



WASHINGTON'S NURSING WORKFORCE: WHAT THE DATA TELLS US—AND WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Washington state has made a significant investment in understanding its nursing workforce—and the results are both illuminating and urgent. The [2025 Washington State of the Nursing Workforce Research Report](#), developed by the Washington Center for Nursing (WCN) in collaboration with statewide research partners, brings together nearly 800 pages of research produced between 2020 and 2025 into one cohesive, cross-cutting analysis.

The report offers a clear message: Washington has a strong nursing workforce, but structural challenges across education, distribution, and retention continue to limit the state's ability to meet growing healthcare demands.

Education Access and Capacity: Demand Still Outpaces Opportunity

Washington's nursing education system includes 42 colleges offering 85 nursing programs, yet geography remains a barrier. Programs are concentrated in population centers, and while some rural areas offer pre-licensure education, no graduate nursing programs are located in rural counties. This gap matters—students who leave their communities for education are less likely to return, deepening rural workforce shortages.

Capacity is another constraint. During the 2023–2024 academic year, only 50–81% of qualified applicants were admitted to nursing programs, reflecting a system operating near its limits. Clinical placements remain a primary bottleneck. Nursing programs coordinated more than 25,000 clinical placements in a single academic year, yet most occurred in acute-care settings during weekday shifts, limiting flexibility. Programs consistently report that staff burnout, limited space, and competing priorities for employee training restrict their ability to take on more students.

Simulation offers promise, but it is underutilized. Only 12% of Washington nursing programs currently use simulation as a meaningful component of clinical education, despite growing evidence that high-quality simulation can supplement traditional placements when properly resourced.

Faculty: A Quiet but Growing Risk

While faculty vacancy rates remain relatively low, the report highlights a more subtle concern: Washington relies heavily on part-time and adjunct faculty, placing administrative, advising, and leadership burdens on a shrinking pool of full-time educators. Faculty demand has increased by nearly 23% over the last five years and is projected to grow more than 32% by 2032.

Compensation plays a major role. Nursing faculty wages have not kept pace with inflation, and Washington now ranks behind several neighboring states in faculty pay. The result is increased resignations, leadership turnover, and difficulty recruiting future educators—trends that directly affect student capacity and program stability.

Licensure and Distribution: Who Is Working—and Where?

Washington currently has more than 133,000 licensed nurses, yet not all are actively working in the state. Estimates suggest that only 82% of RNs and 84% of LPNs licensed in Washington are actively employed in nursing within the state. The introduction of the Nurse Licensure Compact in 2024 adds complexity, making it easier for nurses to practice across state lines—but also harder to track who is actually providing care in Washington.

Geographic distribution remains uneven. Nurses cluster in urban centers, while several rural counties fall below national rural averages for RN availability. Certain specialties face sharper gaps: nine counties have no practicing CRNAs, and access to advanced practice care varies widely by region.

New Nurses: Growing Numbers, High Risk of Loss

One of the most striking findings is the rapid growth of younger nurses in Washington. While nurses aged 20–29 still make up a small share of the workforce, their numbers have increased dramatically over the past four years. At the same time, this group reports the highest levels of emotional exhaustion and the greatest intention to leave their employer within a year.

Among younger nurses planning to leave, more than half cite burnout, lack of feeling valued, dissatisfaction



with management, and concerns about safety. These trends signal an urgent need for stronger mentorship, residency, and early-career support programs to protect Washington’s future workforce.

Diversity and Inclusion: Progress with Persistent Gaps

The report shows encouraging gains in diversity among nursing students and LPNs, with representation exceeding that of Washington’s general population. However, diversity decreases at higher levels of practice and leadership. Faculty, RNs, APRNs, and specialized roles such as CRNAs and CNMs remain less diverse than the population they serve.

Survey data also reveal ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination, with one-third of nurses of color reporting negative impacts on their professional well-being. These findings underscore that retention and equity are inseparable—and that workforce strategies must address both.

