

Beacon Award for Excellence Program Overview



Contents

About AACN & Beacon Award.....	4
Acknowledgments	5
Executive Summary	6
Beacon Award Value	6
Influence and Recognition	6
Recruitment and Retention	7
Credibility	7
Beacon Award for Excellence - Reimagined	7
Our Logo.....	8
Making an Impact on Healthcare	8
AACN shapes nursing and the healthcare system.....	9
Work environments are healthy.	9
Nurses make their optimal contribution.	10
Patients receive optimal care.	11
Participating in the Beacon Award for Excellence Program	11
Beacon Award Application	11
Demographic Questions.....	11
Patient Outcomes	12
Quantitative Data Measures	12
Process Measures	12
HWEAT Scores	12
Qualitative Exemplars	12
Work Environment.....	13
Quantitative Data Measures	13
Process Measures	13
HWEAT Scores	13
Qualitative Exemplars	13
Nursing Workforce	14
Quantitative Data Measures	14
Process Measures.....	14
HWEAT Scores	14
Qualitative Exemplars	14
Beacon Award Evaluation Framework.....	15
Measure Level.....	15
Dimension Level.....	15
Module Level	15
Award Level	16



Audits	16
Recognition	16
Applicants From International Hospitals.....	16
Beacon Award Annual Cycle	17
Pricing	18
Bulk Pricing Discount	18
Individual Modules	18
Purchasing	19
Refund policy	19
Statement Regarding the Use of Data in AACN’s Beacon Award Program	19
1. Purpose.....	19
2. Data Description.....	19
3. Permitted Uses.....	19
4. Data Security.....	20
5. Confidentiality	20
6. Data Retention and Destruction	20
7. Publication and Reporting	20
8. Indemnification.....	20
9. Term and Termination	20
Resources	21
Certification.....	21
Healthy Work Environments	21
Hospital-Acquired Condition Prevention	21
Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection.....	21
Central Line-Associated Bloodstream Infection	21
Fall Prevention	21
Medication Safety	21
Pressure Injury Prevention	22
Ventilator-Associated Event Prevention	22
Leadership.....	22
Professional Development.....	22
Staffing.....	22
Well-Being	23

About AACN & Beacon Award

AACN Mission

AACN drives excellence in acute and critical care for nurses, patients and families.

AACN Vision

AACN is dedicated to creating a healthcare system driven by the needs of patients and families where acute and critical care nurses make their optimal contribution.

AACN Values

As AACN works to promote its mission and vision, it is guided by values that are rooted in and arise from the Association's rich history, traditions and culture. Our values are the foundation upon which we build our relentless pursuit of excellence. AACN's members, volunteers and staff honor the following:

1. **Integrity** — We demonstrate sound judgment, ethical behavior and accountability in all we do.
2. **Inclusion** — We cultivate an inclusive culture, where everyone contributes their unique strengths and perspectives.
3. **Transformation** — We drive change and innovation to positively impact the healthcare system and improve the lives of patients, families and nurses.
4. **Leadership** — We advocate and influence to achieve optimal outcomes and healthy work environments.
5. **Relationships** — We collaborate and advance partnerships, honoring each individual to strengthen the collective.

Beacon Award Program Mission

The Beacon Award provides unit-based recognition to nurses for their unwavering commitment to enhancing nursing practice and providing exceptional patient care in a nurturing and supportive work environment.

Beacon Award Program Vision

The Beacon Award provides nurses with the knowledge to improve outcomes that influence both patient care and the overall work environment, fostering a culture of continual improvement and excellence in healthcare.

Beacon Award Program Goals

1. Recognize Unit Achievement
 - a. Excellence in units or teams that provide patients with acute, progressive and critical care services
 - b. Successful performance in quality measures, processes, structures and outcomes based on evidence
 - c. Collaboration, communication and partnerships that support a healing environment
2. Contribute to AACN's mission, vision, values and strategic plan as evidenced in the AACN annual report



Acknowledgments

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) appreciates the experts who contributed to the development of the Beacon Award for Excellence (Beacon Award) application and evaluation framework. Their expertise and experience with the program are essential to its ongoing development, ensuring that the Beacon Award remains relevant and grounded in current evidence and trends in healthcare.

A special thank you to our Beacon Program applicants and reviewers for their feedback. This helps us ensure we are meeting your needs and making the program accessible.

