Perspectives in Ambulatory Care

Gaining Insight into Member Demographics and Perceptions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives in a Professional Organization (AAACN)

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The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) Board of Directors appointed the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force, and charged them with engaging the AAACN membership in a larger DEI conversation and creating a safe space for open discussion and education. The task force administered a survey to give voice to and gain understanding of the current state of member demographics and opinions on the topic of DEI. The survey was developed using an evidence-based approach to collecting diversity information in a non-confrontational, open, and honest way. Using results of the survey, the task force has taken steps to build an initial platform for DEI dialogue and education.

Research supports that organizations prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have improved patient and workforce outcomes and better financial performance (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Morrison et al., 2021). In addition, the business case for DEI in diverse organizations is linked to improved problem-solving, innovation, engagement, and retention compared to those that are more homogenous (Fields et al., 2022; Rosenkranz et al., 2021). Achieving a more diverse organization is a critical step toward integrating structural competency, and mitigating or eliminating discriminatory policies and practices within the organization (Fine et al., 2020).

Recognizing the value of diversity, the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) boldly devised strategies to actively support and engage its membership in embracing DEI through the use of intentional practices (see Box 1). Leaders sought to establish a mechanism to amplify diverse voices who possessed a passion for the topic and to ensure its permanent incorporation into the fabric of the organization (AAACN). This commitment led the AAACN Board of Directors to charter a task force to further develop and implement a DEI strategic plan.

Box 1.
AAACN Strategies

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION – EMBRACING THE DIVERSE NATURE OF WHO WE ARE AND WHOM WE SERVE

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
AAACN is fully committed to diversity and being an inclusive and equitable organization. We will achieve this through the incorporation of diverse thoughts and voices, a proactive approach to intentional action, and a responsibility to continue to raise awareness around this issue.

STRATEGIC GOAL
Integrate the practice of DEI into the fabric of AAACN.
1. Invite AAACN member voices to contribute to the conversation.
2. Take an active role to understand the current state of AAACN.
3. Raise awareness of DEI in ambulatory care nursing.

Call to Action

AAACN put out a call for volunteers for the DEI Task Force. The response from members was tremendous, and the Board of Directors interviewed and selected two co-chairs to lead the effort. The co-chairs were selected from a pool of highly qualified AAACN members possessing a wealth of experiences and enthusiasm for working in the field of DEI.

The AAACN DEI Task Force was charged by the Board of Directors to survey all AAACN members, including the Board of Directors and other leadership members, regarding both awareness of DEI in terms of core principles, definitions, and organizational perspectives, as well as basic demographics, to ascertain a starting point for the task force's work. The survey would be the first step in initiating a thoughtful and collaborative dialogue to ensure AAACN has an inclusive culture and creates opportunities for AAACN leaders and members to embrace and integrate a DEI focus into their existing and future endeavors.

The first phase of the task force's work plan was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of DEI in the organization. The second phase is to use survey results to develop recommendations to redesign the governance structure and enhance/expand educational offerings and resources that meet the needs and preferences of the membership.

Survey Development

AAACN DEI Task Force members conducted a literature search to identify existing tools and surveys with a focus on assessing member perceptions of the current state of DEI in an organization to inform the creation of a survey developed specifically for the ambulatory nursing audience. A few tools and surveys utilized in this process included resources provided by the eXtension Foundation Impact Collaborative (2023), the American Nurses Association (ANA)/California's (2022) *An Assessment to Irradicate Racism in Nursing,* and the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2015) *Best Practices for Measuring Socioeconomic Status and Subjective Social Status.* In addition, there was a discussion about the amount of demographic information that should be collected as part of the survey, and whether definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion should be provided with the survey. Subsequently, individual task force members were assigned to complete an in-depth review of the tools identified. Final survey items were constructed utilizing a variety of resources, including previous DEI work experiences of task force members. Several iterations of the survey were reviewed by the task force and the Board of Directors. Feedback was provided and reviewed by the task force with the goal of achieving consensus and approval of the survey design prior to dissemination to the membership.

The final survey consisted of 19 items (see Box 2). The survey provided respondents with definitions pertaining to the terms *diversity, equity,* and *inclusion* using widely accepted definitions across academia and health care organizations. Following the definitions, the survey was prefaced with section headers to give respondents context for the questions to follow regarding their purpose and intended use. Items 1-7 focused on DEI from a personal and professional perspective along with items focused on perspectives about DEI and AAACN. Items 8-19 focused on a variety of demographic information. There was opportunity for narrative comments throughout the survey.

