

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT: NURSE PRACTITIONER (NP) STUDENT TRENDS, 2015-2024

Introduction

The Master of Science in nursing (MSN) degree has been the primary educational path for NPs since the 1980s.¹ Recent years have seen steady growth in post-MSN and doctor of nursing (DNP) 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® 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 2015 to 2024.

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, 2015-2024

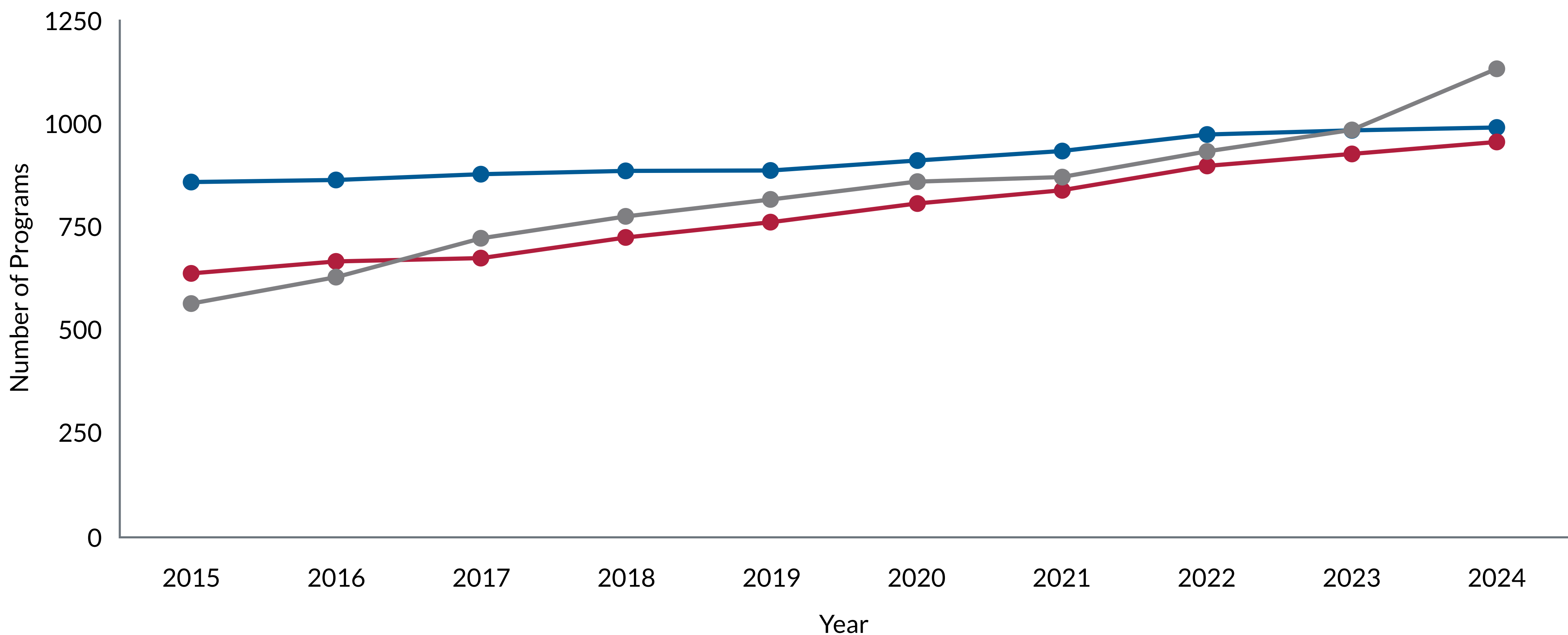
