

Oklahoma Nurse Practitioners: Leading the Way in Access to Care

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Celebrating NP Week

Each November, National Nurse Practitioner Week (NP Week) provides an opportunity to recognize the contributions of nurse practitioners (NPs) and the critical role they play in improving access to health care across Oklahoma and the nation. More than 461,000 licensed NPs provide nearly one billion patient visits annually in primary care, specialty care, hospitals, long-term care facilities, schools, and community settings (American Association of Nurse Practitioners [AANP], 2025).

Meeting Oklahoma's Health Care Needs

The contributions of NPs are particularly important in Oklahoma. Across much of the state, residents face challenges accessing timely health care services due to provider shortages and geographic barriers. Many Oklahoma communities are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) or Medically Underserved Areas, highlighting the ongoing need for a strong and accessible health care workforce (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2025).

Oklahoma also continues to experience significant health challenges, including high rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and tobacco-related illness (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2025). Nurse practitioners are helping address these challenges by providing comprehensive, patient-centered care in primary care clinics, hospitals, schools, tribal health systems, and community health centers. As demand for primary and preventive care continues to grow, practices are increasingly relying on NPs to help meet workforce needs, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Barnes et al., 2018).

A Historic Milestone for Oklahoma APRNs

In 2025, Oklahoma achieved a historic milestone for advanced practice nursing with the passage of House Bill 2298. Beginning November 1, 2025, qualified Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) may obtain independent prescriptive authority after meeting established education and clinical practice requirements (Oklahoma Board of Nursing, 2025). This legislation recognizes the expertise of APRNs and creates new opportunities to improve access to care, particularly in rural and underserved areas of the state.

By reducing barriers to practice, Oklahoma is better positioned to address workforce shortages and ensure that patients receive timely, high-quality care closer to home.

A Personal Perspective

As a Family Nurse Practitioner with more than 20 years of clinical experience, I have witnessed firsthand the impact NPs have on the lives of Oklahomans. Through my practice at the University of Oklahoma Health Campus Unity Clinic, I care for uninsured and underserved patients who often face significant barriers to health care access. As an educator at the University of Oklahoma, I also have the privilege of preparing future nurse practitioners who will serve communities throughout our state.

Whether practicing in rural clinics, urban health centers, hospitals, schools, tribal health systems, or community settings, Oklahoma's NPs are improving access, reducing disparities, and helping patients achieve better health outcomes every day.

As we celebrate National Nurse Practitioner Week, let us recognize Oklahoma's nurse practitioners for their leadership, clinical expertise, compassion, and unwavering commitment to the health of our communities. Their contributions are essential to ensuring a healthier future for all Oklahomans. ■

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References online:
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