Methods

In early 2022, an email was sent to all AAACN members requesting their participation in the survey to collect information about members' experience with DEI, personally and professionally, along with their perceptions of DEI in AAACN and DEI programs in their workplace. The intent of the survey was to identify the current state of AAACN's membership knowledge and attitudes regarding DEI and to inform future programming and strategies for recruitment of new diverse members and retention of all existing members.

Results

Two hundred and fifty (250) AAACN members responded to the survey; some respondents did not answer all items. Data were reviewed by the DEI Task Force and presented to the Board of Directors. As shown in Figure 1, most respondents ($n = 244$) were over age 51 years (63.5%), with only 12.6% less than age 40 years. In Figure 2, members responded to the question about racial identity, with over 77% of respondents ($n = 242$) identifing as White/Caucasian, 9% as African American, 5.3% as Black, 2.9% as Hispanic, 2% as European, and 1.6% as Latino/Latina. Less than 1%

Box 2.
AAACN Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Membership Survey

1. What is your gender identity?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Transgender Male
   d. Transgender Female
   e. Cis-Gender
   f. Gender Fluid
   g. Gender Queer
   h. Non-Binary
   i. Agender
   j. Not specified above

2. What is your sexual identity?
   a. Asexual
   b. Bisexual
   c. Homosexual
   d. Heterosexual
   e. Gay
   f. Lesbian
   g. Pansexual
   h. Omnisexual
   i. Queer
   j. Not specified above

3. What is your racial/ethnic identity?
   a. African
   b. African-American
   c. Black
   d. Middle-Eastern, North-African (MENA)
   e. East Asian
   f. Pacific Islander
   g. Hispanic
   h. Latino/Latina
   i. LatinX
   j. South Asian
   k. Southeast Asian
   l. Caucasian
   m. White
   n. American Indian
   o. Alaskan Native
   p. European
   q. Not specified above

4. Are you living with a disability?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. How old are you?
   a. 20-30
   b. 31-40
   c. 41-50
   d. 51-60
   e. 61-70
   f. Over 70

6. Is English your first languge?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. What language(s) are spoken in your home?
   Select all that apply.
   a. English
   b. Spanish
   c. Portuguese
   d. Arabic
   e. Armenian
   f. Russian
   g. Mandarin Chinese
   h. Burmese
   i. Kurdish
   j. Swahili
   k. Vietnamese
   l. Filipino/Tagalog
   m. Korean
   n. Italian
   o. Navajo
   p. Polish
   q. German
   r. Not specified above

8. What religion do you identify with?
   a. No religion/agnostic
   b. Protestantism
   c. Catholicism
   d. Baptist
   e. Christianity
   f. Judaism
   g. Islam
   h. Buddhism
   i. Hinduism
   j. Lutheran
   k. Jehovah's Witness
   l. Evangelicism
   m. Modern Paganism
   n. Atheist
   o. Not specified above, please comment

9. Are you the primary caretaker of a dependent child?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. Are you the primary caretaker of a dependent adult?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. Do you consider yourself a first-generation college student?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Box 2. (continued)
AAACN Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Membership Survey

12. What level of education have you completed? Select all that apply.
    a. Diploma in Nursing
    b. Diploma in another field
    c. LPN/LVN
    d. Associate's degree in nursing
    e. Associate's degree in another field
    f. Bachelor's degree in nursing
    g. Bachelor's degree in another field
    h. Masters in nursing
    i. Masters in another field
    j. PhD
    k. DNP

13. Are you active or retired military?
    a. Yes
    b. No

This section is regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within your personal life or AAACN experience:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are personally
    a. Not important to me at all.
    b. Not so important to me
    c. Somewhat important
    d. Very important
    e. Extremely important

2. AAACN is dedicate to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness?
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Neutral
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

3. How much of a priority is Diversity to Senior Leaders of AAACN?
    a. Top priority
    b. Important, but not a top priority
    c. Not very important
    d. Not important at all

4. How much Diversity do you think AAACN has, in your opinion?
    a. A great deal of Diversity
    b. A lot of Diversity
    c. A moderate amount of Diversity
    d. Not much Diversity
    e. No Diversity

5. What is your opinion of workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs? Whether your workplace has one or not.)
    a. It's a good thing.
    b. It's neither good nor bad/Neutral.
    c. It's a bad thing.

6. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your interest in commitment to Diversity and Inclusion?
    a. Add comment box

Figure 1.
Age of Membership
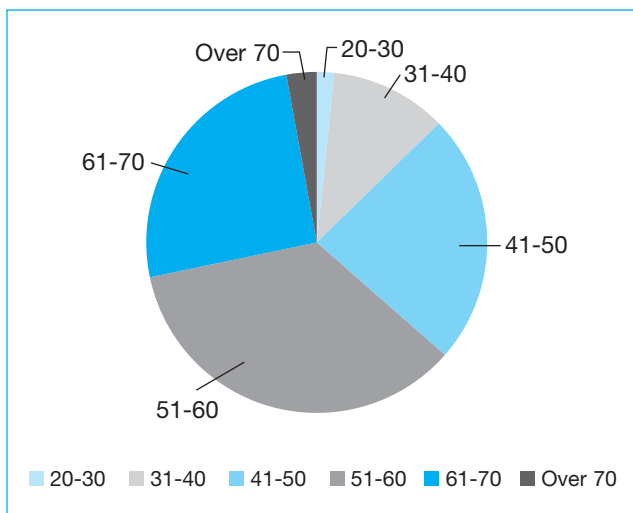
identified as African, Latinx, East Asian, or American Indian, and 6% did not specify. Figure 3 reveals that almost half of the sample identified as first-generation college students, while 46% had a bachelor's degree. Top languages (Figure 4) spoken at home were English (99%), Spanish (5.7%), and Portuguese (<1%); 17 different religions (not displayed) were identified, and several responded "none." In Figure 5, 15% reported living with a disability. Figure 6 reflects