Editor and Project Coordinator

Michelle Sanchez, MSN, RN, CPHQ, CENP,
Beacon Award Program Manager,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Contributing Editor

Andrea Schmitt, MSN, RN, CCRN, NPD-BC,
Clinical Practice Specialist, Beacon Award Program,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Contributors

Tracey Birosak, MBA, Business Strategy Manager,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Devin Bowers, DNP, RN, CENP, Associate Chief Clinical
Officer, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Brad Gottschalk, Community Insights Analyst,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Javier Miranda Jr., BA, Beacon Program Associate,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Tao Zheng, PhD, RN, CCRN-CSC-CMC, CHFN, PCCN,
Clinical Practice Specialist, Beacon Award Program,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Production Coordinators

Monica Garcia, MA, Project Manager, Community
Impact, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Editorial Contributors

Jeremy Stevens, BA, Marketing Communications
Strategist, American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Judy Wilkin, BA, Marketing Communications Editor,
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Graphic Design

Deborah DeLisi, Senior Designer, American
Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Julia Kagiwada, Senior Designer, American
Association of Critical-Care Nurses

Andrea Testa, Senior Designer, American Association
of Critical-Care Nurses



Executive Summary

As nurses, we frequently discuss the importance of excellence in our practice, patient care and profession. Pursuing excellence can lead us on various paths, such as continuing education, professional growth, certification and achieving a better work-life balance.

In healthcare organizations, excellence is the sum of many complex parts. To recognize excellence at the unit level, where direct care nurses have the greatest impact on outcomes, the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) established the Beacon Award for Excellence (Beacon Award) in 2003. As the undisputed leader in acute, progressive and critical care nursing, AACN possesses the knowledge and data to set the standards for acute and critical care nursing and the environments where this care is provided. When the Beacon Award program began, AACN aspired to provide hospitals and healthcare systems with a way to respond to increasing concerns about quality and safety and to monitor the evolution of clinical care. Disseminating data insights and trends to key partners and influencers supports shared learning from Beacon Award participants to improve patient care.

For patients and their families, the Beacon Award signifies exceptional care in a unit that puts them first.

For nurses, this award can mean a positive and supportive work environment with greater collaboration, higher morale and lower turnover (Ulrich B, Cassidy L, Barden C, Varn-Davis N, Delgado S, 2022). Every unit uses innovation and implementation science to improve outcomes; the Beacon Award application allows your unit to showcase its accomplishments and to be recognized for them. As individual units strive for excellence, the Beacon Award program's three levels of designation – bronze, silver and gold – recognize progression along the unit's journey of excellence.

Beacon Award Value

AACN provides qualifying units with meaningful recognition and feedback to support their ongoing improvement. In addition, units that have been recognized with a Beacon Award report the following:

Influence and Recognition

Units that receive the Beacon Award set the standard for excellence in patient care environments by collecting and using evidence-based information to improve patient outcomes, as well as patient, family and staff satisfaction. Patient safety and quality programs, along with other recognition programs, regard the Beacon Award as a significant achievement in their evaluation process.



Recruitment and Retention

Prospective employees consider the Beacon Award an indicator of a healthy work environment and a place where the quality of care is tied directly to the quality of staff. Nurses who work in these units know their skills and expertise are appreciated and valued. This appreciation, in turn, boosts retention and employee engagement while attracting new staff.

Credibility

Consumers, who pay close attention to the quality of care when making decisions about their healthcare, consider Beacon Award recognition when choosing a hospital for treatment.

Beacon Award for Excellence - Reimagined

Since AACN believes excellence is a continual journey, the Beacon Award program evolves alongside the dynamic healthcare environment, which is influenced by changes in evidence, practice, regulation and operations.

The experiences of applicants, awardees, reviewers and AACN staff led to the current philosophy and structure of the program. It is recognized that units and facilities influence performance based on the methods and initiatives to support nurses in providing optimal care and ensuring a healthy work environment. When assessing nursing excellence, AACN believes the outcomes achieved are as important as the methods to achieve them.

Using a robust data-driven approach, AACN has validated the outcomes, unit processes and team characteristics, which have a profound impact on nursing excellence based on research, current industry standards and input from AACN subject matter experts and community members.

The program design focuses on the stories that showcase excellence in your unit while standardizing the collection of data from process measures, including the AACN Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT).

The Beacon Award program encourages units at all stages on their journey to excellence to engage with AACN to support continual measurement and improvement.

When a unit partners with AACN through the Beacon Award program, in addition to meaningful recognition, they receive valuable insights based on their application compared with other applicants as well as current evidence and best practices.



