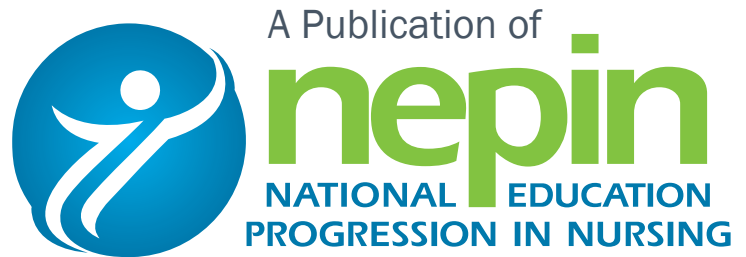


*Trends in*  
**Nursing  
Academic  
Progression**  
2016-2020



Empowering Nurses  
to Navigate the Future





## MISSION STATEMENT

Foster collaboration to ensure that nurses have access to higher levels of education and achievement.

## VISION

A diverse nursing workforce that optimizes the health of all Americans.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

Over the past decade much emphasis has been placed on the importance of academic progression for the nursing workforce. Scholars and health experts agree that higher levels of education increase delivery of quality patient centered care across all health care settings. However, obtaining and analyzing equitable national and state data regarding academic progression trends in nursing is no easy task. Multiple sources and researchers have benchmarked and crosswalked key data sources over the years.

NEPIN, the National Education Progression in Nursing collaborative, sought to locate and evaluate a single data source to equitably interpret current trends in academic progression. Created as an expansion of the former Academic Progression in Nursing (APIN) initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, NEPIN is the only national entity solely devoted to ensuring that nurses have access to higher levels of education and achievement. Operating under the fiscal oversight of the OADN Foundation (a federally recognized 501c3 nonprofit organization), NEPIN's stakeholders understand that successful patient outcomes depend on a well-equipped and sufficiently supported nursing workforce.

To our knowledge, prior to this data study, a detailed analysis of trends in progression from the Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) to the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (BSN) did not exist. For this report, NEPIN obtained several key datasets from the National Student Clearinghouse. The mission of the Clearinghouse is to serve the education and workforce communities and all learners with access to trusted data, related services, and insights ([www.studentclearinghouse.org](http://www.studentclearinghouse.org)). Their data includes 3,600 colleges and universities with 97% of students enrolled in public or private institutions.

Except for the report of current ADN enrollments (page 4), the baseline of all analysis is the ADN graduate progressing to the BSN. For depictions inclusive of graduate figures, the number is inclusive of any student graduating between July 1 and June 20 of the year noted for that year. Additionally, "enrolled" is defined by CIP code 51.3801. The point at which the code is assigned to a student can vary depending on each school and their own internal processes. The NSC's guidance is limited, but in the Enrollment Reporting Programming and Testing Guide provided to schools, a student's major/CIP are defined as "courses of study associated with a student's degree". Therefore, it is assumed, in most cases, the student will have been accepted into the nursing program before being assigned the corresponding CIP code.

*This report and all data contained herein is the property of NEPIN and shall not be used without the express written permission of NEPIN.*

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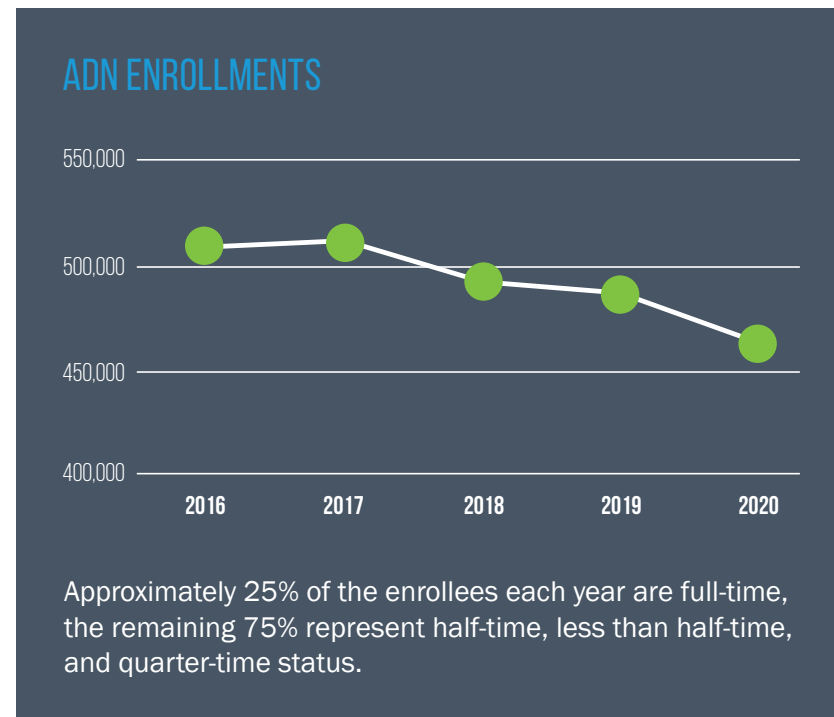
*Reliable data is essential to informed decision making. At NEPIN, we champion academic progression at all levels. We recognize that there is a role for every nurse in improving the health of Americans. Our goal is to ensure that each one of those nurses is empowered and equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and supports necessary to be the best they can be. That's how we will ensure patients have the best outcomes.*

