



## Community/Academic Partnership Promoting Recruitment and Retention Of American Indians into Nursing

Loretta Heuer, PhD, RN, FAAN, Patricia Moulton, PhD, & Marilyn G. Klug, PhD.

*American Indians are under-represented at all levels of licensure in the North Dakota nursing workforce. To better understand the factors that American Indian people face in entering the nursing professions, Cankdeska Cikana Community College at Spirit Lake, North Dakota and North Dakota State University Department of Nursing received one of five University Partnership Research for Health Professional Opportunity Grants (HPOG) awarded by the Administration of Children and Families (ACF). This Community/Academic Partnership project collected data that show a loss of potential nursing candidates between pre-nursing and enrollment in nursing programs, a disproportionate percentage of American Indian nurses licensed as LPNs and few American Indian nurses represented among RN and advance practice nurses in North Dakota. Analysis of this data points to the need for a comprehensive and coordinated system of support services and programs. Such a system would create a “pipeline” for American Indians who aspire to a career in nursing. Components of the pipeline identified by the HPOG work begin with youth and extend through employment in the nursing workforce. The recommended next step in this project is to convene key stakeholders to build upon the Community/Academic Partnership work and create a shared vision and collaborative plan for improving the recruitment and retention of American Indians into nursing in North Dakota.*

# Practice Brief

## Overall Issue

There are 178 employed self-reported American Indian nurses in North Dakota, or 1.33% of the state's total employed nurse population.<sup>1</sup> Given that American Indians represent 5.47% of the ND population,<sup>2</sup> American Indian nurses are significantly underrepresented in the nursing sector, particularly across the spectrum of RN and advanced nursing practice.

## Overall Policy Implication

It is recommended that a task force be created and charged with developing a collaborative plan and shared vision for providing a system of supportive programs that will address gaps in the American Indian nursing pipeline stretching from K-12 students to higher education to recruitment and retention in the workforce.

The task force should be composed of nursing education program directors, the Next Steps Program, the North Dakota Office for Elimination of Health Disparities, RAIN (Recruitment/Retention of American Indians into Nursing), Community/Academic Partnership Promoting Recruitment and Retention of American Indians into Nursing, ND, Center for Nursing, ND, Tribal Chairman Council, Indian Health Service, North Dakota University System, ND, Career and Technical Education, ND, Department of Commerce, ND Indian Affairs Commission, State Legislators, Governor's office, ND Board of Nursing and other relevant stakeholders.

## Primary Gaps in the Pipeline – To Be Addressed

- **K-12 Students Don't Feel Prepared:** Although over half of American Indian students in a health career program thought it would be valuable to become a health care professional, few thought their school was preparing them adequately. In addition, there is little data on American Indian high school students' interest in nursing careers.

- **Articulation from Pre-Nursing to Nursing Programs:** Although American Indian students compose about 13% of pre-nursing students across ND, they make up much smaller percentages of nursing program applicants, accepted students and currently enrolled students.
- **Articulation to RN-BSN and Higher Programs:** American Indian students made up between 6.52% and 10.48% of graduating classes in LPN and ADN-RN programs, but few American Indians have graduated from bachelor, masters or doctorate level programs.
- **Post-Graduation Support:** Health care facilities do not provide recruitment and retention programs for American Indian nurses and there are few support services available. Currently the Next Steps program offers assistance with work placement in health careers,

## Highlights of the Current Nursing Pipeline

American Indian students comprise **over 13% of pre-nursing students** across ND.

In 2011-12, American Indian students made up between **6.52% and 10.48% respectively of graduating classes** in ND Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) and Associate Degree of Nursing – Registered Nurses (ADN RN) programs.

American Indian graduates have similar and in some cases **higher scores on National Council Licensure Examinations (NCLEX)** than White/Caucasian students.

Multiple programs currently provide supportive services to American Indian student nurses.

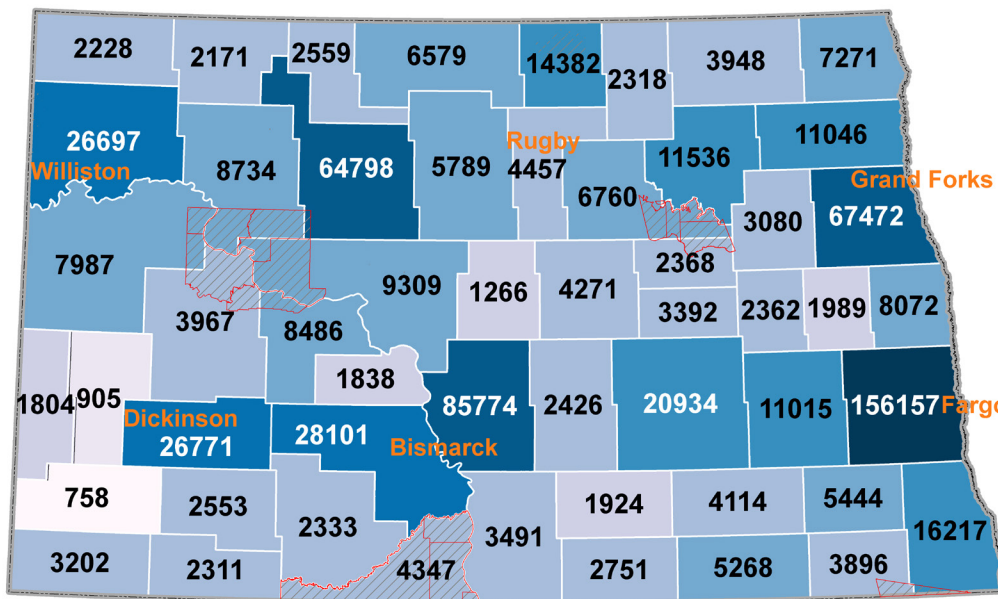
American Indian nursing graduates are very likely to **stay in ND for employment.**

American Indian nurses are markedly **younger** than the national average and the ND White/Caucasian nursing population

# North Dakota Nursing and Demographic Study

ND has only 178 employed American Indian nurses, which represents 1.33% of the total nursing population. Given that American Indians represent 5.47% of the ND population, American Indian nurses are significantly underrepresented in the nursing sector. Maps below represent data from 2013.

