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Regents Approve Plan to Increase Number of Nurses, Healthcare Workers in Louisiana

The Louisiana Board of Regents today approved a 2007-08 Health Works budget plan to use more than \$12.4 million in new state funding to address the shortage of nurses and allied health care professionals working in the state. The plan aims to help the state's public and private nursing and allied health programs employ more faculty, enroll more students, and produce more graduates.

"Louisiana is experiencing a critical shortage of nurses and other allied health care professionals," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "The plan adopted today addresses a fundamental cause of this workforce challenge: a shortage of qualified faculty to teach additional students."

The plan allocates new funding for the state's nursing and allied health educational programs. One important use of that funding will be to hire new faculty, which will help increase program capacity at institutions by an additional 772 nursing students and 202 allied health students in critical shortage areas. In addition, the plan provides for an increase of 500 students in Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) programs in Louisiana.

To help meet future faculty needs, the budget plan provides stipends for 86 graduate students in health care disciplines. Upon receipt of their graduate degrees, recipients benefiting from the stipends are committed to teach in Louisiana nursing programs.

"Since the entire nation is suffering from this nurse faculty shortage, it's clear that Louisiana's most effective response will be to grow its own faculty," Savoie said.

Savoie expressed thanks to Governor Blanco and the Legislature, especially Senator Joe McPherson, who chairs the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, for their strong support of this important initiative.