Wages, Jobs, and Retention: High Pay, Persistent Shortages

Washington offers some of the highest nursing wages in the nation, yet ranks near the bottom for nursing employment per capita. This paradox suggests that high wages alone are not enough. Housing costs, rural infrastructure, workload intensity, and burnout all influence whether nurses stay.

In 2024, about one-third of Washington nurses reported feeling emotionally drained on a weekly or daily basis. While nurses reported strong collegial relationships, fewer than half felt there were enough staff to get the work done—a clear signal that retention efforts must focus on staffing, safety, and organizational culture.

Turning Data into Action

To move from insight to impact, WCN and its research partners have identified short-term research priorities for 2026, including developing an interactive statewide nursing education access map, streamlining education data collection, and examining hybrid and remote education models.

The takeaway is clear: Washington has the data, the expertise, and the collaborative infrastructure to strengthen its nursing workforce. What’s needed now is coordinated action—across education, practice, and policy—to ensure nurses can enter the profession, thrive in their roles, and continue caring for communities across the state.

These findings are only the beginning. Explore the full [2025 Washington State of the Nursing Workforce Research Report](#) to dive deeper into the data, research implications, and recommended next steps for strengthening Washington’s nursing workforce.

Source: 2025 Washington State of the Nursing Workforce Research Report, Washington Center for Nursing

A NURSES WEEK WEBINAR!

Join WCN for a dynamic look at the **2025 Washington State of the Nursing Workforce Research Report**

The State of Nursing in Washington: What the Data Reveals About Our Future



Tuesday, May 12, 2026 | @Noon | Online | Free

In just 30–40 minutes, we’ll break down the most important findings in a clear, practical way — followed by 20 minutes of open Q&A and discussion.

This isn’t just numbers on a page. It’s the story of:

- Who is entering the profession — and who is leaving
- Where shortages are most critical
- What’s happening with student capacity and clinical placements
- What burnout trends are telling us
- What this means for you and your organization



Bring your questions. Bring your perspective. This is your chance to understand the data shaping nursing policy, education, and workforce decisions across Washington.

Scan or click or to register today!



https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/rV53_d2LQtyaNfFKtZOVhA

Nurses across Washington are speaking clearly about what it feels like to do this work right now.

They describe being mentally exhausted. Emotionally drained. Used up. Afraid to ask for help.

They talk about documentation demands that pull them away from patients. Staffing levels that feel unsafe. The quiet toll of stress, trauma, and responsibility carried day after day.

In the 2024 Washington nursing burnout survey, nearly half of nurses reported workloads they believe are unsafe for patients. Only 47% said they have enough staff to get the work done. Just 16.7% reported that mental health services are available through their facility. In some mid-career age groups, up to 66% indicated they plan to leave their employer due to burnout.

Behind every percentage is a nurse — and a story.

One nurse shared: “Workload per nurse with increased documentation and responsibilities leaves little time for true patient care... It’s a broken system just getting worse.”

This is not simply about stress. It is about the sustainability of the profession. It is about patient safety. It is about whether nurses feel valued, supported, and able to continue the work they were called to do.

In response, the Washington

Center for Nursing convened statewide workgroups aligned with the National Academy of Medicine’s National Plan for Health Workforce Well-Being. The goal was not just to study burnout — but to act.

The result is the **Nursing Retention & Burnout Workgroup Key Strategies & FY 2026 Action Plan for Priority Statewide Recommendations**, a coordinated effort to build healthier work environments across the state.

The plan focuses on five critical areas:

- **Reducing documentation burden** so nurses can spend more time with patients and less time behind screens.
- **Expanding mental health support** and eliminating stigma so nurses can seek help without fear.
- **Leveraging technology** thoughtfully to ease workload rather than add to it.
- **Creating positive work environments** grounded in autonomy, recognition, safety, and meaning.
- **Strengthening diversity and inclusion** by reducing regulatory barriers and addressing inequities that drive nurses — particularly Nurses of Color — out of the workforce.