## Total Population by County (N = 699,628)



**KEY**

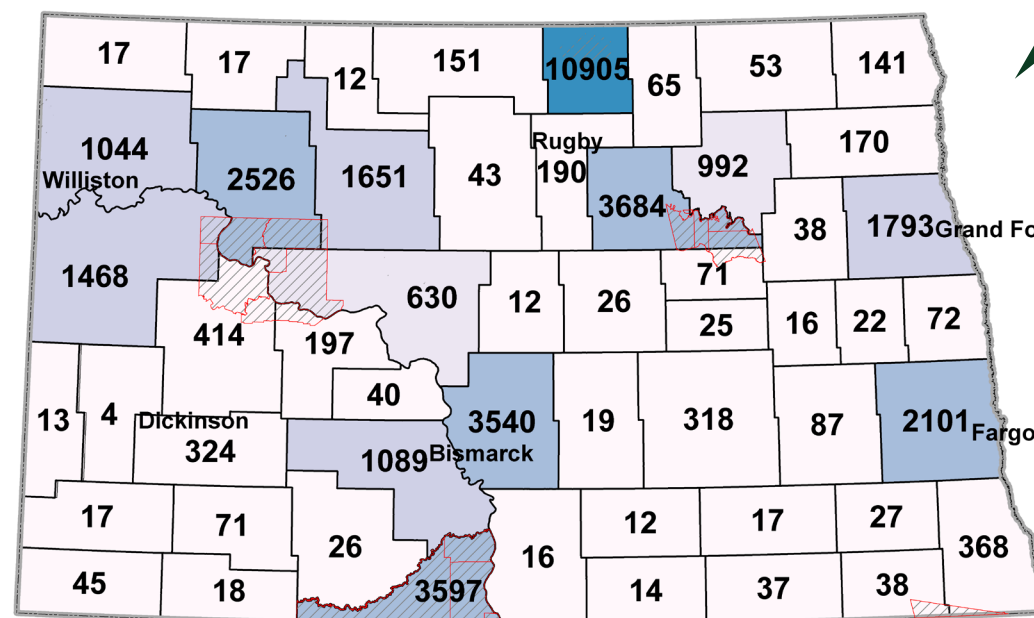
**Counties**

**Total Population**

- Tribal Subdivisions
- Tribal Lands
- 0-500
- 500 - 1000
- 1001 - 2000
- 2001 - 5000
- 5001 - 10000
- 10001 - 25000
- 25001 - 50000
- 50001 - 100000
- 100001 - 200000

Data Sources: U.S. Census and North Dakota Center for Nursing  
 Cartographer: Deidra Lies