Our Logo

The Beacon Award logo reflects the progression of the program. The graphic representation of a beacon of light, or sun, is dimensional, uplifting and radiant. The Beacon Award guides nursing units on their journeys to excellence by measuring their successes. For participants, it illuminates the path for those on a journey, so that obstacles are seen, identified and overcome.

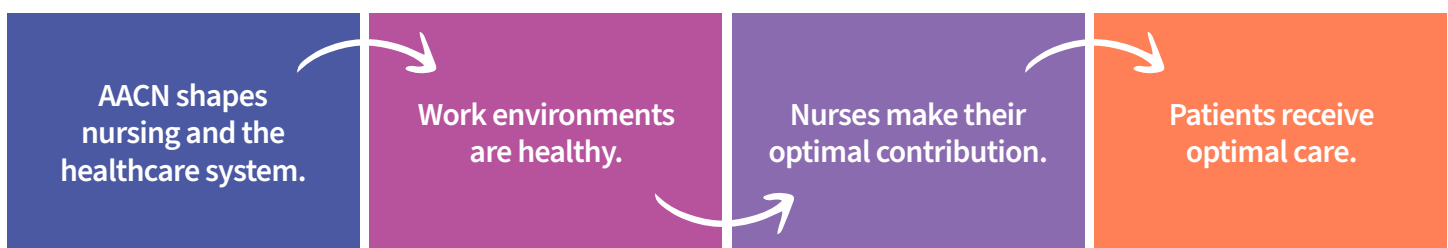
The colors in the light ray represent the spectrum from night to day. From the darkness of unexpected events that challenge a unit to the successes gained from implementing forward-thinking strategies, the spectrum represents a unit's experiences and its 24-hour operations. This symbolism extends to each nurse individually and to the unit collectively.

The bold font symbolizes a unit taking pride and ownership, announcing their achievement with dignity and assurance. The traditional "Beacon blue" color remains in the logo, reinforcing evolution, not reinvention.



Making an Impact on Healthcare

AACN strives to improve healthcare by helping nurses influence and improve patient safety, outcomes and healthy work environments. We believe patient safety is better achieved when nurses advocate for changes to the healthcare system that improve the delivery of patient care. Consumers believe this too, as evidenced by the [Gallup Poll](#), which measures how Americans view the honesty and ethics of professions. Nurses have been rated as having the highest ethical standards year over year (Saad, 2025).



AACN uses these **four impact statements** to drive the work of the Association. Healthcare facilities strive to achieve the same four impacts in their daily operations. Participating in the AACN Beacon Award program is an example of how work at the unit level can make significant improvements in the hospital and health system. Having multiple units participate in the program extends the ability to appreciate these outcomes on a broader scale.



AACN shapes nursing and the healthcare system.

In addition to providing meaningful recognition for units and their staff, the Beacon Award program serves as one of AACN's platforms to gather data for setting standards of excellence. In the application, units demonstrate how they use implementation science and process improvements to achieve optimal outcomes. Nurses lead and collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to improve outcomes to reach the standards of excellence set by AACN, regulatory organizations or other industry leaders. All units that participate in the Beacon Award program describe improvements that shape their practice, processes and performance.

Work environments are healthy.

Having a healthy work environment is a necessary foundation for providing high-quality patient care.



AACN has established six essential Healthy Work Environment (HWE) Standards that produce effective and sustainable outcomes for patients and nurses.

Elements of the HWE standards have always been integrated into the application and evaluation framework for the Beacon Award, and now this connection has been formalized in the application process. In the process of applying, units begin by assessing the health of their work environment using the [AACN Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool](#) (HWEAT) and use the information to implement changes based on the HWE standards. Nurses in units applying for or that have been recognized with a Beacon Award report healthier work environments and higher quality of patient care (Ulrich, Cassidy, Barden, Varn-Davis, Delgado, 2022).

Nurses make their optimal contribution.

Nurse staffing is a persistent and significant barrier to delivering optimal patient care, and less than optimal staffing is one of the most dangerous threats to patient safety and nurse well-being. In partnership with the American Nurses Association, American Organization for Nursing Leadership, Healthcare Financial Management Association and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, AACN led an initiative to identify strategies that address the staffing crisis in acute and critical care. AACN convened Partners for Nurse Staffing, which launched a [Nurse Staffing Think Tank](#) and a Nurse Staffing Task Force. Together, this group created new staffing solutions that advance patient outcomes while ensuring better work environments for nurses and all other members of the healthcare team.