These are not abstract strategies. They are practical, measurable steps designed to restore what many nurses say they are losing: time, voice, value, and well-being.

The work is ongoing. The infographics released as part of this plan represent progress — but not the finish line. Real change requires partnership across healthcare organizations, educators, policymakers, and nurses themselves.

Nurses entered this profession to care for others. The question before us is whether our systems will care for them.

A supported nursing workforce does more than reduce burnout. It strengthens retention. It improves access to care. It protects patients. And it honors the humanity of the people who show up every day to serve Washington communities.

We invite you to explore the Washington Plan for Nursing Retention & Burnout Workgroup Key Strategies & FY 2026 Action Plan for Priority Statewide Recommendations and consider how you can be part of this work.

Learn more:

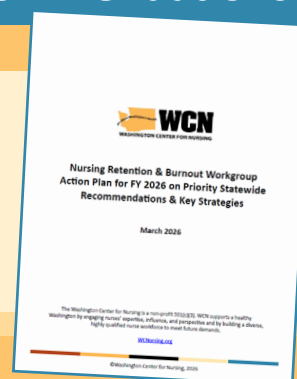
www.wcnursing.org/data-reports-publications/

When nurses are supported, everyone benefits.

Nursing Retention & Burnout Workgroup Key Strategies & FY 2026 Action Plan for Priority Statewide Recommendations



Click here to read full recommendations



Compliance & Regulation Workgroup



- Create a regulatory & compliance requirement infographic to reduce the time nurses spend on documentation.
- Publish an infographic detailing state and national requirements for mandatory learning & training to streamline modules for hospitals & unburden health workers.



Nationally, **53%**

reported that reducing the documentation burden would be extremely effective for reducing stress. (AMN Healthcare, 2023)



Less than **4%** of WA nurses reported their facility had implemented strategies to reduce time spent on documentation. (WCN Burnout Report, 2024)

According to a study published in the [Journal of Patient Safety](#), hospitals that invested in comprehensive training saw annual savings of...



“Workload per nurse with increased documentation and responsibilities leaving little time for true patient care . . . This is all detrimental to patient care. Patients don’t understand and demand more and become angry. It’s a broken system just getting worse.” (WCN Burnout Report, 2024)

ACTION STEPS



Collect compliance requirements for draft infographics.



Develop a comprehensive dissemination plan.



Finalize, publish, & disseminate infographics.



Measuring & Assessment



- Have organizations track documentation time before and after implementing strategies to measure impact.
- Have organizations track costs related to mandatory trainings and cost savings when reducing requirements.

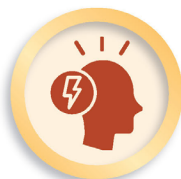
In 2025, WCN convened workgroups aligned with the [National Academy of Medicine's National Plan for Health Workforce Well-being](#), a nationally recognized best-practice framework for strengthening the nursing workforce through well-being. The strategies highlighted in these infographics were developed by these workgroups. Not all identified strategies are represented here. To view the 2024 Prioritizing Nursing Well Being to Strengthen the Workforce Burnout Survey report, visit www.wcnursing.org/data-reports-publications/.

Mental Health & Well-being Workgroup



- Make mental health services available & accessible to all healthcare workers.
- Eliminate stigma as a barrier to seeking mental health care.
- Include personal care & wellness as a core component of education programs & curricula.

In 2024, Washington nurses reported feeling:



Mentally Exhausted



Used Up



Emotionally Unhealthy



Afraid to ask for help



Only **16.7%** reported that mental health services were made available by their facility. (WCN Burnout Report, 2024).

WHAT NURSES HAVE TO SAY:

STRESS
+
TRAUMA
+
LACK OF RESOURCES
=
=



"We need easy ways to support our mental health - make mental health care a benefit."

"Treat nurses as if their lives matter too."

"I have personally witnessed an RN driven to depression and severe anxiety."

"Better services for mental health, the struggle is very real."

