

# The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project



## The Nursing Shortage in Ventura County: How Policymakers Can Work with the Community to Develop Strategic Solutions

### A Healthcare Crisis

Our communities are suffering from a severe nursing shortage:

- According to the American Hospital Association, there are more than 100,000 nursing vacancies in the United States.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2016, the U.S. will need more than one million new and replacement nurses.
- California graduates only two thirds of the nurses it needs each year.
- The state's nursing schools turn away more than 40 percent of applicants because they cannot accommodate them.
- Latinos are quickly becoming a majority in California, but they make up only four percent of the state's registered nurses.

In Ventura County, the shortage is more acute:

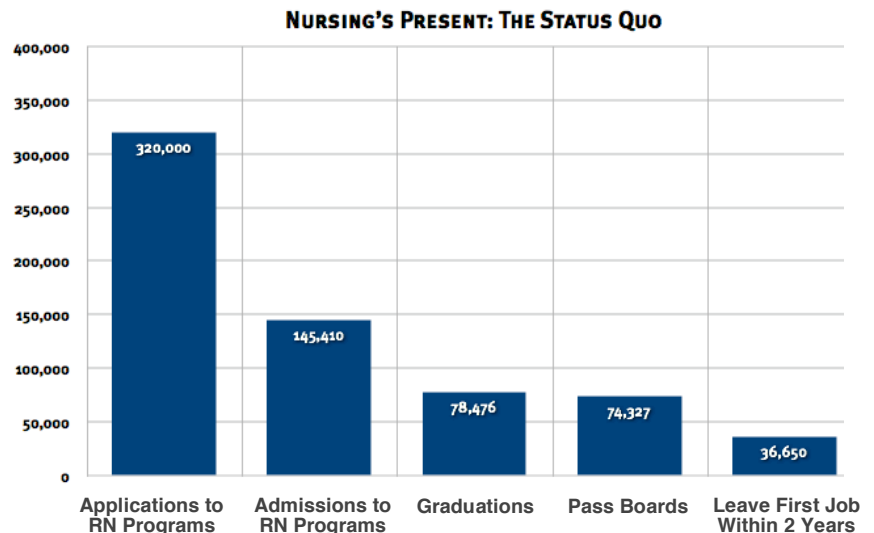
- The county has received an "F" grade from the California Institute for Nursing and Health Care for its low nurse-to-patient ratio.
- There are only 430 nurses for every 100,000 residents in Ventura County, half the state average.
- Local colleges graduate only 175 nursing students each year, with more than six hundred qualified students placed on waiting lists.

The California legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger have already taken some steps to address the crisis. In 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger announced the California Nurse Education Initiative, a public-private partnership designed

**"Nurses are people of compassion and courage. Their profession is a labor of love and without them we simply could not deliver quality care for patients. California is facing a severe nursing shortage and it is absolutely critical that we open up the nursing profession to everyone who has the passion and potential."**

Governor Schwarzenegger

to pump \$90 million into the state's nursing education programs. The resulting grants to nursing programs at California's community colleges are credited by many with creating the first signs of a turnaround in California's nursing shortage: graduation rates in nursing programs went up by nearly 68% between 2004 and 2008.



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The funding made it possible for a backlog of applicants to enter nursing programs. But the challenges facing the state due to the ongoing budget crisis and the current economic downturn will likely make it difficult for that progress to continue. Direct grants to schools may prove difficult to fund over the next few years, forcing the public and private sectors to develop less comprehensive, but perhaps more creative, approaches to addressing the shortage.

**"Nurses serve their patients in the most important capacities. We know that they serve as our first lines of communication when something goes wrong or when we are concerned about health."**

Representative Lois Capps, RN  
U.S. Congress

## Finding a Solution

There is no single cause for the nursing shortage. The issues we face are systemic, cultural, financial, even personal. Because the causes are complex, there is no single strategy that will successfully stem the nursing shortage facing Ventura County. The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project was established to bring all the sectors of our community together to come to grips with this public health crisis and identify the best way forward. The Project has already brought together the leaders in the Ventura County nursing community and other key stakeholders across the region to examine the situation in detail and identify the priority issues that must be addressed.

