

North Central Health Care Workforce Forum

- *Beltrami County*
- *Cass County*
- *Clearwater County*
- *Hubbard County*
- *Lake of the Woods County*
- *Mahnomen County*

Regional Profile

Current Population (2000): 99,170
Projected Population (2025): 106,800

Regional Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 7.7 percent
State Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 9.9 percent

Regional Count of Employers: 3,157
Regional Employment Estimate: 37,059
2000 Regional Unemployment Rate: 5.5 percent
2000 State Unemployment Rate: 2.7 percent

Regional Health Care Employment: 7.6 percent of total
State Health Care Employment: 8.4 percent of total

February 21, 2001 Bemidji State University Bemidji, MN

Attendance at forum: 45

Over the last 15 years, Minnesota has experienced an unprecedented economic expansion. Since the late 1980s, the number of new jobs created in Minnesota has gradually outpaced the growth of the available workforce, creating a shortage of workers. Employment growth in the health care industry has remained robust, well above the average job growth for the state. At present, the demand for workers, especially by health care employers, remains strong.

Overall, this trend in the state's economy is expected to continue well into the future. In fact, the gap between the number of all new jobs and available workers is expected to widen. Compounding the absence of an available workforce to fill new jobs is the aging of the state's population.

The Northwest Region's population is projected to grow at a strong rate during the next twenty-five years. The local economy has a significant employment in health care and the unemployment rate is at 5.5 percent. The region faces a number of challenges. In particular, the proportion of the population ages 45 and older is projected to increase from 35 percent to 48 percent between 2000 and 2025. During this same period the number of people ages 19 and under is expected to decline. As a result, the region's working age population is projected to decline in relation to an increasingly larger, mature and retired population.

North Central Strategies

Following a detailed presentation of health care industry and workforce trends, forum participants were asked to begin to identify three critical supply and demand issues that would positively impact the health care workforce for this region. After identifying these issues, participants shared and discussed possible strategies and solutions that could be implemented at the state, regional and local levels. Following these discussions, six groups reported their results to the entire group. Using the pages of detailed information provided, six critical issues were distilled. What follows is a summary of their work.

Resources for Training

Five out of six small groups identified the need to enhance the regional public and private K-12 and post secondary educational system to better meet the needs of health care employers. Specific solutions included:

- *Make healthcare training more accessible with flexible hours.*
- *Offer incentives, i.e. scholarships, bonuses and more schools offering healthcare classes.*
- *Bring education into targeted facilities.*
- *Study what other countries do for healthcare education. (i.e. Sweden)*
- *Increase personal involvement of healthcare personnel with students in high schools to share experiences.*

- Offer more night classes and on-line classes.
- Offer student/healthcare partnerships-expand internship programs in paid positions.
- Open up enrollment caps in healthcare programs to meet needs and demands.
- Provide daycare for students with children.
- Make students aware of loan forgiveness programs.
- Explore ways to provide supplemental income to healthcare students.

Enhanced Recruitment & Retention

All six of the small groups identified the need to better recruit and retain workers as critical to solving the regional health worker shortage. Specific strategies included:

Recruitment

- Develop a positive marketing campaign with health professionals as positive role models.
- Make nursing a more attractive career to both women and men.
- Expand the presence of health care at local and regional career fairs and K-12 career days. Target middle schools and use aptitude tests.
- Develop partnership collaborative efforts with the school system (shadowing program, candy striper, and health care organization grants).
- Create new strategies for attracting workers.
- Partnership with healthcare systems in other states (i.e. Arizona).

Retention

- Increase wages, offer incentive programs.
- Identify existing tuition assistance/loan forgiveness resources; employer sponsored programs and collaborative efforts.
- Offer competitive benefits including wellness programs to both full and part-time workers.
- Lower paperwork documentation time to improve job satisfaction.
- Explore creative staffing solutions that allow workers to balance family and work: i.e., no weekends and banking hours.
- Lower work load.
- Involve employees in planning surveys and adopting policies and procedures.
- Offer free lunches.
- Offer pay raises for nights, weekends and holidays.

Increased Productivity and Efficiency

Two out of six small groups reported that one way that employers could respond to the worker shortage was to utilize their current staff more efficiently. They advocated the greater use of technological tools, such as pagers, computers and monitoring devices, to increase the productivity of the current workforce. Specific solutions included:

- Develop more technology for health care delivery; enable more time for patients.
- Encourage long range planning and promote collaboration in order to address cyclical workforce problems.
- Work on strategies to reduce over-load and job burnout.
- Use more community resources.

