

# South Florida Celebrates Nursing Excellence at the 16th Annual FNA South Region Symposium & Awards Ceremony

The 16th Annual Florida Nurses Association South Region Symposium & Awards Ceremony, held April 18, 2026, at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach, Florida, brought together nursing professionals, educators, students, and healthcare leaders for a day of education, advocacy, and recognition. Centered around the theme, *Lessons from Nursing's Past: Pathways to Professional Transformation and Advocacy*, the symposium explored how nursing history continues to shape leadership, innovation, and patient care.

The event featured a keynote presentation by nursing historian Dr. Christine Ardalan, who discussed how lessons from nursing's past continue to influence professional identity, leadership, and advocacy today. Attendees also participated in a panel discussion featuring Dr. Audrey P. Miller, Vianney S. Rosales, Senator Barbara Sharief, and Dr. Maria Suarez, who shared insights on leadership, professional transformation, and advocacy within the nursing profession.

A highlight of the symposium was the recognition of nursing excellence across South Florida. Nurses and healthcare leaders were honored across numerous award categories celebrating leadership, education, innovation, advocacy, clinical excellence, and emerging talent. The prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award recognized Dr.

Marie O. Etienne, Senator Barbara Sharief, and Dr. Nola Holness for their lasting contributions to nursing and healthcare. The Legacy of Service Award honored Dr. Maria Suarez for her leadership, dedication, and enduring impact on the profession. Additional award categories and nominees are listed below.

The symposium also featured poster presentations highlighting innovative research, quality improvement initiatives, nursing education strategies, community health projects, and advancements in patient care. Presenters represented a wide range of nursing specialties and academic institutions, showcasing the depth of scholarship and collaboration taking place throughout the region.

Scholarship recipients were also recognized for their academic achievements and commitment to the future of nursing. Recipients included Stephanie Gossett, Jahnaya Gourgue, Ivette Gonzalez, Matthew Leith, Jeremiah Perard, Genesis Botana, and Shaunte Jean-Poix.

The Florida Nurses Association South Region extends sincere appreciation to the South Region Volunteer Leadership Council, volunteers, sponsors, exhibitors, and participating organizations whose support and dedication made this year's symposium and awards ceremony a success. ■

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** Marie O. Etienne, DNP, APRN, FNP, PNP, D. Min. (h.c.), PLNC, FADLN

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** Senator Barbara Sharief, DNP, MSN, APRN

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** Nola Holness, PhD, CNM, APRN, ANP-C, CNE, FACNM

**Unsung Hero Award:** Gisela Bretones

**Legacy of Service Award:** Maria Suarez, DNP, MSN, APRN, ACNP-BC

**Distinguished Academic Nurse Leader Award:** Greta Mitzova-Vladinov, DNP, CRNA, CHSE, FAANA

**Distinguished Academic Nurse Leader Award:** Maikel Y. Portal, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, PMHNP-BC, MBA

**Excellence in Undergraduate Nursing Education Award:** Antuanet Cruz, DNP, APRN-FNP-BC, PMHNP-BC, MSN, CNE

**Excellence in Graduate Nursing Education Award:** C. Victoria Framil Suarez, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC, CNE, GS-C, CWS

**Innovative Technology Impact Award:** Greta Mitzova-Vladinov, DNP, CRNA, CHSE, FAANA

**Rising Star: Nursing Student Excellence Award:** Hung Anh Vu

**Future Clinical Leader: Graduate Nursing Student Award:** Emma Mullen, BSN, RN, CCRN

**Visionary Leader: Chief Nursing Officer Award:** Elizabeth L. Vieito-Smith, DNP, RN

**Champions of the Unit: Nurse Leader Recognition Award:** Louis Dominguez-Lira, DHA, MHA, MSN, APRN, FNP, RN, CNOR

**Innovative Advanced Practice Nurse Award:** Carmen Presti, DNP, APRN, ACNP-BC

**Community Nurse Warrior Award:** Yui Matsuda, PhD, PHNA-BC, MPH, RN, FAAN

**Nurse of the Year:** C. Victoria Framil Suarez, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC, CNE, GS-C, CWS