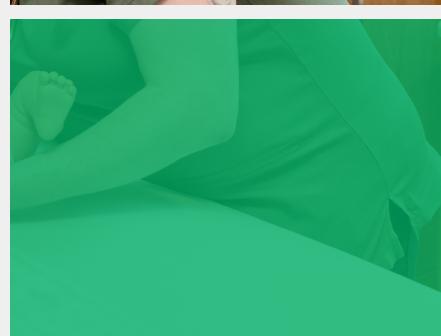
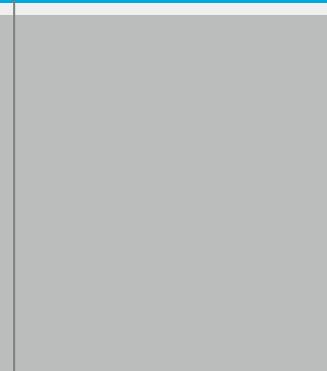
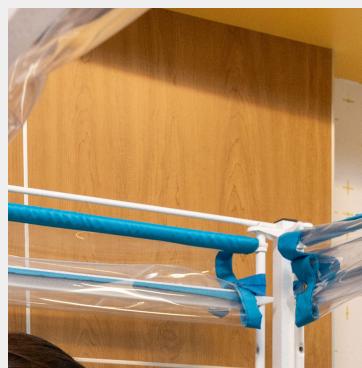


2025 ANNUAL REPORT

We are an innovative online nurse residency program designed to help recent graduates transition into their roles as professional nurses.





On the Cover: a nurse resident in the IONRP and site coordinator (left) participate in a pediatric simulation at ChildServe in Des Moines, Iowa on Tuesday, June 24, 2025. (Photo by Rebecca F. Miller/College of Nursing)

IONRP extends special thanks to Rebecca F. Miller, Creative Media Specialist at the University of Iowa College of Nursing, for traveling with our team to photograph three of our facilities and their nurse residents. Her photography is featured not only on the cover but throughout the entirety of this report. We are also grateful for the collaboration and support from Lakes Regional Healthcare, Floyd Valley Healthcare, and ChildServe, and their dedicated site coordinators.

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WHAT'S NEXT IN 2026

*“Give yourself grace.
It’s OK not to know
things, and it’s OK to
ask questions—
because that’s how
you grow.”*

—Annika McMillen,
July 2025 Completion



Resident Spotlight: Annika McMillen

Orthopedic-surgical nurse Annika McMillen has used the residency program to strengthen her confidence and reflective practice during her first year in a rural hospital setting. Monthly discussion prompts helped her evaluate her experiences and identify opportunities for growth, ultimately inspiring her professional project on improving debriefing after rapid responses and codes. Motivated by real events on her unit, Annika aims to create space for nurses to process, learn, and feel supported. She credits the program’s sense of community for helping her feel validated and less alone as a new graduate.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As we close out 2025, I'm proud to reflect on a year defined by connection, collaboration, and growth. From coast to coast, our team engaged with leaders at national and regional conferences, reinforcing the vital role transition-to-practice programs play in supporting nurses in every setting. These conversations continue to inspire new ideas and guide our work forward.

Season 2 of the **Beyond Nurse Residency** podcast expanded our reach even further. We were honored to feature national experts on transition stages, professional identity, preceptor development, clinician well-being, and inclusion—alongside the stories of current site coordinators, nurse residents, and innovative programs across Iowa. Each episode deepened our understanding and strengthened our commitment to those we serve.

This year we also welcomed new partners, celebrated returning organizations, and launched new collaborations—including joint work with **Simulation in Motion - Iowa (Sim-IA)** and the **Midwest Clinical Instruction Regional Network (MCIRN)**. Together, we are enhancing clinical skill development and ensuring preceptors have the support they need to guide nurses entering practice.

Our team contributed to national publications and research exploring preceptor support, nurse engagement, and the challenges organizations face in implementing transition-to-practice programs. This work is helping shape the future of nurse residency support and continues to inform our own program development.