over 96% of respondents ($n = 239$) identified as female, 2.5% male, and less than 1% as gender queer or cis gender. Figure 7 explores the self-reported sexual identity of members. Twenty five percent of respondents reported being a primary caretaker of a dependent child and 9% as being a
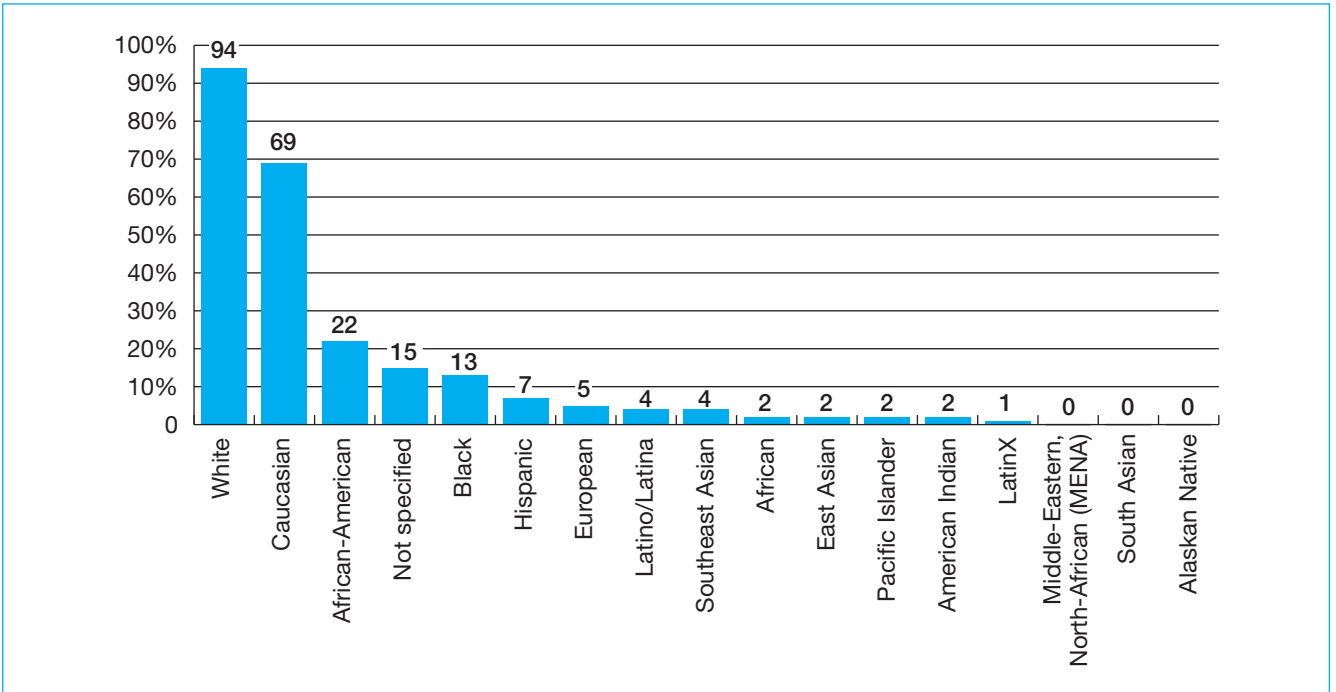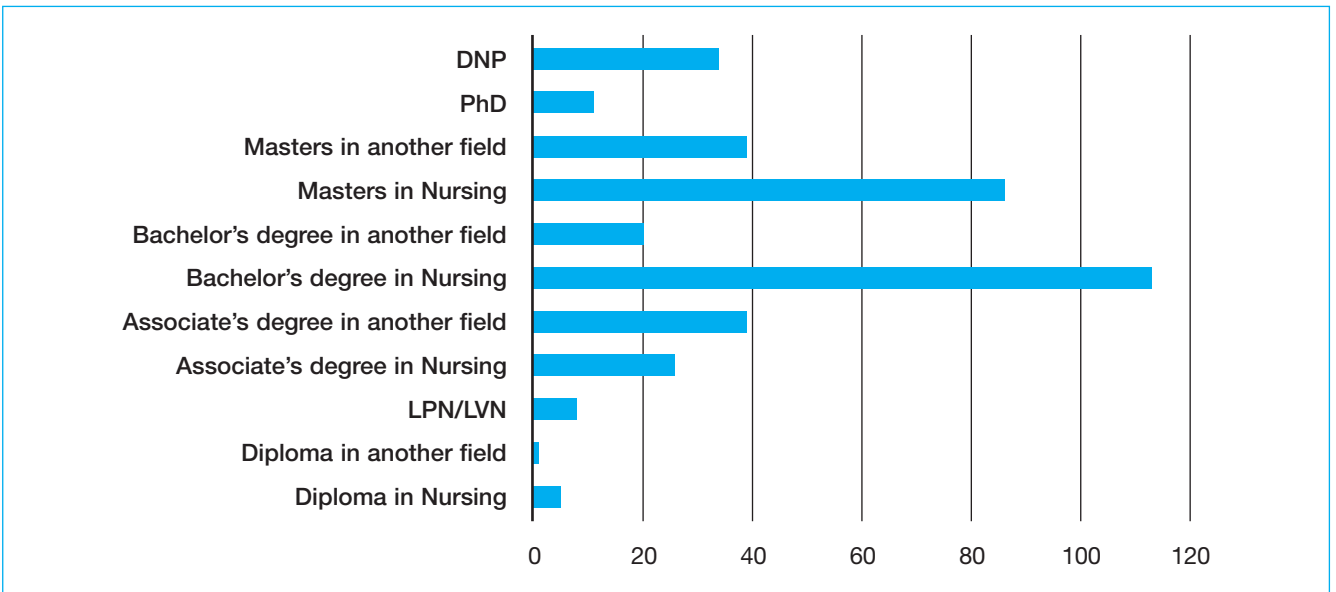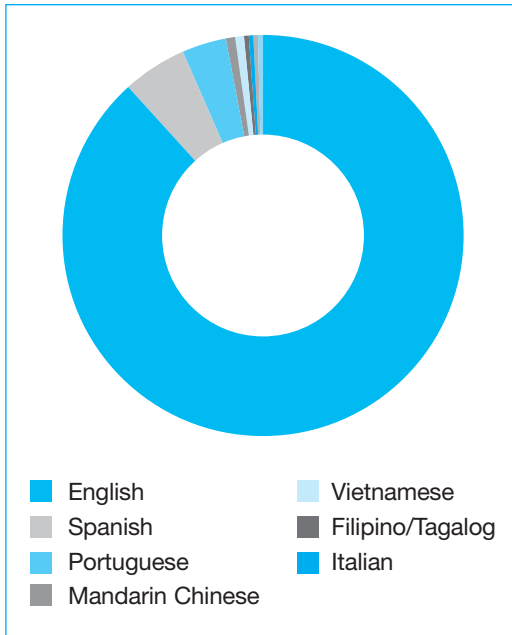
**Figure 2.
Racial/Ethnicity**

**Figure 3.
Education**

Figure 4.
Language Spoken

- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Mandarin Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Filipino/Tagalog
- Italian

Figure 5.
Living with a Disability?