**TINA LEAR, MHA**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEPIN**

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# ADN ENROLLMENTS

The Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) is a pathway into a professional registered nursing career. These programs are most often found at community colleges, though many ADN programs can be found at universities or embedded within health systems. Once students graduate, they are eligible to sit for the National Council Licensing Examination-Registered Nurse or NCLEX-RN. Taking the exam and receiving a passing score is a state requirement for licensing. The ADN pathway continues to be the most accessible option for many aspiring nurses seeking a career as a professional registered nurse, particularly for those students who may be socio-economically disadvantaged, first generation college students, geographically isolated or second careerists.



ADN programs are essential to the healthcare of our country. Research shows that community college nursing graduates are more likely to live and work in their communities after graduation. As these graduates progress to higher levels of education, their communities reap the benefits of their growing skills, knowledge, and abilities. This is critical as these nurses will take on new roles in the community alongside their counterparts in more traditional acute care settings. Patients and families rely on associate degree registered nurses to ensure access to high-quality health care. Furthermore, the ADN pathway provides individuals with the ability to launch careers, setting them on the path to achieve their goals with minimal debt. Community colleges educate a nursing student population that is reflective of the communities they serve, with nursing programs that graduate more African American, Latino, and Native American registered nurses than other types of prelicensure nursing programs. This nursing workforce diversity is not only a necessary goal itself, but also important for the development of culturally competent care and increased knowledge of health disparities in diverse populations. Community college nursing graduates are also twice as likely to work in the most economically distressed areas and nearly twice as likely to work in rural areas.

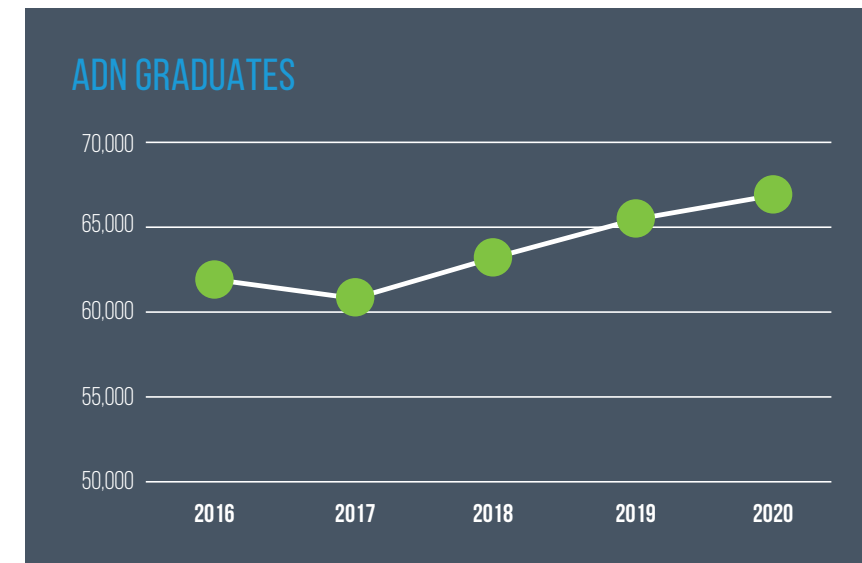
AACN's "Highlights from AACN's 2020 Annual Survey" issued April 1, 2021 reports 251,145 students enrolled in entry-level BSN programs nationwide. Compared to the 463,010 ADN enrollees for the same time period,

