



# INVESTING IN GENERATIONS OF CARE

Workforce Innovation Grants secure a brighter health care future in Wisconsin



November 2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# EXPANDING HEALTH CARE EDUCATION PATHWAYS TO SOLVE INDUSTRY SHORTAGES



*November 2025*

Like many other states, Wisconsin in recent years has faced a workforce shortage driven primarily by an aging population and slowing birth rates. Given our already high labor participation rate—consistently higher than the national average—we’ve chosen to focus our efforts on helping communities and workers overcome the remaining barriers to full employment.

In 2021, Governor Tony Evers created the Workforce Innovation Grant (WIG) Program to encourage communities to identify local workforce needs and develop and implement solutions that could be replicated elsewhere. Jointly administered by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the program used funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to award \$128 million to 27 projects across the state.

Wisconsin’s health care infrastructure—mirroring a national trend—has struggled with shortages of nurses, nurse educators, certified nursing assistants, and those in related careers. An aging population depends on high-quality health care, a foundation of our quality of life.

Ensuring a strong health care career pipeline will help lift people into in-demand careers with cutting-edge, patient-centered skills through innovative approaches.

This report details the success that those WIG-funded programs have built. We hope their example triggers new initiatives to bridge the career gap and secures a promising health care future for all Wisconsinites.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Ridders'.

Sam Ridders  
Chief Operating Officer  
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

# WORKFORCE INNOVATION GRANTS SPUR PARTNERSHIPS, RESULTS



*November 2025*

DWD is proud to support the WIG-funded projects in this report, which are creatively working to bolster the health care workforce pipeline, an in-demand occupational sector with significant shortages of qualified and skilled workers in Wisconsin and across the nation.

Projections show a critical need for nurses with demand growing in Wisconsin over the next 20 years. Wisconsin faces an expected deficit of 20,000 nurses by 2040, according to data in the Wisconsin Registered Nurse Supply and Demand Forecast Results 2020-2040 report. State projections anticipate a 10.7% increase in health care jobs from 2022 to 2032, with 35,879 annual job openings during that period for practitioners, technical, and support staff.

Governor Evers invested a groundbreaking \$158 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to not only support innovative pandemic recovery efforts, but to address the state's ongoing workforce needs brought into relief by the pandemic. The projects highlighted in this report are examples of some of the creative, local solutions to these regional workforce challenges.

The Workforce Solutions Initiative is composed of three programs, including WIG, that have delivered workforce training and supportive services to 18,000 Wisconsin residents since they began and continue to yield results today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Pechacek', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Amy Pechacek  
Secretary  
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development





# THE CHALLENGE

## ***CRISIS OF CARE: WISCONSIN CONFRONTS A HEALTH CARE WORKER SHORTAGE***

The one-two punch of the COVID-19 pandemic and demographic changes in the population has shone a spotlight on Wisconsin's shortage of health care professionals—a shortage that lingers today.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) reported in spring 2023 that about 9% of state hospital jobs were vacant in 2023, the most recent period available. The report recommended expanded health care career pathway programs, but it also warned that demographic factors would make filling those jobs and meeting the demand for health care services an uphill climb.

“Wisconsin hospitals are beginning to gain traction in filling job postings but remain challenged by a factor that is most immovable: the state’s changing demographics that are shrinking the available workforce and at the same time increasing health care demand,” Ann Zenk, a senior WHA vice president, said in releasing the report.

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, in 2022, the median age of employed registered nurses was 46, and more than 25% of survey respondents said they would retire or leave the nursing field within the next five years. These nurses will take with them an abundance of nursing expertise when they leave the field. According to DWD forecasting, Wisconsin’s nursing shortage could reach nearly 20,000 by 2040.

This challenge has spurred Wisconsin to think creatively about ways to attract and retain nurses, especially in rural areas.





# THE VISION

## *EXPANDING THE STUDENT PIPELINE FOR A STRONGER HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE*

As part of its work to develop an Economy for All, Wisconsin had the vision to tackle targeted workforce needs in a variety of areas, including transportation, education, health care, and housing, among others. A total of \$128 million was awarded to 27 projects during the course of the program.

The WIG Program harnessed the power of creativity and regional collaboration to longtime local workforce needs. The grants encouraged development of leading-edge, long-term solutions enabling businesses and institutions to find ways to connect people to resources that meet communities' needs, support businesses' hiring goals, and help people find family-supporting careers more easily.