Regulatory and Reimbursement Reform

Four out of the six small groups reported that decreasing or streamlining regulations could improve the delivery of patient care and enable facilities especially those in the long term care facilities and rural hospitals to remain financially solvent and make capital improvements. Specific solutions included:

- Provide more scholarship money or educational stipends for healthcare professions.
- Write letters to Congress for more funding.
- Educate the public of affects to generate more support of increased funding, of lower reimbursement.
- Increase funding for programs to increase public awareness of health care in general.
- Lobby Legislature to raise pay for long-term care facilities.
- Develop consistent interpretations of regulations.
- Engage health care professionals into legislation.

Forum attendees included representatives from:

*Ah-Gwah-Ching Center
Bemidji State University
Bemidji Workforce Center
Deer River Healthcare Center
Dept. of Trade Economic Development
Falls Memorial Hospital
First Care Medical Services, Fosston
Headwaters Science Center
Homestead Nursing Home
Lutheran Social Service
Mahnommen Health Center
MN Department of Health District Office
MN Dept of Health-MN Children with Special Health Needs
North Country Regional Hospital, Bemidji
Northwest Minnesota Foundation
Northwest Technical college
Search Resources
St. Joseph's Area Health Services, Park Rapids*

**About The Critical Resources
Health Care Workforce Forums**

The shortages we see today in the health care workforce -- shortages of registered nurses, nursing assistants, home care aides, lab techs, radiology techs and others -- are really only the tip of the iceberg and are not isolated to health care. This time, the shortages will last a lot longer than we've seen in the past, and health care will increasingly be competing against other fields for the same workers.

The Country Health Services members and the Minnesota Health Profession Workforce Partnership were interested in your ideas about creative approaches to health care worker shortages. To that end, a regional forum was organized in order to gather ideas, gain new contacts and re-establish old ones. We heard from a variety of health care professionals, elected officials, economic developers, business leaders, educators, community resources directors and consumers on this vital topic that impacts the health of all Minnesotans.

Shortage Solution

***Nursing Assistant Training Program
Bemidji, MN***

In January 2001 we will be providing a Nursing Assistant course for North Country Rehab Center, Bemidji and Bemidji High School. We plan to admit 10 students from the High School. The first 9 weeks the students will complete the 3-credit Nursing Assistant course, pass the MN Nursing Assistant Competency Exam, with the second 9 weeks spent completing a mentoring "Career Shadowing" course.

The classes are held from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday for both the Nursing Assistant Course and the Mentoring Program. North Country will be the clinical site for both programs. Funding for this project was secured by North Country Rehab through foundation monies.

For more Information: Karen Schumacher
Northwest Technical College
Custom Training Services
Moorhead, MN
(218)-236-6277

Forum Sponsors

Regional Sponsor:

North Country Health Services, Bemidji, MN

Minnesota Health Professions Workforce Partnership:

Healthcare Education-Industry Partnership, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Minnesota Center for Rural Health

Minnesota Colleagues in Caring

Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Minnesota Hospital and Healthcare Partnership

Office of Rural Health & Primary Care, Minnesota Department of Health

Stay Connected

To Health Care Workforce Issues, Projects and Groups

- **Bob Verchota, North Country Health Services**, 1100 W. 38th St., Bemidji, MN 56601 (218) 751-5430
- The **Minnesota Rural Health Conference** (Health People/Vibrant Communities 2001) in Duluth on June 25-27 will have a half-day devoted to health care workforce issues. **Visit the website:**
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhconfe.htm.
- **Health Care Workforce Data, Information and Web Site Links** can be found by clicking on the **Health Workforce** link at the following website: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/orh_home.htm.

**Healthcare Education-Industry Partnership,
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**
www.tip.mnscu.edu/healthcare_facts.htm

Minnesota Center for Rural Health
www.ruralcenter.org/mcrh

Minnesota Hospital & Healthcare Partnership
www.mhhp.com

Minnesota Department of Economic Security
www.MNWorkforceCenter.org

Minnesota Colleagues in Caring
www.mnnursing.org

**Office of Rural Health & Primary Care,
Minnesota Department of Health**
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/orh_home.htm