**65%** OF NEW NURSING STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING THE ADN AS THEIR ENTRY POINT.

# ADN GRADUATES

According to the American Community College Association, enrollment at Community Colleges (CCs) peaked in 2010 during the Great Recession as workers pursued new skills/training and in response to displaced workers initiatives, etc. Since that time, enrollment in CCs has been on the decline. Despite the decline in ADN enrollment, graduation rates have increased substantially over the past five years. ADN programs have improved graduation rates through retention efforts including student success coordinators that work with nursing faculty to assist students in meeting the demands of nursing schools.

It is imperative to recognize the important role Associate Degree programs share in this process. In spite of calls to increase the number of nurses with BSNs, as of 2018 ADN programs were producing approximately 60 percent of RN graduates (Hawkins, Chard & Seibert, 2018).



The demand for Registered Nurses with ADN degrees is already high, and is expected to continue to grow, in part because more than half-a-million new RN positions are anticipated through the year 2026. Add to that remarkable number the fact that another half million RNs will be needed to replace those who leave the field through attrition and retirement, and the ADN pathway will remain essential to meeting these nursing workforce demands nationwide.



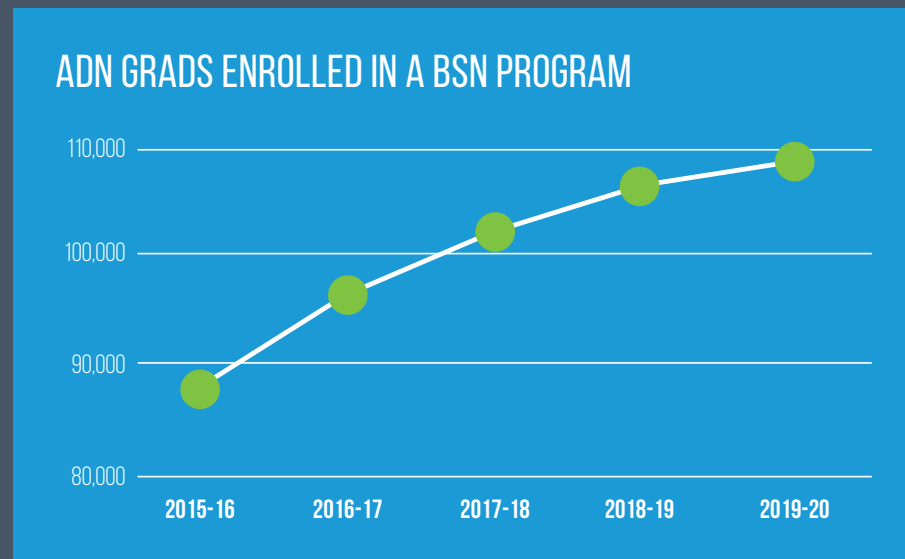
*Community college nursing graduates continue to contribute to over 50% of the nursing workforce, despite a slight decline in enrollments. Community colleges have a crucial role in preserving nursing as a profession. Nowhere is this more important than in the many communities across the country that rely on these colleges to provide an educational approach that serves as a solid foundation for baccalaureate and higher degree obtainment.*

**DONNA MEYER,**  
MSN, RN, ANEF, FAADN, FAAN  
CEO, OADN



# ADN GRADUATES ENROLLED IN A BSN PROGRAM

To adequately measure academic progression in nursing, it is essential to have an accurate number of ADN graduates who are currently pursuing a BSN. The chart below depicts the number of ADN graduates currently enrolled in a BSN program. For the purpose of this analysis, the completion date of the ADN is not significant. The enrollment date for the BSN is reflected.



ADN prepared nurses are seeking higher levels of education at increasing rates. Over the past five academic years, there has been a 23.3% increase in the number of ADN graduates who have enrolled in a BSN program. Since the 2010 IOM report calling for an increase in the number of nurses with BSNs, the number of registered nurses obtaining a BSN increased to more than 60,000—up 170 percent (Campaign for Action, 2017). Accordingly, many ADN programs have adopted

and incorporated models for progression including, but not limited to, accelerated options, concurrent enrollment, partnership programs, and more. Details of these models can be found on the NEPIN website at [nepincollaborative.org/programs/models/](https://nepincollaborative.org/programs/models/). Such measures suggest that the ADN education model has transitioned from a terminal option for graduates entering into the profession, to a first step towards attainment of a bachelor's degree.

