According to a 2017 National Nursing Workforce Survey, nurses from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds represent 19.2% of the RN workforce. Despite efforts to increase the diversity of this workforce, racial and ethnic minorities remain under-represented in the nursing professions.

Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) and Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs are the largest contributors to the nursing workforce. ADN programs tend to be less expensive and allow nurses to enter the workforce sooner, making them a more financially viable option for many students than a BSN.

This study focuses on how racial/ethnic composition of ADN programs has changed over time between 2012-2018, and compares whether student composition varies by the institutional status of the program (i.e., public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit). It also examines the percent of undergraduate students who receive financial aid and the amount awarded to them by type of institution, recognizing the positive association between financial aid and student diversity.

We analyzed the racial/ethnic diversity of ADN programs by examining the characteristics of each institution's number of student completions, using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) for 2012-2018. Programs were selected based on having at least one total student completion in an ADN program for each year in our study. Types of financial aid (i.e., student grant aid, Pell Grants, and federal student loans) provided to all undergraduate students were assessed by type of institution. Data for financial aid indicators were only available at the institutional level, with no classification by race/ethnicity or student type.

The total number of students who completed ADN programs across all types of institutions declined by 8.5 percentage points (pp) from 2012 to 2018. At the same time, there was an increase of 25.4 pp across private-for-profit institutions.

The composition of student ADN completions across institutions became more racially/ethnically diverse over time, across years and institution types: the total number of non-White ADN student completions increased by 8.6 pp (excluding unknown and non-resident categories).

Public ADN programs:
- Contributed 77.1% of total ADN completions
- Had the highest number of completions across all racial/ethnic categories
- Experienced a decrease in the total number of completions across race/ethnicity categories, except for Hispanic/Latino and Two or more races

Private not-for-profit ADN programs:
- Tended to be the least diverse, the lowest number of completions across non-White categories, while contributing 10.3% of total ADN completions
- Experienced a decrease in the total number of completions across race/ethnicity categories, except for Hispanic/Latino and Two or more races

Private for-profit ADN programs:
- Saw increases in total number of ADN completions across all race/ethnicity categories, while contributing 12.6% of total ADN completions
- Had the highest average percentage of total ADN student completions for all non-White race/ethnicities, except for Asian
- Had the lowest percentage of White student ADN completions, at an average of 46.6%