There is a role for everyone in addressing this crisis: policymakers, educators, employers, even nurses themselves. **In particular, there is a need for policymakers at the state and local level to remain focused on this serious public health problem, and to work with the private sector to develop and fund effective strategies to address it.**

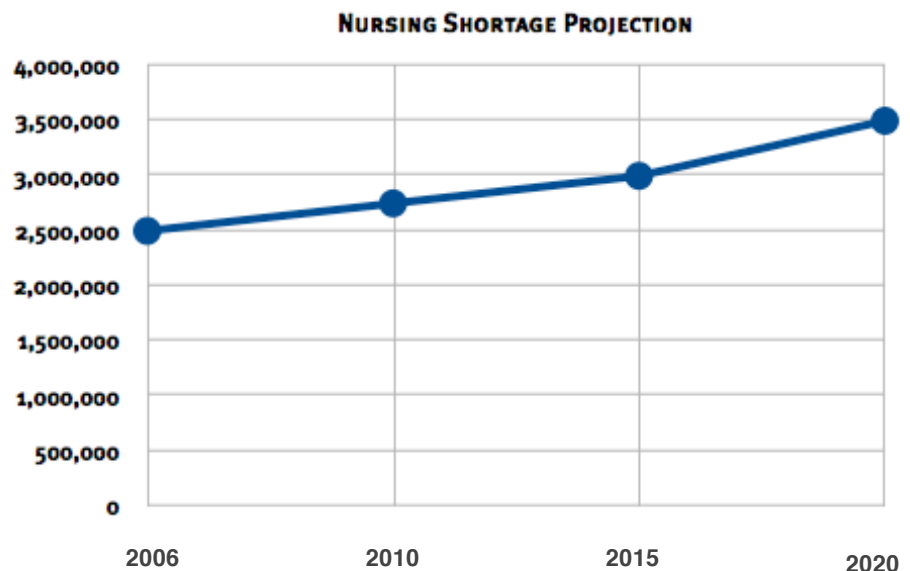
## A Strategic Approach

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has spent the past two years working with community leaders to identify and prioritize strategies that will lead to concrete progress in addressing Ventura County's severe nursing shortage. The challenges fall into three basic categories:

- **Barriers to supply and diversity**, including insufficient capacity in the education system, high attrition rates in the nursing workforce, and a shortage of qualified faculty.
- **A difficult working environment**, including workplace safety issues, the demands of nursing and the stress it can place on family life, and lack of management training and mentorship programs for young nurses.
- **Workforce practice and skill issues**, including lack of orientation for new nurses, a lack of understanding by novice nurses of the demands of their jobs, and lack of support for mid-career transitions.

## Developing Effective Policy

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has identified a number of strategies that stakeholders believe can make a significant impact. Implementing them effectively is the next challenge, one that will require educating the community about the nature of the problem, generating political support at the state and local level to target resources toward finding solutions, and working collaboratively to



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ensure the progress we have already made continues. A continued focus on public-private partnerships will likely yield the most consistent results, since the causes of the shortage go beyond a lack of resources to a more sustained and systemic set of challenges.

Effective public-private partnerships require flexibility, creativity and willingness for institutions to take on non-traditional roles and suspend any preconceived beliefs about proposed partners. Most of all, successful partnerships require leadership. Ventura County's policymakers can and must play that leadership role, whether it is in the state legislature in Sacramento, county government, or the municipal buildings of Ventura's cities, towns and rural communities.

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has identified a series of strategies that can help lead to long-term sustainable solutions. In particular, the Project has identified a number of approaches to expand the capacity of nursing programs at local colleges and universities, recruit and retain qualified faculty, provide additional training and mentorship for young nurses, and more effectively tap the expertise and experience of nurses who are nearing retirement.