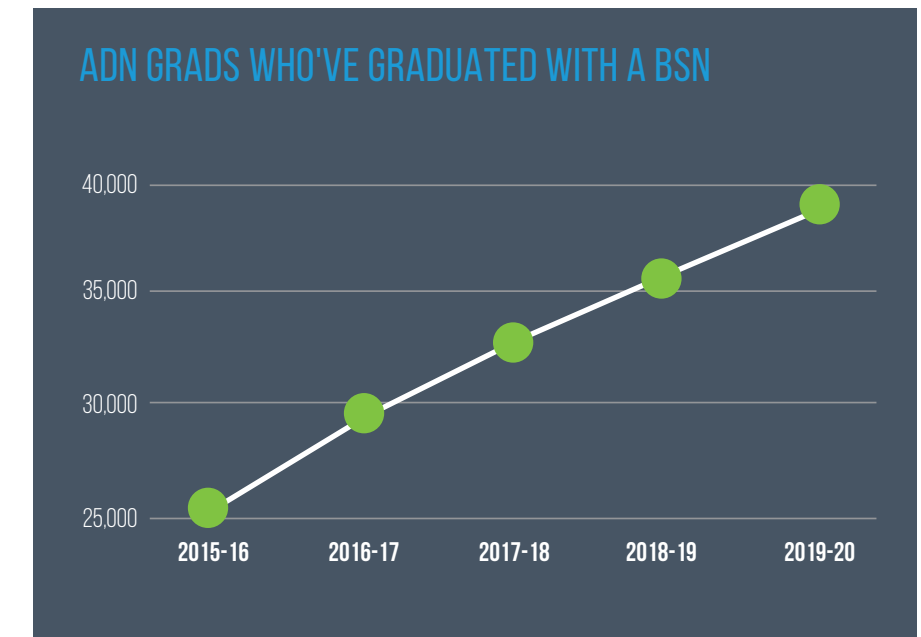
↑ 23%

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ADN GRADUATES WHO HAVE ENROLLED IN A BSN PROGRAM IN LAST 5 YEARS

# ADN GRADUATES WHO HAVE GRADUATED WITH A BSN

The chart below depicts the number of ADN graduates who have subsequently earned a BSN degree. For the purpose of this chart, the completion date of the ADN is not significant. The completion date for the BSN is included.

Just as enrollments in a BSN program continue to increase, the number of ADN graduates who have subsequently earned a BSN degree also continues to increase. To increase the number of subsequent BSN graduates, among other efforts and initiatives, ADN programs have partnered with BSN programs to offer dual enrollment or direct admission to their BSN program upon graduation.



In a recent study conducted by the NEPIN Incumbent specialized interest group, nurse participants identified barriers to progression, as well as significant deficits in the area of career counseling. Despite being told to continue their education, participants reported the lack of counseling made degree progression and career development choices difficult. NEPIN is working to address this issue and has established a Career Mapping source highlighting degrees in nursing, emerging roles, and links to other resources.

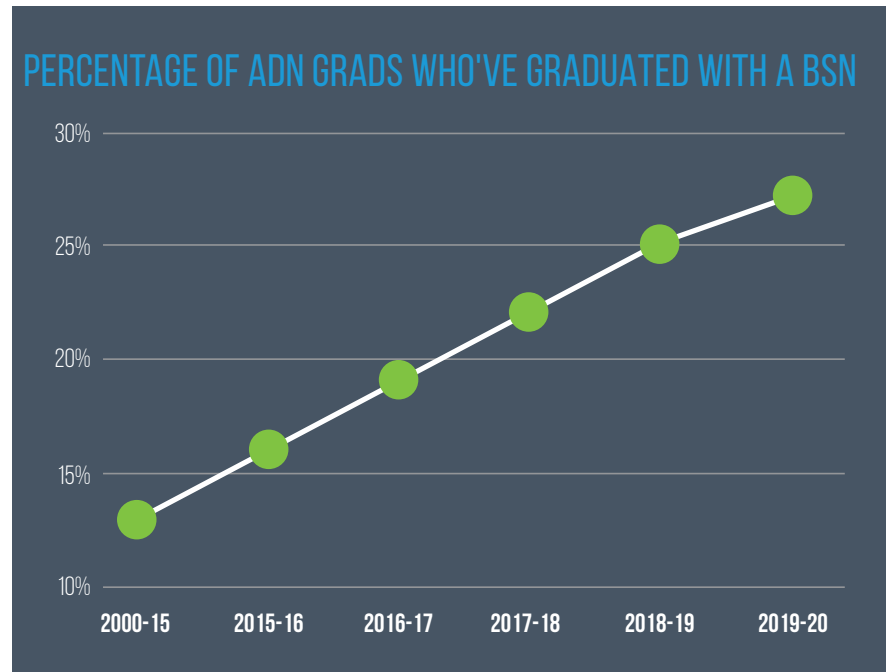
**CAREER MAPPING** [nepincollaborative.org/career-mapping/](https://nepincollaborative.org/career-mapping/)