## Total Native American Population (N = 38,283)



**KEY**

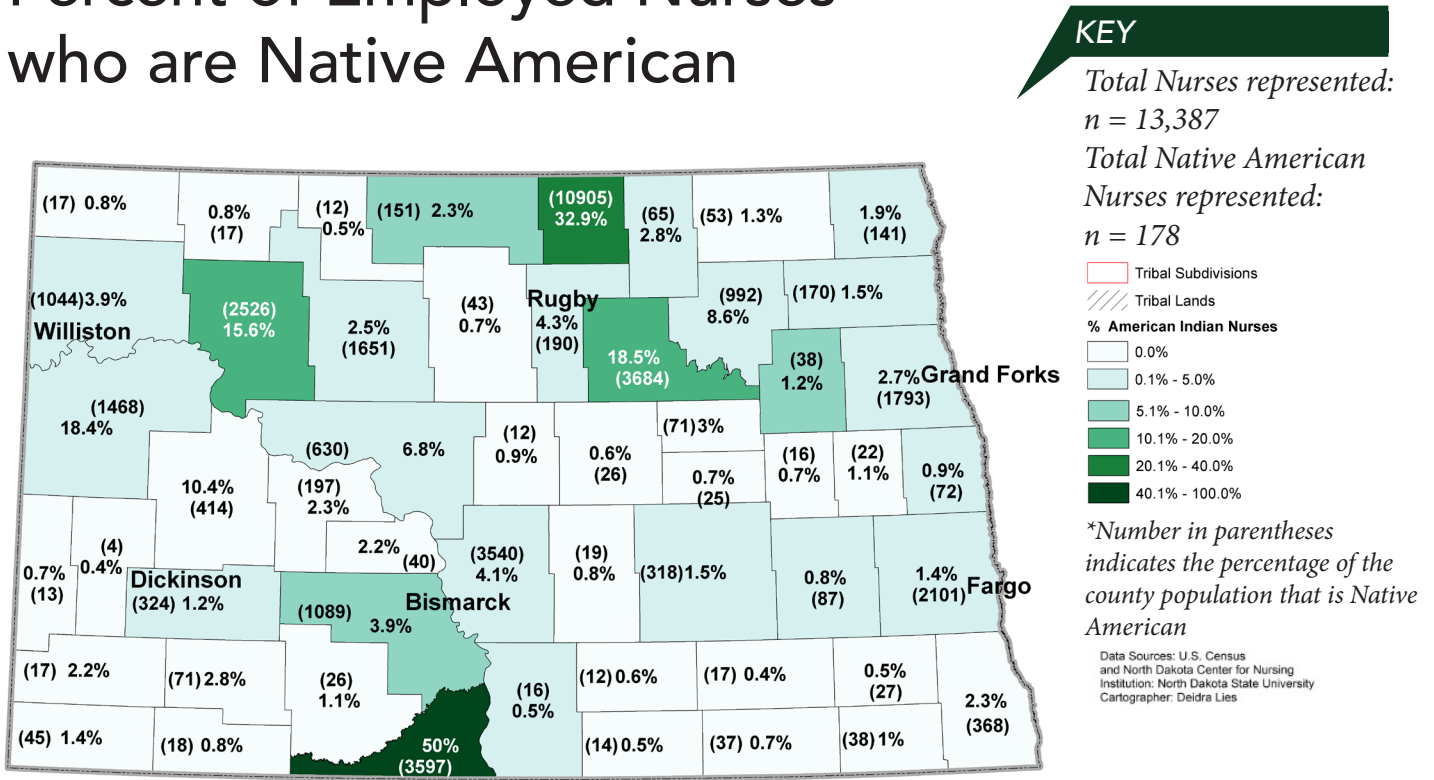
**Counties**

**Native American Population**

- Tribal Subdivisions
- Tribal Lands
- 0 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 2000
- 2001 - 5000
- 5001 - 10000
- 10001 - 25000
- 25001 - 50000
- 50001 - 100000
- 100001 - 200000

Data Sources: U.S. Census and North Dakota Center for Nursing  
 Cartographer: Deidra Lies

# Percent of Employed Nurses who are Native American



American Indians make up the largest minority group in North Dakota. Of the 699,628 residents found in the latest general census, 38,283 (or 5.47%) identify themselves as American Indian.<sup>2</sup> Comparing this with North Dakota nursing statistics, there are 13,387 employed nurses in the state, **but only 178 employed American Indian nurses.**<sup>1</sup> This includes 72 LPNs which represent 2.38% of the LPN population. There are 104 American Indian RNs representing 1.08% of the RN population and 2 Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) representing .25% of the APRN population. Forty-seven of the 53 counties in the state exhibit an underrepresentation of American Indian nurses. This is especially apparent in counties that contain reservations. Compounding this issue are the significant health care needs of tribal populations throughout the state,

and the preference of American Indian patients to be cared for by American Indian nurses. All of the American Indian Nations that share geography with North Dakota are in rural counties that are designated as Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs), Medically Underserved Populations (MUPs) and/or Health Professions Shortage Areas (HPSAs).<sup>3</sup>

Feeding the ND American Indian nursing workforce pool is a patchwork of nursing education programs directed by dedicated educators. These programs provide special supportive services that are funded through a complex system of federal, tribal and other funding sources. Many of these funding sources are in jeopardy due to changing federal budgets.

# North Dakota Nursing Programs with Supportive Services for American Indian Students

- United Tribes Community and Technical College graduated its first class in 1979 and offers an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Practical Nursing (AASPN) degree. Services on the ND campus include career assessment and guidance, scholarships, licensed child care, and tutoring. Distance education courses are provided through their Black Hills Learning Center in Rapid City, SD.
- The University of North Dakota RAIN (Recruitment/Retention of American Indians into Nursing) program started in 1990. The program offers mentoring and academic advisement, tutoring, scholarship and financial aid advisement, and other student services to students obtaining a BSN-RN or higher graduate degrees.
- Sitting Bull College (SBC) began as Standing Rock Community College in 1973 and was one of the first tribal colleges in the US. It began offering an AASPN program in 2003.
- The Fort Berthold Community College Nursing Program started in 2006 as part of Williston State College. In 2007, the Fort Berthold Community College Nursing Program became part of the Dakota Nursing Program and now offers LPN and AD-RN programs. The nursing program's first AD-RN graduates were in 2009. Fort Berthold Community College Nursing Program is the only ND RN program located at a tribal college.
- Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC) started graduating nurses in 2011, through an AASPN program. TMCC also offers a pre-nursing associate degree.
- Cankdeska Cikana Community College offers supportive services for American Indian students through the Next Steps program made possible through a Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The grant is administered by the Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Fort Totten or Spirit Lake Nation, ND. The purpose of this grant is to provide education, training, and support to make it possible for American Indian students to be employed and advance in careers in the health care sector. Students enrolled in this program receive a wide range of educational support services which include a collaborative relationship with a mentor, full tuition, childcare assistance, and fuel assistance for travel to clinical sites. Next Steps American Indian mentors are located in five sites – Spirit Lake Nation, Three Affiliated Tribes, Standing Rock, Fort Berthold, and United Tribes. As long as the American Indian students qualify, the Next Steps Program provides mentors and educational support services to student nurses enrolled in any ND nursing education program.<sup>3</sup>

# Nursing Pipeline:

## Building, Filling And Providing The Nursing Pipeline

North Dakota American Indian students face some daunting hurdles as they forge a path to a career in nursing. To better understand the factors that American Indian people face when entering the nursing professions, a Community/Academic Partnership consisting of Cankdeska Cikana Community College and North Dakota State University Department of Nursing collected data regarding many aspects of the American Indian health care workforce. Their research was funded by a Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) funded through the Administration for Children and Families, a division

of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Analysis of the data points to the need for a comprehensive and coordinated system of support services and programs with attention to gaps at the transition points (e.g. K-12 to college; pre-nursing to nursing; college to employment; employment to career profession, etc.). Such a system would create a “pipeline” for American Indians who aspire to a career in nursing. Under the HPOG grant, steps identified in creating the pipeline begin with youth and extend through employment in the nursing workforce.