The Beacon Award application is an opportunity for units to showcase how nurses make their optimal contributions and what outcomes result from their contributions. Several areas reflect this approach, including:

- Maximizing nurses' roles considering:
 - Individual scope of practice
 - Education and preparation of individual nurses
 - Regulatory requirements
- Aligning patient needs and nurse competencies
- Providing meaningful recognition
- Ensuring quality, safety and satisfaction
- Orienting and validating competencies
- Establishing a personal and professional learning and development structure
- Resolving ethical issues and moral distress
- Collaborating with others to provide patient care

Nurses' collective experiences prepare and position them to lead innovation and change management to improve areas of opportunity. Participating in the Beacon Award program creates a pathway to encourage all nurses to improve their work environments and the care of patients and families.

As units share their successes and learnings, these improvements can be expanded across the hospital and health system.



Patients receive optimal care.

The best patient care delivery can be achieved when there is a commitment from hospital leaders to partner with all staff to identify and address challenges. Creating a culture that supports change requires empowering and engaging nurses to use their expertise to advocate and implement what is best for their patients. Through education, innovation and setting standards, AACN raises the bar for the care of patients and families. While other organizations offer resources designed for nurse leaders, the Beacon Award program is a collaborative approach between unit leaders and staff to improve the care and experiences of everyone on the unit.

Participating in the Beacon Award for Excellence Program

Beacon Award Application

The comprehensive Beacon Award program modules reflect the areas in which nurses have the most significant influence on healthcare:

Patient Outcomes, Work Environment and Nursing Workforce.

Each module helps units share the processes used by direct care nurses and nurse leaders to achieve positive unit outcomes. The unit is required to provide supporting evidence within the following dimensions:

- Quantitative data measures predetermined by AACN
- Process measures specific to the focus of each module
- Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT) scores
- Qualitative measures - unit exemplars

All reported data must be from the calendar year before submission. Demographics are also collected to enable an appropriate analysis of the Beacon Award program data. Details and definitions related to the award criteria may change and are included in the module-specific handbooks, which are available at no charge after your application purchase.

Not ready to apply for the Beacon Award yet? We also offer individual module sales for a unit that wants to start gradually on its journey!



Demographic Questions

Demographic questions include the following:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| • Facility type | • Number of unit beds | • Current or previous Beacon Unit awardee |
| • Hospital system affiliation | • Patient population | • Current or previous Magnet® Recognized Hospital |
| • Hospital setting | • Average length of stay | • Union or collective bargaining unit |
| • Number of licensed hospital beds | • Average daily census | |
| • Unit type | • RN education | |
| | • Staff skill mix | |



Patient Outcomes

In the Patient Outcomes Module, units are asked to report their patient outcomes for the measures outlined below. These measures are required and must be reported per AACN's requirements. Alternative data is not permitted. Therefore, if a unit does not collect this data, it will not be eligible to complete this module.

Quantitative Data Measures

- Catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTIs)
- Central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSIs)
- Ventilator-associated events (VAEs) - ***Required only for units caring for patients who require ventilators. Both the unit's ability to report this data and its performance are considered in the scoring.***
 - Possible ventilator-associated pneumonia (PVAP) - Adult
 - Pediatric ventilator-associated events (PedVAEs) - Pediatric and/or neonatal
- Unit-acquired pressure injury prevalence
- Falls
 - Total falls
 - Falls with Injury
- Barcode medication administration scanning compliance

Process Measures

Process measure data is collected using standardized tables for your unit to complete, most often by checking/selecting applicable responses.

- Patient quality and safety

HWEAT Scores

- Effective Decision Making
- True Collaboration

Qualitative Exemplars

Provide two written responses, each describing a project or initiative your unit implemented to address an identified issue or opportunity for improvement that positively impacted patient outcomes.

Responses should focus on unit-level initiatives completed during the year prior to applying. Each response should align with the module and be related to practices that support quality, safety, patient outcomes or patient satisfaction. These responses can include projects related to the quantitative data, HWEAT scores, and process measures in the module. Responses can relate to the outcome measures required by AACN or be specific to your specialty area or patient population. Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Unit-acquired infections/conditions
- Safe medication practices
- Alarm or alert fatigue
- Safe patient handling/mobility support
- Implementation of new technology
- ICU Liberation

Note: *One project per response, maximum of 1,000 words each.*

Work Environment

The work environment creates an atmosphere that helps determine the success of the unit staff when providing care. In the Work Environment Module, units are asked to share information about processes, initiatives and outcomes that reflect crucial elements for the success of the unit's team that are related to the work environment.

