



# Arizona's Healthcare Workforce Shortage

## Overview

Arizona leaped ahead of Nevada for the first time in nearly two decades to become the nation's fastest growing state in 2006.<sup>1</sup> While the population continues to soar, the numbers of registered nurses (RNs) and other healthcare professionals in Arizona have not kept pace with the state's rapid population

growth. In fact, Arizona has among the lowest number of employed RNs per capita of all 50 states.<sup>2</sup> The reason: a lack of education capacity in the state's college and

university nursing programs. For example, in 2005, Arizona nursing programs were forced to wait-list 1,406 applicants who were qualified to enroll in a program.<sup>3</sup> These students met all of the rigorous prerequisites and were accepted into a nursing program, but could not begin due to lack of nursing instructors and/or classroom space. In addition, Arizona also faces chronic shortages of other healthcare professionals, including:

- laboratory/medical technologists;
- occupational therapists;
- pharmacists;
- physical therapists;
- radiologic technologists;
- respiratory therapists; and
- surgical/operating room technologists.

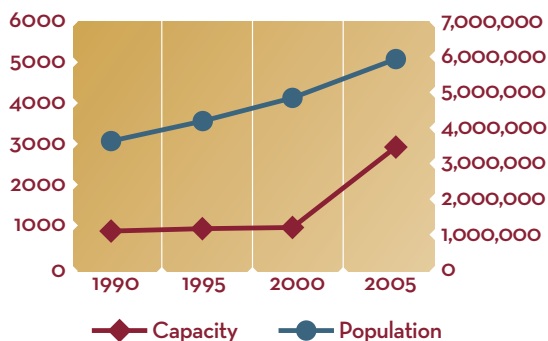
## The Education Bottleneck

Arizona needs registered nurses, and many students are eager to explore this dynamic and vibrant profession. However, the number of new RNs entering the pipeline is constricted by a bottleneck: a lack of capacity in the state's educational system. For example, 35 percent of the qualified applicants—1,406 prospective nursing students—to Arizona nursing programs were accepted but not admitted in 2005 because there were not enough faculty.

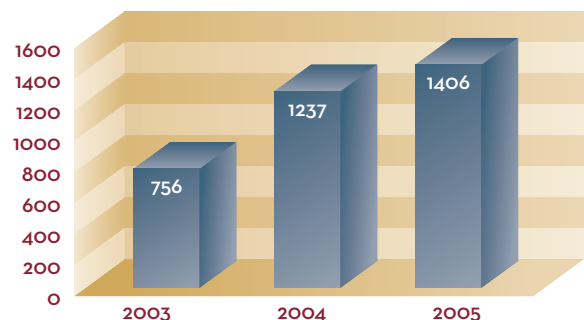
However, the state's healthcare community in recent years has galvanized support for statewide initiatives to increase the state's capacity to produce more nurses and other healthcare professionals. Many hospitals are partnering directly with educational institutions to boost enrollment.

In 2005, the Arizona Legislature passed AzHHA-driven legislation that appropriated a total of \$20 million over five years (\$4 million annually) in an effort to double the capacity of Arizona's college and university nursing education programs by increasing the number of nurse education faculty. Known as Arizona's Partnership in Nursing Education (APNE), the legislation is projected to increase the state's number of annual nursing graduates by more than 1,000 by 2008.<sup>4</sup>

Nursing Program Capacity vs. AZ Population Growth



Wait-listed Nursing Program Applicants



Arizona's Legislature showed leadership by supporting APNE, but the state's population growth will require even more than a doubling of nursing education program capacity. Hospitals are seeking additional \$20 million in federal or private matching dollars to accelerate the progress that began with APNE.