## K-12 Students

The first step in the pipeline involves increasing preparation and interest among elementary and high school students for a future career in nursing. Twenty-one percent (21%) of 2010 North Dakota high school students taking the ACT test indicated an interest in health sciences and allied health fields. Another twenty-one percent (21%) indicated that they were undecided. However, the specific percentage of American Indian students that are interested in health careers or in nursing is unknown.<sup>6</sup> At the 2012 Future of American Indian Nursing in North Dakota conference held in Fort Yates, ND, diverse participants (N=30) in a nominal group study emphasized the importance of cultural and tribal support for providing a foundation for American Indian students interested in nursing<sup>7,8</sup> A solid background in Science,

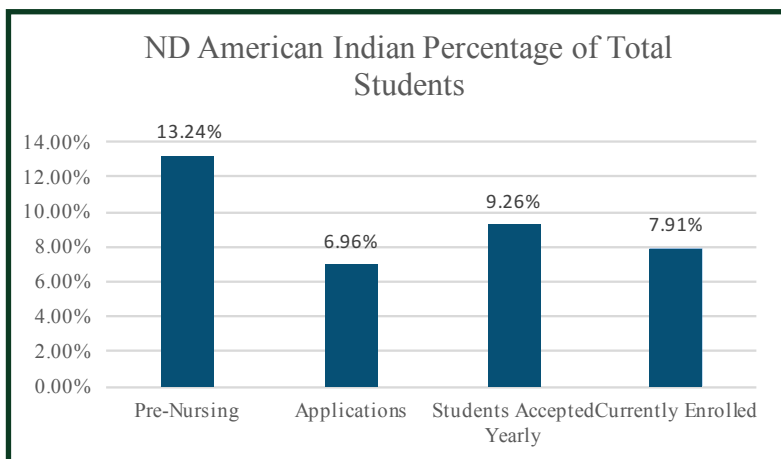
Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) also provides a firm foundation for student nurses. Summer offerings such as the Introduction into Community and Public Health course, as well as the Health Careers For You (HC4U) program held at Cankdeska Cikana Community College, provide American Indian students with the opportunity to become more familiar with the nursing field and connect with potential mentors and peers with similar interests.<sup>5</sup> Fifty-five percent of American Indian 11-14 year olds participating in the HC4U Summer Program (n=40) indicated that becoming a health care professional would be valuable to their community. However, only 14% believed their school had the resources they needed to become a health care professional such as a nurse or doctor.<sup>6</sup>

# Pipeline Step:

## HIGHER EDUCATION

North Dakota nursing education programs tend to recruit American Indian students through high school career fairs, college career days and visits to American Indian communities, high schools, tribal colleges, Indian Health Services (IHS) and other tribal health facilities. Nursing education programs face challenges in recruiting American Indian nursing students. Challenges include limited university support programs that are specific to the transition needs of American Indian students, cost, and the time commitment needed for recruitment activities. Faculty shortages contribute to the pressures of providing adequate recruitment and mentoring support. Programs also tend to face challenges retaining American Indian students once they are recruited and enrolled. Strong family ties which make it difficult to move away from home, lack of housing at the university settings, and unpreparedness to study at the college level are some of the typical barriers to American Indian student retention.<sup>10</sup>

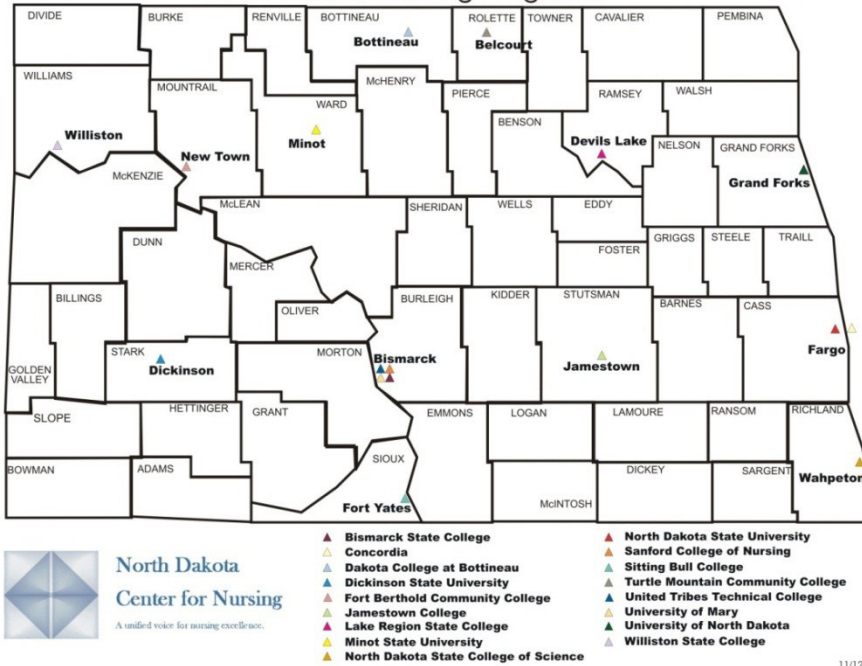
Although American Indian students comprise about 13% of pre-nursing students across North Dakota, they make up much smaller percentages of applicants to nursing programs including accepted students and currently enrolled students.<sup>10</sup> Cultural and tribal support were indicated as important elements of a strong foundation in recruiting American Indian students into education programs.<sup>7,8</sup> These elements include the need for American Indian faculty, as well as cultural sensitivity education for all faculty. Recruitment strategies that are utilized by the UND RAIN program include maintaining visibility of the program within the American Indian communities, connecting tribal and junior colleges with universities to provide an easier transition, involving alumni in contacting potential students and providing a point of contact when students return to their community.<sup>11</sup>