A highlight of our year was receiving the **ANA Edge Runner Award**—an incredible honor recognizing nearly 12 years of continuous improvement, innovation, and dedication to the nursing workforce.

Behind the scenes, we completed comprehensive updates to both our nurse residency and preceptor development curricula. These refreshed programs, launching in the new year, reflect the evolving needs of nurses and healthcare organizations across the country.

As we look ahead, we are energized by the momentum of 2025 and deeply grateful for the partners and nurses who make this work possible. We cannot wait to see where 2026 takes us.



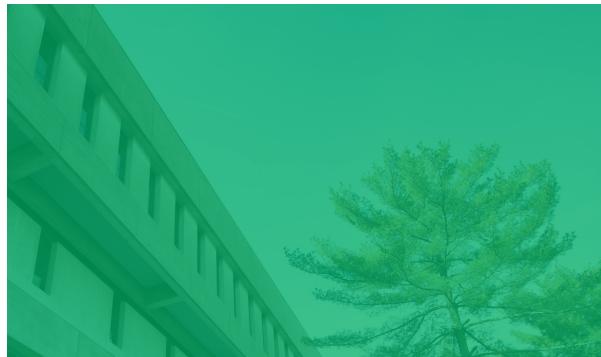
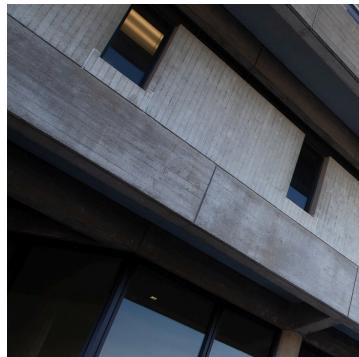
Nicole Weathers

— Nicole Weathers, DNP, RN, NPD-BC
Program Director, IONRP

MEET THE TEAM



Jessica Ociepka, MSN, RN-BC
Program Coordinator



Amanda Bruscher, MSN, RN
Program Coordinator,



Jill Gillespie, BA
Marketing Coordinator

COMPANY OVERVIEW

VISION

To provide every new graduate nurse, no matter their practice setting, with the tools and support necessary to enhance their transition to practice and lay the foundation for a successful career.

MISSION

To provide a cost-effective and innovative program to help nurses nationwide have a positive transition into practice.

VALUES

- Authenticity
- Growth
- Innovation
- Intentionality
- Service

IONRP DESIGNATED AN AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING EDGE RUNNER

In 2025, the Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program (IONRP) received one of the highest national honors in nursing innovation: designation as an **American Academy of Nursing Edge Runner**. This prestigious recognition is awarded to nurse-designed models of care that demonstrate proven, replicable impact in improving health outcomes, reducing cost, advancing equity, and elevating the profession. The Academy identified IONRP as one of the most innovative and transformative programs in the country—recognizing more than a decade of work to reimagine transition to practice for new graduate nurses, particularly those in rural and underserved communities. As IONRP Director Nicole Weathers shared, the designation is “both humbling and deeply affirming,” underscoring the vision, collaboration, and commitment that have shaped the program’s evolution.

Since launching in 2014, IONRP has grown into the nation’s first fully online, evidence-based transition-to-practice program with a scalable hub-and-spoke model that meets the diverse needs of healthcare organizations. Now serving 54 organizations across 13 states, the program provides standardized education, structured peer support, and guided application facilitated by local leaders and preceptors. Its outcomes speak for themselves: stronger retention, reduced onboarding costs, and empowered new graduate nurses who enter the workforce confident, supported, and prepared. Becoming an Edge Runner highlights not only IONRP’s national impact but also its continued leadership in shaping the future of nursing practice and workforce development.



Nicole Weathers receives the AAN Edge Runner Award, pictured with Billy Lynn Allard, chair of the Edge Runner National Advisory Board Council, and Linda D. Scott (1956–2025), then-president of the American Academy of Nursing, during the award ceremony.



