

nursing research network

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Title: Meeting the Need for Better Data on the Nursing Workforce

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Purpose: Efforts to create state-level nursing workforce data systems are frequently hindered by organizational, analytical and funding challenges. This series of three briefs identifies strategies nursing stakeholders can engage in to convince stakeholders of the need and justification for a system; identifies strategies to address common logistical obstacles; and suggests mechanisms to enhance the collection of robust data to inform nursing workforce policy decisions.

Background: Nurses are the single largest health profession in the United States. With nearly 2.7 million registered nurses employed in the health care system¹, nurses are in a pivotal position to transform American health care. Faced with an increased demand for health care services from an aging population, insurance expansion, a rising prevalence of chronic disease, and new models of health care delivery and financing, policy makers are questioning whether there will be enough nurses, in the right types of roles and geographies, that are needed to lower costs, increase quality and enhance patient care. Efforts to answer these questions are often frustrated by a lack of comprehensive and basic nursing workforce data. Rather than relying on anecdotes, data provide evidence for justifying funding requests, influencing nursing education program planning, informing regulatory policies, identifying shortage areas and forecasting employment needs.

- Key Findings:**
- **Brief 1** - A key barrier to building better nursing data systems is convincing policy makers, funders, the various agencies that have nursing data, and other stakeholders that the benefits of investing in a data system outweigh the costs to develop and maintain it.
 - **Brief 2** - Questions about who owns, collects, funds and protects the data are important issues to resolve prior to setting up a data system, both to avoid turf wars and to ensure long-term sustainability of the system.
 - **Brief 3** - Significant efforts are underway at the state and national level to develop data collection instruments and online data collection tools. These efforts provide a wealth of best practices on what data states should collect, how to collect it and how to translate the data into policy-relevant analyses.

Charts: Links to briefs

References: 1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Employment Statistics. April 2013. Available at http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_104.htm. Accessed August 24, 2013