



Agency Recommendation Summary

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCQAC) requests adequate spending authority to support staffing solutions addressing the increasing demand for nurses. The increasing demand significantly impacts licensing, discipline, education, and regulations. The 2022 legislature increased the number of nursing student positions in education programs and the use of simulation. Implementing new processes requires new and updated regulations with valuable interested party participation. With an increase in the number of nurses practicing in Washington, there is a corresponding increase in the number of disciplinary actions and associated administrative workload.

Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Staffing						
FTEs	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 02G - 1	\$1,147	\$1,129	\$2,276	\$1,129	\$1,129	\$2,258
Total Expenditures	\$1,147	\$1,129	\$2,276	\$1,129	\$1,129	\$2,258

Decision Package Description

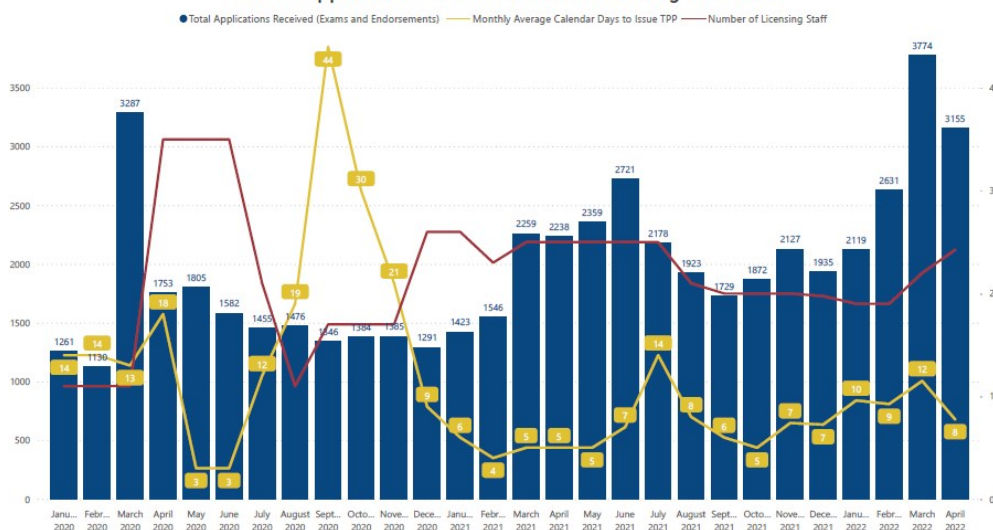
Over the past two years, the increasing demand for more nurses in our state has hit record numbers of applications and corresponding renewal of nursing licenses. Last year, the governor and legislature supported NCQAC in adding licensing staff to address this demand and decrease the time needed to process out-of-state applications. The licensing staff also embraced numerous process improvements during the pandemic to achieve 100% remote work, leading the way in health professions regulation. This increased efficiencies, productivity, and staff morale. A major improvement was the transition to online applications, increasing the number of nurses applying online instead of mailing paper applications to NCQAC. Online applications reach NCQAC an average of two weeks faster than a mailed application. The increased use of the online portal also resulted in an increase in online renewals after the nurse is issued a Washington state license and decreased the number of nurses renewing their licenses at the last minute. The use of the online portal for new nursing applications increased from 8% online application submission in 2019, to 98% online application submission in 2022.

New Nursing Applications	2019	2020	2021	2022
% Online Applications	8%	79%	96%	98%
% Paper Applications	92%	21%	4%	2%

