

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT: NURSE PRACTITIONER (NP) STUDENT TRENDS, 2016-2025

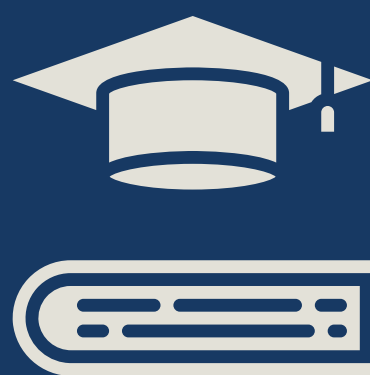
Introduction

The Master of Science in nursing (MSN) degree has been the primary educational path for NPs since the 1980s.¹ The past 10 years have seen larger increases in the number of post-MSN and doctor of nursing (DNP) programs relative to MSN programs, reflected in increased post-MSN and DNP enrollments and graduations. Post-MSN degrees are typically certificate programs for nurses who have already earned an MSN or DNP degree. DNP degrees prepare NPs for clinical leadership and translation research.

The American Association of Nurse Practitioners® (AANP) analyzed data from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) enrollment and graduation reports to compare trends across these degree types.²⁻¹¹ This research snapshot illustrates the interrelated shifts in programs, enrollments and graduations across degree types from 2016 to 2025.

Takeaways

- In the past 10 years, the number of NP programs, enrollments and graduations has steadily increased across MSN, post-MSN and DNP degrees.
- The DNP degree had the largest relative growth in programs and graduations.
- Post-MSN degrees had the largest growth in enrollments.
- In absolute numbers, the MSN degree is most numerous as measured by enrollments and graduations. Until recently, this was also true of the number of programs, but the number of DNP programs has now surpassed the number of MSN programs.



