



Growth in Community College Bachelor's in Nursing Programs in the United States

**CCB
DATA POINTS
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Healthcare employers are struggling to fill vacant registered nursing (RN) positions in virtually every state in the country, and community colleges are helping to close this critical workforce gap. Community college RN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs were first approved in Florida in 2001 and have grown to 83 programs across 13 states by 2025, with Oregon's approval of RN to BSN programs at six community colleges earlier this year. Graduates of these programs help address the nation's nursing shortage, adding bachelor's-prepared nurses who reflect the racial demographics of their communities.

The current [RN shortage](#) is a nationwide concern, with vacant positions in nearly every state. This dearth of qualified RNs has a detrimental effect on the healthcare of Americans and diminishes the capacity of colleges and universities to prepare new nurses, given the limited pool of qualified RNs to teach future nurses. Lowered [nursing program enrollments](#) are attributable to many factors, including faculty and clinical placement shortages, as well as budget constraints. This downward pull on enrollment is also associated with reduced acceptance of new students as nursing program applications remain strong across the country. However, recent reporting by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) suggests this trend may be reversing. AACN shows increasing enrollments in BSN programs of about 5% from 2023 to 2024, including a 2% increase in enrollments in RN to BSN programs.

Interestingly, five states that authorize the conferral of CCB degrees top the list of states projected to have the most severe nursing shortages: Washington (26% shortage), Georgia (21% shortage), California (18% shortage), Oregon (16% shortage), and Michigan (15% shortage). Washington, Georgia, and Oregon authorize community colleges to offer RN to BSN programs, whereas California and Michigan have not authorized community college nursing programs despite recent attempts to pass state laws to do so. Nursing bills authorizing community colleges to confer bachelor's in nursing degrees to nurses holding RN licensure have been introduced in both states without success in passage, although California is continuing to pursue [legislation](#) that would allow community colleges to pilot RN to BSN programs. In [Illinois](#), the need to address nursing shortages in rural and remote regions of the state is central to current Governor Pritzker's push to authorize CCB degrees that would include RN to BSN programs.

Research Approach

This brief explores which states authorize community colleges to award bachelor's in nursing degrees, who completes these programs, and what graduates of RN to BSN programs make relative to associate degree nursing (ADN) graduates. The brief utilizes data from the latest national community college baccalaureate (CCB) program inventory reported in [Watch Them Grow](#) (Community College Baccalaureate Association and Bragg & Associates, Inc., 2024) to describe community college nursing programs in the country, almost all of which utilize an RN to BSN program design. Drawing on the national inventory data, we found 13 states have approved a total of 77 community college bachelor's in nursing programs through December 2023, with additional research conducted in 2025 identifying six new RN to BSN programs in Oregon.