15% Growth in NP MSN Programs



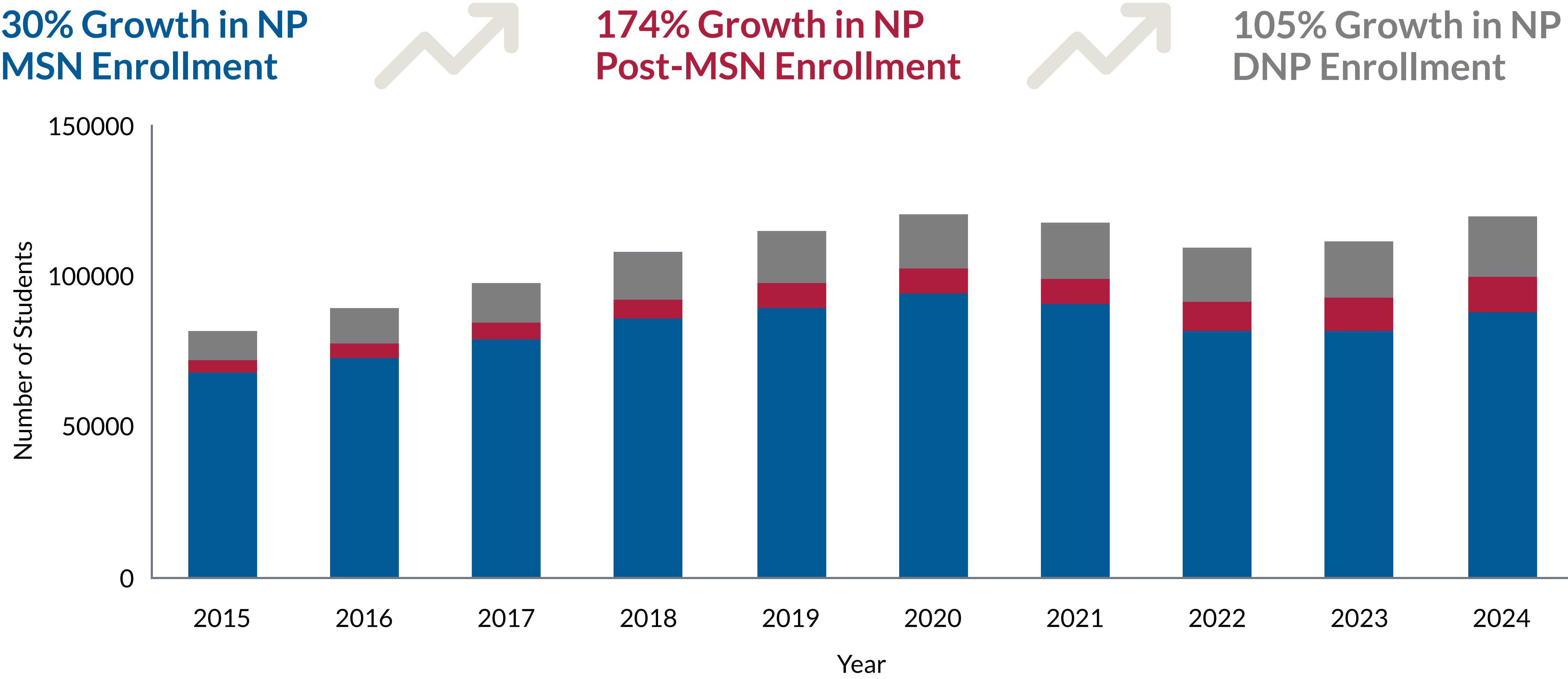
50% Growth in NP Post-MSN Programs



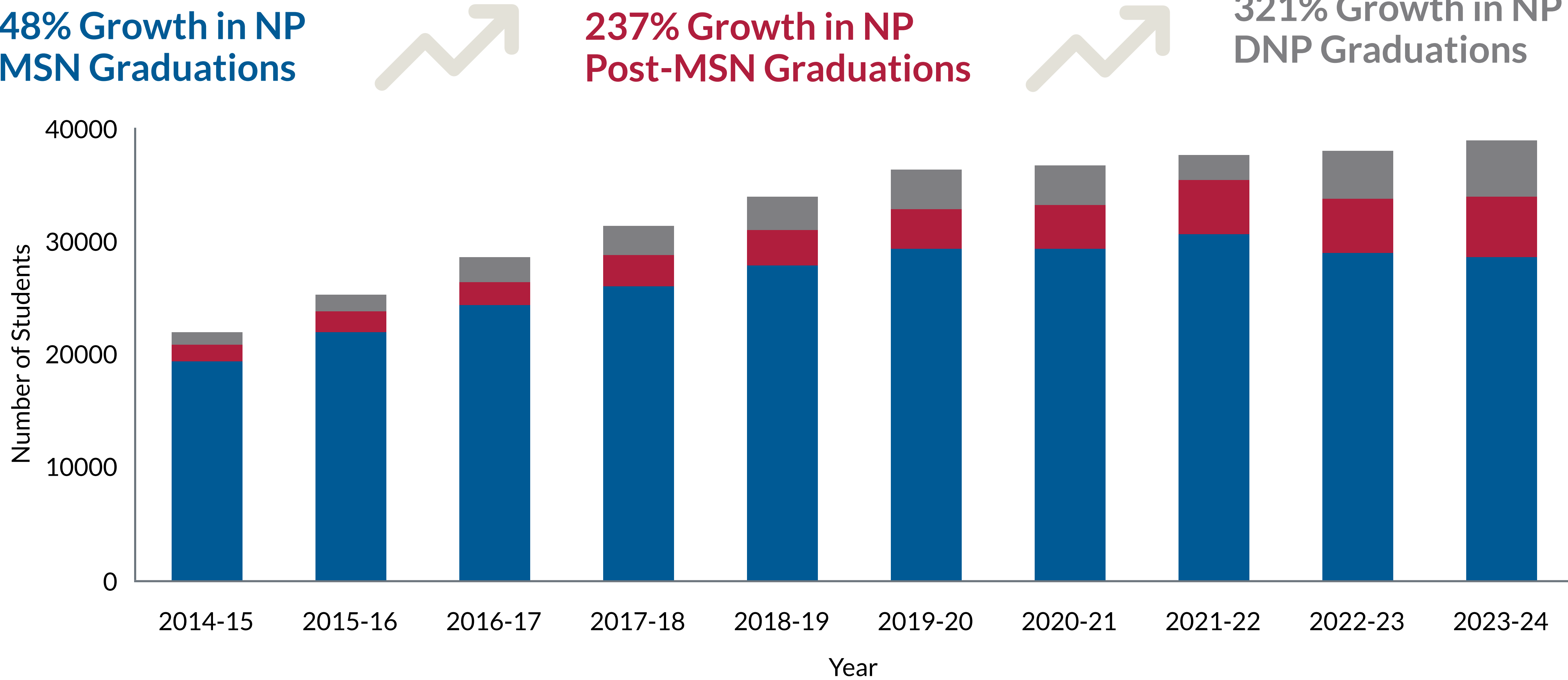
101% Growth in NP DNP Programs



NP Enrollments by Degree Type, 2015-2024



NP Graduations by Degree Type, 2014-15 to 2023-24



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. Fang, D., Li, Y., Stauffer, D.C., & Trautman, D.E. (2016). 2015-2016 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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