Quantitative Data Measures

- Travel, contract, agency and float pool usage
- RN full-time equivalents (FTEs) - budget and actual
- LPN/LVN full-time equivalents (FTEs) - budget and actual, if applicable
- Voluntary RN turnover
- RN participation rate in HWEAT survey

Process Measures

Process measure data is collected using standardized tables for your unit to complete, most often by checking/selecting applicable responses.

- Unit leader visibility
- Nurse well-being
- AACN Synergy Model
- Approach to staffing

HWEAT Scores

- Appropriate Staffing
- Authentic Leadership

Qualitative Exemplars

Provide two written responses, each describing a project or initiative your unit implemented to address an identified issue or opportunity for improvement if the project positively impacted the work environment.

Responses should focus on unit-level initiatives completed during the year prior to applying. Each response should align with the module and be related to practices that support the environment in which nurses work. Responses can include projects related to the quantitative data, HWEAT scores and process measures in the module. Possible topics may include but are not limited to:

- Staffing
- Retention
- Recognition
- Workplace safety or violence prevention

Note: *One project per response, maximum of 1,000 words each.*

Nursing Workforce

Each nurse brings their own experience and expertise to influence the care provided in their unit. In the Nursing Workforce Module, units are asked to share information about the nurses who work on the unit as well as support for the personal and professional growth and development of staff.

Quantitative Data Measures

- Professional nursing certification
- Length of time as a licensed RN
- RN length of time employed on unit
- RN membership in professional organization

Process Measures

Process measure data is collected using standardized tables for your unit to complete, most often by checking/selecting applicable responses.

- Professional development and continuing education
- Conference attendance
- Certification preparation, testing, renewal and/or recognition
- Transition to practice
- Transition to nursing leadership

HWEAT Scores

- Skilled Communication
- Meaningful Recognition

Qualitative Exemplars

Provide two written responses, each describing a project or initiative your unit implemented to address an identified issue or opportunity for improvement that positively impacted the nursing workforce.

Responses should focus on unit-level initiatives completed during the year prior to applying. Each response should align with the module and be related to practices that support the growth and development of the nurses. Responses can include projects related to the quantitative data, HWEAT scores and process measures in the module. Possible topics may include but are not limited to:

- Orientation
- Competency
- Precepting
- Mentorship
- Professional development

Note: *One project per response, maximum of 1,000 words each.*



Beacon Award Evaluation Framework

Aside from the demographic questions, all submitted data is evaluated to determine Beacon Award recipients as well as additional recognition for top-tier performance. The four levels of the evaluation framework are measure level, dimension level, module level and Beacon award level. Each framework level has a score determined by the unit's performance compared with all other participants during the same Beacon Award cycle. The score from each level contributes to the score at the next level, ultimately ending with a final percentile score for a Beacon Award if the unit has completed all three modules (**Patient Outcomes, Work Environment and Nursing Workforce**) in one annual cycle.



Measure Level

The measure level is each question on the Beacon Award application. Please note that some questions are included that may not have a weight or score associated with them, because they are pilot questions or are intended to understand your unit's performance without affecting your score.

Dimension Level

The dimension level is the grouping of measure-level questions based on the type of question asked: quantitative, qualitative, process measure or HWEAT score.

- Quantitative measures and HWEAT scores are compared with data submitted by all participants during the same annual cycle.
- Qualitative responses are evaluated and scored by trained individuals who assess the innovation, improvement or excellence reflected in the unit's submission.
- Each process measure has a predetermined number of points based on the question and possible responses.

Module Level

The module level is the weighted combination of the dimension level scores for each module - Patient Outcomes, Work Environment and Nursing Workforce. Quantitative data and qualitative responses have an equal weighting and represent the majority of points available for each module. The process measures and HWEAT scores are viewed as contributing factors and scored at a lower weight.

Award Level

The award level reflects the combination of scores for each module. Qualifying units receive a Beacon Award, which includes AACN recognition and promotional materials as well as recognition at NTI.

1. Each question or measure is scored:
 - a. Quantitative responses and HWEAT scores are compared with aggregate data from the cycle.
 - b. Process measures and qualitative responses are compared with AACN's established standards and then compared with aggregate data from the cycle.
2. Individual question scores are combined to achieve a score for each dimension (HWEAT, quantitative, qualitative, process).
3. The dimension level scores are weighted and combined to establish a module score for each completed module.
4. Units completing all three modules within the same cycle will have their module scores combined to produce a final score that determines Beacon Award designation.