“ It took me a long time to actually enroll because I was so afraid. I guess I didn’t think I could become a nurse. ”

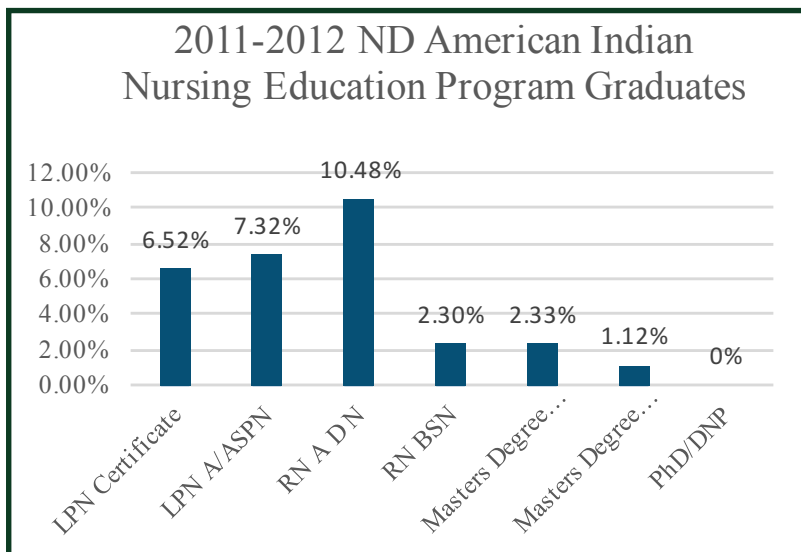
- Student Nurse

## North Dakota Nursing Programs



North Dakota  
Center for Nursing

North Dakota currently has 19 nursing education programs approved by the North Dakota Board of Nursing. There are three graduate level education programs designed to train students for advanced practice registered nursing (APRN) licensure. There are eight baccalaureate programs and two associate programs to prepare registered nurses (RNs). Additionally, there are five associate degree programs and one certificate program for practical nurse licensure (LPNs).<sup>12</sup>



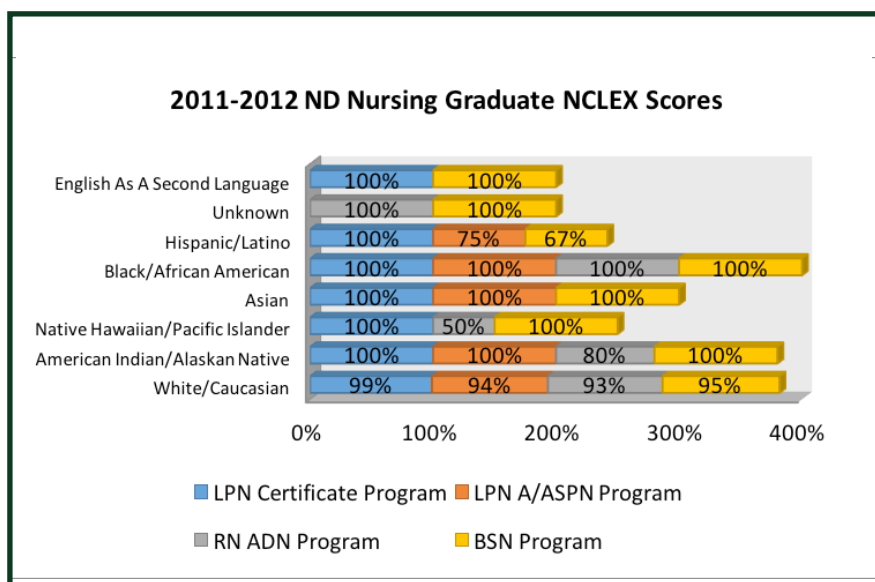
In 2011-2012, American Indian students made up between 6.52% and 10.48% of graduating classes in LPN and ADN-RN programs, but few American Indians graduated from bachelor, masters or doctorate level programs.<sup>12</sup>



## NCLEX Scores

“ All students need mentoring and support, they need a good orientation before they start so they will know what to expect.”

- Video Participant



In 2011-2012, American Indian nursing graduates had similar NCLEX pass rates in comparison to White/Caucasian students and in most cases had greater pass rates than U.S. averages.<sup>10</sup> First-time and repeat U.S.-educated candidates for the NCLEX-RN have pass rates of 87.4 percent and 54.9 percent, respectively. First time and repeat U.S.-educated candidates for the NCLEX-PN have pass rates of 87.1 percent and 40.6 percent, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

Focus group research indicates that supportive training and education programs provide a designated place where American Indian students can feel accepted and safe, receive counseling for life and academic skills and have access to other resources. Currently, 60% of responding ND nursing education programs offer social support and 80% of responding nursing education programs offer financial assistance for American Indian students.<sup>10</sup>

Supportive programs should include a mandatory “no excuses” orientation that confirms the commitment of students while providing structured information to support their success.<sup>7,8</sup> Programs should also monitor students to determine if they are at academic risk, assure that no non-academic barriers exist, and provide interventions where needed to optimize success. Further, it is important for programs to acknowledge that there are multiple teaching methods and different learning styles amongst all students. Nursing education programs work to retain American Indian students through offering general tutoring

or advising, offering small classes with high faculty involvement, financial assistance and/or a programs designed specifically to recruit/retain American Indian students.