The WIG-funded projects featured in this report are using innovative approaches to build career pipelines that will ease the shortage of workers in critically important health care fields.







# INNOVATION ONE:

## *UW-EAU CLAIRE EXPANDS PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE NURSING GRADUATES*

Using \$9.4 million in WIG funding, UW-Eau Claire made innovative changes to its undergraduate nursing program. It added in-demand graduate and undergraduate health care programs and sparked an initiative to improve rural health in Northwest Wisconsin.

### HOW IT WORKS:

- Expands clinical experience for students with nursing simulation equipment, and also with a Dedicated Education Unit (DEU), which deploys students for one-on-one experience with trained nurses in rural hospitals that can't accept larger clinical groups
- Offers six new health care academic tracks—master of science in public health, master of science in exercise physiology, psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, master of business administration in health care management, and certificates in speech-language pathology and navigating health systems—to align with regional demand for health care
- Collaborates with Mayo Clinic to upskill its current medical assistants to serve as preventive health specialists
- Explores the use of technology to remove barriers to care through the Rural Health Care Innovation Alliance

### THE SITUATION:

In 2023, more than

**65.7K**

qualified applications were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs by U.S. nursing schools

Source: 2023 American Association of Colleges of Nursing Enrollment and Graduations Report

More than

**56%**

of health professional shortage areas are in rural areas

Source: 2023 Health Resources and Services Administration report

**NEARLY HALF**

of Wisconsin direct primary care RNs reported plans to leave in the next 10 years

Source: Wisconsin 2024 RN Workforce Survey Report

## THE EXPERIENCE:

UW-Eau Claire faced a dilemma: An abundance of students wanted to become nurses, but the school lacked the resources to accommodate growing class sizes.

“Most [prospective nursing students] are well-qualified academically to become nurses, but we didn’t have the capacity in our program to admit even a third of them,” says Carmen Manning, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences and joint principal investigator on the grant. “We’d tell them to come to our university, and then a year-and-a-half later, we had to tell them, ‘We don’t have room for you.’”

One of the keys to bringing innovations to life was UW-Eau Claire's strong pre-existing partnership with the Mayo Clinic Health System—a relationship that grew stronger during the project as officials worked together on curricular, clinical, and programmatic improvements.

### UNDERGRADUATE NURSING

**EXPANDED  
BY 60%**

### ANNUALLY,

**128 STUDENTS**

**can now be accepted to  
UWEC’s Nursing Program**

Rick Helmers, regional vice president of Mayo Clinic Health System-Northwest Wisconsin, spoke highly of the collaboration.

“The partnership between UW-Eau Claire and Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin began with Chancellor James Schmidt’s vision of how, working together, we could transform health care education and research in the Chippewa Valley. This has led to many initiatives and projects that have greatly benefited our staff and the patients we serve,” Helmers says.

Traditionally, one clinical instructor works with eight students to get hands-on experience with patients. Leaders at UW-Eau Claire and Mayo combined efforts to create a new clinical model for undergraduates enabling more students to learn in clinical and simulation settings.

Part of the \$9.4 million in WIG funding helped introduce a DEU, in which students sign up for smaller clinical groups—often one-on-one—on designated floors with a trained nurse acting as a clinical instructor for the students.



## THE EXPERIENCE:

“It opened up new clinical sites for students in rural Wisconsin,” says Mike Carney, interim provost and joint principal investigator on the grant. “If you have eight students in a hospital in Bloomer, you’d have more students than doctors. You just can’t take over a whole hospital. This allows students to have that one-on-one experience and still have the same value as if you were in a major hospital.”

The DEU model also exposes students to rural health care and the benefits of having a career at a smaller hospital or clinic. Mayo supported the project by training designated nurses to serve in teaching roles and demonstrate tasks encountered by practicing nurses.

“They are really hip-to-hip with that nurse. It immerses them in the role,” says Mayo Nursing Education Specialist Amy Olson.

“We’re finding that the students are having a better learning experience. There’s still a lot of value in the traditional clinical model, but this is a new way of doing things.”

*- Amy Olson, Nursing Education Specialist, Mayo Clinic Health*

Another curricular innovation was the use of nursing simulations. Manning says research shows that nurses trained using simulations are better prepared for the variety of the job because simulations offer training consistency.

WIG funding enabled the purchase of a large amount of simulation equipment, including lifelike patient mannequins that can simulate various health conditions and emergencies.

