

# Everyone Needs a Nurse

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The nursing shortage discussion has been around for as long as I have been a nurse.... which is quite a while. We were told in the 1980s that all nurses would have BSNs by the mid-1990s. RNs would play a central role in primary care. The nursing shortage would end improving forever patient outcomes and we would all be happy and sing Kum Ba Ya. What a beautiful thought! Didn't happen.

Last year the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence completed a direct care healthcare workforce snapshot with the intention of identifying the availability of the current nursing and medical workforce in Colorado. The results were not surprising but concerning. "Over 20% of Colorado's current RN workforce is over 60 years old. According to CDPHE data, 22 rural counties in the state have only 37-74 RNs for every 10,000 residents, while 10 urban counties have 125-197 RNs per 10,000 residents. This is a 300% difference between many rural and urban counties."<sup>1</sup> This data certainly highlights the maldistribution of RNs between rural and urban counties. What is missing is the fact that urban counties also continue to experience nursing shortages, especially in specialty areas such as Med-Surg. Additionally, very few of the rural hospitals in the

state have a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) and if they do, do not have the finances to support that role on a full-time basis. Reports of shortages in behavioral health professionals are state-wide with little end in sight.

Will nursing shortages ever end? Highly unlikely. That is because nurses are so adaptable to almost any situation that they are a sought-after workforce well beyond the bedside. There are so many non-direct care roles that nurses can and do fill. This means that bedside nursing, once the bread and butter of the profession, is only one professional option for nurses. Living in a world with a growing aging community needing added health services and behavioral health challenges on the rise, nursing needs to be the answer to these gaps. How can we support more nurses staying in direct care roles while building a new workforce for the future? Financial support, upskilling and professional development can be powerfully persuasive.

So far in 2024, the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence has received funding to extend the Grow Your Own Primary Care APRN, Grow Your Own PMHNP, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Training, and RN and LPN Refresher Courses. All have

funding to support nurses' professional development as we seek to fill the shortage gaps. Additionally, a new Nursing Student Success Fund was launched through The Center in 2023 as a pilot to create support for wrap-around services for nursing students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The plan was to fund 4 students in a pilot this year to test the project. Over 50 applications were received from all over the state within 24 hours of opening the application process. This suggests a strong need for this type of support. More donations are needed to continue to build and expand that program, but it is off to a strong start and is a great example of nurses supporting our next generation of nurses. Please consider donating to this project. You can do that on The Center's website: [www.coloradonursingcenter.org](http://www.coloradonursingcenter.org).

There is a need to fill the shortage gaps to ensure all Coloradans have access to quality nursing care regardless of where they live and their ability to pay. We must work together to make that happen. Please consider how you can engage in strengthening our profession for the future. After all, at some point in our lives everyone needs a nurse. ■

## Reference

1 Colorado's Direct Care Healthcare Workforce September 2023 snapshot. Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence. (2024, April 30). <https://www.coloradonursingcenter.org/colorados-direct-care-healthcare-workforce-september-2023-snapshot/>