**STUDY RESULTS** [nepincollaborative.org/programs/incumbent-nurses/](https://nepincollaborative.org/programs/incumbent-nurses/)

# PERCENTAGE OF ADN GRADS WHO HAVE GRADUATED WITH A BSN

To adequately determine the percentage of ADN graduates who have completed a BSN, this chart depicts a cumulative total of ADNs who have graduated with a BSN. The years 2000-2015 were utilized as a baseline, then the same five year period of 2016-2020 is illustrated in detail. As the chart depicts, the percentage of ADNs who continued their education and graduated from a BSN since 2000 reflects approximately 27% of the ADN population.

From 2000 to 2020, there were a cumulative 847,195 graduates with an ADN. Of those, 231,266 went on to complete a BSN during the same timeframe, for a total of 27%. NEPIN is aware this figure is significantly lower compared to the 2018 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (NSSRN). The NSSRN reflected RNs with a BSN or higher increased from 50% in 2008 to 64% in 2018. The Campaign for Action reported employed nurses with a BSN or higher equated to 59% in 2019. It is imperative to note that the methodology and data sources are



different for all of these reports and will therefore reflect different results and findings. In both cases mentioned, the total number of RNs with a BSN or higher was considered. The purpose of this analysis is to show academic progression, therefore only those who had previously graduated with an ADN and progressed to the BSN were included.

BETWEEN 2000 - 2020, THE PERCENTAGE OF ADNS GRADUATING WITH A BSN INCREASED FROM

**13% to 27%**

# ADN GRADS WHO HAVE GRADUATED WITH A BACHELOR'S (ANY)

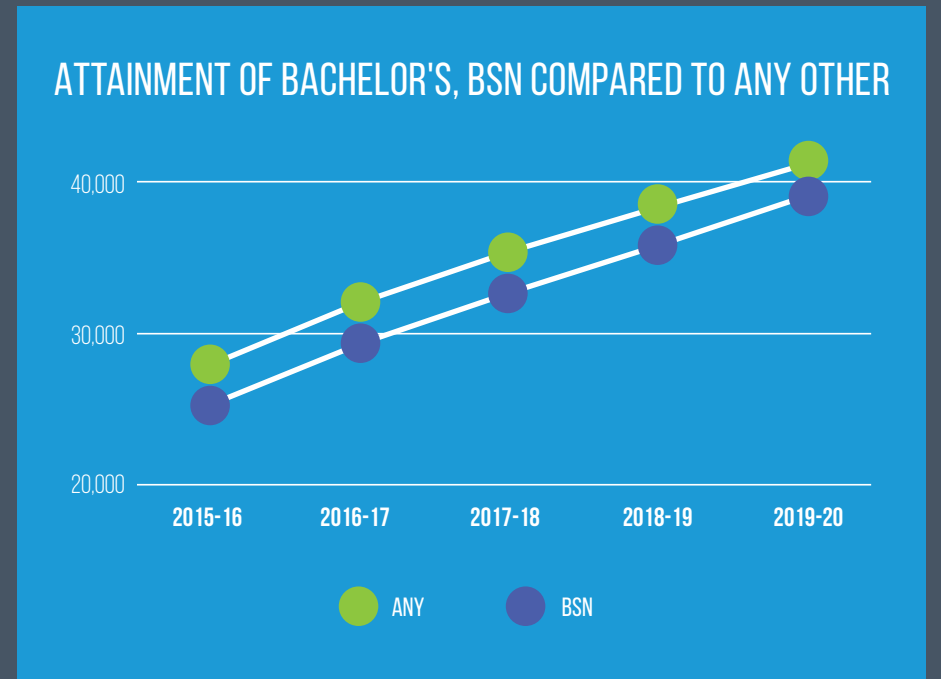
Equally important as measuring the progression to the BSN is analyzing the rate at which ADN graduates are pursuing a bachelor's degree outside of nursing. The following graph depicts both the attainment of any bachelor's degree as well as the BSN over the five year period 2015-2020. At first glance, the trend seems to be parallel. However, a detailed look at the actual figures shows that the move outside of nursing is decreasing at a significant rate.