“In a real clinical situation, a student could get pushed aside because the health stakes are too high for the patient,” Manning says. “That’s not the case with simulation. Students can now work through situations on their own.”

The grant also enabled the university to expand its health offerings to respond to marketplace and regional demand for health care workers. In some cases, it supported faculty positions, and the funding also enabled UW-Eau Claire to engage curricular designers to create the programs from scratch.

## THE EXPERIENCE:

The **Doctor of Nursing Practice in Psychiatry and Mental Health Program** addresses the strong need for mental health providers in rural Wisconsin. This program aims to increase the number of nurse educators and nurse practitioners in this specialized area. UW-Eau Claire was struggling to hire instructors with Ph.D. degrees, so it began the program as a continuing education course in psychopharmacology provided free of charge for qualified prescribers. More than 300 people enrolled and as of spring 2025, 20 had completed the program. The university recruited a Ph.D. faculty member to oversee the program and is extending the graduate program for the 2025-26 academic year.

“It’s always been a problem to find psych-mental health providers in rural regions,” says Associate Professor and Graduate Programs Director Lisa Schiller. “In practice, I would want to refer a patient because I felt they had severe issues, and I couldn’t get an appointment for six months. That’s not helpful if someone is suicidal. This program will help provide more deeply trained professionals.”

Nurse educators are also in short supply in Wisconsin. The **Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Program** focuses on preparing academic nurse educators while also providing them with hands-on skills for teaching staff nurses, patients, and families. Another degree track focuses on nursing education leadership, preparing graduates to be leaders in an academic setting, a health care organization, or a public health department. To further encourage student enrollment in DNP, the university used some of its WIG funding to provide tuition support for eight students in its master’s degree program in nursing.

### 300+ STUDENTS

have enrolled in the new  
**Doctor of Nursing Practice  
in Psychiatry and Mental  
Health program**

### 8 STUDENTS

provided with tuition  
support for the new  
**Doctor of Nursing  
Practice program**

### 21 STUDENTS

enrolled in the new **Master  
of Public Health program**

The 100% asynchronous online **Master of Public Health (MPH) Program** began in September 2024 with 21 students—greatly exceeding the predicted enrollment of six. The degree focuses on promoting and protecting the health of populations locally, nationally, and around the world. It educates students in shaping health policy and leading initiatives to improve health. The program partners with Mayo Clinic, which plans to create a special topics course taught by its physicians and has offered an internship for a public health student. The program offers a yearlong, accelerated MPH program.

## THE EXPERIENCE:

“There is a need for public health-trained clinicians, and Mayo has been at the forefront of promoting population health and valuing the Master of Public Health degree,” says Program Director Marilyn Gardner.

The **Master of Science in Exercise Physiology Program** recognizes the need to train more students in this discipline.

“There is a greater need in rural areas to increase access to exercise and to offer support to people who need guidance for behavior modification to well-being,” says Saori Braun, the Master of Science in Exercise Physiology program director.

Exercise is often prescribed for cardiac rehabilitation, diabetes management, and for cancer patients. In addition to classroom work, students work with patients in various clinical settings and outreach programs such as Cancer Recovery and Fitness, Parkinson’s Exercise, Community Fitness, Physical Activity and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities in the Eau Claire area (PRIDE), and PRIDE 4Adults programs, in which students are paired with clients to administer a fitness assessment and a tailored exercise prescription. A new hybrid format exercise model has been developed in which student practitioners meet in person with clients once a week and virtually on another day to guide them through exercise routines. The degree program, which began in fall 2024, had an initial cohort of five students. The 2025-26 cohort comprises 18 students.

There is significant demand in public school districts for speech-language professionals. UW-Eau Claire established a 15-credit undergraduate **Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Certificate Program** to help address the need. Students get 100 hours of clinical practice under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist in an educational setting.





## THE EXPERIENCE:

“It’s a win-win because the student is getting experience and the district is getting someone who is present physically,” says Shannon Collins, program coordinator and clinical professor.

Students have worked in face-to-face settings in Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, Durand, Arcadia, Bruce, Ladysmith, Barron, and Bloomer, among others. Some students have also worked with a private company that provides virtual speech-language instruction. The grant has helped equip students with toolkits, including computer tablets, for instruction.

Launched in 2023, the **Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Health Care Management Program** builds on an existing online MBA program. It provides a pathway for those seeking leadership roles, offering both a degree emphasis and a certificate program.