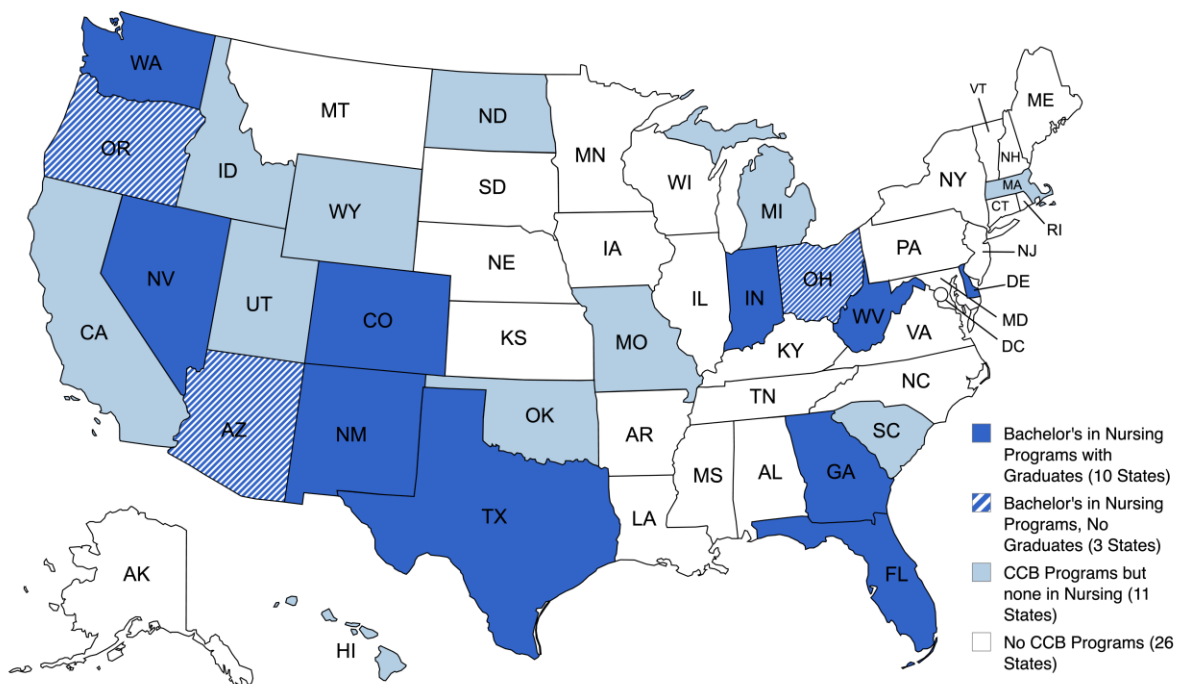
In addition to data from [Watch Them Grow](#), current data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System ([IPEDS](#)) were analyzed to report on the geographic location and minority-serving status of community college bachelor's in nursing programs and graduates from 2017-18 to 2023-24, with 2023-24 being the most current year graduate data are available in the federal data set. These two metrics were chosen because of the priority CCB degrees place on increasing [access](#) to bachelor's degrees for underserved populations. The seven-year period was selected because it utilizes data from two years prior to the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 and approximately five years after the pandemic start date. We hypothesize using this time period may shed light on ways in which the pandemic may have influenced changes in the number of programs and graduates, since COVID-19 had a well-documented [dampening effect](#) on community college enrollments nationwide. We also compare community college bachelor's in nursing programs and graduates to all CCB programs and graduates nationwide, and we

compare the earnings of community college bachelor's in nursing graduates to the current RN workforce using [The 2024 National Nursing Workforce Survey](#).

Community College Bachelor's in Nursing Programs in the United States

According to *Watch Them Grow*, 24 states authorize one or more community colleges to offer at least one CCB program in a wide range of fields of study. Figure 1 displays a U.S. map showing the current status of these 24 states related to community college bachelor's in nursing programs, with 10 states having RN to BSN programs and graduates during the period of 2017-18 through December 2023 when the inventory was completed. Three more states approved community college RN to BSN programs but recorded no graduates by 2025, due to the recent approvals of any community college bachelor's in nursing programs. No other state having authorized CCB degree programs had approved any community college bachelor's in nursing programs by the time this report was written.

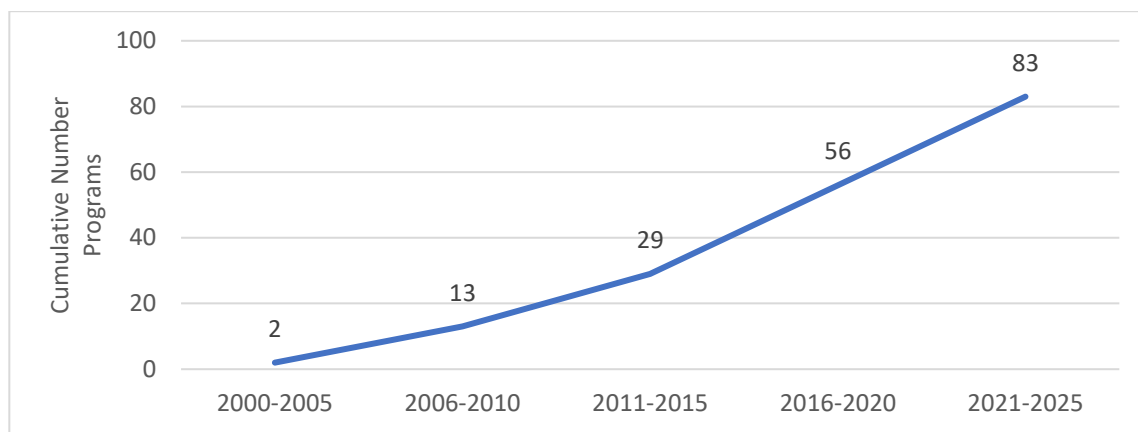
Figure 1. Current Status of 24 states on CCB and Community College RN to BS Program Approval through June 2025