Common challenges that nursing education programs encounter in retaining American Indian students include the cost and faculty time commitment required to retain students, the need for rigid attendance policies, and shortage of faculty able to provide tutoring and remediation services. Some characteristics of American Indian students also pose a challenge for retention. These include limited academic background, varying levels of commitment to study, need for child care, and additional resources needed for transportation to clinicals given that many come from rural areas with limited access to transportation.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the supportive services that programs provide, mentors provide ongoing support during a nursing student’s educational program and transition to employment. Peer-to-peer mentor programs can be used to strengthen relationships among nursing

students. In fact, focus group participants indicated that they consider mentoring services to be one of the most important interventions.<sup>7, 8</sup>

Increasing diversity within nursing education programs also has many benefits including facilitating student exploration of diverse perspectives, increasing knowledge of racial and gender differences and reducing student's level of racial prejudice.<sup>11</sup>

## Higher Education Pipeline Gaps

**Articulation from Pre-Nursing to Nursing Student Programs:** Although, American Indian students compose about 13% of pre-nursing students across North Dakota, they make up much smaller percentages of applications, accepted students and currently enrolled students.

**Articulation to BSRN and Higher Programs:** American Indian students made up between 6.52% and 10.48% of graduating classes in LPN and AND-RN programs, but few American Indians graduated from bachelor, masters or doctorate level programs.

“ We continue to recruit students of color or cultural ethnicity however; our college does not have specific support services... More services that employ and provide programs and provide tutoring services are needed. ”

- Nursing Faculty

“ When I was admitted, I had the RAIN Program and my mentors through the Next Steps Program. Once I knew they were there just for me, I really felt supported and happy. The anxiety of everything went away because I know I have someone to go to ”

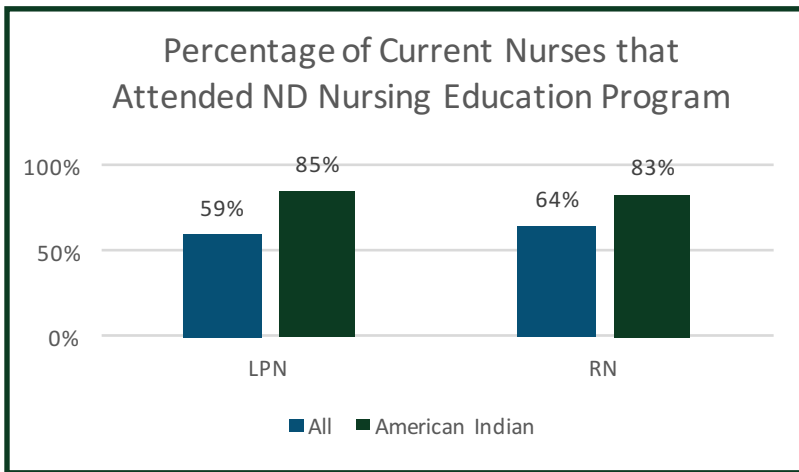
- Student Nurse



# Pipeline Step:

## EMPLOYMENT AND ADVANCEMENT IN THE ND WORKFORCE

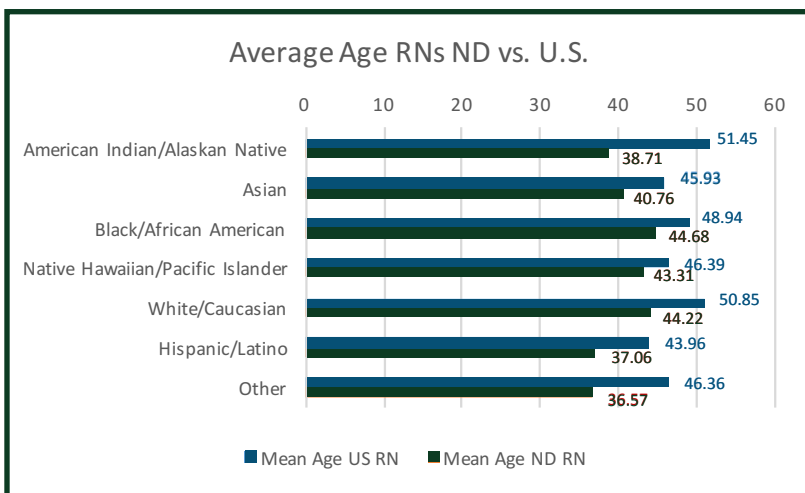
Once nursing students graduate, a large percentage of American Indian nurses choose to stay and work in ND, at a higher rates than that of the overall retention rate.<sup>1</sup>



