

Profile of Internationally Educated Nurses in Texas

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Background

Employing internationally educated nurses (IENs) is a strategy that has been used to address nursing workforce shortages. Though exact numbers are difficult to calculate, estimates indicate that IENs comprised between 5.6 percent and 16 percent of the nursing workforce in the United States as of 2020.¹ The 2022-2036 health workforce supply and demand projections, published by the Texas Health Professions Resource Center, projected a statewide unmet demand for registered nurses (RNs) of 16 percent in 2023, which was projected to remain the same through 2036.² Assessing the role of IENs in Texas will help to guide nursing workforce planning and development policy. The purpose of this study is to quantify the number of IENs practicing in Texas, identify their demographic characteristics, and assess the role of IENs in the Texas nursing workforce.

Methods

The data presented are from the 2023 Texas Board of Nursing (BON) licensure data.³ Individuals were selected for analysis if they were identified as having an active Texas RN license, a Texas practice address (or mailing address), were employed in a position requiring a nursing license full-time, part-time, or per-diem, and if they responded to the question, “In what country were you initially licensed as an RN or LPN?” on the annual BON licensure renewal questionnaire. Of the 232,187 RNs actively practicing in Texas in 2023, 228,690 responded to this question (98.5 percent). RNs were identified as IENs if they responded to this question with a country other than the United States.

Results

- 21,124 active RNs were identified as IENs, comprising 9.1 percent of the Texas RN workforce (n=232,187).
- The top five countries of original licensure for IENs were the Philippines, India, Canada, Nigeria, and Nepal. Combined, these countries provided 83.4 percent of Texas IENs.
- 84.8 percent of IENs were female, and 15.1 percent were male. In comparison, 87.5 percent of U.S. educated nurses were female, and 12.5 percent were male.
- 73.9 percent of IENs’ highest level of education was a baccalaureate degree in nursing, compared to 55.0 percent of U.S. educated nurses.
- Almost half (47.4 percent) of IENs were over the age of 50, compared to 31.4 percent of U.S. educated nurses.
- Nearly one in four RNs specializing in nephrology were IENs. However, only 5 percent of IENs specialized in nephrology. The most common specialty for IENs was medical surgical at 20.6 percent, and IENs made up 17 percent of all medical surgical RNs.
- Similarly, approximately one in five RNs employed at dialysis centers were IENs, despite only 3.7 percent of IENs working in dialysis centers. While 76.5 percent of IENs worked in hospitals, they made up 11 percent of the hospital RN workforce.
- 45.6 percent of IENs were located in the Gulf Coast region, compared to 25.4 percent of U.S. educated nurses. IENs made up 15.3 percent of RNs in the Gulf Coast.