Looking at the evolution of RN to BSN programs offered by community colleges in the U.S., the first two programs were approved during the five-year period of 2000-2005, with the first such program authorized at St. Petersburg College in Florida in 2001. Subsequent to this period, community college bachelor's in nursing programs increased during each five-year period through 2025, with substantial growth during the last decade. Figure 2 shows 83 community college RN to BSN programs by 2025, which is a near doubling of these programs from 2011-15 to 2016-20 and another approximate 50% expansion from 2016-20 to 2021-25.

Looking at trends in community college bachelor's in nursing program authorization across states, we see some states have approved many more RN to BSN programs than other states. By far, Florida has the most RN to BSN programs of any state, with all 28 colleges having approved and presently offering such programs. Relative to the nation, Florida accounts for about one-third of all approved RN to BSN programs, reflecting a finding reminiscent of the national CCB program inventory findings in *Watch Them Grow* that shows nearly one-third of all the CCB programs in the country are located in Florida. Texas comes in second with the approval of 12 RN to BSN programs since its passage of [SB 2118](#) in 2017.

Figure 2. Cumulative Number of Community College RN to BSN Programs from 2000-2005 to 2021-2025



Further, we looked at the geographic location of these programs, as well as the minority-serving institution status of the schools offering them. What we found is a higher proportion of community colleges offering RN to BSN programs are located in: 1) rural and 2) distant, fringe and remote locations than all community colleges conferring CCB degrees nationally. Specifically, 57% of RN to BSN programs are situated in rural and remote regions of states, compared to 47% of all CCB programs nationally.

Also noteworthy, we found 5% fewer community colleges offering RN to BSN programs are recognized as minority-serving institutions than all community colleges offering CCB degree programs. Specifically, IPEDS data show 45% of community college RN to BSN programs are located in minority-serving institutions, while 50% of all community colleges offering CCB degrees carry a [minority-serving institution](#) designation. More specifically, all but one of the 37 minority-serving community colleges that confer bachelor's in nursing degrees is designated as a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) ([Excelencia in Education](#), 2025).

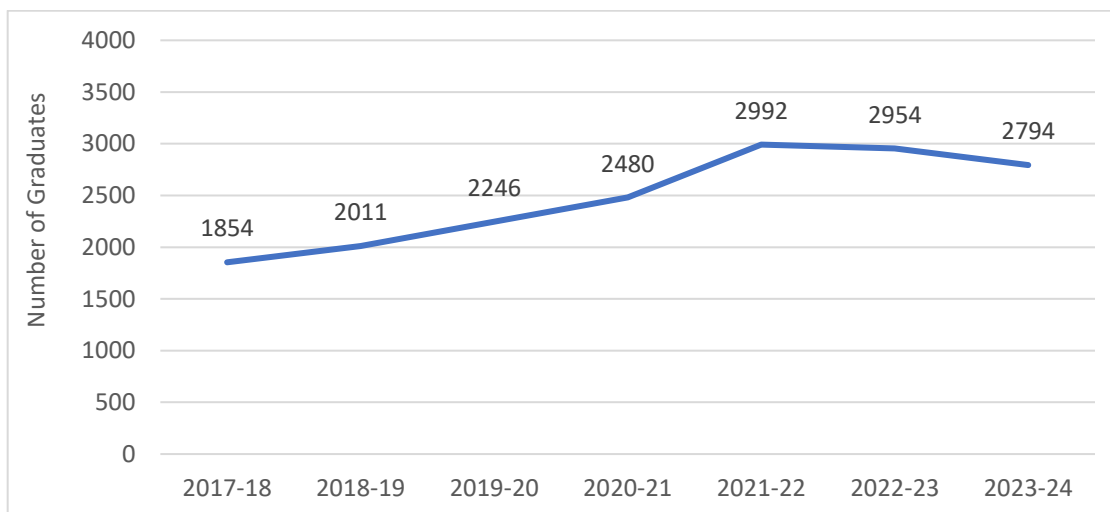
Growing Community College Bachelor's in Nursing Graduates