FACILITY SPOTLIGHT: DELTA HEALTH

Advancing Nurse Development Through Innovation, Engagement & Evidence-Based Practice

Since joining the Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program (IONRP) in 2022, Delta Health has emerged as a model of rural nurse development—pairing creativity with a strong commitment to evidence-based practice. Through the leadership of Shauna L. Meilner, DNP, MSN-Ed, RN, NPD-BC, CCRN, CNE, Delta Health has steadily expanded its professional development culture, investing in both nurse residents and the educators who support them.

In 2025, Delta Health continued to demonstrate its strong commitment to nurse development through both its skills days activities and its residency program achievements. During the annual skills days event, the organization showcased a comprehensive poster exhibit highlighting change projects, case studies, and committee work from six residency cohorts, illustrating the steady growth and breadth of professional development across the facility. Shortly after, Delta Health celebrated the graduation of its July 2024 nurse resident cohort, whose professional experience projects addressed critical areas of patient care—from maternal sepsis and glucose monitoring to medication safety and communication efficiency—reflecting the deep impact of the residency program on quality improvement within the organization.

Delta Health's long-standing partnership with IONRP reflects its dedication to supporting new nurses, strengthening clinical practice, and improving patient outcomes across the organization. The hospital first joined IONRP through funding awarded to the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence by the U.S. Department of Labor, allowing Delta Health to participate without financial burden during the initial grant period. Now, even after that funding has concluded, Delta Health has chosen to continue the partnership by intentionally incorporating the residency program into its operational budget—a testament to its proven value. Moving forward, Delta Health is expanding its commitment to Nursing Professional Development (NPD), supported by Meilner's achievement of her NPD-BC credential and the continued development of initiatives that equip new nurses with the confidence, competence, and readiness needed to thrive in practice.

In the News

To explore the full list of resident projects, case studies, and skills days highlights from Delta Health, click on the original news stories from the IONRP website below:

[Delta Health Prepares for Skills Days with Comprehensive Nurse Residency Showcase](#)

Friday, January 10, 2025

[Delta Health Celebrates July 2024 Nurse Residency Graduates and Project Presentations](#)

Monday, July 7, 2025

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

We launched **Season 2** of the ***Beyond Nurse Residency*** Podcast and reached 1,000 downloads, led by our top-performing premiere episode featuring Dr. Judy Duchscher.



FEBRUARY

IONRP Director Nicole Weathers represented the program at the **NRHA's Rural Health Policy Institute** in Washington, D.C., advocating for improved healthcare access and support for rural communities.

MAY

National Engagement & Recognition

IONRP celebrated Nurses Week May 6–12 and served as a Silver Sponsor for the **ANCC Transition to Practice Symposium** in Phoenix. Jess represented the program at the **NRHA's Annual Rural Health Conference** in Atlanta, supported by IONRP's ongoing status as a Gold Partner of the NRHA. Nicole also exhibited at the **Iowa Organization of Nurse Leader's Conference** in Altoona, IA.



APRIL

Advancing Nurse Engagement

Nicole Weathers led a National Rural Health Association's (NRHA) webinar "Nurse Engagement Strategies That Are Helping Rural Hospitals Cut Early Turnover." To round out the month, the IONRP team exhibited with a booth at the **2025 ANPD Aspire Convention** in Las Vegas.

JUNE

Innovation & Recognition

IONRP was named an **Edge Runner** by the American Academy of Nursing. The SIM-IA pilot launched with on-site simulation stops at Lakes Regional Healthcare, Floyd Valley Healthcare, and ChildServe. June also marked the publication of Nicole Weathers and Hannah Hayes' *Nurse Leader* article, "Building Nurse Engagement & Retention: An Organizational Framework."

JULY

National Publication Spotlight

IONRP proudly celebrated the publication of an article by coordinators **Amanda Bruscher** and **Jessica Ociepka** in the *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*. Their work, "**Nursing Professional Development Practitioners' Strategies to Support Preceptors in Rural Facilities**," highlights innovative approaches to strengthening preceptor support in rural settings.

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

AUGUST

IONRP Director Nicole Weathers authored a featured **NRHA blog** highlighting how nurse-led innovation—through IONRP and SIM-IA—is transforming rural health care nationwide.