Each unit receives an extensive feedback report that includes:

- The score for each measure, including a benchmark comparison and dimension, module and/or award-level scores, as appropriate
- Identified areas of strengths and opportunities
- Resources to support the unit's journey

Audits

Audits of Beacon Award applicants are a routine part of the Beacon Award program's approach to quality assurance. Audits are conducted randomly after a unit's application is submitted. The primary contact for the unit will receive an email informing them about the audit and the next steps. It is the unit's responsibility to ensure a current contact is documented for the unit.

Failure to respond to an audit, pass an audit or provide the requested documentation promptly may result in ineligibility for the Beacon Award. Refunds will not be issued in the case of failure or non-response to an audit. Revocation of an award may be appealed.

Recognition

AACN recognizes that units seek the Beacon Award for meaningful recognition on their journey to excellence, as represented by the bronze-, silver- and gold-level Beacon Award. As previously mentioned, the updated Beacon Award program offers additional recognition opportunities for individual modules. The primary contact for the unit will receive details about the unit's results and access to recognition and promotional information. Recognition from AACN for the Beacon Award includes an award plaque, premier recognition activities at NTI and website/social media mentions.

We are excited to recognize your unit and staff for the incredible contributions you make every day!

Applicants From International Hospitals

We welcome international units to participate in the Beacon Award program and ask that they contact a Beacon team member at beacon@aacn.org before purchasing an application. Applicants from international facilities are required to submit the same data as domestic facilities.



Beacon Award Annual Cycle

The design of the Beacon Award program requires certain activities to be completed and/or submitted at specific times, as the award runs on an annual cycle. Applicants must meet posted deadlines to apply.

1. Preparation: Before Dec. 31

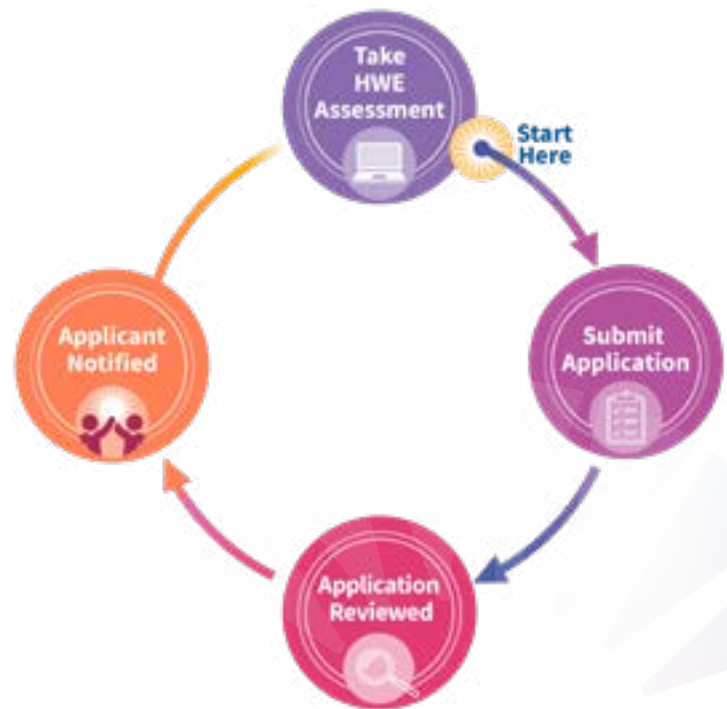
- Review AACN resources, and engage with Beacon Award staff as needed to prepare for participation.
- Complete the AACN Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT).
- Start thinking about projects, improvements and achievements your unit is making that could be developed into qualitative exemplars.

2. Purchase and Submission: Feb. 1-Aug. 31

- Your purchase provides access to criteria questions and definitions.
- Complete the entry of required elements via an online platform.

3. Evaluation and Notification: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

- Quantitative responses, process measures and HWEAT scores undergo automated scoring and benchmarking, as appropriate.
- Qualitative responses are reviewed and scored by trained individuals.
- All elements are considered in the overall scoring for the Beacon Award.



When the unit receives its results from AACN, it also receives an analysis and evaluation of its responses, including benchmark comparisons. An awarded unit also receives access to recognition and promotional materials to celebrate its achievement.

Pricing

The initial application fee is \$3,500 for all three modules. Pricing reflects the enhanced features and benefits of the program and represents a compelling value proposition for your unit's continual improvement journey. Participating in the program contributes to improved outcomes, nurse retention and satisfaction. At the same time, the annual design assists units in monitoring their improvement efforts yearly, ensuring progress is regularly assessed and tracked.

Beacon units purchasing before their award expires will receive a redesignation rate of \$2,975.