Looking at community college bachelor's degree completers, the annual number of graduates with bachelor's degrees in nursing from community colleges increased by 61%, from 1,854 in 2017-18 to 2,992 in 2021-22. However, the nation saw a decline of 6% in bachelor's in nursing graduates from 2021-22 to 2023-24 (Figure 3), possibly reflecting the national trend in nursing program enrollment decline documented by AACN and [other research](#). As noted, an AACN [report](#) suggests falling nursing program enrollments are linked to faculty shortages, clinical placement issues, and budget reductions rather than a drop in applications. Fortunately, this decline may be reversing, as nursing program enrollments appear to be increasing at the ADN, BSN, and master's levels.

To fully understand the count of community college bachelor's in nursing graduates in the U.S., it is important to know only 61 (73%) of the total 83 approved community college bachelor's in nursing programs have reported graduates as of 2025. Assuming these 22 programs eventually produce a similar number of graduates as the programs that are reporting (averaging 45 graduates per program per year using IPEDS), we could anticipate as many as 1,000 more community college bachelor's in nursing graduates per year when all 83 programs report graduates.

It is also important to point out that the trend in community college bachelor's in nursing graduates varies widely across the 10 states with completers. Specifically, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Nevada, and Texas increased or held steady in community college bachelor's in nursing graduates from 2021-22 to 2023-24, whereas Florida, Indiana, New Mexico, Washington, and West Virginia saw a decline in these graduates over the same period. The reasons for different trends in community college bachelor's in nursing graduates by state are unclear in the IPEDS data but may reflect trends in the RN workforce and nursing education discussed earlier in this brief, including differences in nursing education capacity across states. For example, graduates of the Florida College System, where all 28 colleges confer bachelor's in nursing programs (estimated at about 2,000 graduates per year), are bound to fill more nursing positions than states authorizing community colleges to offer only one or two such programs.

Figure 3. Number of Community College RN to BSN Graduates Per Year from 2017-18 to 2023-24



Given the scale of bachelor's in nursing programs in the Florida College System, it is not surprising to find Florida's bachelor's in nursing graduates make up the majority of all community college nursing graduates in the country. These graduates account for almost 80% of all 17,399 community college bachelor's in nursing graduates from 2017-18 to 2023-24. Other states with over 500 such graduates over the seven-year period are Georgia (n=954), Texas (n=802), and Washington (n=518), with the remaining states conferring fewer than 450 community college bachelor's in nursing degrees. As noted earlier, Arizona, Ohio, and Oregon had reported no bachelor's in nursing graduates to IPEDS during the period this study was conducted.