SEPTEMBER

IONRP presented innovative rural health strategies at the **NRHA Critical Access Hospital Conference**, celebrated **NPD Week**, and reached over 2,500 **downloads** on the *Beyond Nurse Residency* podcast.

OCTOBER

Strengthening Connections & Celebrating Achievement

At the **IHA Annual Meeting**, IONRP joined SIM-IA and College of Nursing partners to showcase shared efforts in strengthening Iowa's nursing workforce. The event fostered valuable connections and renewed collaboration across the state. Later that month, Nicole Weathers accepted the **American Academy of Nursing's Edge Runner Award** in Washington, D.C. The honor celebrated IONRP's growth, adaptability, and long-standing commitment to rural health. IONRP played an active role at the **Iowa Nurses Association Annual Conference**, where Nicole facilitated World Café conversations and connected with nursing colleagues.



NOVEMBER

Nicole led a **NRHA webinar** on preparing organizations for Gen Z nurses in rural settings. November also advanced the **IONRP + SIM-IA pilot**, expanding simulation-based learning for new nurse graduates. These efforts underscored IONRP's continued commitment to strengthening the rural nursing workforce.



QUICK FACTS

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IONRP BLOG POSTS

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PODCAST EPISODES

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IONRP NEWS STORIES

8+

ABSTRACT PROPOSALS

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NRHA WEBINARS/BLOGS

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PRESENTATION

2

ARTICLES

8

CONFERENCES

IONRP + SIM-IA PILOT EXPANDS SKILLS FOR NEW NURSES

In 2025, the Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program (IONRP) partnered with **Simulation in Motion - Iowa (SIM-IA)** to launch an innovative pilot that integrates high-fidelity simulation into the transition-to-practice experience for new nurses. By combining IONRP's evidence-based curriculum with SIM-IA's mobile simulation units, participants engaged in immersive, hands-on scenarios that strengthened clinical judgment, communication, teamwork, and skill development. Residents from **Lakes Regional Healthcare**, **Floyd Valley Healthcare**, and **ChildServe** participated in on-site simulation events, each followed by a structured debriefing session that supported reflection and a deeper understanding of complex care situations.

Early outcomes from the pilot highlight its potential to enhance nurse readiness—particularly for organizations in rural or underserved areas. Guided by IONRP Director Nicole Weathers, DNP, RN, NPD-BC, the collaboration underscores a shared commitment to advancing equity and excellence in nursing education. As feedback and evaluation data continue to shape next steps, this partnership reflects a forward-thinking approach to professional development and demonstrates how technology-enabled learning can expand meaningful support for nurses during their critical first year of practice.



Two nurses in the IONRP and their site coordinator (center) participate in a pediatric simulation inside SIM-IA's training truck at ChildServe in Des Moines, Iowa on Tuesday, June 24, 2025. (Photo by Rebecca F. Miller/College of Nursing)



FACILITY SPOTLIGHT: UNITYPOINT HEALTH - TRINITY

Celebrating the First Cohort of the Enhanced Nurse Residency Program

In early 2025, UnityPoint Health–Trinity reached an important milestone with the graduation of the first cohort from its newly enhanced nurse residency program. Twenty-five nurse residents completed the 12-month program in January, marking the launch of a strengthened approach to supporting new graduate nurses as they transition into professional practice.

The enhanced residency model reflects UnityPoint Health–Trinity's commitment to preparing new nurses for bedside care by expanding both educational depth and support systems. The program now features enriched educational sessions led by guest speakers and interdisciplinary panelists, offering residents a broader view of the healthcare environment. Increased involvement from unit leaders ensures that residents receive consistent mentorship, guidance, and real-time application of skills throughout their first year. Hands-on learning opportunities—including case study reviews, simulations, and scenario-based activities—equip residents with the confidence and clinical reasoning needed to navigate complex patient situations.

A core component of the enhancement is the requirement that all new graduate bedside nurses participate in the residency program, reinforcing UnityPoint Health–Trinity's belief that structured, early support is essential to nursing success. "Our goal is to help these nurses build confidence in their skills while providing a space for them to reflect, ask questions, and better understand the situations they encounter," says Brian Bedoun, RN, Clinical Professional Development Specialist.