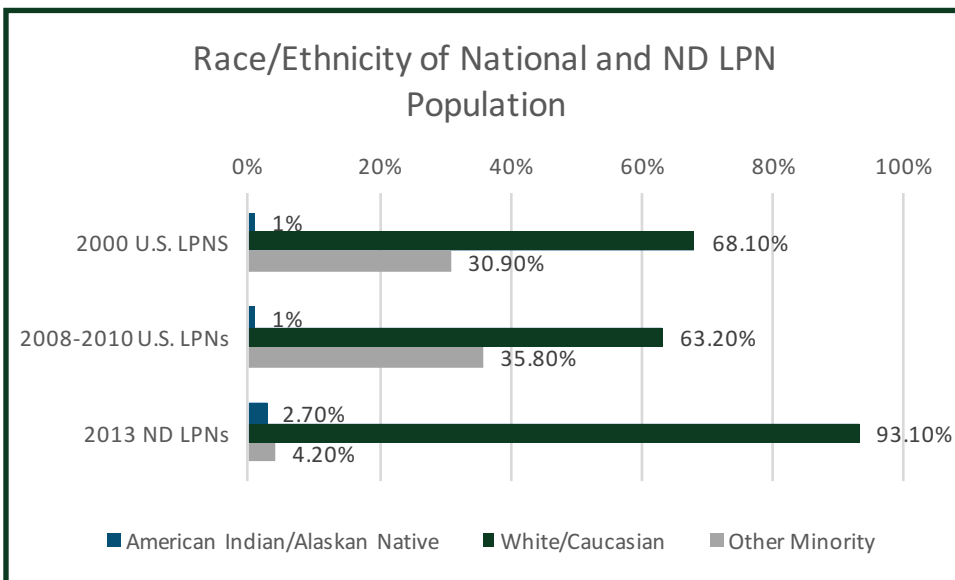
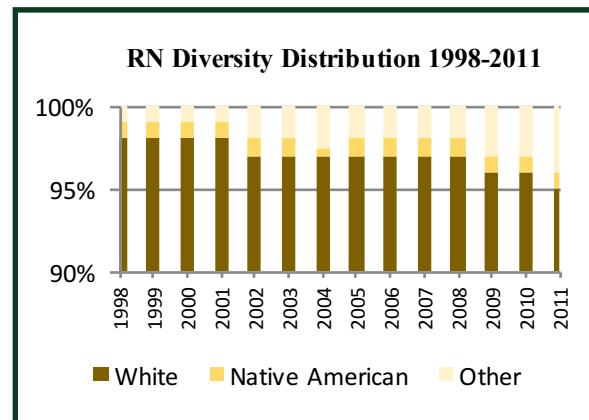
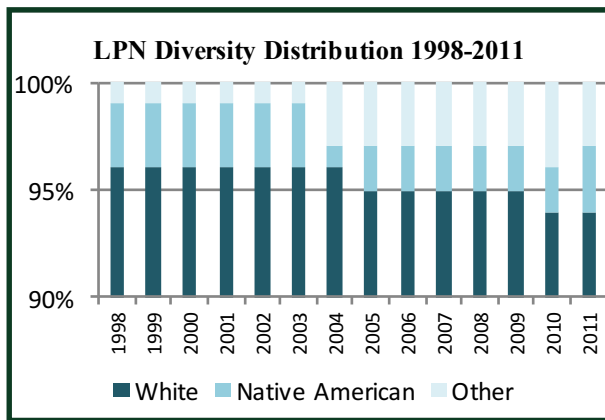
Nationally, American Indian/Alaskan Native nurses have the oldest average age in comparison with other groups.<sup>13</sup> However, in ND, American Indian nurses are markedly younger than the national average and the ND White/Caucasian nursing population.<sup>1</sup>

“ I have received a lot of support from my community so returning to work in my community is part of just paying back what I received from them. ”

- Student Nurse

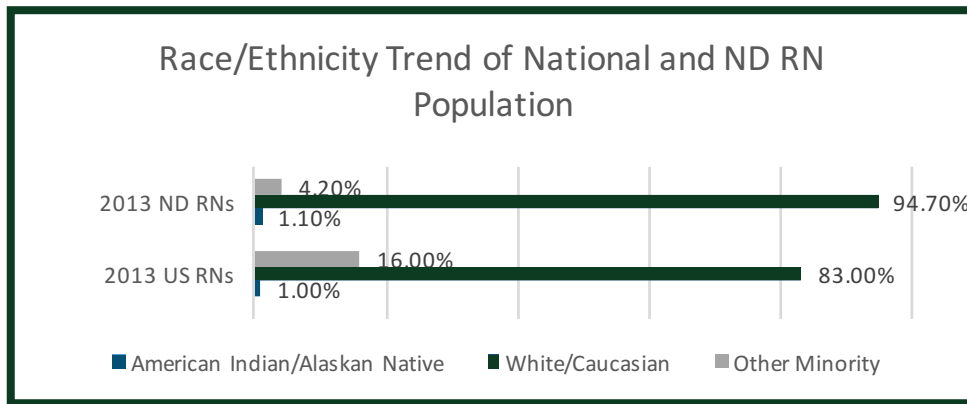


Even with greater retention, there has been little change over the last 13 years in the number of American Indian nurses. Overall, American Indian nurses make up a greater percentage of LPNs than RNs.<sup>17</sup>



In North Dakota, American Indian LPNs represent a greater percentage of the nursing population than U.S. average. There was no increase in the percentage of LPNs nationally between 2000 and 2010. In North Dakota, there was a significant increase of LPNs in 2013<sup>1, 14, 16</sup>

Nationally, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of American Indian RNs from .44% in 2008-2010 to 1% in 2013. However, American Indians are still one of the least represented population groups in nursing.<sup>1, 14, 16</sup>



Focus group participants identified the importance of cultural and tribal support as key factors creating the foundation for recruiting American Indian students into the workplace environment.<sup>7, 8</sup> A survey of hospitals and long term care facilities showed that few health care facilities provide special recruitment or retention programs for American Indian nurses. Most indicated that they do not hire or retain any nurse based on ethnicity.<sup>18</sup>

### Recruitment and Retention Pipeline Gaps

**Post-Graduation Support:** Health care facilities do not routinely provide recruitment and retention programs for American Indian nurses and there are few supportive services available. Currently, the Next Steps program offers assistance with work placement.

*“ I just look for good nurses; I am not concerned about someone’s heritage. We have an excellent tribal college in town and they produce great nurses. ”*

- ND Health Care Facility

# Summary

North Dakota American Indian students with an interest in a nursing face some daunting hurdles that are compounded by the lack of a clear educational and career pathways. Challenges faced by potential American Indian nurse candidates may include inadequate pre-college academic preparation, need for financial assistance, family/community pressures, and the need for social and personal mentoring support while transitioning into a learning or employment environment with rigorous performance expectations -- and often very different cultural norms.