Figure 6.
Gender Identity

Gender Queer 0%
Skipped 5%
Male 2%
Cis-Gender 1%
Female 92%

- Male
- Female
- Cis-Gender
- Gender Queer
- Skipped

Figure 7.
Sexual Identity

- Female/Cis Female
- Heterosexual Hetero/Straight
- Homoflexible
- Asexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Pansexual/Pan
- Decline to answer

primary caretaker of a dependent adult. Seven percent identified as active or retired military.

DEI-Related Items

Over 81% of respondents selected *very important* or *extremely important* when asked, "Diversity, equity, and inclusion are personally important," and only 3% responded that DEI is not important. When asked "AAACN is dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion," 63% *agreed* or *strongly agreed*, and 35% were neutral; only 2% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that DEI is important. Over 19% of members reported that diversity was a top priority to the Board of Directors, 57% reported *important, but not top priority*, 5% reported *not very important*, and 19% were *not sure*. When asked, "How much diversity do you think AAACN has?" 35% responded *a great deal* or *a lot of diversity*, 48% a *moderate amount of diversity*, and 16% *not much diversity*, and 1% *no diversity*. When asked, "Have you
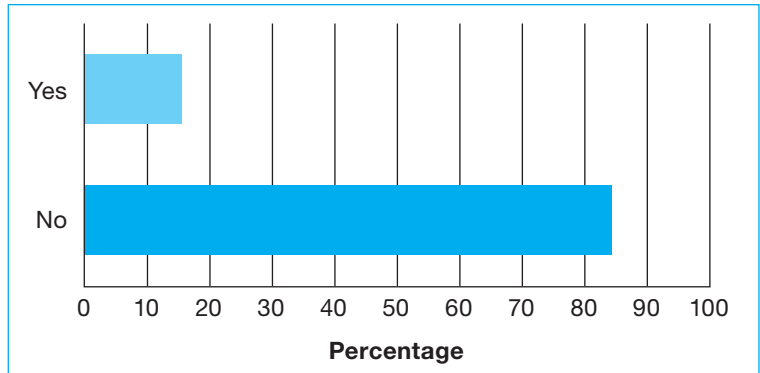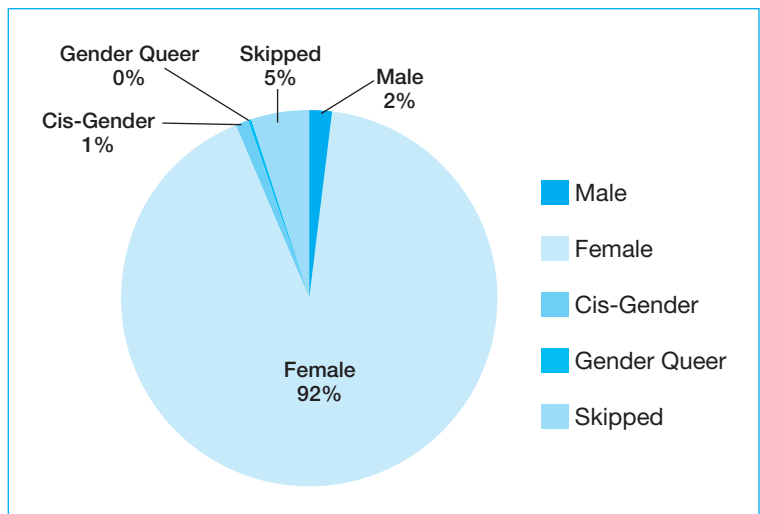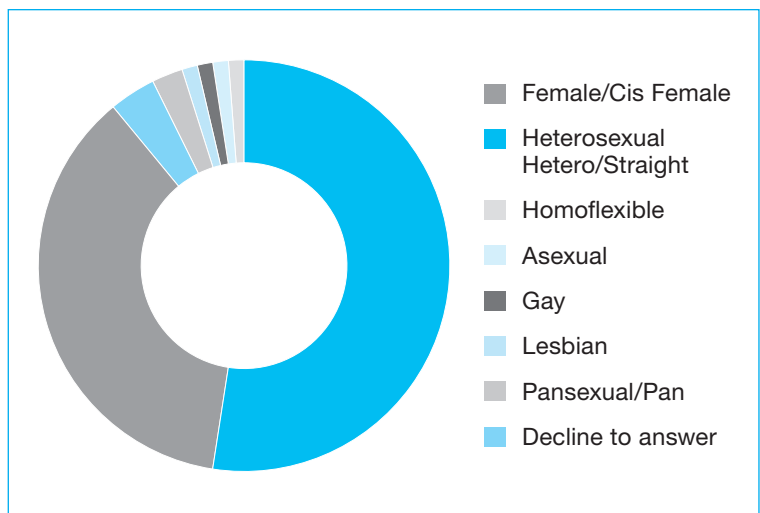
ever personally felt as though you were overlooked by AAACN for a task force position, leadership role, author, or speaker based upon your race/gender identity?" 70% responded *no*, almost 5% responded *yes*, and 25% replied they had *not thought about it*. Lastly, over 80% of respondents reported that *workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion programs were a good thing*, 14% replied that it is *neither a good nor bad thing/neutral*, 2% it is *a bad thing*, and 3% reported that their workplace *does not have a program* or *are unaware of the program details*.