NP Programs by Degree Type, 2016-2025

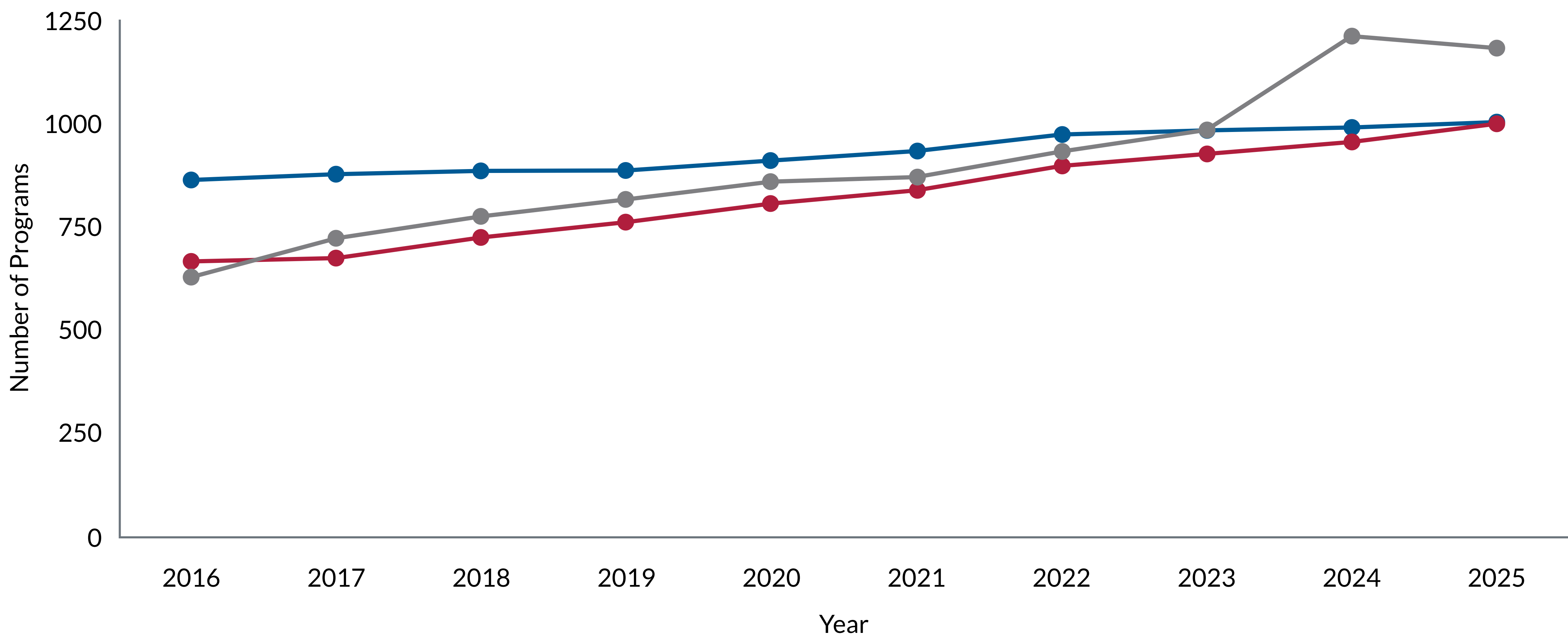
16.2% Growth in
NP MSN Programs



50.1% Growth in NP
Post-MSN Programs



88.4% Growth in NP
DNP Programs

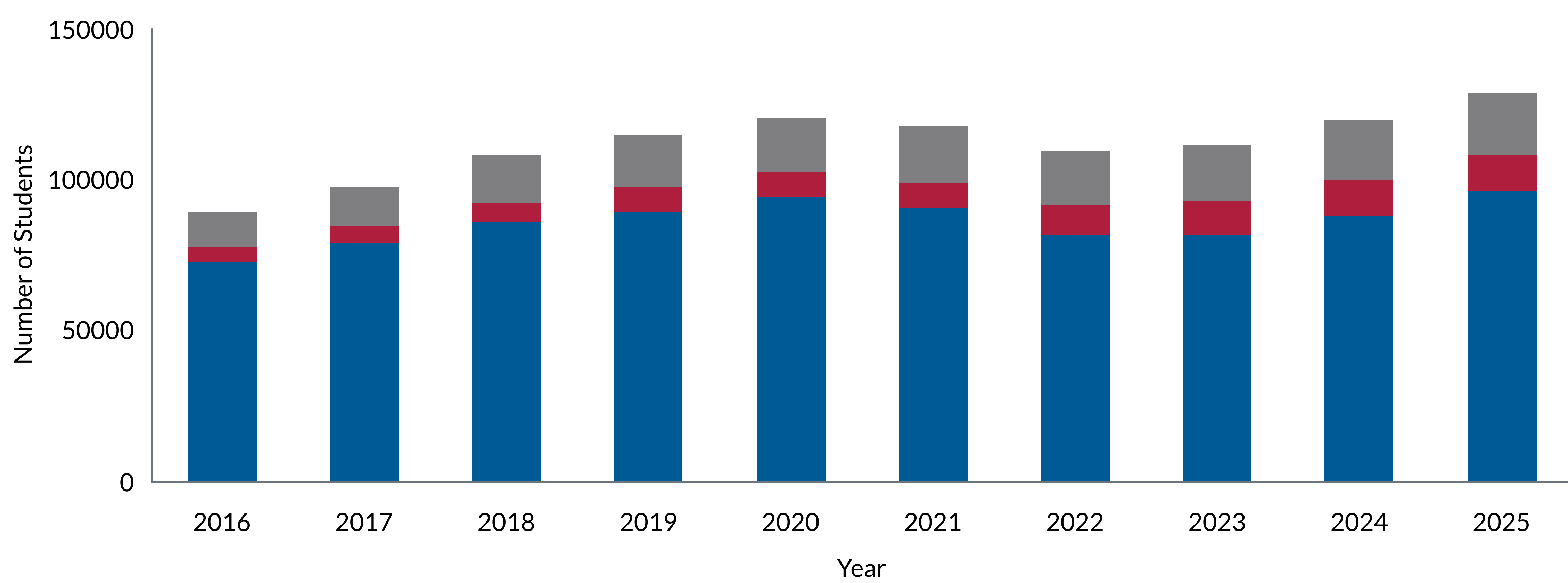


NP Enrollments by Degree Type, 2016-2025

31.7% Growth in NP MSN Enrollment

168.4% Growth in NP Post-MSN Enrollment

76.9% Growth in NP DNP Enrollment

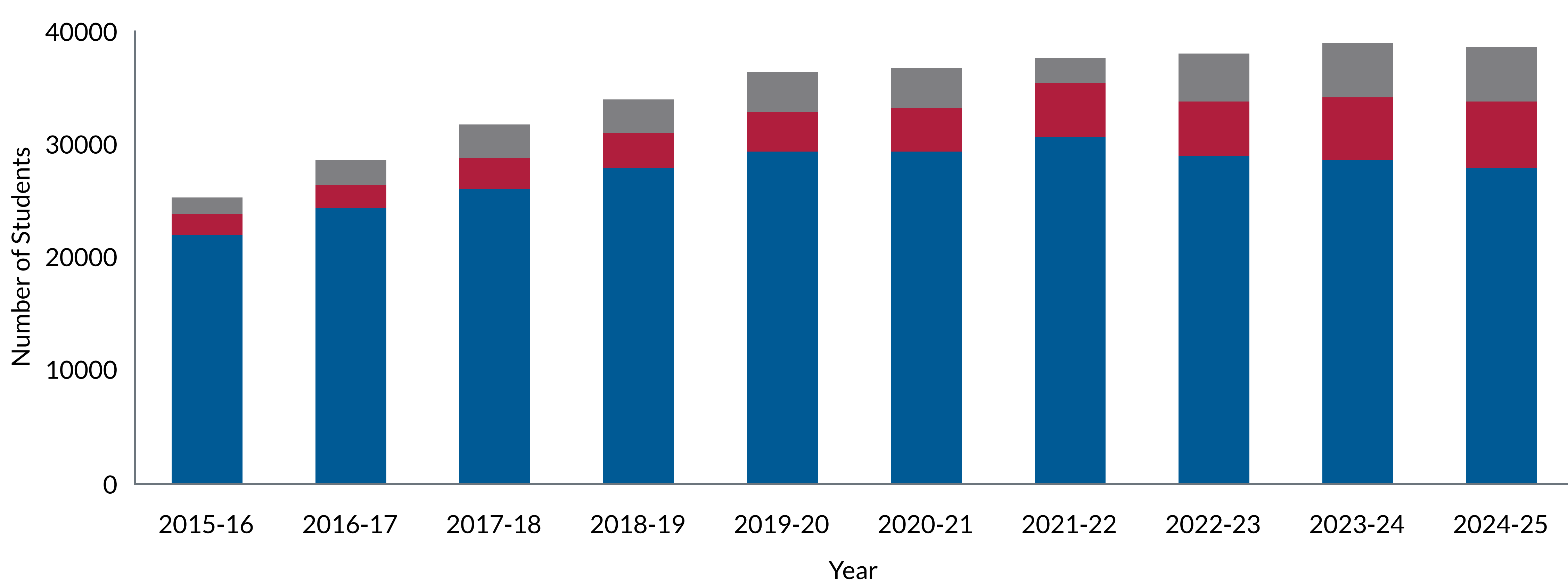


NP Graduations by Degree Type, 2015-16 to 2024-25

27% Growth in NP MSN Graduations

205% Growth in NP Post-MSN Graduations

221% Growth in NP DNP Graduations



Limitations

- AACN reports only provide aggregate data on programs, enrollments and graduations at the national level.
- We did not analyze data on previously certified NPs in post-Master's DNP programs and NPs in dual tracks.
- AACN reports have high response rates, but the same schools might not report their information each year.

1. Pulcini, J., Hanson, C., & Johnson, J. (2019). National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties: A 40-year history of preparing nurse practitioners for practice. Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, 31(11), 633-639. DOI: 10.1097/JXX.0000000000000330

2. AACN. (2017). 2016-2017 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

3. AACN. (2018). 2017-2018 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

4. AACN. (2019). 2018-2019 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

5. AACN. (2020). 2019-2020 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

6. AACN. (2021). 2020-2021 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

7. AACN. (2022). 2021-2022 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

8. AACN. (2023). 2022-2023 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

9. AACN. (2024). 2023-2024 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

10. AACN. (2025). 2024-2025 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

11. AACN. (2026). 2025-2026 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.