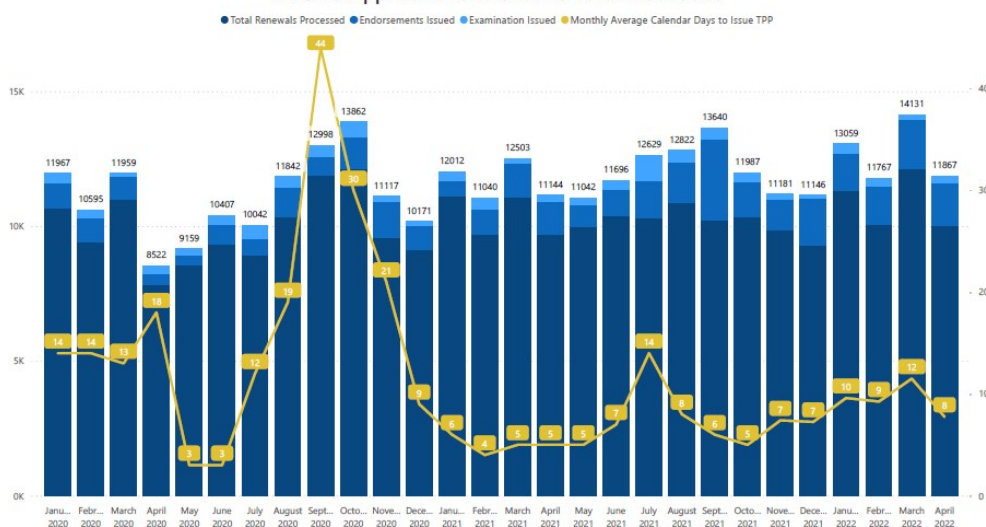
Another improvement was the streamlining of the FBI fingerprinting process. Paper fingerprint card packets are no longer mailed to applicants. NCQAC now emails nursing applicants fingerprinting directions one day after applying to complete the fingerprint process and submit electronically. Due to improved credentialing processing time, phone calls and email volumes have significantly dropped. The improved processes and addition of ten FTEs addressed the projected and realized workload. In addition to innovating and improving processes, NCQAC staff is preparing for the implementation of the Health Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS) for all health professions.

The actual workload in the past year far exceeded projections. The two charts below are sent to the governor's office each week to provide an update on nursing application volume, average days to issue a complete temporary practice permit (TPP), NCQAC Licensing Unit staffing levels (including temporary seasonal staff), and the number of renewals and applications issued by NCQAC.

NQCAC Applications Received and Processing Timelines

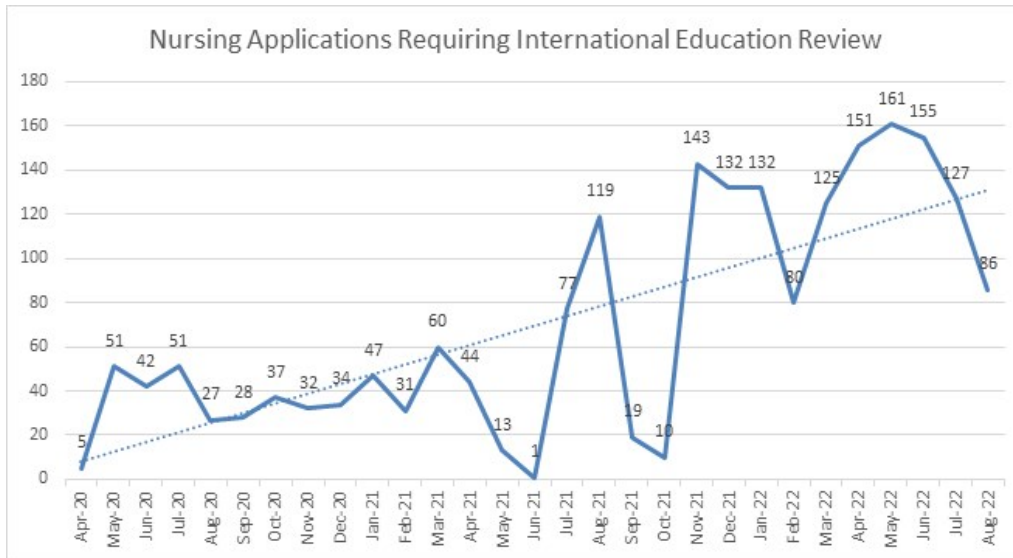


NQCAC Applications and Renewals Processed



The overall volume of new nursing applications being submitted to NQCAC over the past two years notably increased. NQCAC received a total of 19,006 new applications in 2020 and received a total of 24,134 applications in 2021. This represents a 27% increase of applications in one year. Additionally, from January through August of 2021, NQCAC received 16,544 new applications and has already received 22,953 new applications for the same period of 2022. In comparing new applications received in January through August of 2021 to 2022, this is a 39% increase in new nursing applications submitted to the NQCAC.

