

Helene Burns, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FAONL

BIOGRAPHY

Helene Burns, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FAONL, FAAN is Chief Nurse Executive at AtlantiCare. In her role, she is responsible for the practice of nursing across the organization, including the oversight of all members of the nursing team.

Dr. Burns collaborates with nursing leadership and team members to create and execute a nursing strategy that standardizes care delivery across the AtlantiCare system. She works closely with clinical and administrative leadership to develop and implement tactics for building healthy communities that are based on veracity, compassion, and accountability.

Dr. Burns joined AtlantiCare in December of 2023 after serving as the Regional Chief Nursing Officer at Jefferson Health in Cherry Hill, NJ. Prior to joining Jefferson, she held various nursing leadership positions in New Jersey, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Texas. She began her career as a nurse at AtlantiCare in 1981.

Dr. Burns earned both her Bachelor of Science and Masters of Science in Nursing from Widener University in Chester, PA and her Doctorate in Nursing Practice from the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, PA.

Dr. Burns has served as the President of New Jersey Organization of Nurse Leaders and is a member of the American Organization of Nursing Leadership (AONL), where she serves on various committees. She is also a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and AONL.

Dr. Burns serves on the Garden State Council, Boy Scouts of America® Women of Achievement Committee, Rutgers School of Nursing Camden Dean's Leadership Circle, and Widener University School of Nursing Advisory Council.

STATEMENTS

1. Statement describing the biggest issue facing AONL and potential strategies to address the issue.

The biggest issue facing AONL is managing the complexities of the nursing workforce. Nurse leaders, particularly nurse managers, are challenged with engaging a diverse workforce while working to improve staff retention. AONL has identified thoughtful strategies to address the issue and innovations that support and empower nurse managers. The challenge is dissemination of these best practices to provide our nurse leaders with actionable tools. According to AHRQ (Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality) dissemination strategies need to be active with multifaceted approaches. Using a social media forum – podcast or webinar – can be an effective way to communicate best practices.

2. Please describe your actions to increase diversity, equity and inclusion within your organization or community.

At my request, the AONL DEIB Toolkit™ is being used by my organization's DEIB Committee. The committee distributed the Nurse Leader Assessment Tool to identify areas to improve DEIB practices. Results are pending. The Committee's next step will be to implement the toolkit's "Nurse

Pledge” to encourage all nurse leaders and clinical nurses in becoming change agents to eliminate bias and racism. Other actions that I am championing include nursing participation in annual local High School Hiring Blitzes, which leverages the diversity of student hires, and, partnering with Cheyney University, the nation’s first historically black university, in mentoring and hiring their students.

3. Please describe the unique perspective or skills you would bring to the AONL Board.

While I was the AONL PAC Chairman, AONL influenced implementation of Title VIII Nursing Workforce Reauthorization Act. Today, this bill funds institutions educating nurses to practice in rural and underserved communities. I contributed to the Nursing Leadership Workforce Compendium identifying best practices to manage nursing workforce complexities. As a member of the AONL Nominating Committee, we championed for equity-minded leaders among board members. As the ONL-NJ President, I was influential in developing a statewide healthy work environment framework. Years of board and committee experiences provide me the ability to influence and drive AONL’s mission and vision.

4. Please describe your actions to improve health outcomes through advocacy.

As the 2022-2023 President of the Organization of Nurse Leaders New Jersey (ONL-NJ), I led the Board and Committees in advocating for legislation to improve health outcomes. We supported and successfully passed 2 significant pieces of legislation. The first initiative requires healthcare facilities to implement surgical smoke evacuation systems, protecting staff and patients. Additionally, we advocated for the Health Care Heroes Violence Prevention Act, criminalizing threats against healthcare professionals. ONL-NJ also continues to push for the removal of practice restrictions on advanced practice nurses, an effort that improves access to care for New Jersey residents.