Demographics of Internationally Educated Nurses

Figure 1. Countries of Original Licensure, 2023

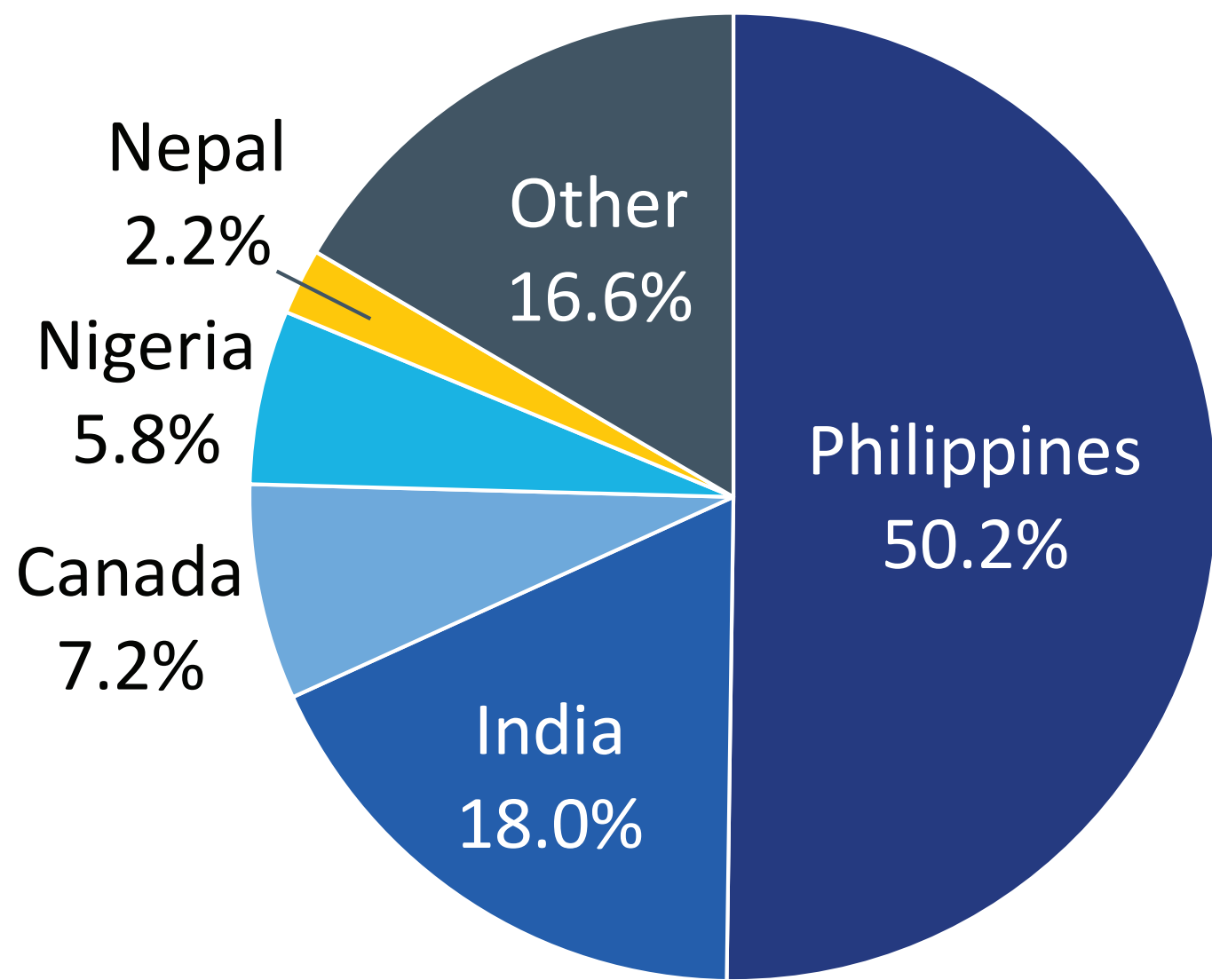


Figure 2. Age Category, IENs vs. U.S. Educated Nurses, 2023

