



Training Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners — Fact Sheet

University of California Online Certificate Program

January 2020

With California facing a growing shortage of mental health professionals, a new online certificate program will be launched in January 2020 by three schools of nursing within the University of California system (UCSF, UCLA, and UC Davis) to prepare 300 psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs) by 2025. Apply on the UCSF website: <https://nursing.ucsf.edu/PMHNP-postmasters-certificate>.

The program builds on an existing, nationally accredited, in-person program that is actively training PMHNPs at UCSF. As the first online, post-master's certificate program of its kind in California, it is expected to nearly double the state's current pipeline of PMHNPs for the next five years. Along with psychiatrists, PMHNPs are specialized mental health providers authorized to prescribe psychotropic medications, treat severe mental illness and substance use disorders, and offer psychiatric care.

The new program gives nurse practitioners across the state an opportunity to expand their certification without requiring relocation to a physical campus. Students can stay in their own communities to complete their training.

Students will also be recruited from underserved rural and urban areas — communities for which they will be prepared to serve upon program completion.

Key Figures and Outcomes

- **1,200 PMHNPs** currently practice in California, and there are between 75 and 80 graduates statewide from PMHNP programs each year.
- **300 PMHNPs** will be produced by this program over five years — nearly doubling the state's pipeline of PMHNPs during this period and filling a critical gap in the state's mental health system by increasing the number of providers who, like psychiatrists, can prescribe medication and treat severe mental illness.
- **378,000 patients** will receive treatment across California from these new providers over five years.
- **\$24.6 million** is the expected program cost, with tuition expected to allow the program to be self-sustaining.



Why the Program Is Needed

California is facing an urgent, growing shortfall of mental health providers:

- In its 2019 report, the California Future Health Workforce Commission [highlighted the need for immediate action \(PDF\)](#) to address a growing shortage of mental health providers in the state. Citing a recent Healthforce Center at UCSF report, the commission projected the state will experience a sizeable decline (34%) in the number of psychiatrists in California by 2028 — and [will have 41% fewer psychiatrists than needed](#).
- Over 50% of people with mental illness already do not receive psychiatric care for these conditions — and many communities in the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire have only half as many psychiatrists as do other parts of the state.
- To address these shortages, the commission called for the rapid development of a PMHNP program to quickly recruit and train a substantial number of new mental health providers who can also provide primary care.

California is already experiencing a substantial drop-off in mental health specialization:

- While existing programs are producing a small number well-qualified PMHNPs, the state's current pipeline of mental health providers is not keeping pace with growing demand.
- In 2016–17, only 73 of 1,070 people who completed a master's degree NP program completed a PMHNP program. Currently, almost all educational programs for PMHNPs are in the greater Bay Area or in large metro regions in Southern California.
- Only a few programs (all private) offer online/distance education. No programs offer an online post-master's option.

Program Details

The new UC online program seeks to address these issues, enrolling experienced NPs who can hit the ground running in communities experiencing provider shortages and fill dual roles in practices that integrate primary care and mental health.

- UCSF's existing, nationally accredited program for PMHNPs provides the online program's curricular template, supported by educators at UCSF, UCLA, and UC Davis.
- The 9- to 12-month, 30-unit program includes 500 hours of supervised clinical training in facilities such as hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers, prisons and jails, schools, university student health centers, Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, and drug and alcohol treatment centers in urban and rural communities. These sites are currently being identified.
- Forty students will be recruited to join the program in fall 2020, and an additional 65 students will be recruited each year for the following four years.
- The program is intended to be self-supporting.