“They need a highly flexible program because they are often on- and off-call in health care settings,” says College of Business Online Programs Managing Director Jessica Franson. “Our program is completely asynchronous, so they don’t have to be online at a specific time.”

Since launching the degree emphasis in the 2023-24 academic year, the program has enrolled more than 50 students, exceeding the initial projection of 40.

“Having staff that can help our patients get the things they need outside of an office visit has been instrumental for us.”

– Marquita Davis, Equity and Inclusion Enterprise Director, Mayo Clinic Health

Another component of the partnership between the university and Mayo Clinic involved upskilling medical assistants to serve as **preventive health specialists**. The university created a series of classes specifically for Mayo medical assistants covering topics related to public health, health care, communication, and navigating health care resources. The specialists engage with patients to ensure they are connected to their care team, schedule regular visits, follow up after medical procedures, ensure patients can access the health system’s online portal and virtual appointments, and provide health education.

## THE EXPERIENCE:

UW-Eau Claire responded quickly to Mayo's need and has seen lasting benefits. "We built that curriculum with the grant, thinking that we needed to get rolling with these people right away," says Manning. "That curriculum is now an official certificate program at the university."

UW-Eau Claire made changes to accommodate more students in its undergraduate nursing program, expanding its capacity by 60% and ensuring that more of the 300 students who enter the university each year intending to become nurses get spots in the program.

WIG funding and UW-Eau Claire's bolstered health sciences programs inspired a broader conversation about new ways to deliver health care in rural areas. UW-Eau Claire joined with Chicago-based consultant Health Equity Partners to form a collaboration of health care providers, entrepreneurs, and other partners to find solutions to improve rural health care called the Rural Health Care Innovation Alliance. The effort gained momentum after two major hospitals in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls closed in 2024.

One innovation stakeholders are studying is the establishment of micro-clinics in rural areas where patients can access providers through telemedicine. They are also exploring solutions to address patients' transportation needs and deliver mental health interventions.

Carney says the WIG funding awakened a sense of experimentation and innovation not always seen in a university setting.

"This is only possible because of the Workforce Innovation Grant," Carney says.

## THE RESULTS: 2022–2025



# 48 ADDITIONAL STUDENTS

are ensured to get a spot in the UWEC's nursing program each year



## LESSONS LEARNED:

### 1. Invest in partnerships before funding opportunities arise.

“We’d been working with Mayo for at least five years before this grant opportunity,” Carney says. “We didn’t have to go and convince them this was the right thing to do.” Once funding is available, says Carney, “there’s no time for a get-to-know-you phase. It seems backwards, but it’s the only way that works.” The grant’s timing also helped propel progress on academic programs. It can often take five or more years to create a new university program, but regional health care needs and the term of the grant accelerated the process.

### 2. Innovation can change institutional culture.

“Innovation requires you to be nimbler and more responsive,” says UW-Eau Claire Grant Administrator Arjen van Dijk. “That spirit has really come to life in the College of Nursing and across the campus. That’s something we’re really thankful for.”

### 3. Keep lines of communication open.

Mayo’s Amy Olson says communication between faculty, students, administrators, and staff is essential. When the two hospitals in the Chippewa Valley closed, Olson says communication and quick action helped to continue students’ access to clinical instruction. “If we didn’t have the grant that allowed us to implement the DEUs, I don’t know that Mayo would have been successful in the clinical capacity for the displaced learners.”

### 4. Use your marketing tools.

Officials also stressed the importance of building awareness and working closely with campus marketing units to ensure that newly created programs attract students and are successful.







## INNOVATION TWO:

### *WISCAP AGENCIES HELP LOW-INCOME PEOPLE BEGIN HEALTH CARE CAREERS, FILLING CRITICAL GAPS*

The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) is a network of 10 Wisconsin poverty-fighting agencies. It used \$4.9 million in WIG funding to help provide low-income students with the financial support and practical guidance to access entry-level careers in health care across the state.