Nurse residents across this inaugural enhanced cohort trained in a wide range of clinical environments—including inpatient behavioral health, NICU, mother/baby, labor and delivery, OR, med/surg, cardiac stepdown, ICU, and the emergency department. This diversity ensured that new nurses developed strong clinical foundations while contributing to high-quality patient care in units across the organization.

As UnityPoint Health–Trinity looks ahead to future cohorts, the success of the enhanced residency program underscores the system's dedication to cultivating confident, well-prepared nurses who are equipped to deliver exceptional care from their first day at the bedside.

On the Podcast

Brian Bedoun, RN, Clinical Professional Development Specialist, also shared insights on customizing nurse residency programs as a guest on *Beyond Nurse Residency* (Season 2, Episode 9). Click to listen below:



[Beyond Nurse Residency podcast, Season 2, Episode 9.](#)

BY THE NUMBERS

NEW ORGANIZATIONS

NEW ONLINE FACILITIES

- Fair Child Medical Center (California)
- Frances Mahon Deaconess Hospital (Montana)
- Pulaski Memorial Hospital (Indiana)
- Myrtue Medical Center (Iowa)
- St Anthony Regional Hospital (Iowa)
- Avera Lakes Regional Healthcare (Iowa)
- Avera Queen of Peace Hospital (South Dakota)
- Avera St. Mary's Hospital (South Dakota)
- Gove County Medical Center (Kansas)

NEW BLENDED FACILITIES

- Hutchinson Regional Medical Center (Kansas)
- Ridgeview Medical Center (Minnesota)
- Animas Surgical Hospital (Colorado)

NEW PRECEPTOR FACILITY

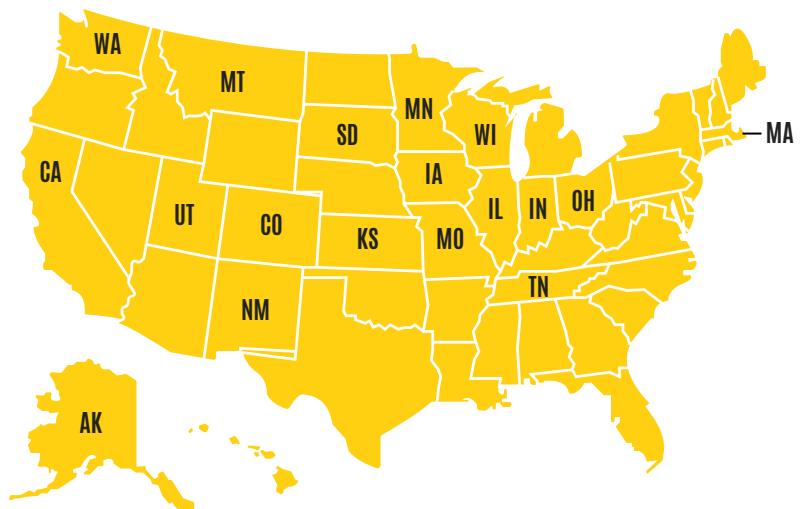
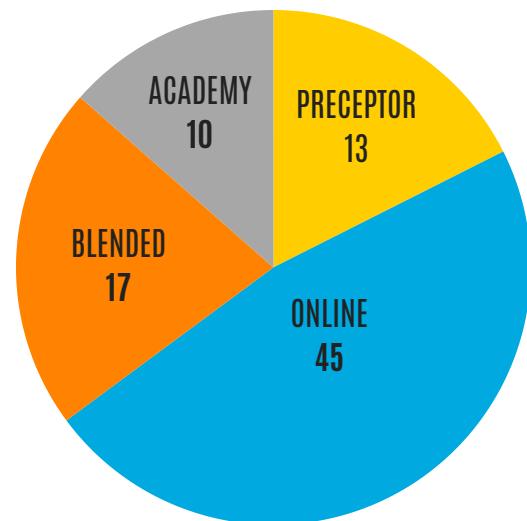
- Island Health (Washington)