Open-Ended Questions

The intent of the open-ended questions was to create a safe space for open conversation regarding DEI. This is where the task force sought to hear the voice of the existing membership and to seek specific topics needed for education. Qualitative responses quoted in this article best represent the themes identified from the membership, and omit inappropriate or explicit comments that are inappropriate for print and not representative of the organization as a whole. Essentially, members shared wide-ranging narrative feedback in the open-ended questions that queried members' perception of the AAACN Board of Directors' prioritization of DEI and additional information to share about members' interest or commitment to DEI. Regarding members' perception of the Board of Directors' prioritization of DEI, 46 of 52 written responses stated that they were unsure or did not know if diversity was a priority for the BOD. One member stated: "I believe AAACN is in its infancy stage with this topic. For the Academy to thrive and survive, DEI must be a business imperative."

When prompted to share additional information regarding their interest or commitment to DEI, respondents shared a variety of thoughts and ideas that can be organized around four themes: 1) organizational and situational awareness, 2) education, 3) professional development, and 4) governance. For example, one member wrote: "I am highly committed and glad that AAACN is taking this first step to understand the needs and commitment of its members regarding DEI." For education: "We

need to work on educating ourselves about how we care for DEI patient populations and how to educate and create policies for our workforce to better care for diverse populations and ensure health equity and belonging," and "need to see educational offerings on DEI – especially in relation to a population of uninsured, underinsured, and low income." Related to professional development and governance: "Some leaders need preparation in DEI leader-peer behaviors that are inclusive of members," and "Leaders of organizations MUST take the lead, set the standards, and stay engaged at every level of the relationship chain."

Recommendations

Based on survey results and continued outreach for ideas, the DEI Task Force has begun to develop educational programming to foster greater understanding of AAACN's diverse ambulatory care community and the populations they serve. A set of comprehensive toolkits for nurses and nursing leaders is planned, with the intent to publish in a centralized location on the AAACN website, which is accessible to all members. The task force has begun a consultative relationship to influence revision of existing AAACN publications, such as the *Scope & Standards of Practice for Professional Ambulatory Care Nursing* (AAACN, 2023), and the *Ambulatory Care Nurse Executive Toolkit* (AAACN, 2021) with the purpose of ensuring an inclusive spirit and voice. In addition, the DEI Task Force believes AAACN should prioritize:

1. Establishing an ongoing communication plan focused on member awareness that diversity, equity, and inclusion is a top priority for the organization.
2. Developing a DEI Academy for Ambulatory Care Nurses that addresses workforce diversity and caring for diverse individuals and families.
3. Recruiting diverse volunteer leaders to task forces, committees, and the Board of Directors to review AAACN's recruitment process, with the intent to include novice volunteer leaders and provide them with DEI professional development opportunities.

4. Planning a member recruitment campaign to recruit diverse members across age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

5. Creating a DEI Special Interest Group (SIG) that provides monthly DEI education/awareness on a variety of topics, such as implicit bias, microaggressions, and structural competency.

6. Integrating recommendations from leading nursing organizations, such as the ANA and American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN).

With continuing work needed toward inclusive excellence, the AAACN Board of Directors has transitioned the DEI Task Force to an organizational committee. $

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