In 2016, 9.5% of bachelor's degree graduates chose a degree outside of nursing. That number continued to decline over the next four years:

**2017 - 8.2%**  
**2018 - 7.7%**  
**2019 - 6.6%**

For the 2019-2020 academic year, only 5.2% of students who had previously obtained an ADN and went on to pursue a bachelor's degree chose a bachelor's degree outside of nursing.

While the overwhelming majority of ADN graduates choose to pursue the BSN, the data shows that the top five non-nursing bachelor's degree choices are in Liberal Arts and Sciences, Science Technologies, Allied Health, General Studies, and Biological Sciences.

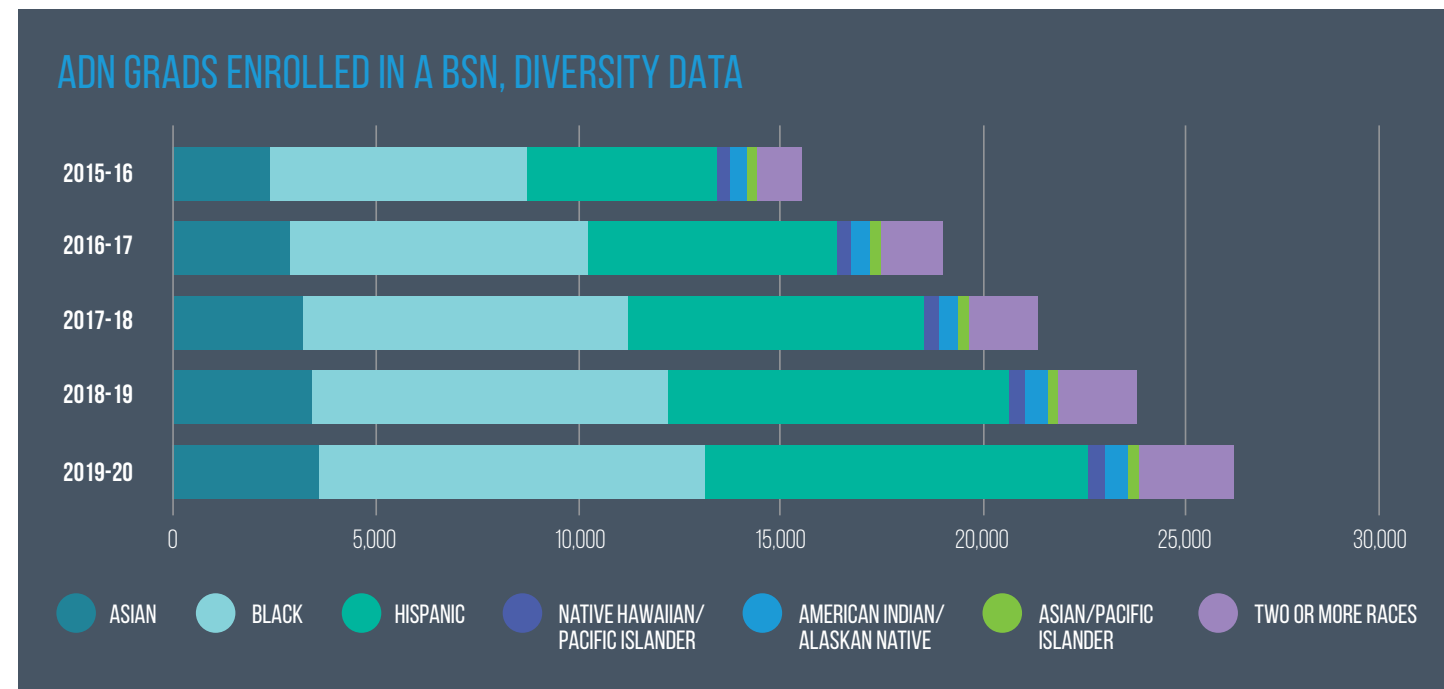


**< 6%**

OF ADN GRADUATES WHO PURSUE A BACHELOR'S DEGREE ARE PURSUING A BACHELOR'S OUTSIDE OF NURSING!