STATE TOTALS

- Alaska = Multiple*
- California = 1
- Colorado = 15
- Illinois = 3
- Indiana = 6
- Iowa = 19
- Kansas = 2
- Kentucky = 1
- Massachusetts = 1
- Minnesota = 1
- Missouri = 1
- Montana = 1
- New Mexico = 2
- Ohio = 1
- South Dakota = 3
- Tennessee = 1
- Utah = 1
- Washington = 1
- Wisconsin = 2

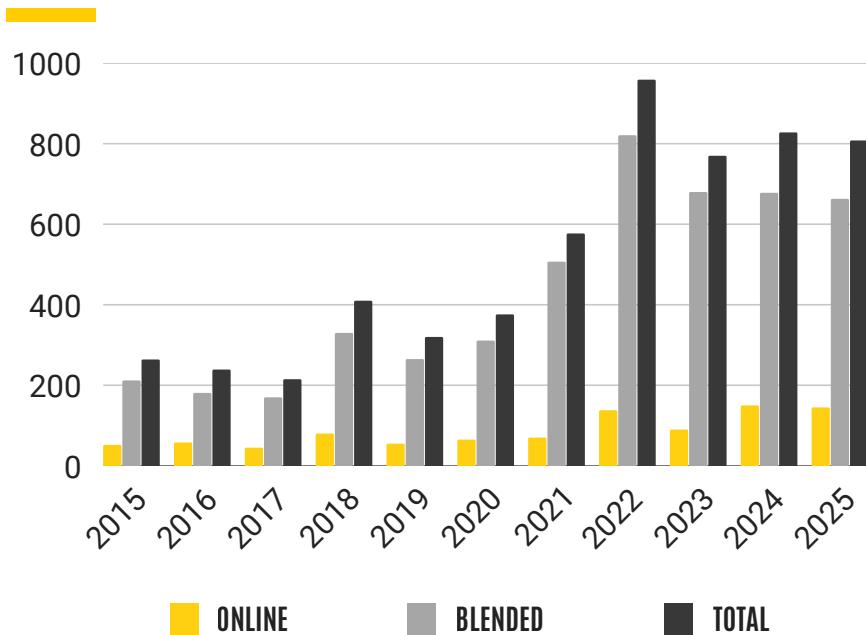
*Multiple = Working with hospital association

SITE DISTRIBUTION



BY THE NUMBERS

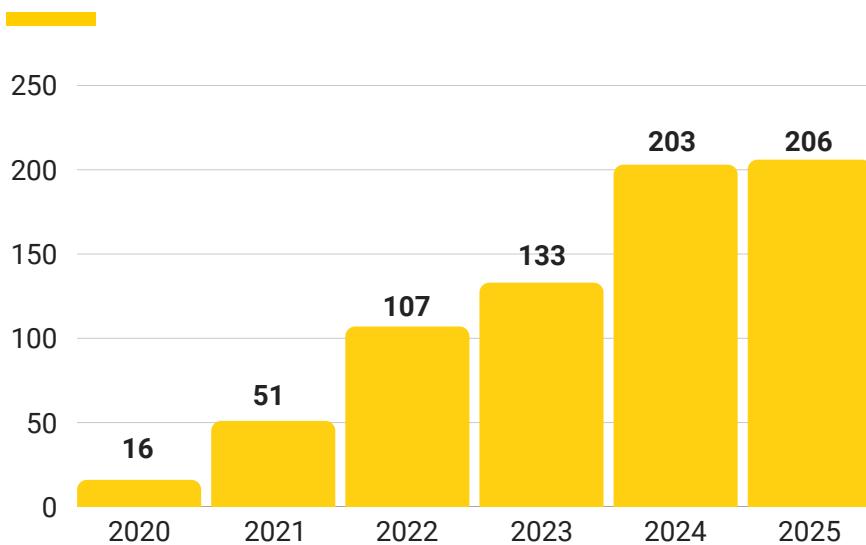
RESIDENCY TOTAL ENROLLMENT



“Excellence breeds excellence – and our patients deserve nothing less.”