The increase in the number of applications results in increased administrative work to process the applications and issue nursing credentials. While most applicants now submit documentation electronically, applications must be evaluated to assure they meet regulatory requirements: minimum education from an approved nursing education program, criminal and licensing background checks, licensing examination passing scores, and assistance with out-of-state and internationally educated applicants. The number of nursing applications requiring an international education review from a licensing international review specialist and a nurse education consultant increased from 392 (Jan-Aug of 2021) to 1,017 (Jan-Aug of 2022). This is a 159% increase in international education application reviews in the last year and this continues to trend upwards. Employers have increased recruitment of internationally educated nurses to meet the growing number of vacancies in health care facilities. Evaluation of the applications for internationally educated nurses requires more time and expertise to determine if curriculum and clinical requirements are equivalent to Washington state standards. Each applicant must supply additional documents from primary sources for their transcripts, credential evaluation, and tests of English comprehension or work verification from another US state.



NCQAC looks forward to the implementation of HELMS in 2023, which will automate additional processes within the licensing review of nursing applications. Until then, there is a need to increase licensing staff to meet the seven-day turnaround required in Chapter 334, Laws of 2021, ESSB 5092.

Demands on nursing education programs have increased due to the demand for more nurses. The 2022 legislature expanded many of the nursing programs student slots and provided money for simulation equipment. As a result of COVID, and a lack of clinical placements available to students, nursing programs rapidly provided faculty professional development to support increased use of simulation. The use of simulation in nursing education is an area of national interest and research efforts. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) and NCQAC supported the research of Dr. Katie Haerling from the University of Washington; Haerling, K., Kmail, Z., & Buckingham, A. (20XX). *Informing regulation of simulation in nursing education: A comparison of traditional clinical, mannequin-based simulation, and virtual simulation.* Submitted for peer review. This research adds knowledge about the effectiveness of simulation as an educational strategy for nursing students.

NCQAC evaluates 42 nursing education programs in Washington to assure the programs are adequately resourced to meet the increasing demands. NCQAC also evaluates the curriculum and educational outcomes to assure new graduates meet the minimum standard for patient safety. The NCLEX examination is the only approved licensing examination used by all boards of nursing to assess minimum safety for new graduates. The nursing education programs prepare the students who then apply for the examination and state licensure. The nursing licensing staff review the applications for compliance with the requirements and authorize the new graduates to take the examination. Each nursing program receives the number of graduates who pass the examination. A required nursing education outcome requires an 80% pass. The nursing education staff perform site visits with every nursing education program to confirm programs meet the requirements, which is an important indicator that their new graduates meet minimum safety standards to practice nursing. Washington needs nursing programs to meet standards, so graduates are safe, competent practitioners when entering the workforce. This requires nursing education staff to survey and support nursing education programs to achieve program outcomes.

The nursing education staff also investigate public complaints against nursing programs or nursing faculty. These complaints may be from students or the public related to the nursing education program. The complaints range from faculty issues to financial issues, to adequacy of clinical experiences.

NCQAC also approves clinical experiences for nursing students from out of state programs. If a nursing student is completing their clinical experience in Washington but the nursing education program is in another state, the clinical faculty must be licensed in Washington state. There has been an increase in the number of students from out-of-state programs due to enforcement by the US Department of Education requiring approval of out-of-state program experiences. The students are often from Washington state who attend an out-of-state nursing education program. Related to the shortage of nurses, these experiences have also increased.

NCQAC initiated an Education Subcommittee in the past year to discuss nursing education issues in open public meetings. The issues have been related to use of simulation, faculty salaries, faculty vacancies, and requirements for faculty.

