

CHALLENGES AND DETERMINANTS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF NURSING IN BRAZIL



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Development

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Authors

Ana Paula Cavalcante de Oliveira
Ana Beatriz Zanardo Mion
Mariana Lopes Galante
Gabriela Di Donato
Rita de Cássia Consule
Ana Maria Laus
Isabel Craveiro
Silvana Martins Mishima
Carla Aparecida Arena Ventura

Working Group State of Nursing in Brazil with representatives:

- **Brazilian Nursing Association (ABen)**
 - Erica Rosalba Mallman Duarte
 - Rosalina Aratani Sudo
- **Brazilian Association of Midwives and Obstetric Nurses (Abenfo nacional)**
 - Kleyde Ventura de Souza
 - Kelly Cristina Almeida Borgonove
- **Federal Council of Nursing (Cofen)**
 - Betânia Maria Pereira dos Santos
 - Tatiana Maria Melo Guimarães
- **National Council of Health Secretaries (CONASS)**
 - Maria José Oliveira Evangelista
 - Mariana Gomes
- **Nursing Now Challenge, Brazil Working Group**
 - Isabel Amélia Costa Mendes
- **Ministry of Health**
 - **Department of Management and Regulation of Health Work (DEGERTS)**
 - Bruno Guimarães de Almeida
 - Gustavo Hoff
 - **Secretariat of Labor Management and Health Education (SGTES)**
 - Célia Regina Rodrigues Gil
 - **Secretariat of Primary Health Care (SAPS)**
 - Ana Cláudia Cardoso Chaves
- **PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center for Nursing Research Development (EERP/USP)**
 - Pedro Fredemir Palha
- **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**
 - Anna Cunha
- **Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)**
 - Julio Pedroza
 - Gabriela Giacomini
 - Maria Silvia Fruet
 - Monica Durães Diniz

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Isabel Duré and Mónica Padilla - Pan American Health Organization

Mario Dal Poz - Institute of Social Medicine, State University of Rio de Janeiro

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PERSPECTIVE

Effective health systems depend on trained and well-distributed human resources to provide good quality care to the population. In this sense, there are many challenges to provide an adequate health workforce to meet people's health needs.

In the International Year of Nursing and Midwifery (2020) context, two reports were organized with contributions from representatives of the Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) and its regions: "State of World's Nursing 2020" and "State of World's Midwifery 2021". Brazil contributed to these reports with the creation of the "Working Group on the State of Nursing in Brazil" consisting of: Brazilian Association of Nursing (Associação Brasileira de Enfermagem, ABEn), Brazilian Association of Midwives and Obstetric Nurses (Associação Brasileira de Obstetrizes e Enfermeiros Obstetras, Abenfo National), Federal Council of Nursing (Conselho Federal de Enfermagem, COFEN), Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Collaborating Center of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) for Nursing Research Development of the Ribeirão Preto Nursing School at the University of São Paulo, "Nursing Now" Challenge Working Group in Brazil, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and PAHO/WHO representation in Brazil (PAHO/WHO/BRA). In recent years, the working group has produced editorials on the state of Nursing*** and Midwifery****, as well as infographics on these topics*****.

Creation of this group established itself as a unique opportunity to collaboratively collect and discuss data among the main actors in planning and regulation of the Nursing workforce in Brazil. In this scenario, the project entitled **"Challenges for Nursing Availability and Accessibility"** was developed, which contributed some of its results described in this document.

*World Health Organization. State of the World's Nursing 2020: investing in education, jobs and leadership. 2020. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003279>

**UNFPA, WHO, ICM. The state of the world's midwifery [Internet]. 2021. Disponível em: <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/sowmy-2021>

***Oliveira et al. State of Nursing in Brazil. Rev Lat Am Enfermagem [Internet]. 2020;28:0-3. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1518-8345.0000.3404>

****Oliveira et al. The Current State of Obstetric Nursing in Brazil. Rev Lat Am Enfermagem [Internet]. 2021;29. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1518-8345.0000.3510>

*****Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde. Fotografia da enfermagem no Brasil. [Internet]. 2020. Available from: Disponível em: <http://www.eerp.usp.br/corporate-enfnobrasil-centrocolaborador/>

*****Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde. Fotografia da Enfermagem Obstétrica no Brasil. [Internet]. Brasília, DF; 2022. Available from: <https://iris.paho.org/handle/10665.2/56918>

We believe that this report is a valuable resource for policy-makers and health managers, as it presents a comprehensive view of the main challenges faced by Nursing in Brazil. We hope that the results presented will stimulate constructive discussions and promote concrete actions to strengthen the Nursing workforce in Brazil and promote policies and investments that guarantee adequate accessibility and availability of Nursing personnel, thus promoting more equitable, safe and effective health care in our country.

Nursing personnel represent one of the central elements to overcome the challenges in health care universality, both for their algorithmic representativeness, that is, for the expressive number of active workers, and for its fundamental role in the performance of actions to meet the social health needs of the population, at all care levels.

