



## The Impact of COVID-19 on Registered Nurse Education Programs in New York and Utah

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Center for Health Workforce Studies  
School of Public Health  
University at Albany, State University of New York



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**August 2022**



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## PREFACE

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This report compares the results of the 2020 surveys of Deans and Directors of registered nurse (RN) education programs in New York and Utah. The surveys were conducted by the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) in New York and the Nursing Workforce Information Center in Utah. Both surveys asked about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing program applications, acceptances, graduations, and the job market for new RN graduates. The primary goal of this analysis was to assess the impact of COVID-19 on registered nursing education programs in New York and Utah.

This study was a collaboration between the Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center and Utah Medical Education Council. The report was prepared by David Armstrong, Clark Ruttinger, and Maa'isa Cleaves, with layout design by Matt Allegretti.

Established in 2013 to support the efforts of the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (NCHWA), the Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center (HWTAC) provides technical assistance to states and organizations that engage in health workforce planning. HWTAC conducts several projects each year designed to provide expert assistance with health workforce data collection, analysis, and dissemination. HWTAC is based at the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) at the School of Public Health, University at Albany, State University of New York.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## BACKGROUND

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Registered nursing is one of the largest licensed health care professions in the US, with over 3 million registered nurses (RNs).<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade, the number of RNs in the US has grown substantially and is projected to continue to grow by 9% from 2020 to 2030.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the RN workforce as well as the RN educational pipeline.<sup>3</sup>

The primary goal of this report is to assess the impact of COVID-19 on nursing education programs in New York State and Utah. In 2020 a series of questions about COVID-19 was added to annual RN education program surveys conducted in New York and Utah. This information can help stakeholders better understand pandemic-related challenges faced by RN education programs and the strategies used to address them.

## KEY FINDINGS

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- The vast majority of nursing deans (≥88%) in both states reported pandemic-related disruptions in 2020.
- Fewer clinical training slots was the most frequently cited pandemic disruption in both states.
- Simulation was the most commonly used strategy to help students meet clinical training requirements in New York and Utah.
- Increased family commitments was the most common reason for students dropping out or taking a leave of absence during the pandemic in each state.
- The number of applications, acceptances, and graduations did not change much in 2020 in New York and Utah.

- Qualified applicants were turned away from nursing education programs in both states.
- Limits on the number of RN program admissions was the most frequently cited reason for turning away qualified applicants in New York and Utah.
- Most nursing program deans (>70%) in both states reported greater demand for new graduates in 2020.
- The overall job market for new RN graduates in New York and Utah appears to be strong.
  - The majority of New York deans (61%) reported hospitals as having the most jobs for new graduates.
  - Most Utah deans (63%) reported home care as the setting with the most jobs for their graduates.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Overall, the impact of COVID-19 on RN education programs in New York and Utah were very similar. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to clinical training for students, but RN programs were able to use simulation, among other strategies, to ensure students met clinical training requirements and graduated on time. In addition to clinical training disruptions, nursing education program deans in each state reported an increase in the number of faculty retirements. Half of the nursing deans in New York also reported an increase in the number of students dropping out or taking a leave of absence due to the pandemic. Despite these disruptions, the number of program applications, acceptances, and graduations did not change much, and the pandemic appears to have increased the job market demand for newly trained RNs.



# TECHNICAL REPORT

## BACKGROUND

Registered nursing is one of the largest licensed health care professions in the US, with over 3 million registered nurses (RNs).<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade, the number of RNs in the US has grown substantially and is projected to continue to grow by 9% from 2020 to 2030.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the RN workforce as well as the RN educational pipeline.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

The primary goal of this report is to assess the impact of COVID-19 on nursing education programs in New York State and Utah. In 2020 a series of questions about COVID-19 was added to RN education program surveys in each state. This information can help stakeholders better understand the pandemic-related challenges faced by RN education programs as well as the strategies used to address them.