"Consider mental health check-ups as equivalent to TB testing."



THE BOTTOM LINE: HEALTHY NURSES = SAFE PATIENT CARE

ACTION STEPS



Align the WABON CARES program with the Washington Physicians Health Program (WPHP).



Codify requirements for employers to provide formalized mental health supports including job protections.



Require nursing education programs to include personal health and wellness education.

Measuring & Assessment

- Assess options for establishing a statewide confidential mental health screening and referral program.
- Establish common quality assurance and performance measures between CARES and WPHP.
- Develop measurement tools to assess the impact of WABON education and outreach efforts on increasing knowledge and reducing stigma.
- Require nursing education programs to submit student mental health and wellness program descriptions along with defined quality measures.

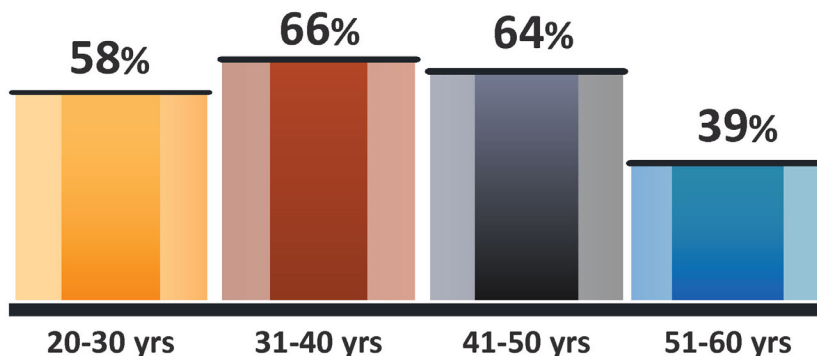
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Technology Utilization Workgroup

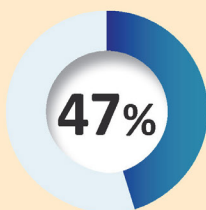


Develop statewide training & guidance for undergraduate & graduate nursing students on the use of AI to streamline documentation, reduce documentation burden, & mitigate burnout.

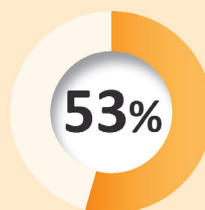
Nurses that indicated they plan to leave their employer in the next year due to burnout.



In a national RN study, nurses indicated that several employer changes would be extremely effective for reducing stress (AMN Healthcare, 2023). These included:



INCREASING TIME PER PATIENT



REDUCING THE DOCUMENTATION BURDEN



WHAT NURSES SAY ABOUT WHY THEY ARE CONSIDERING LEAVING THEIR JOB

“Workload per nurse with increased documentation and responsibilities leaving little time for true patient care. . .”

(WCN Burnout Report, 2024).

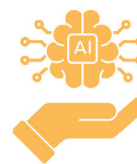
ACTION STEPS



Complete a literature review on the use of AI for patient care documentation including best practices & ethical considerations.



Develop a comprehensive dissemination plan for AI literature review.



Provide a statewide training resource with guidance on the use of AI for patient care documentation to streamline documentation burden on nurses.



Measuring & Assessment



- Final AI literature review is published.
- AI literature review is distributed to audience defined in dissemination plan.
- Statewide training resource is developed and use is tracked.

In 2025, WCN convened workgroups aligned with the [National Academy of Medicine's National Plan for Health Workforce Well-being](#), a nationally recognized best-practice framework for strengthening the nursing workforce through well-being. The strategies highlighted in these infographics were developed by these workgroups. Not all identified strategies are represented here. To view the 2024 Prioritizing Nursing Well Being to Strengthen the Workforce Burnout Survey report, visit www.wcnursing.org/data-reports-publications/.

Positive Work Environments Workgroup



- Develop a webpage toolkit with information about how health care facilities & academic programs can implement the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work® in their organization with a turn-key program.
- Develop training for staff nurses, faculty, & leaders to help implement the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work® as a local workplace wellness standard.

