

## Undocumented Students Pursuing Nursing: What is an ITIN?

Undocumented students often face significant barriers when applying to or completing nursing programs. Misconceptions about their ability to pass a background check, complete clinical experience, and obtain professional licensure, especially if they do not have a Social Security Number (SSN), can be particularly challenging.

For many scenarios, an Individualized Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) serves as a key solution, helping to fulfill or complete some of the requirements that undocumented students may struggle with due to the lack of a Social Security Number (SSN).

This document guides nursing programs in supporting undocumented students in obtaining and utilizing ITINs effectively to complete their nursing programs and receive their professional licensure.

It is imperative that nursing programs recognize the challenges that undocumented students face and actively support them in obtaining or maintaining an ITIN. This is crucial when implementing processes to help enroll and graduate undocumented students in nursing programs.

### What is an ITIN?

An Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) is an identification number used for tax purposes and issued by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). An ITIN is assigned to individuals who do not qualify for a Social Security Number (SSN). ITINs are used for tax purposes and ensure that individuals comply with U.S. tax laws, regardless of their immigration status (Source: [nilc.org/resources/itinfaq/](https://nilc.org/resources/itinfaq/))

### ITINs and Clinical Rotations

Many health professional programs require students to complete clinical rotations as part of their graduation requirements. In these cases, some clinical sites may accept an ITIN as an alternative to an SSN for onboarding students, while others require an SSN. Having an ITIN can minimize obstacles for undocumented students when completing their clinical rotations.

Some states, such as California, have laws like [SB 1139](#) that prohibit clinical sites from discriminating against undocumented students from “healing arts programs.” Verifying if your state has similar laws can be helpful when advocating for your student.

**Tip:** Programs should proactively verify whether their clinical partners accept ITINs and communicate this information to students early as they are admitted to the nursing program.

### ITINs and Background Checks

Some background check companies accept ITINs instead of SSNs or may provide a number “placeholder.” However, students may be required to provide biometrics (ex. fingerprints) as part of the process.

**Tip:** Undocumented students should consult an immigration attorney before undergoing a background check. Background checks can reveal information with potential immigration implications, and professional guidance can help students navigate this process safely.

### Professional Licensure and ITINs

Several states, including CA, have passed legislation allowing undocumented individuals to apply for professional licensure using an ITIN. This enables undocumented students to register for and sit for exams like the NCLEX in those states.

**Action Step:** Regularly check for updates to state licensure policies to ensure students have access to the most accurate and current information. [Click here](#) for a list of states and policies supporting licensure for undocumented students, or visit [phdreamers.org/licensure](https://phdreamers.org/licensure).

### How can schools assist their students with ITIN support?

#### Nursing programs can play a key role in supporting undocumented students by:

1. Providing Guidance: Advise prospective undocumented students on obtaining an ITIN when accepted to the nursing program and before clinical rotations begin.
2. Informing Clinical Partners: Work with clinical sites to ensure they accept ITINs as an alternative to SSNs for onboarding students. Troubleshoot and work on creating partnerships that support undocumented students without an SSN.
3. Connecting Students to Resources: Share information about free or subsidized immigration assistance through non-profits or institutional programs such as Dream Centers and Undocumented Student Programs.
4. Facilitating ITIN Applications: Direct students to the IRS website for assistance from IRS-trained [Certifying Acceptance Agents \(CAAs\)](#).

### Important Considerations

#### To avoid common pitfalls and ensure undocumented students receive the correct guidance:

1. Avoid Directing Students to USCIS: USCIS does not issue ITINs, and directing students to USCIS may cause unnecessary confusion or harm.
2. Leverage IRS Resources: Direct students to the IRS website, where [Certifying Acceptance Agents \(CAAs\)](#) can assist with ITIN applications.
3. Redirect Citizenship Questions: Encourage students to consult an immigration attorney for citizenship-related inquiries. Reliable free or pro-bono resources can be found on the [Immigration Advocates Network](#) website. Many campuses now have free immigration legal services for undocumented students, connect with your campus’ Dream Center or Undocumented Student program to see what legal resources they have for undocumented students.

Explore Additional Resources: Organizations like the [National Immigration Law Center](#) provide comprehensive information about ITINs and related policies.