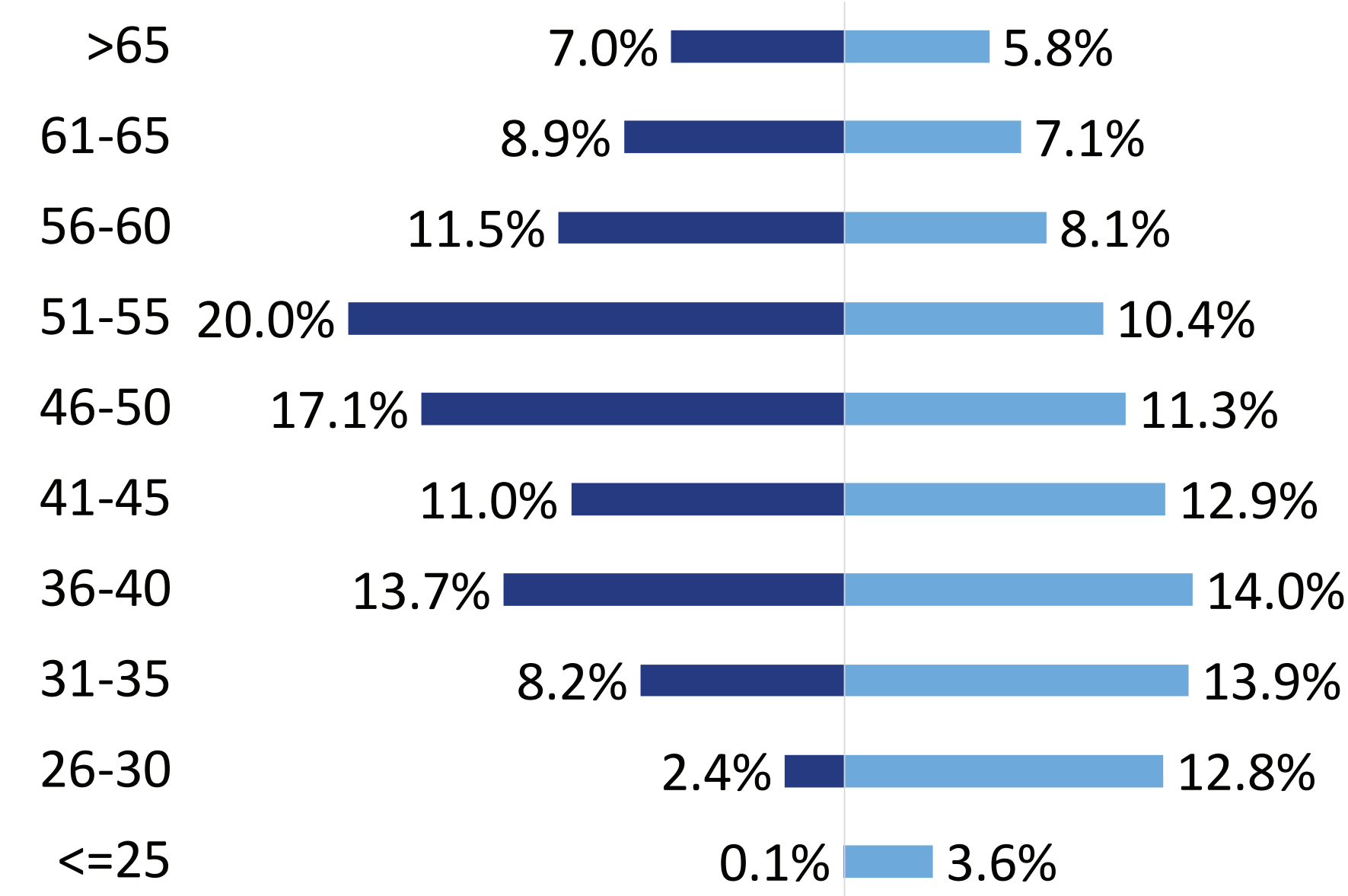
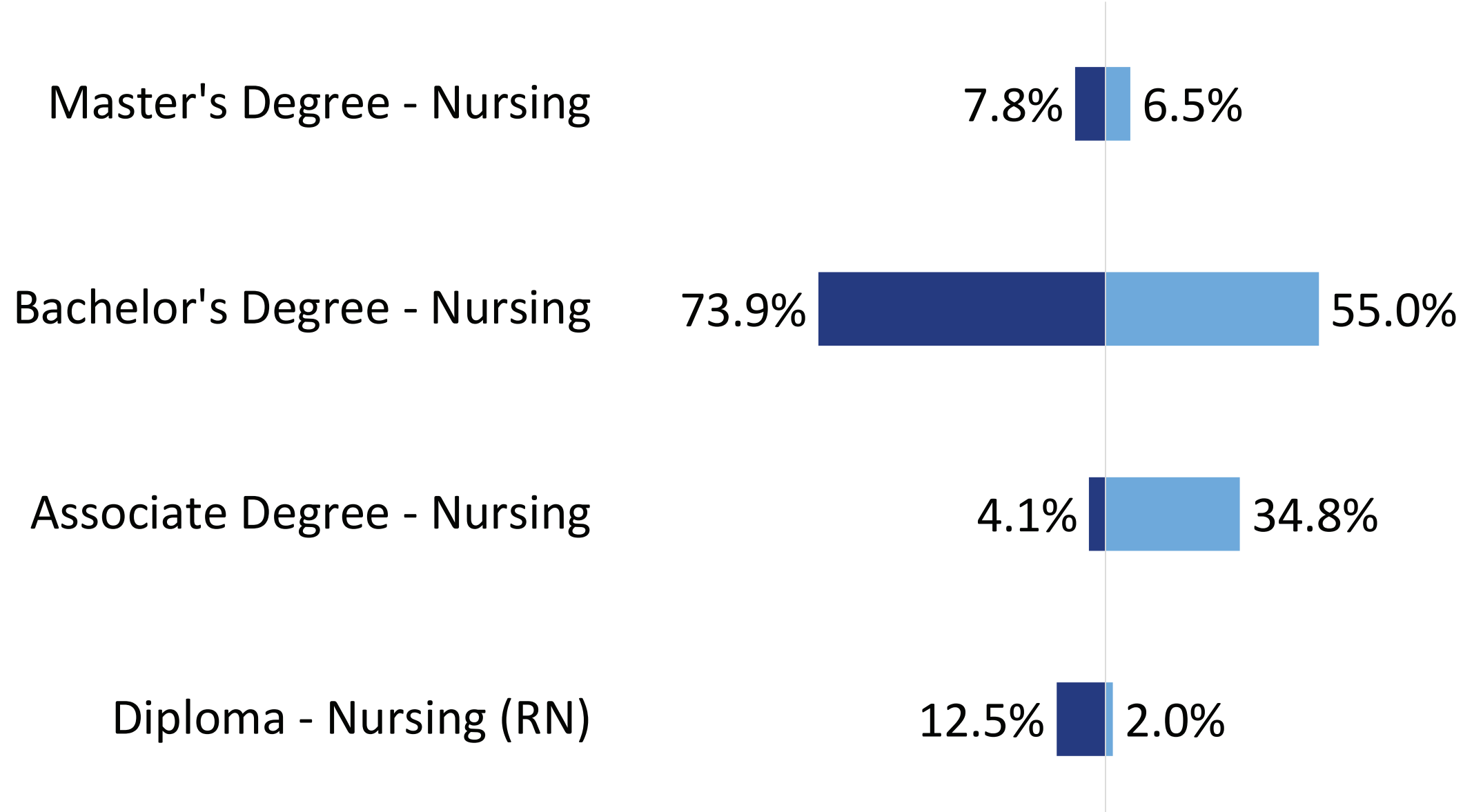