In the past two years, NCQAC has held many summit meetings and issued reports addressing clinical placements with the nursing education programs and employers:

- Long Term Care Summit 2020
- Long Term Care Summit 2021
- Critical Gap Groups 2020
- Clinical Placements Summit 2022
- Veterans Administration and nursing students: Linda Tieman's report 2022
- Multiple Virtual Communications meetings with Nursing Program Deans/Directors

The increase in nursing education issues related to COVID increased the regulatory oversight of nursing education programs. This translates to increased hours for staff to gather evidence to present to NCQAC members for decisions. The staff must coordinate and schedule the meetings, provide the evidence for sound decisions, and professionally communicate decisions to the nursing education programs. NCQAC members and staff worked diligently on nursing education rules during COVID. The staff provided communication with the deans and directors of the nursing education programs. This work continues to increase.

As the number of licensees increases, so does the disciplinary work of NCQAC. The number of investigators and legal staff are sufficient since the addition of staff resulting from a decision package which addressed rising caseloads in 2018. However, administrative staff to support the work of the investigative, case management, and legal staff has not increased since 2008. NCQAC received 1980 complaints in 2021 and determined 36% of these complaints required investigation. Processing and documenting the complaints requires administrative work to meet requirements defined in the Uniform Disciplinary Act, RCW 18.130.

A large portion of the work occurs on a weekly cycle, as staff must log every complaint into the licensing and discipline data base. A panel of NCQAC members attend weekly Case Management Team meetings to authorize complaints for investigation, refer to another disciplinary authority, or close the case. At each step, administrative staff must perform tasks to support the work, such as receiving and logging complaints, scheduling the weekly case management team meetings, scheduling emergency case management meetings for imminent harm cases, scheduling NCQAC members to attend, recording meetings and entering actions in the data base. For those cases opened to investigation, the administrative staff work with the investigators to build electronic case files, maintain paper records according to retention protocols until cases are adjudicated, send notification and whistleblower letters, request facility and medical records and legal documents, retrieve and scan mail, communicate with external requests for information and public disclosure requests, transfer electronic files, monitor the investigative timeline for each open case, process bills related to investigative needs. Once the investigation is completed, the administrative staff process the investigation for closure and assigns a reviewing commission member (RCM) to evaluate the evidence. The administrative staff sends the investigative material to NCQAC members and tracks the timeline for both the legal review and RCM. Administrative staff maintain awareness of timelines throughout the investigative and case disposition process according to Mandatory Timelines as defined in [WAC 246-16-200 through 270](#). Management oversight must occur for any phase that exceeds mandatory timelines. An RCM and staff attorney complete an evaluation of each case and collaborate to determine if evidence supports or refutes the allegations that form the basis of the complaint. The RCM presents their recommendation to a case disposition panel where the panel decides what action NCQAC will take, whether to discipline the nurse or close the case. The administrative staff must coordinate and schedule the case disposition meetings, capture their decisions, and enter into expert witness contracts when necessary.

In addition to regular duties that support the discipline unit, administrative staff also supports the regularly occurring Discipline Subcommittee, which considers all matters related to discipline and brings recommendations to the full NCQAC for action. This requires scheduling meetings, creating agendas, sending meeting notifications, building the packet of information relevant to the agenda, and distributing the information to the subcommittee members and interested parties. Discipline staff also supports the Interagency Roundtable, which is a confidential data sharing group comprised of seven state agencies united for the common purpose of protecting the public through sharing investigative and disciplinary information related to health professionals. One administrative position is no longer sufficient to perform all the associated duties related to supporting the discipline unit.

Washington Health Professional Services (WHPS) is the NCQAC-approved monitoring program for nurses with substance use disorder that provides accountability for nurses and enables them to remain in safe practice. In July 2022, NCQAC implemented the Substance Use Disorder Review Panel (SUDRP). The SUDRP, empowered with decision-making authority, was initiated to directly engage NCQAC members with non-compliant nurses who participate in the monitoring program either because of discipline or in lieu of discipline. NCQAC members may also choose to meet with graduates of the program. Administrative staff must coordinate and schedule meetings, produce the agenda and minutes, and retain all records as required for all disciplinary proceedings.

