



## Illinois Nursing Workforce Center Registered Nurse (RN) Survey 2020 Executive Summary

RNs completing license renewal were invited to participate in this survey. The data was collected during the renewal process post payment of the license renewal fee. Data was collected from 3/10/20 to 9/30/20. The 2020 license renewal period was extended from May 30 to September 30, 2020, by Executive Order during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 41,983 RNs completed the survey for a survey response rate of 22%.

**General overview:** Analyzing nursing workforce data through the lenses of nursing licensure, different specialties, levels of care, and geographic location may inform ways to strengthen strategic efforts for the mobilization of healthcare workers during any epidemic or pandemic (HRSA Report, Resources for Pandemic Response, 2020). This report contains data on the characteristics, supply and distribution of the current Illinois RN workforce, the relative numbers of RNs in each age group, their racial, ethnic and gender diversity, education preparation, education advancement, specialty practice area and workplace role. Based on these findings, issues and concerns around the capacity, distribution and diversity of the nursing workforce are identified. Data in this report is useful in maintaining access to health care and planning for the provision of essential primary care and other health care services.

**Diversity:** Consistent with the increase in ethnic and racial diversity in Illinois, data collected indicate a slight increase in the number of nurses of color in the RN workforce in select groups of the younger cohorts. For those identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, 58% are 44 years of age or younger, while 6% are 65 years of age or older. In the Multiracial category, 56% are 44 years of age or younger, while 8% are 65 years of age or older. The increase in diversity in younger age cohorts did not hold true for all age groups, 28% of Black/African American respondents reported being 44 years of age or younger, compared to the 20% that are 65 years or older. White/Caucasian females with initial licensure in the U.S. continue to constitute a substantial majority of all respondents, approximately 77%; this is less than the 93% reported in 2007 (ICN 2007 report).

**Aging workforce:** The report presents important information about the aging of the RN workforce. In 2020, 52% of respondents are 55 years or older, which is the same as in 2018. In 2014, this age cohort was 42%, so this is a 10% increase in this older age cohort of Illinois RNs. The relatively rapid increase in RNs in older age categories has significant implications for workforce planning. Similar to 2018, approximately 27% of the respondents indicated an intent to retire within the next five years. This combination of aging workforce and retirement plans indicate the potential of an impending shortage of nurses and nursing expertise within the next five years.

**Education post-licensure:** Education post-licensure is either through obtaining additional degrees and/or through specialty certification and recertification. Responses to questions regarding registered nurses' intent to seek higher degrees revealed a low percent of respondents intend to pursue an additional degree.

Respondents who are not pursuing a degree post-licensure indicated that the greatest barrier was cost, specifically cost of tuition, followed by family obligations. Eight per cent of respondents indicated they were currently enrolled in a nursing education program, which in the entire RN population is approximately 15,568 RNs. This is separate from the continuous professional development such as specialty certification and continuing education courses. There are 182 or 183 types of nurse certification examinations.

**Specialty foci:** The respondents reported employment in these top five nursing specialties: acute care; family care from pediatrics through gerontology; medical; surgical, perioperative; and community-health promotion. The data also demonstrate the distribution of nurses in specialties by age cohorts, revealing significantly fewer younger nurses in specialties such as psychiatric mental-health, school health, public health, gerontology, and community health nursing. These trends stand in contrast to the Illinois report, *The Workforce Implications of New Health Care Models (2014)*, which forecasts a significant increase in ambulatory services, as well as a concomitant need for RNs to practice in community-based settings.

**Summary:** Collectively, the 2020 Illinois Registered Nurse (RN) workforce survey is a useful resource as health care planners project the human health care capital that will be needed in Illinois. The information will allow the Illinois Nursing Workforce Center (INWC) to address questions around the current RN supply, will it be adequate to meet the health care needs of Illinois residents? Health care workforce planners should use these data to help determine what types of RN (e.g. specialty, role) will be in greatest demand, in what locales, as well as the types of specialties and skills that will be required in future models of care.