

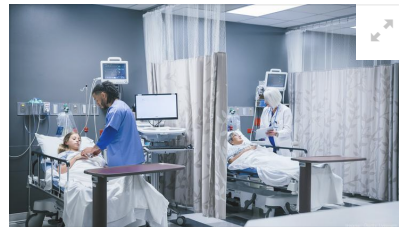
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## HEALTH CARE

# Nurse education funds among top legislative priorities as staffing shortages persist



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## IN THIS ARTICLE

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**Bryan Avila**

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With hospitals struggling to retain staff amid a labor shortage heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic, the allocation of funds for nurse training programs is one of the hot-button health care issues being addressed during Florida's current legislative session.

A 2021 report commissioned by the Florida Hospital Association and the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida projected that the Sunshine State will face a shortfall of 59,100 nurses by 2035. This includes a 12% deficit in registered nurses and a 30% deficit in licensed practical nurses.

The FHA is among the organizations closely tracking the Legislature's health care spending plan. The Tallahassee-based nonprofit, which advocates on behalf of state and federal hospitals, provides guidance to legislators on high-priority health care topics, including the nursing labor crisis.

"Even the research that we've done [in the past] won't have fully captured the overall impact of the pandemic, and certainly not what we've experienced during the Delta and Omicron surges," FHA President and CEO Mary Mayhew said. "When we did some initial analyses last spring, we saw a turnover rate of over 25% among nurses and over 30% among critical care nurses. The reality is that the situation has only worsened in the last six months."



Mary Mayhew, CEO of the Florida Hospital Association

FLORIDA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

The \$47 billion House health care budget, presented by Rep. Bryan Avila, R-Miami, proposes slashing \$252 million from Medicaid reimbursement rates for hospitals and redirecting \$100 million toward nurse training programs. Both the House and Senate have agreed to cut additional critical care funding for hospitals that treat a large percentage of Medicaid patients.

Mayhew and other health care leaders have voiced opposition to state proposals to cut Medicaid funds, as those dollars help pay salaries for nurses and other professionals. But outside of the Medicaid cuts, many leaders within the industry concur with the view that a failure to invest sufficient state dollars into nurse education funding this session will yield serious ramifications for the industry's largest occupation, as well as Florida's economic future.

“Employers moving to Florida want to know that their employees will have access to high-quality health care services. Retirees moving here want peace of mind that there will be reliable health care services available in a timely manner,” Mayhew said. “There is a statewide need for the Legislature and governor to take a look at additional resources to support addressing the shortage.”

The House and Senate are expected to negotiate a compromise on the final budget by the close of the session on March 11.

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