NCQAC worked tirelessly to adopt emergency rules for nursing education during the pandemic. Over the past two years, NCQAC evaluated the need to keep the emergency rules, modify rules, or return to original rules. This necessitated following the proclamations, the state and federal waivers, the emergency rules processes, and now, the rules that need to be modified to reflect current requirements or revert to the previous rules. Currently, a non-permanent staff member is completing the rules process for NCQAC. In addition, there was considerable legislation related to nursing education and nursing in the 2022 legislative session. The increased demands for nurses will continue to drive legislative action for the coming years. NCQAC works with the governor's office to answer questions and attend meetings related to nursing at all levels and in all workplaces. This represents an increased workload for nimble responses to legislation and legislators. There is also a need to track the implementation of legislation such as continuing education requirements, nursing education, nursing preceptors, and simulation.

As the demand for nurses in the state continues to increase, so does the need for improving and increasing NCQAC communications with the public and interested parties, supporting current and new NCQAC staff, maintaining connections with lawmakers, and monitoring upcoming legislation impacting the nursing profession.

Staffing requested to address the issues of increased demand for nurses described above:
8.0 FTE.

Education (2 FTE):

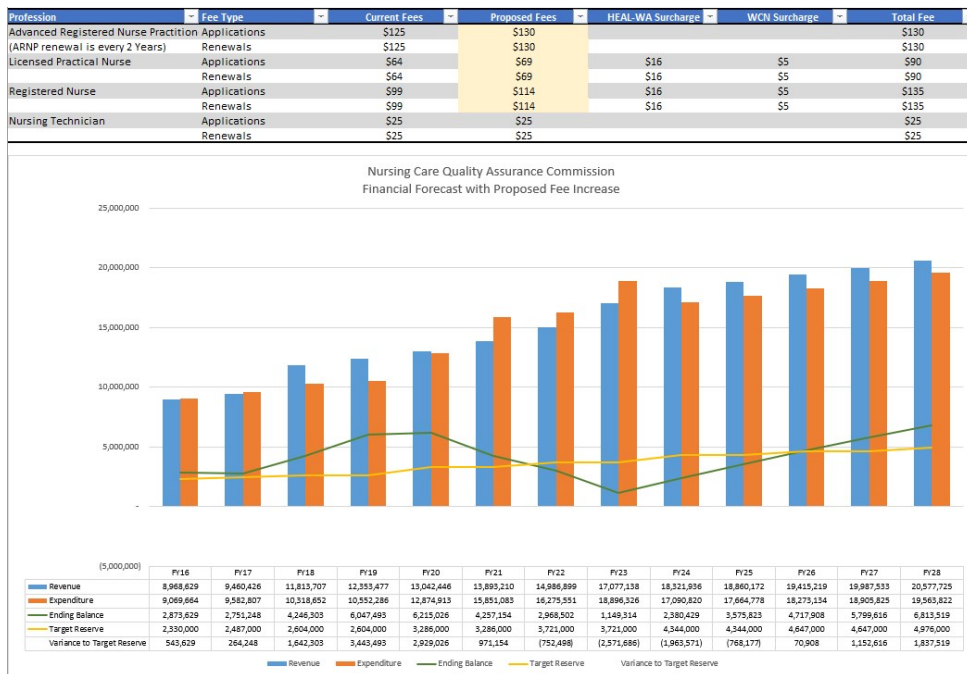
Nurse Consultant Public Health
Health Services Consultant 2

Licensing (2 FTE):
 Health Services Consultant 1
 Health Services Consultant 1

Discipline (1 FTE):
 Health Services Consultant 1

Operations (3 FTE):
 Washington Management Service 2
 Communication Consultant 4
 Administrative Assistant 3

NCQAC is requesting additional spending authority to fund the above-described positions. NCQAC conducted a comprehensive fee study and analysis in 2021-22, resulting in a small fee increase to cover unanticipated costs of the new HELMS database solution, the legislated mandate to process nurse licenses in seven days or less, and to address the crisis in long term care. This fee increase, effective December 1, 2022, along with an unprecedented influx of out-of-state applications in the past year, enables NCQAC to fully fund the requested positions with granted additional spending authority with NO fee increase anticipated in the foreseeable future.