Bulk Pricing Discount

Boost the impact of Beacon while lowering the price per unit! Bulk pricing can be applied to initial or redesignation application fees and must be used in one application year. Please email beacon@aacn.org for bulk purchases.

**Initial
Application Fee**
\$3,500

**Redesignation
Application Fee**
\$2,975

# of Units	Price per Unit	Savings
2	\$3,150	10%
3-5	\$2,850	20%
6-9	\$2,500	30%
10+	\$2,300	35%

Individual Modules

For units looking to participate in 1 or 2 modules, we offer a flexible approach allowing modules to be purchased individually.

# of Modules	Price per Module	Approximate Savings
2	\$1,300	N/A
2	\$1,150	12%
3-5	\$1,050	19%
6-9	\$950	27%
10+	\$850	35%

Please note that recognition will be given to units who participate in individual modules; however, units that wish to earn the overall Beacon Award status must participate in the full program, which includes all three modules.



Purchasing

Units wishing to participate in the Beacon Award for Excellence program can purchase access to the modules or bundle through our website. Once the information is provided in the purchase process, including contact information and demographics, the unit can pay by credit card or print an invoice to send with a check. Access to the module handbooks and application will not be granted until payment is received.

Refund policy

The application fee for the Beacon Award is strictly nonrefundable.

This policy applies regardless of the application's outcome or if the applicant chooses to withdraw their submission after payment has been processed. If your unit has extenuating circumstances, we will allow a one-time deferral to apply in the following year.

Statement Regarding the Use of Data in AACN's Beacon Award Program

AACN is a non-profit organization that promotes and enhances consumer health and safety by establishing and maintaining high standards of professional practice excellence through certification, certification renewal, and educating nurses in the care of acutely and critically ill patients and their families; and each unit has requested to participate in the AACN Beacon Award for Excellence Program in an effort to explore nursing excellence and recognition opportunities by participating in the AACN Beacon Award program.

1. Purpose

Through participation, each unit will share certain data with the AACN Beacon Award for Excellence Program.

2. Data Description

The data covered includes information submitted in the AACN Beacon Award for Excellence Application:

- Demographic information about the unit and hospital for data classification purposes
- Specific quantitative measures, process measures, Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool Scores and qualitative measures included

3. Permitted Uses

AACN may use the data solely for the following purposes:

- Analysis to determine AACN Beacon Award for Excellence Designation
- De-identified data from the application may be shared within AACN to inform the programs, products and services offered by the organization.
- De-identified data from the application may be shared outside of AACN in aggregate.



4. Data Security

AACN agrees to implement appropriate security measures to protect the data, including:

- Physical security of data/files; electronic security of data/files in alignment with AACN policies and procedures
- AACN staff and approved AACN Beacon Award Program volunteers will have access to data and identifying information

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though AACN is taking precautions to protect applicant's privacy, units should be aware that information sent through email could be read by a third party.

Data may exist on backups and server logs beyond the timeframe of an application cycle.

Applicant's confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. AACN cannot guarantee against the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

AACN shall carry and maintain a Cyber Insurance policy in the amount of \$2,000,000, in the event of a data breach due to the willful negligence on the part of AACN.

5. Confidentiality

AACN agrees to keep the data confidential and not to disclose it to any third parties without written consent, except as required by law.

6. Data Retention and Destruction

AACN agrees to retain the data only for the duration necessary to fulfill the purposes outlined in this program and to securely destroy the data thereafter.

7. Publication and Reporting

Any publication or report resulting from the use of the data shall acknowledge the applicant as the source of the data, except when the data is published or reported in aggregate.

8. Indemnification

AACN agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the applicant from any claims, losses, or damages arising from AACN's use of the data.

9. Term and Termination

This applies from the time the unit purchases their application until the unit is notified of the result of their application.

Resources

Certification

Board certification. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/certification?tab=First-Time%20Certification>

CCRN Adult. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/certification/get-certified/ccrn-adult>

PCCN Adult. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/certification/get-certified/pccn-adult>

CCRN Pediatric. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/certification/get-certified/ccrn-peds>

CCRN Neonatal. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/certification/get-certified/ccrn-neo>

Healthy Work Environments

Healthy work environments. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/healthy-work-environments>

Hospital-Acquired Condition Prevention

Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection

Urinary tract Infections (UTI) events: Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection (CAUTI) and Non-Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) Events Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - National Healthcare Safety Network. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/pdfs/pscmanual/7psccauticurrent.pdf>

