **1. Encourage new age groups to consider a career in nursing**

Westminster College in Lawrence County provides **K-12** students with experiences that can motivate future nurses, showing students how to analyze heart rates with an EKG, take blood pressure, and determine blood types.<sup>2</sup> The Science in Motion Consortium (“SIM”) provides supplemental science enrichment to over 260 middle schools and high schools in Pennsylvania. Seven AICUP member schools support SIM, four of which have nursing programs: Drexel, Elizabethtown, Westminster, and Wilkes.<sup>3</sup>

Nursing professors at Drexel University<sup>4</sup> and Thomas Jefferson University<sup>5</sup> volunteered with an **elementary school** outreach program led by the National Black Nurses Association – a “mini nursing academy” — that teaches healthy lifestyle choices and encourages children to consider a nursing career.

**Teens** curious about exploring a nursing career find a unique introductory experience in Thomas Jefferson University’s Nursing Summer Training and Enrichment Program (“Nursing STEP-UP”).<sup>6</sup> Saint Joseph’s University Lancaster Campus promotes a “Discovering Paths” program for high schoolers with an emphasis on healthcare, nursing, and allied health fields, including radiology and surgical technology.<sup>7</sup> And UPenn, which also has a nursing school, offers several K-12 pipeline programs,<sup>8</sup> including a free program for students in grades 10-12 who are interested in medicine.<sup>9</sup>

Jefferson Health, affiliated with Thomas Jefferson University, created a Nurse Emeritus Program for **retired nurses**. Emeritus nurses return to work but with accommodations aimed at emphasizing their considerable mentoring and training skills to guide newer RNs.<sup>10</sup> The novel mentoring program offers an innovative solution to staffing shortages.

## 2. Scale Up

AICUP member schools produce **69% of the nursing degrees** in Pennsylvania and educate **76% of minority** students pursuing their nursing degree in Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup> **New nursing programs** are being added to meet the state’s emerging critical need for nurses. Recent additions include those at Chestnut Hill College,<sup>12</sup> Lebanon Valley College,<sup>13</sup> Thiel College,<sup>14</sup> and Saint Joseph’s, which launched a new nursing program as part of its merger and expansion into Lancaster.<sup>15</sup> Alvernia built a new 55,000-square-foot facility.<sup>16</sup> Thiel College broke new ground on a \$4 million facility expansion with a designated area for the college’s new nursing department.<sup>17</sup>

Villanova utilizes **virtual reality** in nursing classes.<sup>18</sup> Widener University expanded its **simulation laboratory** this spring with a gift from a nurse-alum.<sup>19</sup> Duquesne students can **use their iPhone** to connect with DUSTIN—the Duquesne University Simulating Telepresence in Nursing.<sup>20</sup> Drexel students learning VR at their healthcare simulation lab benefit from the nursing school’s collaboration with Drexel’s ACE Lab, a pioneer in making digital humans for films and video games, even collaborating with the team behind the metaverse concert of a **hyperreal avatar of rapper Notorious B.I.G.**<sup>21</sup>

## 3. Expedite graduation

Dual enrollment saves students time by allowing for concurrent courses in community college or even high school. Harrisburg University offers both traditional dual enrollment<sup>22</sup> as well as “College in the High School,” in which a student may enroll in dual enrollment courses within their high school.<sup>23</sup> Widener University offers high school dual enrollment and even online options.<sup>24</sup> Duquesne<sup>25</sup> and DeSales<sup>26</sup> promote exclusive discounts for dual enrollment participants, as do many of the AICUP members offering this service. The ASPIRE program, a joint project of La Salle University and Penn Medicine, offers high school students a unique jumpstart on nursing.<sup>27</sup>

For those **switching careers**, Holy Family University offers an accelerated nursing degree for people who have already earned a bachelor’s degree in a non-nursing field.<sup>28</sup> **Working nurses** with an associate’s degree can advance their career with an accelerated bachelor’s degree in 12 months through Alvernia,<sup>29</sup> Drexel,<sup>30</sup> La Salle,<sup>31</sup> Waynesburg,<sup>32</sup> and York College of Pennsylvania.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Assist: Make nursing school affordable and accessible