The consequence of not funding this proposal is that NCQAC will be unable to keep up with the growing nursing population and continued demand for nurses within Washington state. As the volume of nurses and nursing applicants continues to grow, the impact is felt on each unit within NCQAC. Licensing staff will need to process a larger volume than initially projected with stagnant staffing or be subject to not meeting the legislatively mandated seven-day licensure processing timeline. Discipline staff will be proportionately impacted by the increase in exception application reviews and complaints submitted to NCQAC. The nursing shortage will continue to drive the need for increased nursing education programs and nursing assistant training programs, impacting NCQAC Education staff. Failure to fund this proposal will impact NCQAC's ability to effectively communicate changes in the nursing profession to the public and nurses. Additionally, maintaining adequate communication with the governor's office and legislature will be impacted, affecting NCQAC's ability to remain current with legislative discussion and to effectively regulate. Without additional spending authority and associated FTEs, the NCQAC will have to shift resources to prioritize work and determine which areas will fall below acceptable performance levels.

NCQAC exhausted all known improvements to be made with processes and software solutions to gain efficiencies. This leaves increasing staff as the desired solution to meet the demands on NCQAC that the increase in demand for nurses in the state has created.

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:

N/A

Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:

See charts in narrative and attached documents:

- Data for Gov Reports
- Licensing Work Orders for International Education Review
- NCQAC Application and Renewal Trend Data
- Staffing Solutions to Address Increase Demand for Nurses DP

Workforce Assumptions:

Personnel: 8.0 FTE

- 1 WMS 2
- 1 NURSE CONSULTANT PUBLIC HEALTH
- 3 HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 1
- 1 HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 2
- 1 COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT 4
- 1 ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT 3

Financial: \$2,276,000 for the 23-25 Biennium

- FY2024 = \$1,147,000
- FY2025 = \$1,129,000
- FY2026 = \$1,129,000
- FY2027 = \$1,129,000

Workforce Assumptions FY24 Projections Only						
FTE	Job Classification	Salary	Benefits	Startup Costs	FTE Related Costs	
1.0	WMS02	\$114,000.00	\$39,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 1	\$56,000.00	\$26,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT 4	\$75,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	NURSING CONSULTANT, PUBLIC HEALTH	\$107,000.00	\$37,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 2	\$66,000.00	\$28,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	ADMINISTRATIVE ASST 3	\$51,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 1	\$56,000.00	\$26,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
1.0	HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 1	\$56,000.00	\$26,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00	
8.0		\$581,000.00	\$237,000.00	\$32,000.00	\$64,000.00	

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic Framework:

Results Washington

This package contributes to meeting the Governor's Results Washington goals by working to improve access to care for healthy and safe communities and addressing the increased demand for nurses in the state.

This proposal supports the department's Transformational Plan priority 1. Health and Wellness and 2. Health Systems and Workforce Transformation. This package relates to the Department of Health's transformational plan by increasing NCQAC staffing to address the public health needs of Washington state communities for more timely access to qualified licensed nurses.

Performance Outcomes:

NCQAC is currently required to meet performance measures established in coordination with the Health Systems Quality Assurance (HSQA) in the Joint Operating Agreement. NCQAC is also currently expected to meet legislatively mandated seven-day application processing time for all complete nursing applications. This performance measure has resulted in positive outcomes for the nursing community and the public of Washington state; however, adequate staffing in NCQAC is necessary to continue to achieve this performance measure. NCQAC also began processing all application types electronically instead of the previous paper process. This Lean initiative was necessary to enact during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to remove the handling of paper applications in the office and replace with electronic and remote review of all applications. NCQAC continues to improve upon the Lean initiative.

