

Funding to support co-created 'Start Early' program aimed at increasing degree completion rates

DENVER, Dec. 19, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- The DaVita Giving Foundation has awarded Western Governors University's (WGU) Michael O. Leavitt School of Health (LSH) a \$1 million grant over the next three years to support more than 1,500 nursing students in **Start Early**, a program co-created by DaVita Inc. and WGU to help increase nursing degree completion at the university nationwide.

Approximately 100,000 registered nurses left the workforce from 2020-2022, and another 610,000 RNs have expressed an "intent to leave" by 2027 due to stress, burnout and retirement. The investment in Start Early will help the next generation of nurses to be supported from the onset of their careers while still in school through targeted assistance.

The WGU Start Early program will provide resources for nursing students who demonstrate financial barriers to their education and will support their efforts to complete their nursing degree. These resources include approximately \$400,000 for prelicensure scholarship support, approximately \$360,000 for prelicensure non-tuition support (for example, childcare costs and scrubs) and approximately \$240,000 for non-tuition wrap-around costs (for example, out-of-pocket travel expenses associated with students' mandatory attendance at clinical simulation learning labs). Scholarship applications will open January 15.

Additionally, through the funding from the DaVita Giving Foundation, up to 80 students annually will receive critical, need-based scholarships to help them afford their education. These scholarships will be focused on underserved student populations in the following cities and counties:

- Kansas City, Missouri – Jackson, Clay, Cass and Platte counties.
- Texoma (region in Texas and Oklahoma) – Bryan, Carter, Johnston, Love and Marshall counties (Oklahoma) and Cooke, Fannin and Grayson counties (Texas).
- Charlotte, North Carolina – Alexander, Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Iredell, Mecklenburg and Union counties.

Underserved student populations include students of color, students with comparatively lower incomes, students in geographically remote areas and/or students who are the first in their families to attend a university.

"Working alongside WGU to create the Start Early program and help remove financial barriers for students pursuing a future in nursing is such important work as the U.S. experiences a critical shortage of this vital workforce," says Tina Livaudais, chief nursing officer for DaVita. "In 2021 alone, WGU produced 17% of the nation's registered nurses earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing – and if the investment from the DaVita Giving Foundation helps more students earn their degree, then it's an investment really well-spent."

Funds will support the WGU Leavitt School of Health's Prelicensure program, which is uniquely positioned to help alleviate pressures on the nursing workforce shortage while working toward making the health care system more equitable. The program is expected to help fill workforce shortages nationwide through the education of more than 13,000 students and approximately 4,800 new qualified nurse graduates by 2027.

"We thank the DaVita Giving Foundation for its support as we broaden access to our high-quality nursing programs to yield skilled and compassionate graduates to tackle the nursing shortage in the country," said Keith Smith, senior vice president, Leavitt School of Health, WGU. "Enhancing diversity, equity and inclusion in the health and higher education sectors to create more pathways to opportunity is a prime goal of the Leavitt School of Health, and this grant certainly helps us take a step forward in the direction to achieving our goal."

In selecting grant recipients, the DaVita Giving Foundation is committed to engaging with local and global communities. Specifically, it seeks to create pathways to health care with nurses and patient care technicians as well as early childhood education.

Within the broader organization, DaVita Kidney Care is working to help close the nursing workforce shortage via a three-pronged strategy. First, DaVita is offering a nephrology specialty nursing school curriculum to

universities at no cost to them. Second, students participating in the curriculum join clinical internships that provide an immersive experience working alongside DaVita caregivers. Third, DaVita has a residency program to help newly hired nurses feel supported and properly trained during their first year at DaVita.

To learn more about DaVita's giving and community partnerships, visit [DaVita.com/About](https://www.davita.com/about).

About Michael O. Leavitt School of Health (LSH)

The school, named in [honor](#) of the former governor of Utah and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, was established in 2006 with the mission to make a difference in the fields of healthcare, nursing, and higher education through [competency-based](#) education. LSH has educated 2 percent of the nation's registered nurses, representing more than 170,000 jobs in the healthcare industry, according to the [Utah Foundation Research Brief](#). More than 20,000 students are currently enrolled at LSH and more than 100,000 have successfully graduated. Learn more at [Leavitt School of Health \(wgu.edu\)](https://www.leavittschool.edu).

About WGU

Established in 1997 by 19 U.S. governors with a mission to expand access to high-quality, affordable higher education, online, nonprofit WGU now serves more than 130,000 students nationwide and has more than 300,000 graduates in all 50 states. Driving innovation as the nation's leading competency-based university, WGU has been recognized by the White House, state leaders, employers, and students as a model that works in postsecondary education. In just 25 years, the university has become a leading influence in changing the lives of individuals and families, and preparing the workforce needed in today's rapidly evolving economy. WGU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, has been named one of Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies, and has been featured on NPR, NBC Nightly News, CNN, and in The New York Times. Learn more at www.wgu.edu.

About DaVita Inc.

DaVita (NYSE: DVA) is a health care provider focused on transforming care delivery to improve quality of life for patients globally. The company is one of the largest providers of kidney care services in the U.S. and has been a leader in clinical quality and innovation for more than 20 years. DaVita cares for patients at every stage and setting along their kidney health journey—from slowing the progression of kidney disease to helping to support transplantation, from acute hospital care to dialysis at home. As of September 30, 2023, DaVita served approximately 201,300 patients at 2,694 outpatient dialysis centers in the United States. The company also operated 359 outpatient dialysis centers in 11 other countries worldwide. DaVita has reduced hospitalizations, improved mortality, and worked collaboratively to propel the kidney care industry to adopt an equitable and high-quality standard of care for all patients, everywhere. To learn more, visit [DaVita.com/About](https://www.davita.com/about).

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