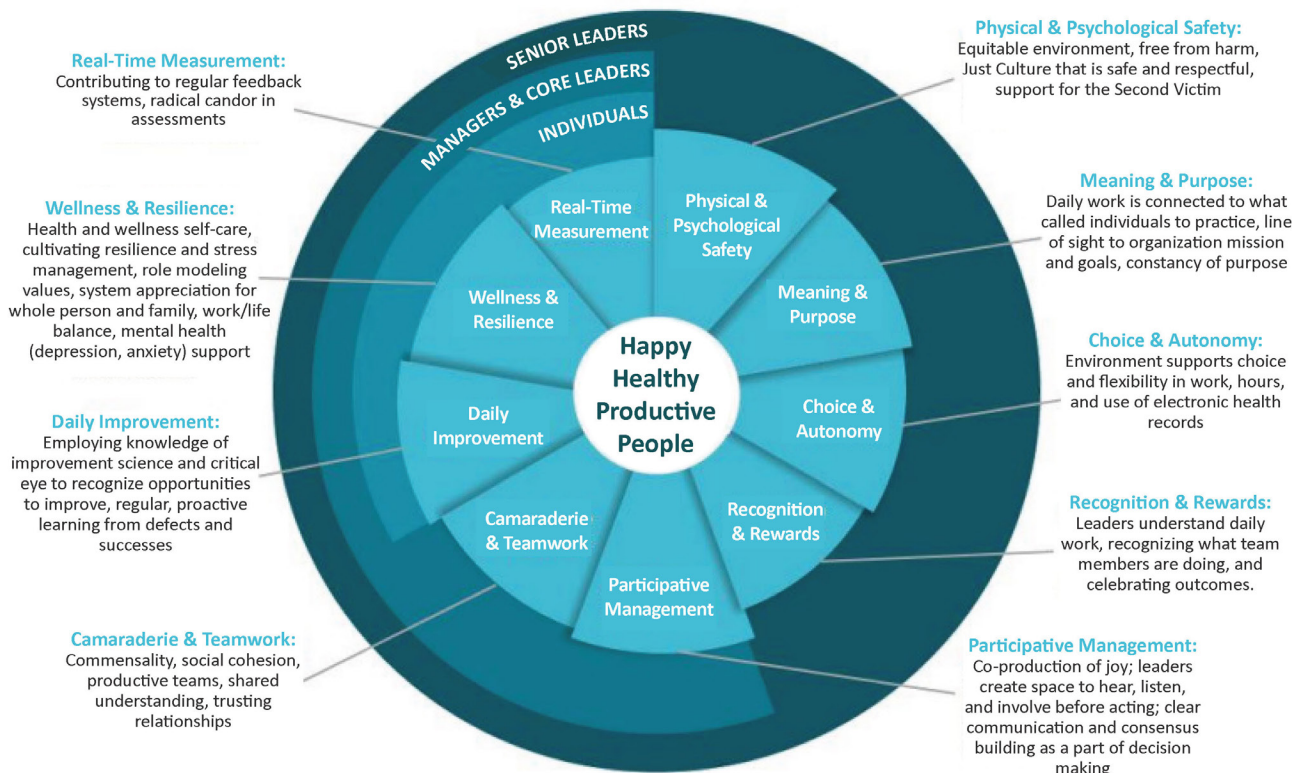


Percent of nurses by age range planning to leave their employer because they do not feel valued.

59%	64%	67%	46%
20-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	41-50 yrs	51-60 yrs

(WCN 2024 Burnout report)

IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work®

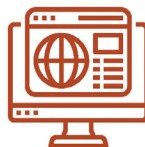


This graphic was created by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and was adapted from the original source. Visit ihi.org to learn more.

ACTION STEPS



Outreach to grow committee member participation.



Gather data & build a Joy in Work® webpage resource toolkit.



Develop a nurse focused Joy in Work® training model & plan a state wide presentation campaign.

