

NM nursing consortium facing dearth of funding

Past support from grants has not materialized this year

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Only three New Mexico counties have enough registered nurses to meet national practitioner-to-population benchmarks, according to the state's latest health care workforce report.

The remaining 30 New Mexico counties are a combined 3,361 nurses short.

And now one organization working to grow and enhance the state's nursing pool is facing financial disaster, and is searching for funding to continue its mission.

The New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium - a collaboration representing every state-funded nursing program - has secured only \$11,500 in funding for the fiscal year that started July 1, when its "bare bones" annual budget is closer to \$300,000, according to Judy Liesveld, a member of the consortium's leadership council and interim associate dean of academic affairs for the University of New Mexico College of Nursing.

Grants historically have buoyed the consortium, including allotments from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the state Board of Nursing. But the foundation grant has ended and the state board's financial support has dissipated.

Liesveld said the budget has primarily gone to consortium personnel, and the consortium no longer has funding for any positions. All staffing will occur "through in-kind efforts," she said, and the budget issues will likely limit service and support for nursing programs at participating schools around the state.

Established in 2009, the consortium galvanized around a 2010 Institute of Medicine recommendation that 80 percent of U. S. nurses should have a bachelor's degree by 2020, Liesveld said.

The nursing consortium developed a common curriculum for New Mexico's state-funded nursing programs and also fostered partnerships that allow community college students to co-enroll at universities to earn their prelicensure bachelor's of science degree in nursing. For example, students at San Juan College in Farmington and New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs can earn a bachelor's from the University of New Mexico. New Mexico State University and Western New Mexico University have community college partners, too.

The number of prelicensure BSN students around the state has surged: 13 public colleges and universities - including three new community college participants - will provide the BSN curriculum this fall for 1,252 students. That's compared to two schools and 640 students in 2013, according to nursing consortium data.

And when students can get their degrees closer to home, Liesveld said they are more likely to stay in those communities to work.

Liesveld said the financial challenges will likely mean reduced support for member programs, including assistance for those just launching, and could impact faculty development, curriculum integrity and more.

UNM's College of Nursing contributed \$112,350 to help sustain the consortium staff last fiscal year, but Liesveld said that was meant to be a one-time occurrence.

The group aims to get legislative funding during the 2019 session.

A UNM Health Sciences Center spokeswoman said conversations about addressing the nursing consortium's loss of funding are ongoing, though it's not yet clear whether UNM will make the consortium a legislative priority.

" At this time we are still reviewing the best way to secure funding for this program during the legislative session," spokeswoman Alex Sanchez told the Journal in an email.

The New Mexico Council of University Presidents - which represents the state's seven public four-year universities - will discuss NMNEC's situation at its meeting later this month and will explore solutions to its financial predicament, according to the council's executive director Marc Saavedra. He said the council might even consider partnering with the state's community college associations on a legislative funding request.

The nursing consortium is a consortium that " affects all the nursing programs," he said.