## METHODS

In 2020 a set of questions about COVID-19 was added to annual RN education program surveys in New York and Utah. The surveys were administered during the 2020-2021 academic year by the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) in New York and the Nursing Workforce Information Center in Utah. The surveys included questions about:

- COVID-19 impacts on clinical training and graduations
- Strategies used to ensure students completed clinical training
- Changes in the number of applications and acceptances compared to the previous academic year
- Whether qualified applicants were turned away and why
- Perceptions about the regional job market for new RN graduates

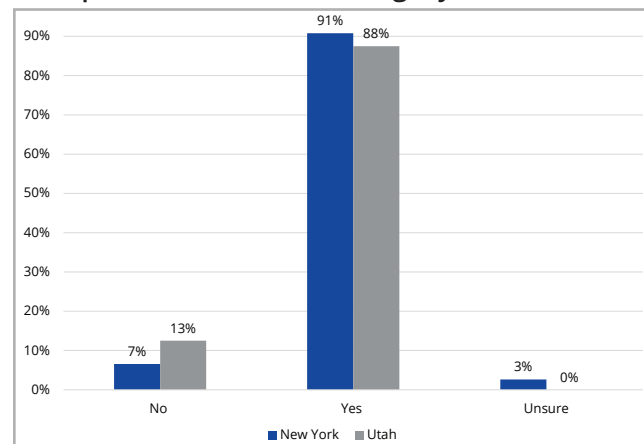
Of the 126 programs eligible to participate in the New York State survey, 76 responded for a 60% response rate. Of the 20 programs eligible to participate in the Utah survey, 8 responded for a 40% response rate.

## FINDINGS

**The vast majority of nursing deans (≥88%) in both states reported pandemic-related disruptions in 2020.**

Ninety-one percent of RN education program deans in New York and 88% of RN education program deans in Utah reported disruptions to clinical training in 2020 (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. Percentage of RN Programs Reporting Disruptions to Clinical Training, by State, 2020**

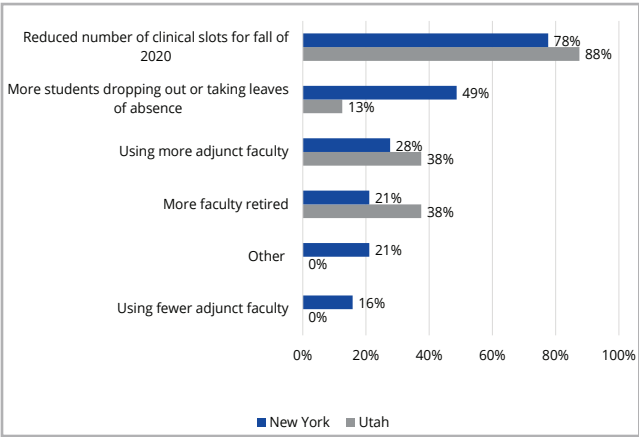


**Fewer clinical training slots was the most frequently cited pandemic disruption in both states.**

More than three-quarters of nursing deans in New York and almost 90% of nursing deans in Utah reported a reduced number of clinical slots in the fall of 2020 (Figure 2). In addition, almost half of nursing deans in New York reported that the pandemic increased the number of students dropping out or taking a leave of absence compared to only 13% of nursing deans in Utah. At the same time, almost 40% of nursing deans in Utah cited that the pandemic

resulted in more faculty retirements compared to 21% of nursing deans in New York.

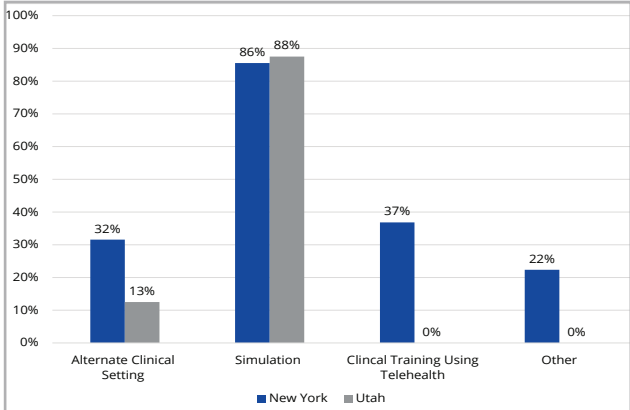
**FIGURE 2. Pandemic-Related Disruptions That Impacted RN Programs, by State, 2020**



Simulation was the most commonly used strategy to help students meet clinical training requirements in New York and Utah.

