

Help Wanted: The Growing Crisis in Rhode Island's Nursing Workforce A Report of the Rhode Island SHAPE Foundation

There is a nursing shortage of roughly 8 percent in Rhode Island, and by 2010, the shortage is predicted to reach 25%. The current demand for nurses in Rhode Island is between 12,500 and 13,500 FTEs. The study reveals reasons for the nursing shortage; there are fewer young people who enter the profession, and there are increasing numbers of older people, who increase the need for acute and long-term healthcare, which increases the need for nurses. While over 82% of surveyed LPNs and 89% of RNs surveyed reported that they were satisfied with their career, they cited work environment and hours as negative factors in their jobs. Sixty percent of nurses surveyed reported dissatisfaction with their salaries.

The study explains that we need recruitment strategies to encourage people to pursue nursing. Jeanette Matrone, president of Consultant for Healthcare Excellence, Inc. said that "We need to accelerate our second degree students through the baccalaureate program by creating special programs for these students, which may include options such as distance learning. We should ask the service and education sectors to make a partnership by providing incentives such as tuition coverage in exchange for the graduate's service." The study also explains that nurses must be better compensated and that the state's colleges and university need to expand their nursing programs to allow more students into the programs.

The study lists six recommendations to address the nursing shortage: communicating the findings of the nursing workforce study, building nursing school capacity, attracting young people to the profession, improving the work environment, aligning financial incentives with skills and education, and attracting out-of-state nurses. The study concludes that "Although the cost of addressing the nursing shortage will be substantial, the effects of *not* addressing the shortage could cost Rhode Islanders far more, not only in dollars but also in lives."