

Nurse Scholars Program

Independence Blue Cross (IBC) recognizes that nurses are critical to the health care delivery system, and that the ever-growing shortage of nurses and nurse educators in southeastern PA threatens the accessibility of quality and affordable health care in our community.

Addressing the nursing shortage

In 2003, faced with a growing shortage of nurses in our community, IBC consulted with the deans of local nursing programs to identify the factors driving the shortage and assess what role we could play in the solution. IBC concluded that the nursing shortage was the direct result of a lack of qualified nurse educators and that increasing the number of educators was necessary to meet the long-term demand for nurses.

In collaboration with school deans, hospitals, health systems, and other key stakeholders, including legislators and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Foundation (PHEF), IBC launched the **Nurse Scholars Program**, originally a three-year, \$3 million scholarship and support initiative.

Following its initial success, IBC expanded the Nurse Scholars Program to a total commitment of \$10.75 million through 2010 (including a match from PHEF). Along with undergraduate and graduate scholarships, the program now includes dedicated funding for five nurse faculty positions, supplemental support for graduate nursing education programs, and an undergraduate nursing internship program.

Investing in nurses and nursing education

The Nurse Scholars Program was the first of its kind in the U.S., and has been recognized nationally for its innovative approach to addressing this critical issue in health care. The program:

- provides funding to local accredited nursing programs in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties to award scholarships to nursing and nursing education students;
- creates programs that directly increase the number of nurse educators;
- develops initiatives to support students, faculty, and the nursing profession.

The Nurse Scholars Program has continued to evolve through IBC's efforts to deepen our commitment to nursing, developing the following companion initiatives:

- **Nurse Faculty Program.** Launched in 2006, the Nurse Faculty Program addresses the shortage of nursing educators and provides supplemental support to benefit local nursing programs hindered by lack of qualified faculty.
- **Nursing Internship Program.** Launched in 2005, this innovative program provides internships that offer undergraduate nursing students the opportunity to gain experience working in nontraditional settings in health insurance or community and public health.
- **Nursing Education Forum.** IBC organizes and hosts an annual Nursing Education Forum to recognize the Nurse Scholars Program student scholarship recipients, celebrate nurse educators, and promote dialogue about the nursing shortage and other issues facing the nursing profession.

Evaluating our investment

Financial support

To date, IBC has awarded \$8.5 million for more than 3,000 undergraduate and graduate scholarships to future practice nurses and nurse educators at 31 accredited area nursing programs.

Increasing the current supply of nurses

In 2008, 29 undergraduate nursing programs reported a total of 3,741 graduates – more than double the number of graduates these schools reported in 2002. Since the 2004 inception of the Nurse Scholars Program, 15,000 nursing students have graduated from the IBC-supported undergraduate programs.

Increasing the number of nurse educators

Over five years, total enrollment at the 12 graduate nursing programs that we support in southeastern Pennsylvania rose 75 percent — from 1,416 enrolled in 2003 to 2,496 in fall 2008.

Supporting the development of well-rounded practice nurses

Through 2009, the Nursing Internship Program has provided administrative and clinical internship opportunities to 88 undergraduate nursing students. To date, students from 16 of the 31 local nursing institutions we support have participated in this program.

[Learn more](#)

For more information about the Nurse Scholars Program or any of its companion initiatives, please see our please visit the *Nurse Scholars Program* page in the *Social Mission* section at ibx.com or send us an email.