



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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The Impact of the Aging of the Population on SCHEV's Ability to Deliver Services and How the Agency is Responding

In 2004, SCHEV released both the "Strategic Plan and Recommendations to Ensure an Adequate Supply of Nurses in Virginia," and the "Condition of Nursing and Nursing Education in the Commonwealth," detailing that the inadequate number of licensed nurses remains a persistent and escalating condition within the Commonwealth. As the reports described, the growing elderly population has a significant impact on health service utilization. The Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association estimates that those age 65 and older represent 11% of the population yet consume approximately 35% of hospital resources. This phenomenon contributes to the 42% projected increase in demand for full-time equivalent RNs between 2000 and 2020. Outlined within the reports described above were specific recommendations to alleviate the nursing shortage in the Commonwealth. In addition, SCHEV's 2004 and 2005 budget recommendations included a request for additional general fund support to increase in-state undergraduate enrollment growth in nursing programs.

Population growth, and consequently the increased demand for nurses, differs across the Commonwealth. The greatest regional growth will continue to be seen in Northern Virginia, the Richmond metro area, and the Hampton Roads regions. Some areas of the state, such as Southwest Virginia, are projected to experience a continued decrease in population. However, regions with declining populations have the largest percentage of population over 65 years of age. The declining and aging population in the Southwestern region drives the projected increased demand for health services in that area, while population growth and aging combine to create higher growth for nurse demand in other regions.

Over the next five to ten years, if additional funding is not allocated to meet the increased demand for qualified nurses, it will be incumbent upon SCHEV to continue to advocate for progressively more funding for the recommendations outlined in the agency's "Strategic Plan and Recommendations to Ensure an Adequate Supply of Nurses in Virginia."

In addition to advocating for additional funding to meet the increased demand for qualified nurses, as part of its higher education coordinating responsibilities, SCHEV administers the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act (§ 23-38.54), which permits senior citizens with a taxable individual income not exceeding \$15,000 per year to register and enroll in courses at any state institution of higher education in the Commonwealth exempt from tuition and fees.

At issue, the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act is unfunded by the General Assembly, requiring Virginia's public institutions of higher education to provide this benefit without state support. Last year, over 1,000 students received waivers, representing a total of approximately \$550,000 in lost tuition and fees to the institutions. In addition, senior citizens who wish to enroll in higher education courses but do not reside in a geographic location near a college or university may have difficulty utilizing the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act.

Steps SCHEV is Taking to Address the Impact of the Aging of the Population

1) As referenced above, SCHEV produced both the "Strategic Plan and Recommendations to Ensure an Adequate Supply of Nurses in Virginia," and the "Condition of Nursing and Nursing Education in the Commonwealth" in 2004.

These recommendations include:

- Increase the current number of nursing faculty by 15% in two years and an additional 35% within 12 years
- Expand institutions' capacity to prepare students in basic LPN and RN nursing programs by 15% more students in two years and an additional 35% within 12 years
- Increase the number of graduates from basic LPN and RN and advanced degree nursing programs by 15% in five years and an additional 35% within 15 years
- Improve retention of Virginia nurses in the workforce.

2) SCHEV offered budget recommendations in 2004 and 2005 to address the nursing shortage in the Commonwealth.

3) The General Assembly included language in the 2006-2008 biennial budget to create the Healthcare Workforce Task Force. The task force is charged with establishing criteria for awarding additional state funds via a competitive grant process to innovative public-private sector partnerships that will maximize the number of newly licensed nurses and increase the supply of graduate nursing faculty. SCHEV and the task force must submit a report on the scope, criteria, and structure of the grant process to the governor and the chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees by May 1, 2007.

4) It is the Council's hope that the governor and General Assembly will support the Healthcare Workforce Task Force's May 2007 recommendations by providing general funds to implement the competitive grant process. The Council will work to adopt any recommendations that are supported by the governor and the General Assembly.

5) SCHEV is also supportive of the Commonwealth considering using general funds to support the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act. Funds provided to Virginia's higher education institutions would alleviate the financial burden placed upon the institutions, which are currently required to fund this initiative without state support.

The five specific actions outline above detail the steps SCHEV is taking to address the impact of the aging of the population on the Commonwealth's higher education system. The two 2004 reports are available on SCHEV's website at www.schev.edu.