More than 85% of all RN programs in each state reported using simulation as a strategy to ensure students met clinical training requirements (Figure 3). This included 86% of RN programs in New York and 88% of RN programs in Utah. In addition, about one-third of nursing deans in New York reported using telehealth (37%) and alternate clinical settings (32%) as other strategies to ensure students completed clinical training.

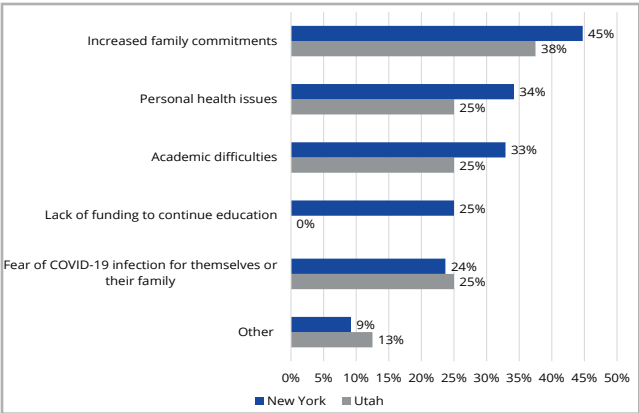
**FIGURE 3. Strategies Used to Ensure Students Completed Clinical Training, by State, 2020**



Increased family commitments was the most commonly cited reason for students dropping out or taking a leave of absence during the pandemic in both states.

Forty-five percent of nursing deans in New York and 38% of nursing deans in Utah cited increased family commitments as a reason for students dropping out or taking a leave of absence (Figure 4).

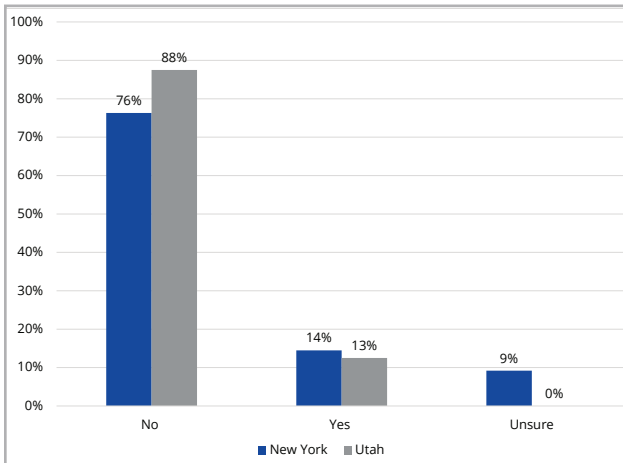
**FIGURE 4. Reasons for Students Dropping Out or Taking a Leave Absence, by State, 2020**



Most nursing deans in New York and Utah reported no change in the number of graduations from their programs in 2020.

Eighty-eight percent of nursing deans in Utah and 76% of nursing deans in New York reported no change in the number of graduations from their program in 2020 compared to 2019 (Figure 5). Less than 15% of RN programs in each state saw fewer graduations than anticipated in 2020.

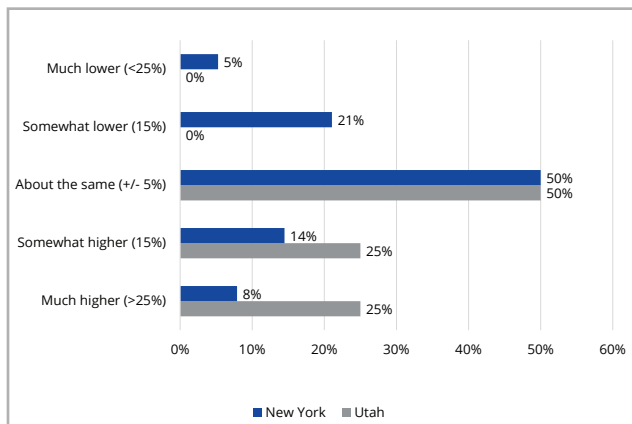
**FIGURE 5. Percentage of RN Programs Reporting Fewer Graduations Than Anticipated, by State, 2020**



Half of nursing deans in New York and Utah reported little change in applications to their programs in 2020.