Figure 3. Highest Level of Education, IENs vs. U.S. Educated Nurses, 2023



Internationally Educated Nurses in the Workforce

Figure 4. Top 5 RN Specialties with Highest Proportions of IENs, 2023

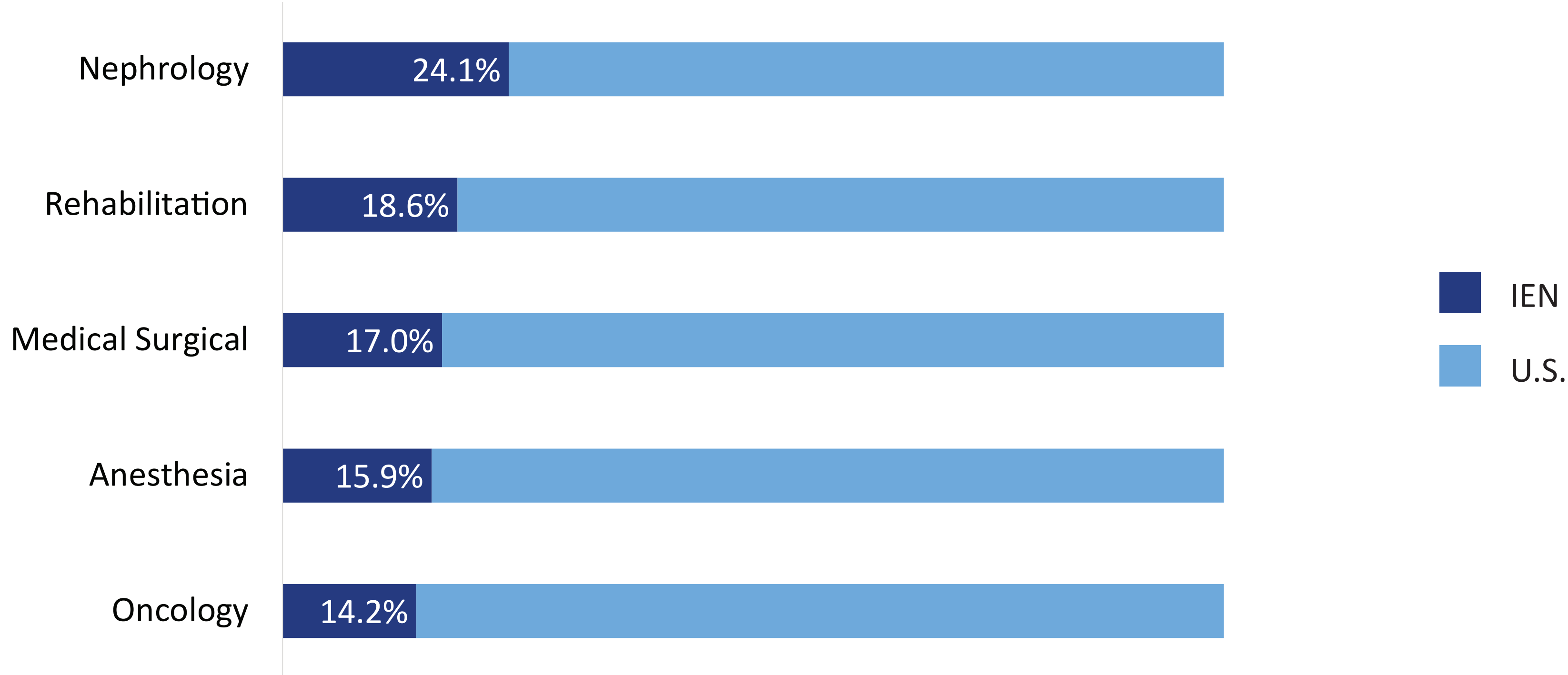


Figure 5. Top 5 RN Practice Settings with Highest Proportions of IENs, 2023

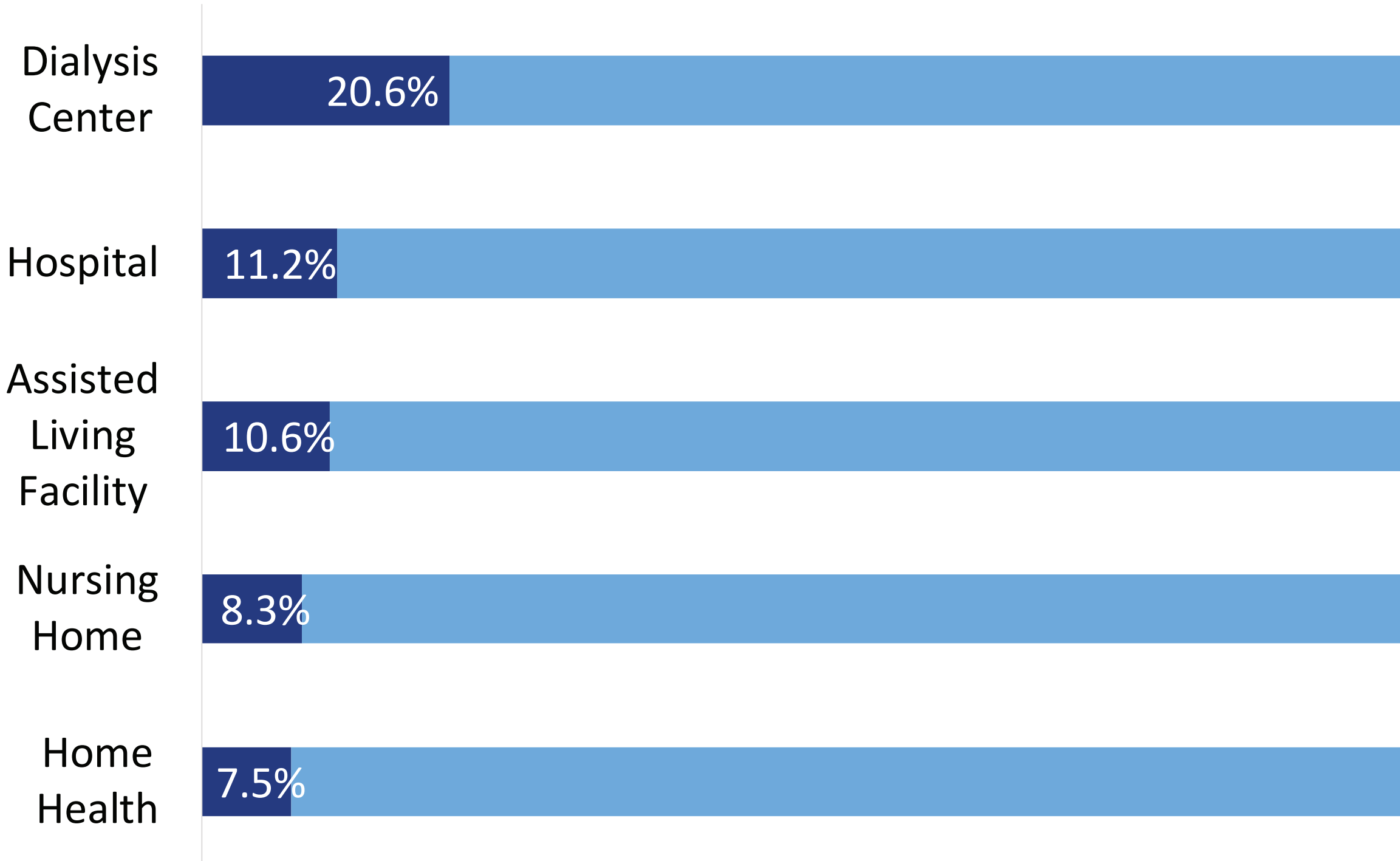
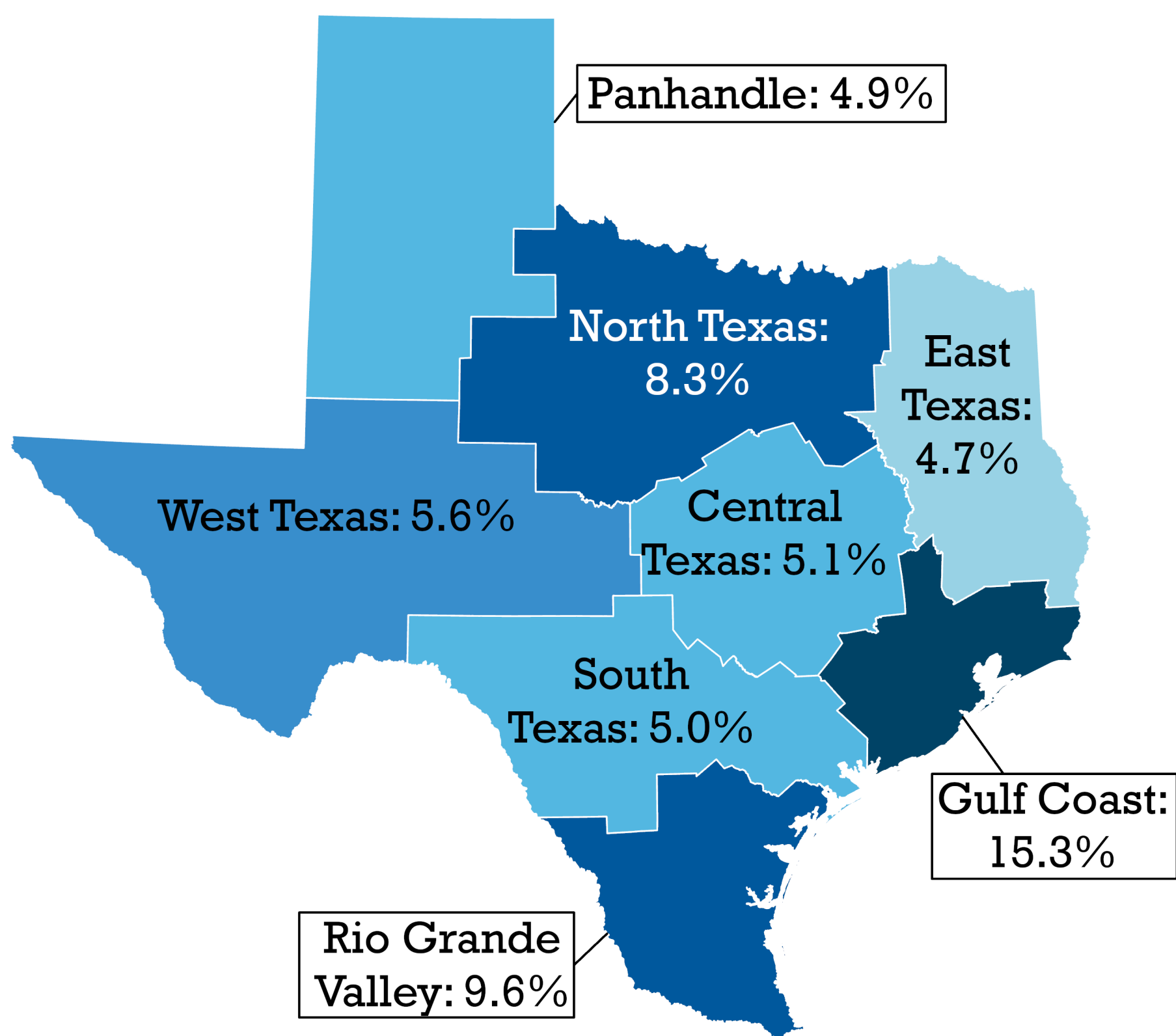