# ADN GRADS ENROLLED IN A BSN DIVERSITY DATA

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts are a primary pillar of NEPIN's activity and a substantial portion of our mission. In performing this data analysis, it was imperative to assess the level at which minority students are graduating with an ADN and going on to pursue the BSN. For the purpose of focusing on the diversity of students only, white students have not been included in the following graph.



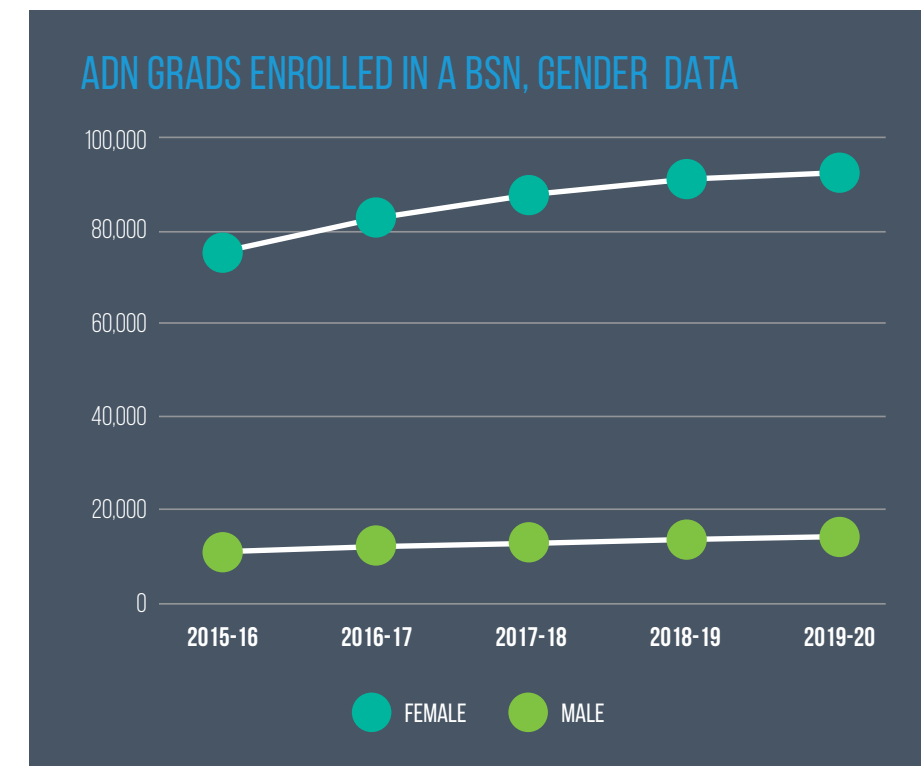
As illustrated, at first glance, students of all minority race classifications are enrolling in BSN programs at significant rates. Asian student enrollment increased 50.4% over the past 5 years; Black student enrollment increased 50.1%; Hispanic student enrollment increased 102.1%; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander increased 33.6%; American Indian/Alaskan Native increased 28.1%; Asian/Pacific Islander increased 13.1%; and those identifying with two or more races enrolled at an increased rate of 111.3% over the same 5 year period.

ADN programs have worked to removed entrance and progression barriers, allowing for a more diverse population of nurses including those with lower

incomes and limited access to other institutions of higher learning (Colville et al., 2015). ADN graduates subsequently enrolling in BSN programs account for much of the diversity seen in the BSN programs. The ADN serves as a valuable entry point for many diverse nurses.

NEPIN has a comprehensive equity specialized interest group focused on efforts to increase diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in nursing education. This group recently published a White Paper on the role equity plays in one's ability to progress in their education. View the White Paper here: [nepincollaborative.org/programs/equity-achievement-thriving/](https://nepincollaborative.org/programs/equity-achievement-thriving/).