#### HOW IT WORKS:

- Identifies individuals interested in pursuing health care careers who have encountered obstacles in accessing the education they need
- Helps these prospective health care workers identify an area of interest and provide ongoing coaching as they progress through the programs
- Removes barriers to education by assisting students with tuition and fees and providing financial support for things like child care, transportation, and textbooks

#### THE SITUATION:

Each year on average,

**189,100**

openings for registered  
nurses are projected

Source: 2024 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

**1 IN 3  
WISCONSINITES**

struggle to make  
ends meet each month

Source: 2023 United Way ALICE Report

**1 IN 3  
STUDENTS**

cite costs as their reason for stopping  
their higher education program

Source: 2025 Lumina Foundation-Gallup State  
of Higher Education report

## THE EXPERIENCE:

As the pandemic dramatically increased health care needs, the significant demands on health care professionals caused some to take early retirement, while many others left the profession altogether. This staffing shortage has caused facilities to reduce their services and limit admissions. This was and is still particularly true at long-term care facilities. The need was so great during the pandemic that the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) deployed 154 National Guard members to train as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) at 17 nursing homes, which opened 226 beds for patients.

Accustomed to helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds surmount barriers to employment through a variety of supportive programs, WISCAP envisioned a program that would help low-income people join the health care workforce, easing the labor shortage while also equipping these workers with the skills they need for stable, well-paying jobs.

WISCAP's program provides Wisconsin residents with funds for tuition, educational expenses, and counseling support to allow them to obtain the training needed to become a CNA, a licensed practical nurse, a medical assistant, an associate degree nurse, or a registered nurse.

The program is helping participants break the cycle of generational poverty by providing more accessible pathways to the workforce. As individuals move through the program to take family-supporting, in-demand jobs, they rely less on WISCAP agency programs, allowing the agencies to support more people and strengthening the community.

WISCAP Economic Security Program Manager Amy Loeffelholz says the program targets people making 80% or less of the county median income.

“Helping low-income individuals upskill their training or, if they’re unemployed, to gain the skills to achieve employment, leads to self-sufficiency. Community Action Network agencies are uniquely qualified to work with the low-income population, and they provide wraparound services.”

- Amy Loeffelholz, Economic Security Program Manager, WISCAP

At the program’s outset, WISCAP projected that the funding would aid 142 low-income individuals. Through June 2025, 258 participants were enrolled in their chosen educational programs; 145 had completed their training and were working in their chosen field.

## THE EXPERIENCE:

The breakdown of enrollments by program type was: 69 (27%) in certified nursing assistant programs, 14 (5%) in medical assistant programs, 45 (17%) in licensed practical nursing programs, 120 (47%) in associate degree nursing programs, and 10 (4%) in bachelor's degree nursing programs.

Those students reside in 39 counties across Wisconsin and have been enrolled in 24 different educational institutions.

To ensure student success, WISCAP agencies also keep close tabs on student progress in collaboration with Wisconsin technical colleges and universities, says Loeffelholz. "Our agencies and the college staff can identify students who are struggling and provide help," she adds. "We work together very well."

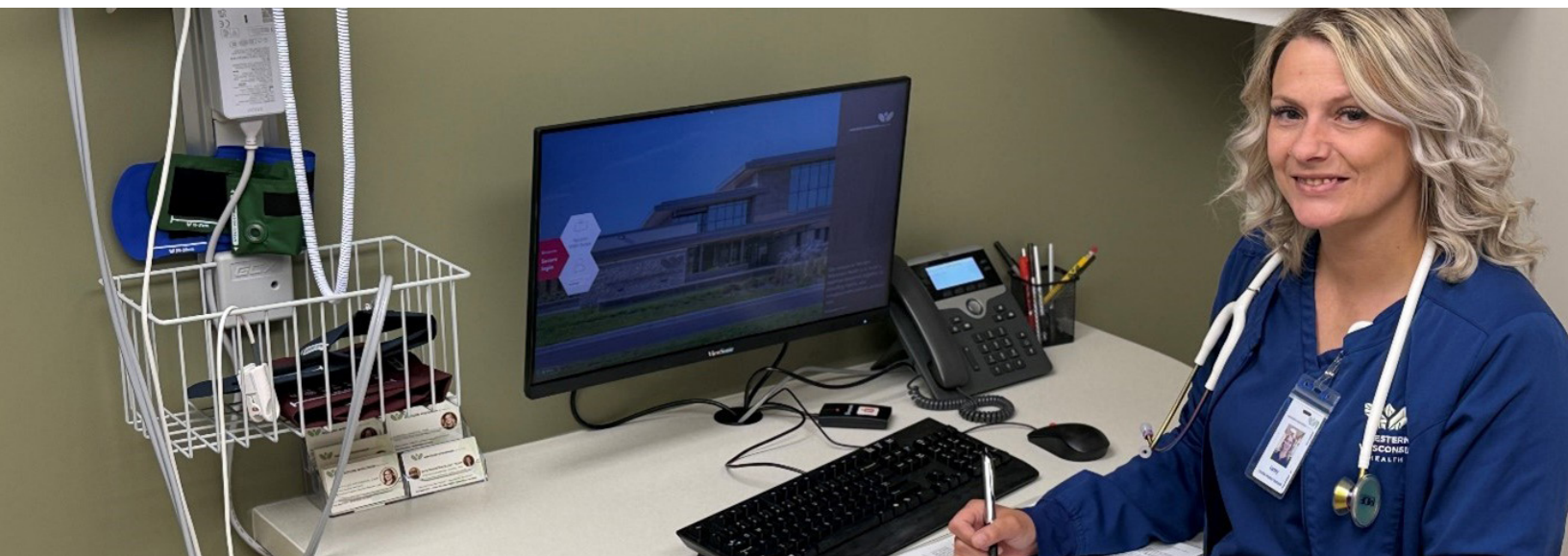
The innovative program is also developing a partnership with LeadingAge Wisconsin, a membership organization for long-term care facilities, to provide certified nursing assistants with on-site, hands-on training experiences.