## Next Steps for Policymakers

The most critical component for addressing the nursing shortage is ensuring a consistent stream of resources is available to implement the strategies the Ventura Nursing Legacy Project has identified. Policymakers can play a leadership role in securing those resources, whether directly through government programs, or by recruiting private partners that can supplement and complement public efforts. Immediate priorities include:

## Develop Funding and Policies that Improve Educational Capacity and Retention Rates:

- Allocate resources to community colleges that are in need of additional faculty, laboratory space and funding to support nursing programs.
- Review the community college lottery system and how that impacts student attrition in nursing programs, and look for innovative policy solutions to help improve capacity and retention/graduation rates in California's community college nursing programs.

- Increase state budgets for the BA of Nursing Program at CSU Channel Islands to increase the number of bachelor's prepared nurses in our community.
- Subsidize nursing degree programs. It costs more to graduate a nursing student than most liberal arts majors. However, policy makers must recognize the urgency of the situation and allocate funding based on the societal need for important health careers and the critical need for skilled workers.

**“A shortage of nurses endangers quality of care and places patients at risk for increased illness and death. A long-term shortage could undermine the American healthcare system ...”**

The Robert Wood  
Johnson Foundation

## Create Policies that Improve Nursing Practice:

- Re-examine policies on workforce practice and strive to create policies that will improve nursing practice. For example, mandated nurse ratios have resulted in the dissolution of the CNA role, and inadvertently shifted this work to RN's, resulting in work dissatisfaction and attrition, making the challenge more acute.
- Recognize that policy decisions in Sacramento can have broad impacts on the nursing environment of practice.

## Support Public-private Partnerships:

- Identify potential public-private partnerships and create policy incentives for their participation (tax credits, for example).
- Ensure that state educational institutions are free of any regulatory barriers that might prevent successful public-private partnerships.
- Expand funding for forgivable loan programs such as Ventura County's Medical Education Fund, a partnership between the County of Ventura and the Ventura County Community Foundation.

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## Provide Legislative Leadership:

- Continued support of the California Nurse Education Initiative and the introduction of bills and funds targeted to more specific issues, such as Senate Bill 1621, providing loan forgiveness for experienced RN's who are willing to teach.
- Working with the Ventura Nursing Legacy Project and its Partners Investing in Nursing Committee, policymakers can identify other key legislative remedies that can be pursued in the state capital, not all of which will require state funding to be effective.

## Support Efforts to Raise Awareness of the Importance of Nursing:

- Use the public platform for policymakers and elected officials to raise awareness about Ventura County's nursing shortage.
- Work with government agencies, local corporations, foundations, and media outlets to create and finance a public information campaign highlighting the contributions nurses make to the community, and encouraging citizens to contribute to a County-wide campaign to address the nursing shortage.
- Act as a spokesperson for the campaign, highlighting the roles various members of the community can play in reaching a more effective and long-lasting solution.
- Educate constituents about the nursing shortage and the role they can play in developing strategic solutions. There are many tools policymakers can use to raise awareness about the issues they care about: writing op-eds for local newspapers, meeting with editorial boards, appearing on public affairs programs, speaking at a variety of community forums, meeting one-on-one with interested constituents.

The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project can help identify opportunities for effective outreach and work with policymakers and their staff to implement specific tactics.

These are just a few ideas that experts believe can play an effective role in reversing Ventura County's nursing shortage. The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project is committed to collaborating with partners throughout our County to implement these and other strategies. Working together, engaging in sustained cooperative dialogue, sometimes across traditional boundaries, will be the foundation of our success. Together we will no doubt identify many opportunities for effective collaboration.

*The Ventura Nursing Legacy Project is a collaboration of the Ventura County Community Foundation and California State University Channel Islands, funded through the Partners in Investing Nursing's Future program, a joint initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Northwest Health Foundation. Its goal is to identify strategies that will have a material impact on Ventura County's Nursing Shortage.*

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Community Foundation**

