

# Nurse Corps Evaluation Final Report

# **Executive Summary**



# Nurse Corps Evaluation: Executive Summary

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) administers the Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program (LRP), Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program for Nurse Faculty Program (NFP), and Nurse Corps Scholarship Program (SP). The purpose of the Nurse Corps program is to assist in the recruitment and retention of nurses who work in facilities with a critical shortage of nurses, known as critical shortage facilities (CSFs), or as nurse faculty in eligible schools of nursing. The Nurse Corps program supports recruitment by decreasing the economic barriers associated with pursuing careers at CSFs or in academic settings. The Nurse Corps received an additional \$200 million in fiscal year 2021 to enhance the reach of the program; this funding was expended in fiscal years 2021 and 2022. Below we highlight the findings of a three-year, mixed-methods evaluation conducted to assess participant experience, determine the impact of the additional funds, and assess the program's costs and benefits to underserved communities.

## Components of the Evaluation

- Analysis of program administrative and loan data for applicants and participants from 2017–2024
- A survey of participants and alumni, resulting in 4,890 fully or partially completed surveys (52% response rate)
- In-depth interviews with 57 participants and alumni
- Cost-benefit analysis

## Findings

### Awards Over Time

**With the additional funding, program staff were able to provide more awards and, therefore, also provide awards to applicants with less student debt.**

- Between 2020 and 2022: The additional funding increased the number of awards by 276%, peaking at 2,640 awards in 2022. The average award value dropped from \$91,684 in 2020 to \$59,170 in 2022.
- Between 2023 and 2024: The number of awards returned to the original amount before the increase in funding, with under 800 awards per year, while the average award amount rose back up to over \$100,000.

### Participant Experiences

**Program satisfaction was very high across all programs, although somewhat lower for scholarship participants.**

**89%**

of survey respondents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the Nurse Corps program.



**96%** of alumni remained in the program through the end of their commitment.

### Spotlight | Nurse Burnout and Resiliency

Burnout among Nurse Corps participants increased from 47% before the COVID-19 pandemic to 69% during the pandemic, returning to 54% following the pandemic. Self-reported resiliency was strongly related to burnout; those with high resiliency reported experiencing burnout less often than those with low resiliency (51% vs 85%). A greater proportion of alumni who remained working in a rural area, medically underserved community, or school of nursing for at least 5 years following their commitment reported high resilience compared to alumni who worked in these areas for less than 5 years (20% vs 16%).

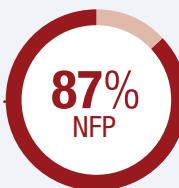
While participants rated their program experiences positively, they also reported challenges, such as the taxation of scholarship or loan repayment funds and aspects of the application process. Recommendations for improving the Nurse Corps program included

- Clarifying program-related instructions and guidance
- Simplifying processes
- Shifting the SP application timeline
- Improving communications between participants and program staff

## Distribution of the Nurse Corps Workforce

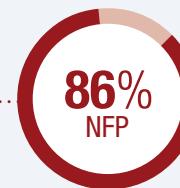
**81%**

of alumni in nursing roles across all programs reported still working in a rural area, medically underserved community, or school of nursing for up to 6 years following their commitment.



**Over 85%**

of in-service participants in each program said they were planning to continue working in a rural area, medically underserved community, or school of nursing after their commitment.



Among LRP and SP survey respondents, satisfaction with the Nurse Corps site and attending a public school of nursing (compared to a private school) were strong predictors of remaining at the site or in a rural area or medically underserved community.

## Access to Healthcare

The estimated total number of patients served by participants in a typical week more than doubled between 2017–2019 and 2022–2023.



**44%** of SP participants indicated that they may not have graduated if not for the Nurse Corps program.

## Cost-Benefit Analysis

A cost-benefit analysis of the Nurse Corps program demonstrated 2.3 to 3.9 times more benefits than costs, meaning that for every dollar spent on the Nurse Corps program, the return is estimated to be over two to nearly four times the cost.

### Benefits

- Adding nurses to the healthcare workforce
- Nurses serving more time in rural areas and medically underserved communities
- Awards to participants
- Avoided loan interest for participants
- Increased patient access to primary care



### Costs

- Appropriated costs to the Nurse Corps program
- Avoided interest on federal loans
- Forgone wages for working in a medically underserved community or rural area compared to an area with higher wages



## Spotlight | Program Reach

Nurse Corps sites consist of CSFs and schools of nursing in all 50 states. With additional funding, the Nurse Corps sites expanded into new rural and non-rural areas. Even though the reach declined in 2024, the program still had a substantially larger reach than in the four years preceding the additional funding.

- The number of rural census tracts with at least one Nurse Corps site increased from 437 in 2017 to 890 after the supplemental funding in 2022 (a 104% increase), followed by a decrease to 735 in 2024.
- The number of non-rural census tracts with at least one Nurse Corps site increased from 1,112 in 2017 to 2,210 after the supplemental funding in 2022 (a 99% increase), followed by a decrease to 1,969 in 2024.