Half of all RN education program deans in each state indicated that the number of applications to their program did not change in 2020 compared to the previous year (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6. Change in Applications to RN Programs, by State, 2020**

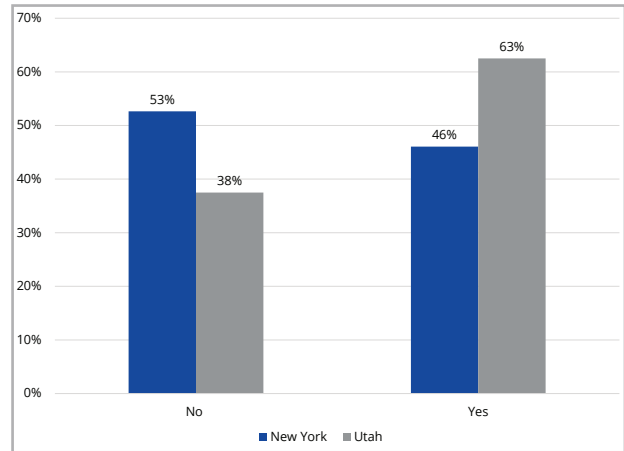


The majority of nursing deans ( $\geq 63\%$ ) in New York and Utah reported little change in the number of acceptances to their programs in 2020.

Sixty-eight percent of nursing deans in New York and 63% of nursing deans in Utah reported that the number of students accepted into their program did

not change from the previous academic year (Figure 7).

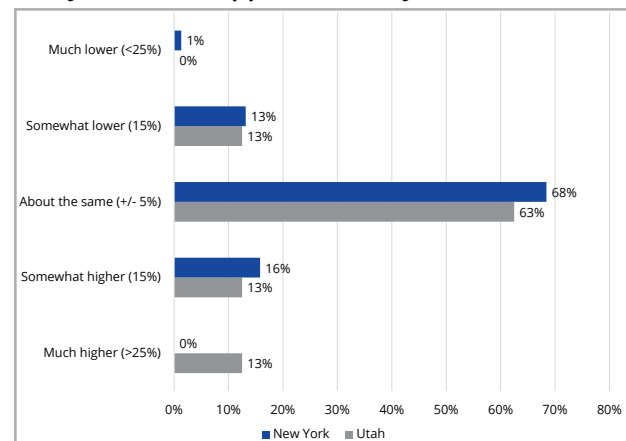
**FIGURE 7. Change in Acceptances to RN Programs, by State, 2020**



Qualified applicants were turned away from nursing education programs in both states.

Over 60% of deans in Utah and 46% of deans in New York reported turning away qualified applicants (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8. Percentage of RN Programs Turning Away Qualified Applications, by State, 2020**

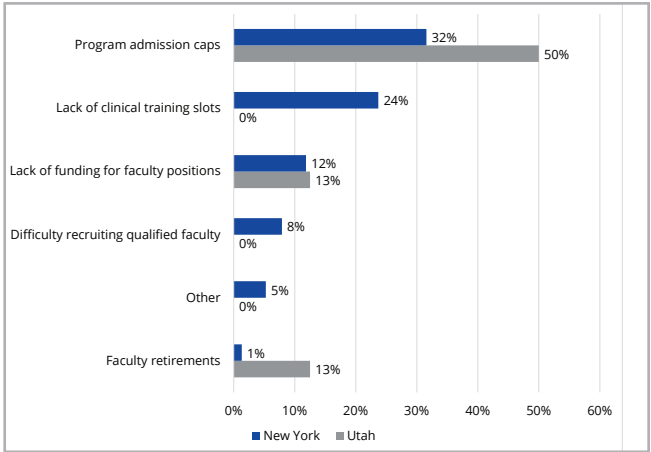


Limits on the number of RN program admissions was the most frequently cited reason for turning away qualified applicants in New York and Utah.

