

June 25, 2024

To the Honorable Chair and members of the Healthcare Workforce Taskforce,

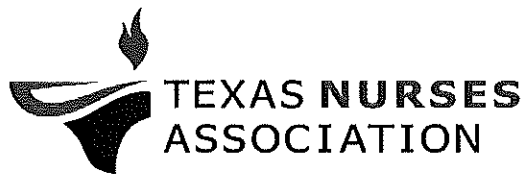
The Texas Nurses Association (TNA) appreciates the opportunity to share information about the state of the nursing workforce in 2024. This is an important issue for the state to address.

Texas is facing an acute nursing shortage in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies indicates a deficit of over 44,678 Registered Nurses (RNs) across the state. Fortunately, Texas is equipped with several policies to address this issue.

In the 88<sup>th</sup> Regular Session, the Texas Legislature passed SB 25, which streamlined several nursing education funding programs and created several new clinical education funding programs. That piece of legislation, combined with the General Appropriations Act (GAA), constituted the largest investment in nursing education in state history.

Following is a summary of previously existing programs streamlined by SB 25 and associated GAA funding:

- **Nursing Scholarship Program:** this program created new scholarship opportunities for Texans attending nursing school, with \$12.5M in funding to be distributed in this biennium.
- **Nursing Loan Repayment Program:** this program created new loan repayment opportunities for Texas nurses as a retention mechanism for keeping nurses practicing in the state, with \$12.5M in funding to be distributed in this biennium.
- **Nursing Faculty Loan Repayment Assistance Program:** this program incentivizes graduate-prepared nurses to serve as full- or part-time faculty in schools of nursing in Texas, with \$7M in funding to be distributed in this biennium.
- **Nursing Innovation Grant Program:** this program provides grants to schools of nursing that develop or expand new activities and projects that promote innovation in the preparation of initial RN licensure nursing students and of faculty who may teach in initial RN licensure programs. The program is funded with proceeds from the Texas Tobacco Lawsuit Settlement, but also received \$6M in funding from Article III, Rider 64 in the 88<sup>th</sup> Regular Session. Examples of grants include funding for simulation training programs, which can alleviate the burden on clinical sites for providing clinical



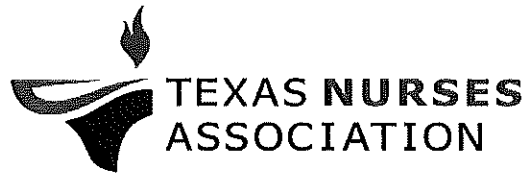
education. Under Board of Nursing rules, 50% of clinical training may be provided through simulation.

- **Professional Nursing Shortage Reduction Program:** this is a highly flexible program, which has evolved significantly since it was first established in 2001. The GAA directed \$46.8M in funding into three tiers:
  - o **Growth Tier:** \$28M of the \$46.8M appropriated for the program goes into this tier of funding. Funds under this tier will be distributed in an equitable manner among nursing programs based on increases in the number of nursing students graduating.
  - o **Production Tier:** \$8M of the \$46.8M appropriated for the program goes into this tier of funding. Funds under this tier will be distributed in an equitable manner among nursing programs based on the total number of nursing students graduating from a program each year.
  - o **Faculty Tier:** \$10.8M of the \$46.8M appropriated for the program goes into this tier of funding. Funds under this tier will be distributed in an equitable manner among nursing programs based on the total number of doctoral level and master's in nursing education students graduating from a program each year.

SB 25 also created several new clinical funding programs that were not funded by the GAA. While many of the programs streamlined by SB 25 and funded by the GAA focused on didactic education, these unfunded programs provide significant opportunities for addressing clinical education needs.

Following is a summary of new clinical education programs created by SB 25 that did *not* receive funding in the GAA:

- **Clinical Site Nurse Preceptor Grant Program:** This program is designed to award grants to clinical sites to support the use of nurse preceptors in providing clinical training to nursing students. Preceptors are practicing nurses who assist in the education of nursing students in the clinical setting. Often, preceptors will take on the burden of training students in addition to their already burdensome workload. This additional burden can dissuade qualified nurses from serving as preceptors when the incentives are not sufficiently aligned, or they lack support for that additional workload. This program could be used to provide support for preceptors in various ways and grant awardees would be able to develop best practices to share more broadly among the nursing profession.



- **Clinical Site Innovation and Coordination Program:** This program is designed to award grants to clinical sites that create and operate innovative pilot programs that will support nursing performed at clinical sites in this state by increasing the number of nurses, improving the working environment for nurses, improving the retention of nurses, addressing workplace safety, and coordinating with other clinical sites any solutions found to address common nursing concerns. These pilot programs could then be shared more broadly in the nursing profession to develop best practices and advance the profession's commitment to quality care.
  
- **Nursing Faculty Grant Program – Part-Time Positions:** This program is designed to award grants to institutions of higher education to provide funding for qualified nursing staff working at clinical sites who serve as part-time nursing faculty at those institutions. Clinical faculty can increase and extend clinical capacity, much like preceptors. Unlike preceptors, clinical faculty work for the educational institution instead of the clinical site. Board of nursing regulations provide different rules for clinical faculty and preceptors; however both are essential to extend the utility and availability of clinical education.
  
- **Nursing Faculty Grant Program – Clinical Training:** This program is designed to award grants to clinical sites who provide additional clinical training to nursing faculty. The grants would improve the quality of clinical education by incentivizing greater collaboration between clinical faculty and the clinical sites they use to train nursing students.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The Texas Legislature should continue investing in existing, proven programs like the Nursing Shortage Reduction Program, the Nursing Faculty Loan Repayment Assistance Program, the Nursing Innovation Grant Program, the Nursing Loan Repayment Program, and the Nursing Scholarship Program, and should also direct funds toward the new programs identified in this paper. It is appropriate to consider shifting funds toward clinical education programs to support the natural flow of student progression, meaning the investments in didactic education from the 88<sup>th</sup> Regular Session necessitate investment in clinical education in the 89<sup>th</sup> Regular Session to ensure the education pipeline does not experience bottlenecks.