Central Line-Associated Bloodstream Infection

Bloodstream Infection Event (Central Line-Associated Bloodstream and Non-Central Line Associated Bloodstream Infection). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Healthcare Safety Network. Accessed October 16, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/pdfs/pscmanual/4psc_clabscurrent.pdf

Fall Prevention

CDC STEADI: Best Practices for Developing an Inpatient Program to Prevent Older Adult Falls After Discharge. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – STEADI: Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/STEADI-inpatient-guide-508.pdf>

Dykes PC, Sousane Z, Mossburg SE. The Ongoing Journey to Prevent Patient Falls. PSNet [internet]. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, US Department of Health and Human Services. 2024. <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/perspective/ongoing-journey-prevent-patient-falls>

Li, Susan et al. Falls in hospitalized patients and preventative strategies: A narrative review. American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry: Open Science, Education and Practice. 5 (March 2025):1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.osep.2024.10.004>

Medication Safety

ISMP targeted medication safety best practices for hospitals 2024-2025. Institute for Safe Medication Practices. Accessed November 20, 2025. https://online.ecri.org/hubfs/ISMP/Resources/ISMP_TargetedMedicationSafetyBestPractices_Hospitals.pdf



Pressure Injury Prevention

International pressure ulcer/injury guideline. National Pressure Injury Advisory Panel. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://npiap.com/page/InternationalGuidelines>

Ventilator-Associated Event Prevention

Pediatric Ventilator-Associated Events (PedVAE). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Healthcare Safety Network. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/pdfs/pscmanual/pedvae-current-508.pdf>

Ventilator-Associated Event (VAE). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Healthcare Safety Network. Accessed October 16, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/pdfs/pscmanual/10-vae_final.pdf

Leadership

Guiding principles for nurse leaders. American Organization for Nursing Leadership. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.aonl.org/resources/guiding-principles>

Professional Development

AACN Clinical Scene Investigator (CSI) Academy. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/csi-academy?tab=Nurses%20Leading%20Innovation>

AACN Competence Framework for Progressive and Critical Care: Initial Competency 2022. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/standards/aacn-competence-framework-for-progressive-and-critical-care>

AACN Online Courses. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/education/online-courses>

AACN Podcast Series. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/education/podcast-series>

AACN Synergy Model for Patient Care. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/aacn-standards/synergy-model>

Benner P. From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice, Commemorative Edition. Prentice-Hall; 2021.

Hardin SR, Kaplow R. Synergy for Clinical Excellence. Jones & Bartlett Learning; 2017.

Riess DL. Supporting new graduate nurses' transition to practice. Nursing. 2023; 53 (9): 20-23. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NURSE.0000946776.70784.69>

Staffing

2025 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report. NSI Nursing Solutions. Accessed October 16, 2025. https://www.nsinursingsolutions.com/documents/library/nsi_national_health_care_retention_report.pdf

AACN Standards for Appropriate Staffing in Adult Critical Care. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/standards/aacn-standards-for-appropriate-staffing-in-adult-critical-care>

AACN Standards for Appropriate Staffing in Adult Progressive Care. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/standards/aacn-standards-for-appropriate-staffing-in-adult-progressive-care>

Delgado S. Nurse staffing: ratios, reimbursement and the work environment. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.aacn.org/blog/nurse-staffing-ratios-reimbursement-and-the-work-environment>

Nurse staffing. American Nurses Association. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nurse-staffing/>



Nurse staffing task force. American Nurses Association. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nurse-staffing/nurse-staffing-task-force/>

Nurse staffing think tank: Priority topics and recommendations. Partners for Nursing Staffing Think Tank. Accessed December 4, 2024. <https://www.nursingworld.org/test-landing/nurse-staffing-task-force/nurse-staffing-think-tank/>

Staffing in Acute and Critical Care. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed October 16, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/clinical-resources/staffing>

Ulrich B, Cassidy L, Barden C, Varn-Davis N, Delgado S. National nurse work environments - October 2021: a status report. Crit Care Nurse. 2021;42(5):58-70. <https://doi.org/10.4037/ccn2022798>

Ye Y, Chandrasekaran A. The impact of nurse staffing on turnover and quality: an empirical examination of nursing care within hospital units. Journal of Operations Management. 2023;69(7):1124–1152. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joom.1245>

Well-Being

American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Accessed November 20, 2025. <https://www.aacn.org/clinical-resources/well-being>





Beacon Award for Excellence



aacn.org | beacon@aacn.org

AACN Beacon Award for Excellence

© 2025 American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. All rights reserved.