## 258 PARTICIPANTS

enrolled in their chosen  
educational programs

## 216 PARTICIPANTS

have completed their training





## THE EXPERIENCE:

Loeffelholz says the program has been “wildly successful” in filling a pressing need in the workforce and elevating people’s standard of living with more reliable, better-paying jobs. “Our agencies love the nursing skills program. We get great feedback from students. They are so committed and enthusiastic. And those are tough programs,” she says.

One of those students was Readstown’s Mary “Gracie” Payne. Gracie’s son is autistic, and the Payne family faced financial obstacles when Gracie’s husband experienced medical problems and bills began to pile up.

Already a CNA at Vernon Manor, a long-term care facility in Viroqua, Gracie enrolled at La Crosse’s Western Technical College, completed the academic prerequisites, and ultimately graduated from its nursing program in December 2024. Gracie earned her RN certification in January 2025.

The cost of her commute was a concern before Gracie enrolled in her program because she lived 45 miles from campus. The financial support from the WIG-supported program eased her worries about costs for tuition, books, and transportation.

Gracie is still working at Vernon Manor as a registered nurse, and her increased salary is helping her family regain its financial footing.

“The grant has given me a sense of empowerment and motivation,” she says. “The financial relief from the grant has allowed me to focus on what really matters—becoming the best nurse I can be.”

She adds: “I’m excited to use the knowledge and skills I’ve gained to make a real difference in the lives of my patients and the communities I serve.”



## THE RESULTS: 2022-2025



# 145 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

are already working in their chosen fields

## **LESSONS LEARNED:**

### **1. Allocate a greater share of funding for student support costs.**

Loeffelholz encourages increasing the funding available to help students succeed, which includes offering subsidies for hotel stays for students forced to commute to distant technical colleges or clinical sites. “Students often have to travel two hours to a clinical site, then turn around and have to be there the next morning,” she says.

### **2. Build strong connections with schools.**

Although WISCAP agencies are prepared to support with a variety of individual needs, Loeffelholz says creating strong partnerships with participating educational institutions is essential to ensure that struggling students get help before it’s too late.





## **INNOVATION THREE:**

### ***UW-GREEN BAY LEVERAGES EXPERTISE OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND PROFESSIONALS TO EXPAND NURSING PIPELINE CAPACITY, BUILD COMPETENCIES***

UW-Green Bay used \$376,000 in WIG funding to strengthen partnerships with Green Bay-area health care organizations. This enabled the university to increase program capacity to graduate skilled nurses and help fill the ongoing workforce demand for health care providers.

#### ***HOW IT WORKS:***

- UW-Green Bay partners with Aurora BayCare to place a graduate program nurse at the medical center.
- The graduate program nurse is able to teach a clinical group of eight undergraduate nursing students, expanding the number of students the school can accommodate.
- The university, bolstered by the success of the program, expects to graduate 64 nurses per year.

#### ***THE SITUATION:***

In 2023,  
**1,977 FULL-TIME  
FACULTY VACANCIES**

were identified in nursing schools  
across the country

Source: 2023 American Association of Colleges  
of Nursing's Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions

Wisconsin's nursing  
gap could reach nearly

**20,000**

by 2040

Source: 2025 Department of Workforce  
Development's 2022-2040 Registered Nurse Supply  
and Demand Forecast Results



## THE EXPERIENCE:

Nursing students receive two types of instruction: lecture-hall education and hands-on clinical training in which they learn at hospitals and clinics under the guidance of a clinical instructor.