Half of nursing deans in Utah and 32% of deans in New York cited program admission caps as the reason for turning away qualified applicants in 2020 (Figure

9). Nearly a quarter of nursing deans in New York reported lack of clinical training sites as the reason for turning away qualified applicants, while no Utah deans identified this as a problem.

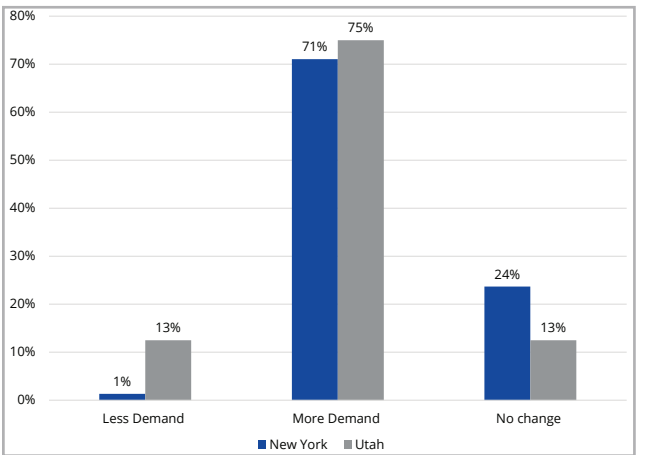
**FIGURE 9. Reasons for Turning Away Qualified Applicants, by State, 2020**



The majority nursing deans (>70%) in both states reported greater demand for new graduates in 2020.

More than 70% of nursing deans in New York and Utah reported that the pandemic increased the demand for new RN graduates (Figure 10).

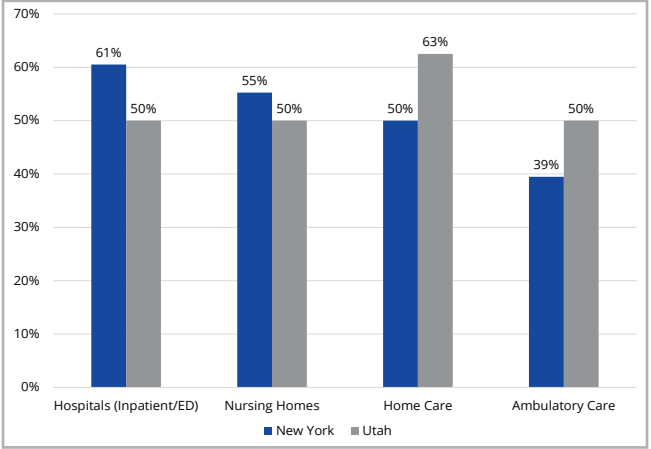
**FIGURE 10. Percentage of RN Programs Reporting More Demand for New RN Graduates, by State, 2020**



The overall job market for new RN graduates in New York and Utah appears to be strong.

Most deans in both states reported greater demand for new graduates in 2020 compared to 2019 in all settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, home care, and ambulatory care (Figure 11). The majority of New York deans (61%) reported hospitals as having the most jobs for new graduates. Most Utah deans (63%) reported home care as the setting with the most jobs for their graduates.

**FIGURE 11. Percentage of RN Programs Reporting Many Jobs for New RN Graduates, by Sector and State, 2020**



**CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the impacts of COVID-19 on RN education programs in New York and Utah were very similar. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to clinical training for students, but RN programs were able to use simulation, among other strategies, to ensure students met clinical training requirements and graduated on time. In addition to clinical training disruptions, nursing education program deans in each state reported an increase in the number of faculty retirements. Half of the nursing deans in New York also reported an increase in the number of students dropping out or taking a leave of absence due to the pandemic. Despite these disruptions, the number of program applications, acceptances, and graduations did not change much, and the pandemic appears to have increased the job market demand for newly trained RNs.





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Clark Ruttinger tracks supply, demand, and educational program data about Utah's healthcare workforce and coordinates with stakeholders to develop modeling and usable information to better inform policy and strategic planning. Clark is a past president of the National Forum for State Nursing Workforce Centers. In this capacity, he co-authored the 2021 NCSBN National Nursing Survey.



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