

Moving ahead with your nursing education

Take advantage of the resources available to you.

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Whether you're a newly licensed nurse or a seasoned professional, the time is always right to take the next step in your education. Returning to school opens new doors of opportunity for your career, as higher levels of education allow you to work in the settings of your choice and assume more responsibility for shaping care delivery.

Today's nurse employers are looking for clinicians with additional levels of education, and nurses are responding by enrolling in baccalaureate and graduate programs in record numbers. According to the latest annual survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), enrollments were up across the board in 2016, with the greatest increases seen in doctor of nursing practice (up 15%), master's (up 8%), and baccalaureate (up 4%) programs.

Nursing schools are working to accept all qualified applicants by offering a wide menu of options to meet the needs of today's learner. In addition to traditionally paced, face-to-face classes, schools now offer degree programs completely or partially online, as well as accelerated programs for those looking to complete degree requirements at a faster, more intense pace.

As you begin planning your education, access the following resources to find out more about your options and available support services:

- **Johnson & Johnson's Discover Nursing:** www.discovernursing.com

Developed to interest new generations in nursing careers, this information-rich site provides clear advice on getting into nursing school, paying for your education, and selecting the nursing specialty that fits your interests.

- **ExploreHealthCareers.org:** <https://explorehealthcareers.org/career-explorer/>

This online clearinghouse gives students reliable information about nursing and the

health professions, including links to career profiles, enrichment programs, financial aid resources, and current issues in health care.

- **Your Nursing Career:** www.aacn.nche.edu/students/your-nursing-career

Housed on the AACN website, this resource features the latest facts about the nursing profession, links to schools of nursing offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and a directory of available scholarships.

- **NursingCAS:** <http://www.nursingcas.org>

Use the profession's centralized application service, called NursingCAS, to explore nursing program requirements and apply to multiple programs using one convenient application.

If you need financial assistance to complete your education, you'll find that federal, state, and local programs are available, if you know where to look. Your first stop should be your employer to find out what assistance is available in terms of professional development and degree completion incentives. Next, check with your local school of nursing and talk to the administrators about what programs working adults are using to pay for school. In addition, check with your state board of nursing and state department of education to see if assistance is available, including funding for advanced clinicians looking to teach after graduation. If you're seeking an advanced degree, consider applying for federal sources of aid from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education.

With a little advance planning, you'll soon be on the path to expanding your nursing knowledge and enhancing the quality of care you're able to provide to those in need. ☞

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