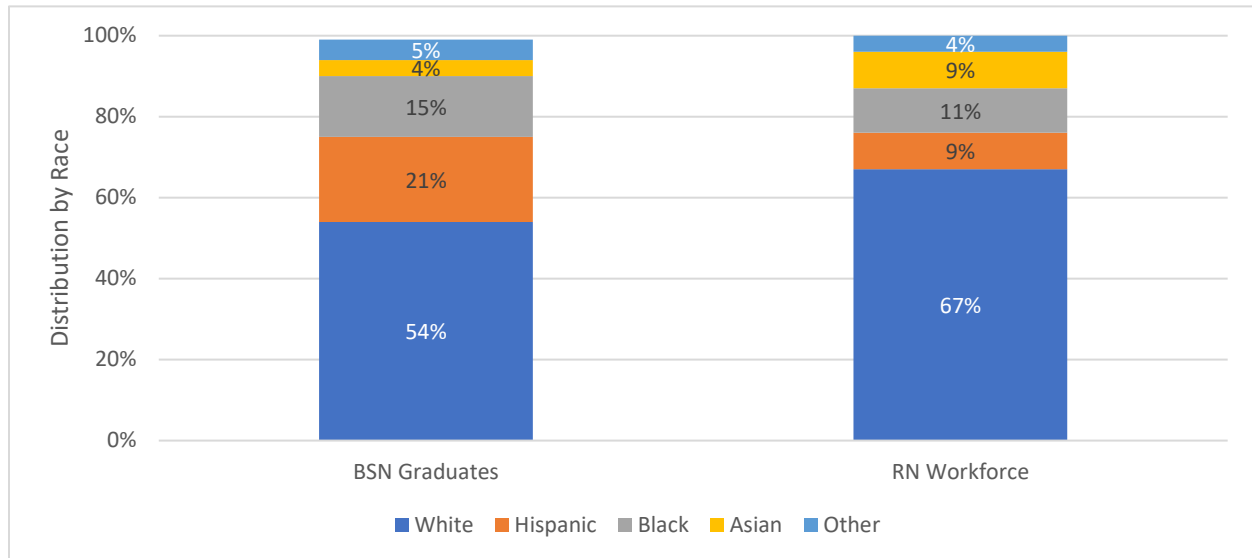
Demographics of Program Graduates

While it is important to recognize that the RN workforce is increasingly [diverse](#), the findings from our study suggest community college bachelor's in nursing graduates are even more diverse in gender and race than the current RN workforce. Looking at the demographic characteristics of community college bachelor's in nursing graduates over the seven years studied, we found 86% of RN to BSN graduates are female and 14% are male. This percentage of males is 3% higher than their percentage in the nation's RN workforce, according to [The 2024 National Nursing Workforce Survey](#).

Also, over these same years, bachelor's in nursing graduates include a higher proportion of Black and Hispanic graduates than the national RN workforce. Notably, 21% of graduates are Hispanic compared to 9% of the RN workforce, and 15% are Black compared to 11% of the RN workforce (Figure 4).

Additional analysis using IPEDS data shows the race of community college bachelor's in nursing graduates varies widely from state to state, with five states (Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington) graduating a much higher percentage of bachelor's in nursing graduates of color than their percentage in the national RN workforce. Specifically, the percentage of nurses of color completing a community college RN to BSN degree is 77% in New Mexico, 54% in Texas, 48% in Florida, 48% in Washington, and 39% in Nevada, all well above the 33% of nurses of color in the nation's RN workforce (2024 National Nursing Workforce Survey).

Figure 4. Distribution by Race of Community College RN to BSN Graduates Compared to the National RN Workforce



IPEDS does not provide data on earnings for college graduates, but the *2024 National Nursing Workforce Survey* does report median annual earnings for employed RNs having various education levels. The data show RNs with a baccalaureate degree have median annual earnings of \$85,000 compared to \$80,000 for ADN graduates. This \$5,000 annual earnings differential is important to recognize, as it contributes to the economic security and financial well-being of working nurses who obtain a bachelor's degree. Of additional importance, a recent study using earnings data from the [Postsecondary Employment Outcomes \(PSEO\) Coalition](#) confirms the comparability of earnings of community college to university bachelor's in nursing graduates. While this finding did not hold true for all community college bachelor's programs, it did apply to other health care bachelor's graduates as well.

In summary, this brief has highlighted the growth of community college bachelor's in nursing programs in the U.S., with graduates of these programs showing a modest decline similar to the dip in nursing program enrollment across the country during the same period. Even so, community college bachelor's in nursing graduates were more demographically diverse in both gender and race, especially Hispanic nurses with bachelor's degrees, than the RN workforce. This finding suggests community college bachelor's in nursing programs may help fulfill the longstanding commitment of the nursing profession to prepare nurses who more closely reflect the demographic profile of their patients. More current community college bachelor's in nursing graduate numbers will be examined in fall 2025 when new IPEDS data are released by the federal government. Future research on CCB degree programs and graduates may also help reveal the further potential for CCB bachelor's in nursing programs to fill the nursing workforce gap and increase representation of diverse populations who seek to pursue well-paying nursing employment.

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Suggested citation: Bragg, D. D., & Bishop, C. (2025). [Growth in Community College Bachelor's in Nursing Programs in the United States](#). Community College Baccalaureate Association & Bragg & Associates, Inc.