# ADN GRADS ENROLLED IN A BSN GENDER & AGE DATA

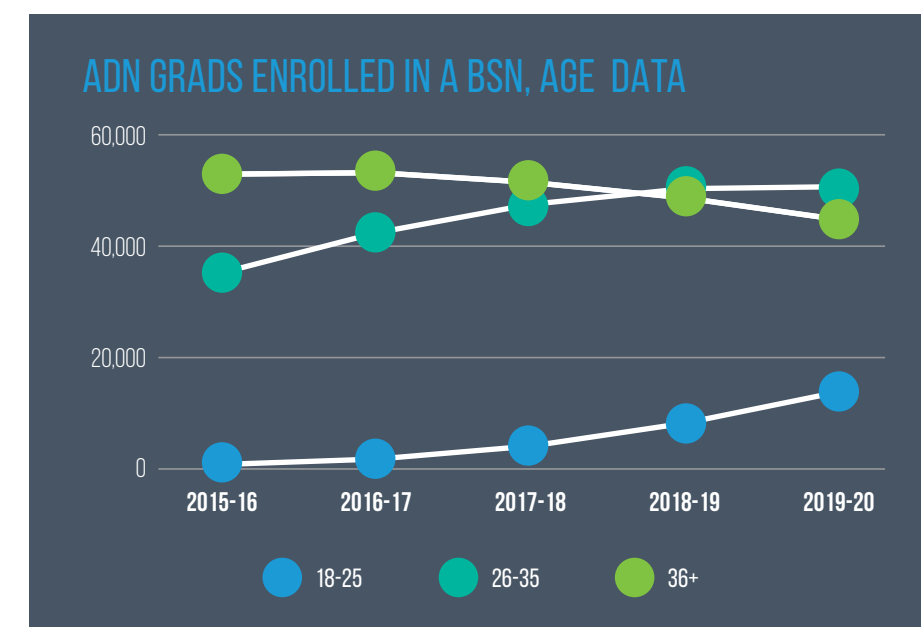


As has traditionally been the case, female nurses significantly outnumber their male counterparts. Of those ADN graduates who have enrolled in a BSN program for the years depicted, females account for nearly 86% of enrollees for all years studied. Males represented 12.4-13%.

For each of the years, approximately 1500 enrollees represented "unknown" gender or 1% of the total.

There is still tremendous work to be done on increasing the number of males entering the field.

Interesting to note in the age trends is that in 2015-2016, only 250 ADN graduates between the ages of 18-25 enrolled in a BSN program nationwide. For 2019-2020, that same age group had 13,364 enrollees in a BSN program, an increase of 5245.6%. The 26-35 age group, which had been experiencing a steady incline in BSN enrollments, experienced a decline for 2020. While enrollment in a subsequent BSN is decreasing for all other age groups, it is significantly increasing for 18-25 year olds.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When designing the structure of the NEPIN organization, we deliberately adopted the term “alliance” in place of committee, team, or board. NEPIN operates successfully because of our alliances across the country. Each and every one of our allies truly understand the important role that educational mobility has in self actualization for nurses and are extremely valuable to the mission and vision.

Tremendous attention and detail went into the research and compilation of this report. Many thanks to our allies who volunteered to serve on the content development and review alliances. Sincerest thanks to the alliance organizations that specifically joined us for this data study: CastleBranch, Marsal Stoll, Organization for Associate Degree Nursing, Organization for Associate Degree Nursing Foundation and Pennsylvania Action Coalition.

Special thanks to the NEPIN Leadership Alliance whose members envisioned, pursued, supported, and championed this report from thought to completion.

To our Affiliate Alliance - the organizations who support NEPIN financially on an annual basis - we thank you for stepping up and investing your time and talent to ensure that nurses have the opportunities and support necessary to be the best they can be so that patients can be the best they can be. Current NEPIN Affiliate Alliance (as of September 2021) members are: Elsevier, HealthImpact, Jones & Bartlett Learning, Organization for Associate Degree Nursing, Organization for Associate Degree Nursing Foundation, University of Phoenix, Washington Center for Nursing, and Western Governor’s University.

Last and certainly not least, to all of you reading this report, we applaud and thank you for your interest in nursing academic progression. Recognizing the critical role that education mobility has for nurses and patients is essential to responding to evolving health needs.

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