—Azra Spahic,
February 2025 Completion

PRECEPTOR COURSE ENROLLMENT



Resident Spotlight: Azra Spahic

As a new nurse, Azra found the Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program to be a source of validation, confidence, and community. From connecting with peers who shared her first-year challenges to leading a meaningful change project, she discovered her voice, her confidence, and her ability to drive improvement at the bedside. Azra credits the program with helping her grow into a reflective, evidence-driven professional – and says that “excellence breeds excellence.”

OUTCOME DATA 2024-2025

CASEY-FINK GRADUATE NURSE EXPERIENCE SURVEY

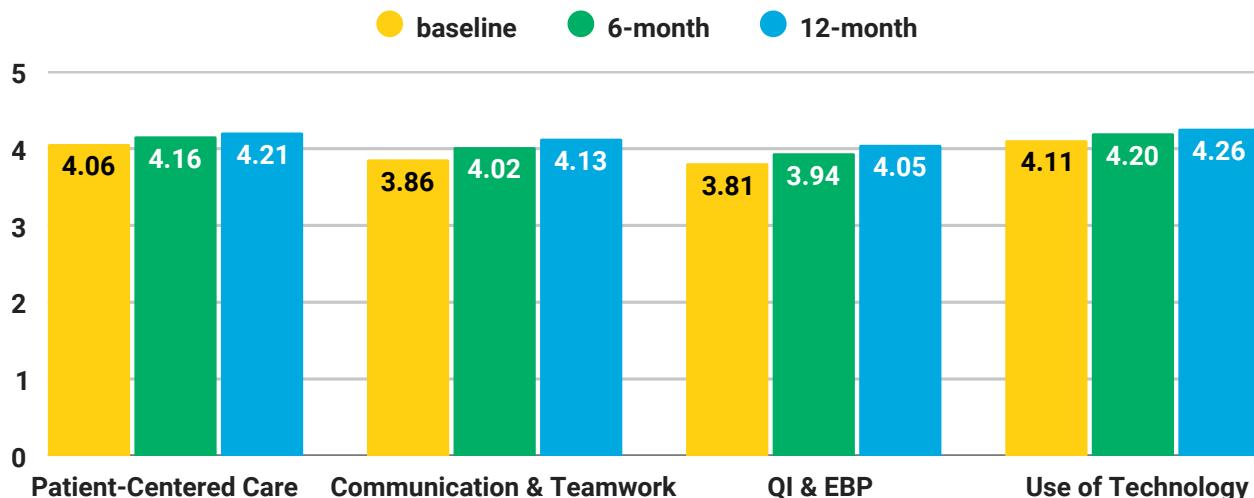
In this section, nurse residents were asked 41 questions about their experience as they transitioned into the professional nursing role in seven subscales: role confidence, manage patient care, support, role satisfaction, stress and burnout, resilience, and organizational commitment. Residents were asked to select the response that best described their recent clinical experience, utilizing a 4-point Likert scale: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). Please note, the stress and burnout subscale represents a negative construct, where lower scores represent lower levels of stress and burnout and higher scores represent higher levels of stress and burnout.



**lower scores represent lower levels of stress and burnout and higher scores represent higher levels of stress and burnout

SPECIFIC COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT TOOL

Participants indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with their abilities to perform certain nursing-specific skills. Thirty-four questions were included in this tool. Respondents answered using a five-point scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) with the statements. A higher score indicated more self-reported competence. The questions are categorized into four subscales: patient centered care, communication and teamwork, quality improvement and evidence-based practice (EBP) and use of technology.