Equity Impacts**Community outreach and engagement:**

Additionally, with the 159% increase between 2021 and 2022 of internationally educated nurses applying for licensure in Washington state, increasing NCQAC staffing to the education and licensing units supports improved application processing times for this population of applicants. Current Washington state law requires a review of transcript evaluation and English proficiency for those healthcare professionals educated outside of the United States. This is to ensure that minimum requirements are met to ensure the safety of those who will receive care from these healthcare professionals. With the recent dramatic increase in international applications, the application review processing time has been negatively impacted since there are limited staff available to perform this detailed analysis, comparing educational requirements of other countries to those of Washington state.

We frequently hear from employers, state representatives, and international nursing applicants who are impacted by the delays in reviewing international applications due to the lack in resources. This decision package will address the needs of these populations, while also maintaining our role as a regulatory agency to ensure competency of the nursing population. Improving application processing times will assist in expediting these reviews and issue credentials more expediently to qualified international applicants so they may work in the United States.

Disproportional Impact Considerations:

With the current nursing shortage in Washington state and around the nation, increasing the nursing pool and improving access to care through this decision package should not unintentionally marginalize or disproportionately impact any populations or communities.

Target Populations or Communities:

All communities statewide who benefit from access to nursing care are impacted by this proposal. This includes tribal, urban, and rural communities. The ability for NCQAC to process qualified nurses in a timely manner allows all communities with a nursing shortage to better address the shortage with the available nursing population pool. State agencies that hire nurses will also benefit: Department of Social and Health Services, Labor and Industries, Department of Corrections, and Department of Health

Other Collateral Connections

Puget Sound Recovery:

N/A

State Workforce Impacts:

The WMS 2 position is non-represented.

The nursing consultant public health position is a member of the SEIU/1199 union. All other proposed positions are members of the Washington Federations of State Employees union.

Intergovernmental:

All communities statewide who benefit from access to nursing care are impacted by this proposal. This includes tribal, urban, and rural communities. Appropriate staffing directly impacts NCQAC's ability meet the purpose defined within RCW 18.79.010 in regulating the competency and quality of professional health care providers under its jurisdiction by establishing, monitoring, and enforcing qualifications for licensing, consistent standards of practice, continuing competency mechanisms, and discipline. Other state agencies who will benefit include Department of Social and Health Services, Labor and Industries, Department of Corrections, and Department of Health.

Stakeholder Response:

Nurses, hospitals, long term care employers, and associations support this proposal as it supports increased access to nursing care and works to address the nursing shortage in the state.

State Facilities Impacts:

There will be limited impact on facilities and workplace needs with this proposal since NCQAC staff is able to work remotely. New staff can receive remote training and telework.

Changes from Current Law:

N/A

Legal or Administrative Mandates:

Appropriate staffing directly impacts NCQAC's ability meet the purpose defined within RCW 18.79.010 in regulating the competency and quality of professional health care providers under its jurisdiction by establishing, monitoring, and enforcing qualifications for licensing, consistent standards of practice, continuing competency mechanisms, and discipline.

Reference Documents

[Data for Gov Reports_.xlsx](#)

[Licensing Work Orders for International Education Review.xlsx](#)

[NCQAC Application and Renewal Trend Data.xlsx](#)

[Staffing Solutions to Address Increase Demand for Nurses DP.xlsm](#)

IT Addendum

Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?

No

Objects of Expenditure

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Obj. A	\$719	\$716	\$1,435	\$716	\$716	\$1,432
Obj. B	\$306	\$304	\$610	\$304	\$304	\$608
Obj. E	\$42	\$42	\$84	\$42	\$42	\$84
Obj. J	\$20	\$7	\$27	\$7	\$7	\$14
Obj. T	\$60	\$60	\$120	\$60	\$60	\$120

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