Figure 6. Proportion of IENs in Workforce by Public Health Region⁴



Conclusion

Understanding the demographics of IENs is useful for workforce planning. For instance, IENs are more likely to have a baccalaureate degree in nursing than U.S. educated nurses, but are also more likely to be close to retirement age, which may affect planning for the replacement of baccalaureate-educated nurses in the workforce. Looking at geographic distribution, nearly half of IENs are located in the Gulf Coast; employers should look into strategies to recruit IENs to other parts of the state. This study also found that IENs make up over 10 percent of the RN workforce in dialysis centers and hospitals, and in specialties including nephrology, rehabilitation, medical surgical, anesthesia, and oncology. As such, changes in the supply of IENs may have a more pronounced effect on staffing these settings and specialties. Further research could investigate the impacts of IENs on patient care or strategies in helping IENs transition to a new workplace.

References

1. Ma, C., Ghazal, L., Chou, S., Ea, E., & Squires, A. (2020). Unit utilization of internationally educated nurses and collaboration in U.S. hospitals. *Nursing Economics*, 38(1), 33-40,50. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/unit-utilization-internationally-educated-nurses/docview/2354888913/se-2>
2. Texas Health Data- Workforce Supply & Demand Projections. <https://healthdata.dshs.texas.gov/dashboard/health-care-workforce/hprc/workforce-supply-and-deman>.
3. Texas Department of State Health Services, Center for Nursing Workforce Studies. Licensure data from Texas Board of Nursing as geocoded, processed, and analyzed by CNWS, 2023. www.dshs.texas.gov/nursingworkforce
4. Map made by GIS Team at the Center for Health Statistics at the Texas Department of State Health Services, May 2024.