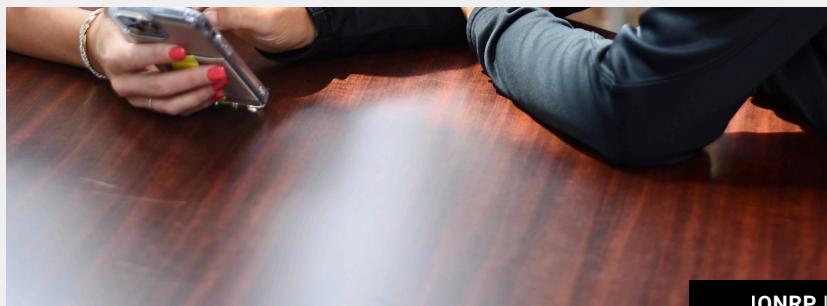


ADVANCING PRECEPTOR EDUCATION ACROSS IOWA

The Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program (IONRP) and the **Midwest Clinical Instruction Regional Network (MCIRN)** have strengthened statewide support for nurse development through a new collaboration focused on elevating preceptor education. Together, the partners have launched the newly updated *Supporting Nurses: Training for Preceptors, Mentors, and Clinical Coaches 2025*, now available **at no cost** to learners across Iowa, thanks to HRSA funding*. The refreshed program features an enhanced curriculum, expanded resources, and a flexible microlearning format designed to meet the needs of today's nursing workforce. By joining forces, IONRP and MCIRN are ensuring that healthcare organizations—large and small, rural and urban—have access to high-quality, evidence-based tools that build confidence, consistency, and clinical coaching excellence at the point of care.

Learners who complete the IONRP preceptor training now have a clear next step in their professional development through the MCIRN Advanced Preceptor Fellowship. This advanced program offers a deeper dive into preceptorship, preparing nurses for expanded leadership and teaching responsibilities while providing a stipend and 29 continuing education hours. Through this aligned pathway, Iowa nurses can progress from foundational training to advanced preceptor development with seamless support. This collaboration represents a shared commitment to strengthening the state's nursing pipeline, improving clinical learning environments, and empowering nurses to thrive as educators, mentors, and role models across Iowa's healthcare system.

*This program is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under 5T1QHP47311-02-00, Nurse Education Practice Quality and Retention: Clinical Faculty and Preceptor Academy, award totaling \$3,995,519 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://hrsa.gov).



Visit our website to access full program details.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2026

As we look ahead, 2026 will be a year focused on strengthening our foundation, elevating the learning experience, and expanding the ways we support nurses and healthcare organizations across the country. While many initiatives are still taking shape, several strategic priorities are emerging.

Strengthen and Streamline Program Infrastructure

We will continue enhancing the systems and processes that support our work behind the scenes. These improvements aim to make coordination easier for partners and ensure a smooth, consistent experience for nurse residents and preceptors.

Innovate and Evolve the Learning Experience

With our updated residency and preceptor curricula now launched, we will focus on refinement, implementation support, and exploring new ways to personalize learning. Our goal is to ensure the curriculum remains relevant, flexible, and responsive to the evolving needs of today's nursing workforce.

Deepen Partnerships and Expand Reach

Collaboration remains central to our mission. In 2026, we will continue strengthening partnerships across rural and urban settings, explore new opportunities to extend high-quality transition-to-practice support, and expand pathways that help nurses grow throughout their careers.

Advance Research and Evidence-Based Practice

We will continue contributing to the evolving science of transition-to-practice through outcomes analysis, scholarship, and ongoing collaboration with research partners. This work helps ensure our programs are grounded in evidence and aligned with emerging best practices in nursing and workforce development.

Evolve Our Identity to Reflect Our Growth

As our programs expand, we will explore opportunities to refine our mission, vision, and overall alignment so that our identity reflects the full scope of the support we provide to organizations and nurses nationwide.



Resident Spotlight: Raul Castillo

During his first year as a nightshift nurse, Raul discovered that the residency program offered far more support than he expected. The monthly meetings became a lifeline—an honest space where new nurses could share challenges, process stress, and realize they weren't alone in feeling overwhelmed. Raul credits the program with helping him care for his own mental well-being and navigate the pressures of transition to practice. He recommends the residency to other new nurses because it provides a community of peers who truly understand the experience of starting out in the profession.

"It made me feel relief knowing most were feeling stress or on the brink of quitting... I loved sharing stories and how we managed our stressors."

—Raul Castillo,
August 2025 Completion



Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program



Questions? Contact us.

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www.nursing.uiowa.edu/IONRP

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 [@Iowa Online Nurse Residency Program](https://www.linkedin.com/company/iowa-online-nurse-residency-program)

 [@IONRP](https://www.youtube.com/@IONRP)