

**Nurse Career Ladder Initiative (NUCLI)**  
**Building a Sustainable Nurse Education Infrastructure in Massachusetts**

**Final Report**

**Submitted by**

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## Final Report

**The Nurse Career Ladder Initiative (NUCLI)** is an initiative funded by a \$2.9 million USDOL H-1B grant led by Commonwealth Corporation in partnership with the healthcare industry, higher education, workforce investment boards, and labor to respond to the critical nursing shortage and nursing faculty shortage in the Commonwealth. An additional \$2.9 million from partners matched the USDOL funds. NUCLI worked in 4 broad regions of the state, (Greater Boston, Central, Southeast and West).

A Statewide Advisory Committee informed the initiative's work. The NUCLI Staff Partnership, four Regional Advisory Committees, and utilization of a Career Coaching model provided the necessary support to achieve the goals and objectives established by the SAC.

The **NUCLI State Advisory Committee (SAC)**, led by the Commonwealth Corporation, brought together representatives of the healthcare industry, higher education, workforce development organizations, labor and professional nursing organizations. The SAC established the overarching goals of NUCLI to:

- **Increase the number of nurses available to work in the healthcare industry**
- **Increase the enrollment capacity of nurse education programs in Massachusetts**
- **Decrease the attrition rates of nurse education programs in Massachusetts**
- **Improve the retention rate of practicing nurses**

Specific objectives of NUCLI were developed to help achieve this long-range vision. These objectives were:

- **To recruit and sustain 1000 individuals into nurse education programs of which:**
  - **250 participants will graduate and be licensed as a Registered Nurse by September 30, 2005**
  - **150 participants will be within 6 months of licensure as a Registered Nurse**
  - **600 participants will enter into the nursing career pipeline**

As the NUCLI work developed, two other priorities emerged. It became evident that in order to positively impact the shortage of nurses, it was necessary to address the lack of Master's prepared nurses available and working as faculty in nursing programs. This significant issue became a focus of the NUCLI. Additionally, specialized or advanced skill development specifically geared to

employer needs had to be considered. Pediatric specialty care among home care nurses is an example of such a need.

The **NUCLI Staff Partnership** provided a combination of direct service, technical assistance and capacity building support, evaluation, and general coordination and oversight. The State Massachusetts Workforce Board Association, The Massachusetts Community College Executive Office, and the Massachusetts Center for Nursing were active participants of this group.

An integral component of NUCLI is the **Nurse Career Coach**. The role of the Career Coach is to assess skills, interests, and employment background of individuals interested in pursuing a career in nursing and to offer information on financial aid and childcare. Career Coaches also worked on improving retention of employed nurses through coaching; pairing up new nurses with mentors, training key individuals to become a Career Coach and improving communication between healthcare employers and nurse education programs.

**Regional Advisory Committees (RAC)** were formed and led by local Workforce Investment Boards in Boston/Metro North, Central MA, Western MA, and Southeastern MA. All included representation from local hospitals, long-term care facilities, higher education schools of nursing, local community based organizations and other interested stakeholders.

The Regional Advisory Committees framed the implementation strategy of NUCLI according to local needs. Specifically, each Regional Advisory Committee:

- Completed an assessment of nursing needs in their region
- Developed and issued a Request for Proposals and then selected a total of thirty-one (31) local demonstration projects
- Recommended strategies to insure regional success
- Disseminated lessons learned at quarterly meetings
- Recommended promising practices to the Statewide Advisory Committee.
- Investigated ways to obtain resources that would sustain NUCLI

In addition to the 31 projects under the auspices of the RAC's, Commonwealth Corporation worked in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts to select an additional three projects. The Massachusetts Community College Executive Office also conducted Demonstration Projects at five schools of nursing.

Each funded project utilized a variety of approaches to help NUCLI achieve its objectives. The various strategies included:

- Expansion projects allowing schools of nursing to increase their nursing education enrollment
- Retention projects to assist individuals currently enrolled in nursing education programs

- Alternatively scheduled nurse education programs for individuals unable to attend regularly schedules classes
- Fast-Track Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) programs for individuals who currently possess a Bachelor's Degree in another discipline
- Fast-Track Associate Degree (ADN) programs for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN's) to complete an ADN program in one year
- A nursing faculty initiative that brings Bachelor's prepared nurses into a Masters of Nursing (MSN) program enabling them to supervise undergraduate nursing students in the clinical setting
- A Pediatric Nursing Certificate project to address the critical shortage of pediatric nurses available to work in a home care setting
- Mentoring programs for new nurse graduates
- A bridge program fro Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's) to enroll in nursing school
- An NCLEX testing preparation course
- A Nurse Refresher course for individuals who have not been working as a nurse over the past 5-7 years
- A forgivable loan pool for individuals employed in community clinics
- An Immigrant Nursing project for individuals who are certified in nursing in another country
- Career Coaching for youth

The cumulative work of each project added up to results that significantly exceeded the numerical objectives of each NUCLI component. The chart below illustrates the enrollments into NUCLI and the actual outcomes.

<b>Nursing Degree</b>	<b>of Enrollments</b>	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Licensed</b>
<b>BSN Degree</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>ADN Degree</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>LPN Certificate</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Specialty Nursing Certificate for RN's</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55 Certificates Issued</b>
<b>MSN</b>	<b>25</b>		
<b>Career Coaching</b>	<b>343</b>		
<b>Nurse Refresher Course</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6 Certificates issued</b>

Out of the 1955 initial NUCLI participants, 125 left the project for some of the following reasons: academic difficulty in a nursing program, family issues, financial issues, or because they were no longer interested in a career in nursing. This number reflects a 6% dropout rate.

**1013 participants remain in the nursing pipeline** as a result of NUCLI.

Commonwealth Corporation considers the nursing pipeline to be:

- Individuals still enrolled in nursing education classes
- Individuals enrolled in pre-requisite nursing classes
- Individuals working on a career pathway to nursing
- Individuals being coached or mentored in the workplace.

## **Lessons Learned**

Reports from each project to the SAC reinforced a number of adult learner and workforce development concepts widely known to the Commonwealth Corporation.

- Enhanced communication between employees and managers is crucial to incumbent worker projects.
- Students face multiple barriers that interfere with success.
- Individual identification of barriers and targeted interventions make a significant difference in student retention and success
- Working adults must balance complicated work and education schedules, along with family and financial issues in order to be successful in preparing for a nursing career. Career decision-making involves an examination of personal issues, including family and work situations.
- Individual career coaching is a key component in workplaces hoping to “grow their own”.
- Career coaching is a distinct discipline and should not be confused with the role of a mentor or preceptor.
- It is vital for school program administrators to identify all the resources that a school offers and to develop clear linkages among them that students benefit.
- Students benefit from establishing a relationship with a tutor or other academic support person.

## **Recommendations**

- Healthcare institutions should provide organizational supports and benefits that encourage nursing education.
- Clinical nurses are interested in and have initial competencies in the clinical faculty role. Strategies to increase the potential pool of nurse educators should be addressed. The strategies should include removing

financial barriers and creating a workplace climate that would be support the individual nurse's transition from staff nurse to faculty.

- The establishment of a common curriculum in ADN and BSN programs will help portability of courses for students transferring or matriculating into the next level of education.
- Tools developed by nurse career coaches like pathway charts; information on financial aid and web site information are invaluable and should be referenced by all schools.
- The need for career coaching services for both nursing students and employed nurses is strong as reported by all NUCLI projects. Sustainability of this component should be considered not only in Massachusetts but also nationally.