Measuring & Assessment



- Increase active workgroup committee participation to 10 members from across the state.
- Workgroup collects data and successfully publishes Joy in Work® webpage toolkit.
- Training is developed and shared around the state. Organizations and training participation is tracked.

In 2025, WCN convened workgroups aligned with the [National Academy of Medicine's National Plan for Health Workforce Well-being](https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/2021-national-plan-for-health-workforce-well-being), a nationally recognized best-practice framework for strengthening the nursing workforce through well-being. The strategies highlighted in these infographics were developed by these workgroups. Not all identified strategies are represented here. To view the 2024 Prioritizing Nursing Well Being to Strengthen the Workforce Burnout Survey report, visit www.wcnursing.org/data-reports-publications/.

Recruit & Retain a Diverse & Inclusive Workforce Workgroup



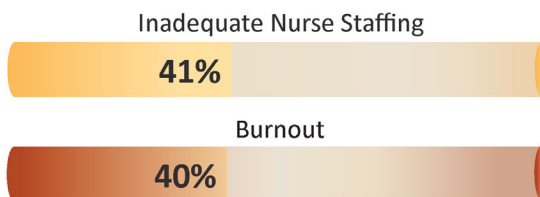
Expand pathways for internationally educated nurses (IENs) by engaging in revising nurse licensure regulations in collaboration with WABON.

IN A 2024 SURVEY OF WA NURSES,

23%

of Nurses of Color indicated they do not intend to stay with their current employer.

WORK ENVIRONMENT REASONS FOR LEAVING INCLUDE



Admitting qualified internationally educated nurses can contribute to higher levels of staffing for patient care, help alleviate staffing shortages, and reduce burnout.

ACCORDING TO THE 2024 WCN BURNOUT REPORT:

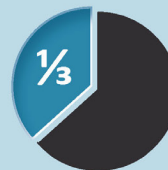
49%

Of nurses report workloads are unsafe for patients.

AND ONLY

47%

Agree that they have enough staff to get the work done.



Of surveyed Nurses of Color indicated that their professional well-being has been negatively impacted by racism.

ACTION STEPS

REVISE LICENSURE REGULATIONS TO DECREASE UNNECESSARY BARRIERS.



Increase options for qualified internationally educated nurses to demonstrate English language proficiency through new rule allowing them to show 1,000 hours of work in a primarily English speaking country.



Qualify internationally educated nurses who can show their completed nursing education in another county is "substantially equivalent" instead of "equivalent," providing WABON reviewers more flexibility in establishing adequate educational credentials for these nurses.



Additional recommendations: Provide a clear definition and examples of "substantially equivalent" in communication materials.



Measuring & Assessment



- Establish baseline data on internationally educated nurses then track how many internationally educated nurses WA admits based on new rule.
- Monitor disciplinary data on internationally educated nurses to identify reasons for discipline, in particular, English language proficiency.

In 2025, WCN convened workgroups aligned with the [National Academy of Medicine's National Plan for Health Workforce Well-being](#), a nationally recognized best-practice framework for strengthening the nursing workforce through well-being. The strategies highlighted in these infographics were developed by these workgroups. Not all identified strategies are represented here. To view the 2024 Prioritizing Nursing Well Being to Strengthen the Workforce Burnout Survey report, visit www.wcnursing.org/data-reports-publications/.

Get to Know WCN's Newest Board Member



Shayla Holcomb, BSN, RN, & WCN Board Vice President Elect

Shayla Holcomb serves as the Nursing Quality and Academic-Practice Partnership Manager for Public Health Seattle & King County and was recently elected Vice President of the Washington Center for Nursing Board of Directors. She brings more than 15 years of nursing experience spanning critical care, ambulatory practice, public health, workforce development, and nursing education.

Shayla began her nursing career in 2009 as an intensive care nurse in rural Idaho. After relocating to the Seattle area in 2013, she transitioned to ambulatory care and supervisory roles serving medically underserved communities in downtown Seattle. Since 2015, her work has focused on nursing education, training, and learning experience design, with a strong emphasis on academic-practice partnerships and workforce pipeline development.