Nurses per 100,000		
YEAR	ARIZONA	NATIONAL AVERAGE
2004 (Preliminary)	681	825
2000	628	782
1996	721	798
1992	606	726

But hospitals aren't merely waiting for federal lawmakers to take action. They are contributing significant dollars to healthcare education in four primary ways:

- supporting employees through tuition reimbursement, scholarships, loan forgiveness programs and other methods;
- supporting schools' capital expenses, bricks and mortar, computer labs, and similar needs;
- making in-kind donations to education programs that include but are not limited to providing professional staff to serve as clinical instructors as well as loaning classroom space and opening simulation labs to the programs; and
- giving via their respective foundations to support education programs or the educational needs of employees.

According to a 2006 survey conducted by AzHHA, 40 of the state's hospitals (about half of the total surveyed) spent more than \$25 million to graduate more healthcare professionals, advance healthcare education and support the state's healthcare education programs. This figure does not reflect the efforts of all Arizona hospitals, which would be a considerably larger sum.

## The Workforce Shortage: By the Numbers

The nation's shortage of healthcare professionals is well documented. Due to our state's unique dichotomy (rapidly growing cities/suburbs and geographically isolated rural areas), the shortage hits Arizona particularly hard.

Arizona ranks 45th among all states for employed RNs per capita (681 nurses per 100,000, compared to U.S. average of 825).<sup>5</sup>

Nationally, nursing is the occupation with the largest projected job growth through 2012.<sup>6</sup>

The shortage of full-time equivalent RNs in all care settings in Arizona is projected to increase from 17 percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2010. If not addressed, the shortage rates will reach 32 percent by 2015 and 39 percent by 2020, much higher levels than national projections.<sup>7</sup>

Health Professions Per 100,000 <sup>8</sup>		
PROFESSION	AZ	US
Pharmacist	67	77
Pharmacy Technician	105	106
Physical Therapist	42	49
Occupational Therapist	21	30
Respiratory Therapist*	39	32
Laboratory/Medical Technologist	78	101
Radiologic Technologist*	67	62

\* While Arizona's professionals per 100,000 population for these professions is higher than the nation, Arizona is the fastest growing state in the country so our need for healthcare professionals is greater than these averages.

## Investing in Arizona's Healthcare Workforce

AzHHA will continue to support efforts to ensure an adequate supply of healthcare professionals, including passage of federal legislation designed to help Arizona expand college and university nursing education programs. These programs are essential, because research shows that more hospital workers will not only benefit the patients hospitals serve, but

also contribute positively to Arizona's economic health. The task of adding the 2,900 inpatient hospital beds slated to open between 2007-11 has been and will continue to be a monumental undertaking for Arizona's healthcare community.<sup>9</sup> Where will hospitals find the staff—physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals—to support these new facilities? Staffing new hospitals to meet the rapidly increasing demand for healthcare services will require a strong public-private partnership and a tangible investment of resources into growing Arizona's healthcare workforce.

### **AzHHA-Sponsored Programs Address RN Shortage**

As part of its ongoing efforts to address Arizona's shortage of health professionals, AzHHA administers a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant, launching the following workforce-focused programs:

- **Health Occupations Students of America**—Through this national program, nearly 700 Arizona high school students in 75 chapters statewide, have learned about the health professions.
- **Nurse Storytelling Project**—Kindergarten through primary grade youngsters learn about real-time healthcare heroes to help expand awareness of the opportunities in the nursing profession.
- **Minority Nurse Stipend Program**—This program provides financial support to minority and low income nursing students.

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- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2006
- 2 Meds & Eds, *The Key to Arizona Leapfrogging Ahead in the 21st Century*, 2005
- 3 Arizona State Board of Nursing (AzBON)
- 4 Arizona Department of Commerce
- 5 Bureau of Health Professions, HRSA
- 6 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS Releases 2002-12 Employment Projections.
- 7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, *Projected Supply, Demand, and Shortage of Registered Nurses, 2000-2020*.
- 8 HRSA, *The United States Health Workforce Profile*, October 2006
- 9 *The Economic Impact of Arizona's Hospitals on the State & Its Counties*, 2007, Arizona State University W.P. Carey School of Business L William Seidman Institute.