The project entitled **“Challenges for Nursing Availability and Accessibility”** is a multi-method study consisting of: (i) A descriptive and cross-sectional study with retrospective secondary data collection identified through a combination of databases such as the Interagency Health Information Network (Rede Interagencial de Informações para a Saúde, RIPSa) and National Health Workforce Accounts (National Health Workforce Accounts, NHWA); and ii) A scoping review covering scientific articles and technical and political documents, with a search in eight databases such as Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences via the Virtual Health Library (Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde via Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde, LILACS via BVS) and Web of Science, and seven websites, such as the Ministry of Health, the Federal Council of Nursing (Conselho Federal de Enfermagem, COFEN) and workstations of the Observatory of Human Resources for Health (ObservaRH). The documents identified totaled 10,045, of which 188 were included and analyzed, and their main results are presented in this report.

The concepts and definitions used in this document consider: I) availability as adequate supply and stock of human resources for health; and II) accessibility refers to equitable distribution of the professionals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nursing personnel in Brazil includes professionals with Higher Education (nurses) and mid- and technical level schooling (nursing assistants and technicians). The professionals' performance levels were considered as follows: licensed to practice (those who have the necessary training and qualification requirements and license, registration/qualification to exercise the profession); active professionals (training and qualification are prerequisites for providing services to patients and communities, management or teaching); and practicing professionals (providing direct services to patients and communities).

OVERVIEW OF NURSING IN BRAZIL

The total number of professional Nursing records in the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) and the Regional Nursing Council (Conselho Regional de Enfermagem, COREN) system was 2,243,161 in 2019.

The evidence analyzed shows an **imbalance in the composition of Nursing teams in Brazil**, with more mid-level and technical professionals. In addition to that, the results showed the predominance of female professionals, young and of black and brown skin color or race.

In the last two decades (from 2000 to 2019), there was a 384% growth in the number of professionals, reflecting an increase in density from 2.78 to 10.64 Nursing per 1,000 inhabitants during the period. However, there is a **persistent asymmetry in the geographical distribution of professionals in the country**, regions and Federal Units (FUs).

The Southeast region stands out for having the highest density and number of Nursing personnel in the country; however, among the FUs, the Federal District has the highest national density, both in terms of Nursing personnel (considering the sum of nurses, assistants and technicians) and of nurses.

The North and Northeast regions presented higher growth than the other regions of the country in relation to the number of Higher Education and mid-level professionals for the period, although the regions still present the lowest national densities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition, when considering the nurses-to-physicians ratio, according to a study carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE), Brazil has a ratio of less than one nurse for each practicing physician (0.88), being the second lowest ratio in all 36 countries studied, which presented a mean of 2.7 nurses for each practicing physician in 2017 (or the last available year). Using data from professionals qualified for the practice, the national ratio rises to 1.07, varying between 0.88 in the South region and 1.60 in the North region. In addition to the South region, the Southeast region also has less than one nurse for every physician.

Despite important growth in the number of professionals and advances with the implementation of the Unified Health System (SUS) were observed, which promoted an increase in employability, it is noted that there is still a considerable number of nurses available for the market who cannot find a job, pointing to a **mismatch between demand and supply of professionals in the labor market**.

When comparing the total number of professionals qualified for the practice, that is, the number of enrollments in the COFEN/COREN system, and the total number of active professionals, which are those linked to some health service in 2019, it was identified that approximately 46% of the Nursing personnel licensed to practice are active.

The results also identified **insufficient evidence for Nursing workforce planning** and the need for professionals to meet the health demands of the population in each sector, whether public or private. Although certain concentration of these workers was found in the public sector, it is not possible to infer that the distribution is adequate across care levels and sectors, or even to assert that there is lack of professionals in other sectors.

Considering professional training, the market and the work environment conditions, some determinants were found, and discussed below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The expansion of undergraduate Nursing courses was not accompanied by a study of the specific needs and demands of each region. Despite the increase in the number of vacancies and applications, not in the same proportion, in recent decades the number of graduates is still lower than the number of students admitted, that is, the profession has an appeal that does not correspond to the demand and there is a significant number of professionals who do not complete their studies.

Higher Education in Nursing in the country presented an exponential growth trend in terms of number of courses available and vacancies offered, but availability of these courses is concentrated in the Southeast region. However, when observing the data per 100,000 inhabitants, the Midwest region stands out for the highest number of vacancies, graduates and density of nurses among the regions for 2019, with the South region at the other extreme. The Northeast region has the lowest evasion rate and the North has the highest.

As for the professionals' working conditions, the findings indicated a trend towards precariousness, with fixed-term contracts, in addition to the absence of a career plan and the need for more than one job to increase income, increasing work overload.

Finally, Brazilian Nursing is showing warning signs regarding the precarious and dangerous life and working conditions to which it is subjected, which include situations of violence and discrimination, requiring the implementation of strategies to overcome them.

The information on the challenges and their determinants to ensure availability and accessibility of professionals for the population in the country, presented in this report and summarized in Figure 1, can be used as tools for decision-making and political dialogue to design and sustain the Nursing workforce agendas, aiming at expanding access to and coverage of services, thus strengthening the SUS. Finally, the data show the importance of deepening the information and analysis of the Brazilian State, notably for political decision-making on management of the Nursing workforce in the country.

FIGURE 1. CHALLENGES AND DETERMINANTS TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF NURSING PERSONNEL



Source: Research Challenges for Nursing availability and accessibility, 2022. Available at: <http://www.eerp.usp.br/corporate-enfnobrasil-centrocolaborador/>

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