A passionate advocate for nursing students and early-career nurses, Shayla is committed to creating learning environments that foster critical thinking, resilience, and belonging. She actively strengthens partnerships between education and practice through service on multiple nursing advisory boards across Washington state. She also led a four-year, \$2.8 million HRSA Nurse Education, Practice, Quality, and Retention grant that established a training center of excellence in partnership with Seattle Pacific University to prepare undergraduate and new graduate nurses for primary care roles in underserved settings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Shayla played a key leadership role in Public Health Seattle & King County's response, including the development of testing, vaccination, and isolation and quarantine operations that integrated physical and behavioral health services.

Shayla proudly identifies as a nurse in recovery and openly shares her lived experience to reduce stigma and support others. She serves as a peer support facilitator with the state's CARES program. In her community, Shayla is a parent, youth basketball coach, and autism advocate, raising her family in Orting, Washington.

WCN NURSES OF COLOR COALITION

Connect, Collaborate, Contribute!

The WCN-Nurses of Color Coalition is a brave space to build community, foster belonging, and step towards creating an inclusive workplace in the nursing profession. The WCN supports the coalition by convening the group virtually monthly.

For more information and to get involved, contact
WCN DEI Associate
Fawzi Belal at
FawziB@wcnursing.org

School of Nursing & Health Studies

MASTER OF NURSING



Equipping you to provide solutions to the most pressing challenges facing healthcare with the advanced knowledge and concrete skills to broaden your scope of influence to address health disparities, teach the next generation of nurses and lead complex organizations.

Program Details: [Admissions - School of Nursing & Health Studies \(uw.edu\)](https://uw.edu/school-of-nursing-and-health-studies/admissions)

Final Application for Autumn 2026 Cohort - Deadline: May 1, 2026

Program Highlights:

- 2-year, full-time program (with option to go part-time, extending to 4 years)
- Flexible and hybrid schedule
- Hands-on fieldwork with leading hospitals, nursing schools, and community health agencies
- Full-time enrollment for a 2-year degree is less than \$20,000 per year
- #1 ranked nursing program
- **This program is not eligible to admit international students enrolling with an F1 or J1 student visa.**

UPCOMING INFO SESSIONS:

- Wed, 4/22/2026 @ 6 PM: [Online Information Session](#)
- Thu, 5/21/2026 @ 6 PM: [Online Information Session](#)

QUESTIONS?

Email Student Recruiting Manager
Monica Hull (Pham) at mlp232@uw.edu

WCN Bilingual Nurse Videos Help Promote Nursing as a Career

According to the 2023 United States Census Bureau, 20.5% [1 in 5] of Washingtonians speak a language other than English at home. At WCN, we celebrate the rich diversity of Washington's communities.

In healthcare, a diverse nursing workforce strengthens care for all. To celebrate the contributions of bilingual nurses in Washington, WCN created Bilingual Nurses, Stronger Care videos to share the journey into nursing for some of Washington's bilingual nurses.

These videos explore the challenges these nurses overcame to pursue a career in nursing, along with their passion for caring and community that helped them to succeed!



HELP US REACH A NEW GENERATION OF BILINGUAL NURSES!

If you or your organization works with K-12 students... you can help by sharing these videos with students. The more Washington students we reach with these encouraging videos, the more impact they will have!

WCN created these videos to promote nursing as a career to diverse populations and culturally competent care. If you are a student considering a career in nursing, know that nursing needs you. And though there are challenges in pursuing a career in nursing, there are people and resources to help you achieve your goal!

To learn more about nursing as a career, start your journey by visiting,

www.WCNursing/be-a-nurse/

Follow WCN on YouTube for more informative videos!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UcK3gToTp1-vqt72Xd9w7xIA>



CHECK US OUT ONLINE!

WCNURSING.ORG

To learn more about Washington's nursing workforce, careers in nursing, and nursing leadership.

