

Helping Arizonans stay healthy

How ASU's new medical school, expanded nursing program and School of Technology for Public Health are advancing health care outcomes in southern Arizona

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
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Story by Matthew Williams

Few issues in Arizona health care loom larger than the shortage of doctors, nurses and other health professionals. According to the Arizona Board of Regents, the state will need more than 14,000 additional nurses and 3,600 physicians by 2030 to close the gap. This shortage has widespread ripple effects across hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities — stretching staff thin and limiting patients' access to care.

To address this challenge, the Board of Regents launched a bold initiative: AZ Healthy Tomorrow. The program calls on each of the state's public universities to accelerate efforts to expand and train the next generation of health care professionals.

ASU has united its health-related colleges, schools and programs under the umbrella of ASU Health to produce more health care professionals and transform health outcomes across the state.

"ASU Health is harnessing and accelerating all of ASU's considerable health assets to improve Arizona's urgent health care needs, now and into the future," says Sherine Gabriel, executive vice president of [ASU Health](#). "In Tucson, ASU Health is carrying out its mission through new local partnerships and programs to develop the nursing and public health workforce."

Training more health care professionals in Tucson and beyond

Lack of local access to nursing education is a large contributor to the state's nursing shortage.

"A major barrier is that nursing curriculum can't be delivered fully online. It requires hands-on training, including simulations that use lifelike mannequins, as well as clinical rotations," explains Salina Bednarek, clinical associate professor at the [Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation](#). "Relocating is simply not feasible for many students, and it limits their options for training."

To overcome that barrier, Edson College has launched Learn Where You Live, a program that delivers high-quality nursing education directly to communities outside Phoenix. In Tucson, the college is expanding this approach through a new partnership with Tucson Medical Center, or TMC.

“Because of this program, students can take coursework synchronously online while ASU brings a mobile simulation unit to their community and coordinates with TMC for clinical placements,” Bednarek says.

The mobile unit carries mannequins from infant to adult, allowing nursing students to practice skills like venipuncture and responding to real-life scenarios such as chest pain or breathing distress. Faculty in a nearby room interact with students through the mannequin in the voice of a patient, and later lead the students through a debrief to reinforce what they learned.

The program builds on Edson College’s unique longitudinal approach to clinical placement: By embedding students at TMC for the duration of the program, they can build connections with the facility’s staff, nurses and providers, enabling an easier transition into the workforce after graduation and directly alleviating the nursing shortage in Tucson.

ASU chose TMC as its local partner because of the institution’s deep experience in education, strong existing laboratory and simulation spaces, and shared commitment to meeting Tucson’s needs.

“We’re helping students stay rooted locally while preparing them to deliver high-quality care,” says Kara Synder, associate chief nursing officer at TMC. “This partnership strengthens our regional workforce and ensures that more nurses are equipped to serve patients where they’re needed most.”

Launching in spring of 2026, Learn Where You Live will begin by supporting eight students in Tucson and 16 students in other regions and expand from there.

“Our whole strategy is to bring high-quality nursing education to learners across Arizona,” says Judith Karshmer, dean of Edson College. “Learn Where You Live is a direct reflection of ASU’s responsibility to improve health across the state.”

ASU’s newly accredited [John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering](#) will also work to address the shortage of physicians.

The school advances an entirely new model for medical education built to prepare a new kind of physician, equipped not just with clinical skills but also cross-trained with the engineering know-how to design new medical technologies, the skills to lead and transform health systems, and the humanistic perspective needed to provide empathetic, person-centric care.

Preparing public health professionals and medical doctors in Pima County

ASU’s work in Tucson also extends into public health, a field that focuses on population-level health outcomes including food insecurity, pollution and sanitation.

Through the newly launched [School of Technology for Public Health](#), part of the greater ASU Health initiative, the university aims to expand statewide access to public health education and train professionals to use technology, data and innovation to solve pressing health challenges, from pandemics to chronic disease.

This will be achieved through partnerships with organizations that include the Pima County Health Department and alongside the work of the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering.

“The state and the country need public health professionals with skills to navigate unprecedented systemic challenges,” says Jyoti Pathak, founding dean of the School of Technology for Public Health.

“Our program is the first of its kind to emphasize the integration of technology and innovation into public health practice. Beginning in 2026, we will offer the degree fully online to reach learners in Tucson, across Arizona and beyond, ensuring that geography is never a barrier to entry,” he says.

Theresa Cullen, director of the Pima County Health Department — and a professor in the school’s Master of Public Health program — highlights the importance of the partnership.

“I’m thrilled that our Pima County Health Department is partnering with ASU Health as they develop and launch the School of Technology for Public Health,” she says. “It’s imperative that public health departments are able to work with academia on innovative education and training, particularly when it comes to the integration of technology and data modernization.”

Partnering across cities for a healthier Arizona

ASU Health’s work in Tucson is part of an even more expansive vision: to dramatically expand clinical health care partnerships to take on pervasive health challenges, triple the nursing workforce, increase the number of physicians and other health professionals, and provide communities with the tools and information to make more informed health decisions.

This mission is why ASU Health is reaching into Tucson — creating more ways for students to become nurses without leaving home, preparing public health leaders who can use new technology to solve tough problems, teaming up with local providers on the front lines, and launching a new accredited medical school for training physicians for all Arizonans — to improve health outcomes in the city and across southern Arizona.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU programs will address the shortage of health care professionals statewide, and specialized mannequins help students train wherever they live. Photos by Mark Peterman (left) and Fervor Creative

Text image(s)



ASU research is working to make bathrooms safer for older adults. Photo by Mark Peterman



Students will train in real-world clinical settings. Photo by Mark Peterman



The integration of cutting-edge technology is key to medical training at ASU. Photo by Mark Peterman