The outcome of these unresolved challenges shows in the numbers. Nurses of American Indian ethnicity are under-represented in the North Dakota work place overall. In addition, the percentage of American Indian nurses licensed at the LPN versus advanced levels (BSN, NP, DNP, etc.) is greater by comparison than that of North Dakota's Caucasian/White nurse population. Given North Dakota's growing unmet need for nurses across the spectrum of nursing practice, and the unmet need for health care services within the Indian nations in particular, attention to addressing the factors that limit nursing supply is a critical strategic issue for North Dakota population health.

On the basis of the research conducted under this community/academic partnership, it is recommended that a task force composed of representatives from Indian nations, education, health care, social services, employers and other key stakeholders convene to develop a shared vision for addressing gaps in the American Indian nursing pipeline from K-12 students to higher education to recruitment and retention in the workplace.

Funded by The University Partnership Research Grant for Health Professional Opportunity Grant, # 90PH0019, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families. For information contact Loretta Heuer, PhD, RN, FAAN at [loretta.heuer@ndsu.edu](mailto:loretta.heuer@ndsu.edu) or 701-231-8205. ©

Disclaimer: Although the evaluation describes preliminary outcomes for program participants, we do not know what the outcomes for participants would have been in the absence of the program.



# References

1. ND Board of Nursing Licensure Database April, 2013.
2. U.S. Census Bureau (2011) Population Estimates. <http://www.census.gov/>
3. Center for Rural Health, University of North Dakota School of Medicine & Health Sciences. Accessed online 9-22-14. <http://ruralhealth.und.edu/maps>
4. Next Steps: A Career Ladder into the Health Professions in Tribal Communities. Cankdeska Cikana Community College. <http://www.littlehoop.edu/content/index.php/component/content/article/9-cccc/128-next-steps>
5. North Dakota State University Department of Nursing/Candkeska Cikana Community College. (2013). Building, Filling and Proving the Nursing Pipeline, Efforts to Increase American Indian Involvement in North Dakota Healthcare Careers. Health Professional Opportunity Grants (HPOG), Year 1 Activities, #90PH0019. <http://www.littlehoop.edu/content/index.php/component/content/article/9-cccc/128-next-steps>
6. ACT (2010). ACT Profile Report- State. Graduating Class North Dakota. <http://www.act.org/news/data/09/pdf/states/Northdakota.pdf>
7. Azure, L.A., Burd, C., Moran, C., McKay, L., & Wadsworth, A. (2012). The Future of American Indian Nursing in North Dakota Conference, Executive Summary. Prairie Nights Casino and Lodge, Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, North Dakota, Mary 23-24, 2012.
8. Wright, M. M., Heuer, L., Secor-Turner, M., Kiser-Larson, N., Azure, L., & McDonald, L. A Community/Academic Partnership Promoting Recruitment and Retention of American Indians into Nursing. Nuts & Bolts for Nurse Educators. Active Learning & Assessment to Facilitate Clinical Reasoning, Hilton Minneapolis Airport - Mall of America, Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 10-11, 2012.
9. Anderson, M., Secor-Turner, M., Heuer, L, & Klug, M.G. American Indian Youth Employment and Education Survey, Past, Present and Future of American Indian Nurses in North Dakota Conference, Spirit Lake Casino & Resort, Fort Totten, North Dakota & Cankdeska Cikana Community College Spirit Lake Dakota Nation, Fort Totten, North Dakota, June 11-12, 2013.
10. Heuer, L, Moulton, P., Anderson, M., Secor-Turner, M., & Klug, M.G. (2012). Nursing Program Administrators' Perspectives of the Recruitment and Retention of Native America Nurses. Sustaining Career Pathways for American Indian Health Professionals in ND: Building Apprenticeship and Workforce Options with the Next Steps HPOG Project, University Partnership Research Grants for Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program under the Affordable Care Act, Administration for Children and Family, Department of Health and Human Services.
11. ND Center for Nursing (2012). Nursing Education Program Fall Survey Results.
12. Korniewicz, D., Wilson, D. & Anderson, B. (2103). Recruitment Strategies: RAIN Retention in American Indians in Nursing, Past, Present, and Future of American Indian Nursing in North Dakota Conference, Spirit Lake Casino & Resort, Fort Totten, North Dakota, June 11-12, 2013.
13. North Dakota Board of Nursing (2012-2013) Nursing Education Annual Report, North Dakota Board of Nursing, <https://www.ndbon.org/about/AnnualRpt.asp>
14. Moulton, P. (2012). Nursing Education Programs 2012 Fall Survey Results, North Dakota Center for Nursing.
15. Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. (2013). The U.S. Nursing Workforce: Trends in Supply and Education. <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/reports/nursingworkforce/nursingworkforcefullreport.pdf>
16. Budden, J., Zhong, E., Moulton, P. & Cimiotti, J. (2013). Highlights of the National Workforce Survey of Registered Nurses. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 4 (2), 5-14 & Supplement.
17. North Dakota Center for Nursing Leadership Team. (2013). Spotlight on the Past and Looking Forward to the Future of Nursing in North Dakota. North Dakota Center for Nursing Research Publication #5. <http://www.ndcenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Spotlight-Report-Final.pdf>
18. Moulton, P., Heuer, L, Anderson, M., Secor-Turner, M., & Klug, M.G. (2012). North Dakota Health Care Facility Survey. North Dakota Center for Nursing and North Dakota State University Department of Nursing University Partnership Research Grants for Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program under the Affordable Care Act, Administration for Children and Family, Department of Health and Human Services.