In June, Cedar Crest College in Allentown made a steep **reduction in tuition** across all its nursing programs.<sup>34</sup> Geneva College, which advertises “all eligible Pennsylvania traditional undergraduate students from families earning less than \$70,000 annually will pay **no tuition**” starting fall 2024, boasts an RN-BSN **dual degree** program in conjunction with the Community College of Beaver County.<sup>35</sup> The Stabler Scholarships for accelerated BSN students at DeSales prompts recipients to “**pay it forward**” with future donations to the Stabler Grant endowment fund.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the 43 AICUP member nursing schools offer **scholarships** for nursing majors, including Chatham,<sup>37</sup> Duquesne,<sup>38</sup> Messiah,<sup>39</sup> Neumann,<sup>40</sup> and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>41</sup> Mount Aloysius College touts multiple scholarships for nursing students, a 100% NCLEX exam pass rate by the ASN program, and cutting-edge simulation labs.<sup>42</sup> AICUP itself funds the **McLean Scholarship for Nursing** and Physician Assistant Majors,<sup>43</sup> which awarded eight new nursing students on August 20, 2024.<sup>44</sup>

Nursing school is also made affordable through **transfer** agreements between community colleges and the 43 AICUP member nursing schools. For example, **Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC)** partners with 23 AICUP member schools. HACC-AICUP transfers include discounts and free textbooks the first semester through Messiah University, and a dual enrollment agreement at both Elizabethtown College and Wilson College.<sup>45</sup> Manor College in Jenkintown offers a *pre-nursing* associate degree in partnership with four-year colleges.<sup>46</sup> Transfer agreements are also specific to career stages, such as the agreement between York College of Pennsylvania and Montgomery County Community College for *working nurses* wishing to advance their education in a 12-month program.<sup>47</sup>

After graduation, a **100% job placement** rate for nursing graduates is touted by Gannon,<sup>48</sup> Saint Joseph's,<sup>49</sup> La Roche,<sup>50</sup> Mercyhurst,<sup>51</sup> Messiah,<sup>52</sup> and Saint Francis.<sup>53</sup> Mount Aloysius College even **guarantees employment** at one of three local hospitals for their "Future Heroes" students.<sup>54</sup>

#### The 43 AICUP member nursing programs are located at:

[Alvernia University](#), [Carlow University](#), [Cedar Crest College](#), [Chatham University](#), [Chestnut Hill College](#), [DeSales University](#), [Drexel University](#), [Duquesne University](#), [Eastern University](#), [Elizabethtown College](#), [Gannon University](#), [Geneva College](#), [Gwynedd Mercy University](#), [Harrisburg University of Science & Technology](#), [Holy Family University](#), [Immaculata University](#), [King's College](#), [La Roche University](#), [La Salle University](#), [Lackawanna College](#), [Lebanon Valley College](#), [Marywood University](#), [Mercyhurst University](#), [Messiah University](#), [Misericordia University](#), [Moravian University](#), [Mount Aloysius College](#), [Neumann University](#), [Robert Morris University](#), [Saint Francis University](#), [Saint Joseph's University](#), [Seton Hill University](#), [Thiel College](#), [Thomas Jefferson University](#), [University of Pennsylvania](#), [University of Scranton](#), [Villanova University](#), [Waynesburg University](#), [Westminster College](#), [Widener University](#), [Wilkes University](#), [Wilson College](#), [York College of Pennsylvania](#).

**Rankings:** According to US News and World Report, all of the **top 10** nursing schools in Pennsylvania are AICUP members.<sup>55</sup> Half of the top schools are AICUP members according to RegisteredNursing.org.<sup>56</sup>

Find all **85** AICUP member schools mapped at the link here: <https://aicup.org/about-us/members/>  
Superscripted reference notes linked here: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

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