UW-Green Bay realized that strong partnerships with quality local nursing instructors are essential to growing Wisconsin's pool of highly trained nurses.

"One of the biggest barriers in educating more nurses is the lack of qualified nursing faculty to teach clinicals in undergraduate programs," says the project's principal investigator, UW-Green Bay Assistant Professor of Nursing Jenna Liphart Rhoads. "Right now, we have 56 nursing students, and we can fit them into one lecture hall for theory classes, but in a clinical setting we need one instructor for every eight students. That decreases how many students we can teach at one time. It creates a problem in graduating more nurses and moving them into the workforce."

The program's innovations benefit everyone involved, from the partner facility to the graduate nurse and the undergraduate students. The graduate program nurse receives time off from their regular duties one day each week to teach students, and UW-Green Bay reimburses Aurora BayCare for their time. The graduate nurse can share their knowledge in hard and soft health care skills with students, and the undergraduate nursing students gain access to Aurora BayCare's state-of-the-art simulation center to hone their skills on lifelike mannequins.

"That means being able to educate eight more students without the need to hire full-time faculty," says Rhoads, who noted that St. Vincent Hospital provided a co-clinical instructor for a semester and Bellin Health offered one for two semesters during the project period.

**8 MORE STUDENTS  
EDUCATED**

per co-clinical  
instructor provided

REGIONAL CAPACITY FOR  
CLINICAL TRAINING GREW TO

**140 NURSING  
STUDENTS**

over the 2.5-year  
project period

Regional capacity for clinical training grew to a total of 140 nursing students over the 2½-year project period after the new training model was deployed and is intended to sustain an annual capacity of 80 students afterward.

The grant allows the school to reimburse Aurora BayCare for the instructors' time. But the medical center is an eager partner and has a vested interest in seeing more nursing students graduate.

"We draw students from all over the state, but there are a lot of students who grew up here, and they want to stay here and work. It's been fantastic to have clinical instructors with boots on the ground."

*-Jenna Liphart Rhoads, Assistant Professor of Nursing, UW-Green Bay*

The co-clinical instructors enjoy having contact with students and learning from them.

"They are seeing a benefit in understanding what students are learning today versus what they remember from when they were in school. They're able to look at some processes through student eyes," Rhoads says.

Aurora BayCare Nursing Professional Development Specialist Nichole Lauf has spent three semesters as a co-clinical instructor as part of the program.

"It's super rewarding to see clinical groups that really struggle in the beginning rise to my expectations and things start clicking for them," she says.

The program has opened the door to clinical experiences for more nursing students at a critical time. And the instructors are able to share more than just the technical facets of the job with students.

"Being able to see beyond the tasks and see the person in the bed as someone's mother or grandmother or sister is so important," Lauf says. "That compassion, kindness, and communication really come through."



## THE RESULTS: 2022-2025



# EXPANDED CAPACITY OF 80 STUDENTS

is expected to be sustained annually

## LESSONS LEARNED:

### 1. Carefully assess the time needed to teach.

It's crucial to be realistic about the time that co-clinical instructors need to be effective. In addition to the eight hours of teaching in a clinical setting, the instructors need time to grade papers and provide student feedback, Rhoads says. "They didn't anticipate how much time being an instructor really takes. That was really eye-opening," she says.

### 2. Gauge which compensation method works best.

Rhoads said the program encountered a couple of financial bumps along the way. Originally, the idea was for the university to pay the nurses directly, but officials discovered that it was more efficient to route those payments through already established fiscal pathways in health care organizations.

## THE CONCLUSION:

These programs, brought to life through WIG funding, are strengthening Wisconsin's health care infrastructure and providing state-of-the-art instruction for nurses and other health care professionals.

The effectiveness of these three programs has helped students thrive, assisted individuals in lifting their families out of poverty, jump-started promising careers, and built strong bonds between educational institutions and health care providers. These partnerships benefit both colleges and the health care industry while ensuring a new generation of health care professionals is trained in innovative, relevant ways.

As our society ages and demands high-quality health care, these initiatives will help ensure that bedside and outpatient care for all Wisconsinites are excellent today and into the future.