

# Central Lakes Health Care Workforce Forum

- *Cass County*
- *Crow Wing County*
- *Morrison County*
- *Todd County*
- *Wadena County*

## Regional Profile

Current Population (2000): 145,090  
Projected Population (2025): 155,480

Regional Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 7.2 percent  
State Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 9.9 percent

Regional Count of Employers: 4,581  
Regional Employment Estimate: 58,426  
2000 Regional Unemployment Rate: 4.7 percent  
2000 State Unemployment Rate: 2.7 percent

Regional Health Care Employment: 8.6 percent of total  
State Health Care Employment: 8.4 percent of total

## October 19, 2000 Central Lakes College, Brainerd

Attendance at forum: 52

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 Central Lakes Region's population is projected to grow at a strong rate during the next twenty-five years. The local economy also remains strong, with an unemployment rate below five percent. Despite positive signs, the region faces a number of challenges. In particular, the proportion of the population ages 44 and older is projected to increase from 49 percent to 56 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.

## Central Lakes 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.

### Enhanced Recruitment and Retention

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

### Recruitment

- *Improve the public's perception of health care work.*
- *Expand the presence of health care at local and regional career fairs and k-12 career days.*

- *Explore ways of recruiting trained workers who are interested in pursuing a second career in health care.*
- *Provide competitive wages and comprehensive benefits for all positions, especially for nursing assistants and home health aides.*
- *When hiring staff, health care providers need to network with other employers in order to find job opportunities for a spouse.*

#### **Retention**

- *Develop strong employee retention plans.*
- *Increase the wages for health care workers, especially for those in nursing care facilities*
- *Develop a mentoring program where experienced staff would guide new staff.*
- *Reimburse employees who travel for costs associated with their work.*
- *Expand the number of benefits offered to both full- and part-time workers.*
- *Gather information about why workers leave positions and why current employees do not recommend health care careers.*
- *Explore creative staffing solutions that allow workers to balance family and work.*
- *Inform workers of additional health career and training opportunities.*
- *Develop short-term training programs and informational resources for managers and supervisors with working different age, cultural and ethnic groups.*

#### **Public Relations and Marketing Campaign**

Four out of six small groups identified the need to create, or enhance any existing, public relations and/or marketing campaigns to promote the value of health care and health care careers. Specific solutions included:

- *Promote the quality of health care and living in the Central Lakes region.*
- *Promote the missions and values of health care and a health care career to younger people through an advertising campaign.*
- *Provide more training and materials to educators and career counselors regarding health care careers.*
- *Promote health care as critical to regional economic development.*
- *Educate the public on the growing elderly population and the need services for this age group.*
- *Promote greater collaboration, instead of competition, between health care providers at a regional level.*

#### **Increased Educational Capacity**

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

- *Incorporate school-to-work curriculum and practices into the regional K-12 system, including mentoring, career-based education and job shadowing.*
- *Increase access to postsecondary health care education through the Internet and distance learning.*
- *Increase the number of learners by increasing the capacity of health care education providers to increase class sizes, especially for nursing, pharmacy, medicine, dental and radiology programs.*
- *Increase the number of clinical sites and rotations in rural settings.*
- *Promote/Expand the Minnesota Rural Health School.*
- *Expand and promote partnerships with educational institutions and health care employers.*
- *Promote educational and employment opportunities that allow nursing assistants to move up a seamless nursing career ladder to other nursing and health care positions.*
- *Continue to support internship opportunities and scholarships for students interested in pursuing a health care career.*
- *Provide nursing assistant training within the secondary educational system.*

#### **Regulatory Reform**

Three out to 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 industry, to remain financially solvent. Specific solutions included:

- *Increase the level of reimbursement for facilities and service providers.*
- *Promote greater collaboration between health care providers and regulatory agencies in order to streamline reporting requirements and improve compliance.*
- *Provide rewards for positive patient outcomes.*
- *Remove regulatory obstacles and legal mandates that discourage additional family and/or caregiver involvement in providing care.*

- *Create incentives for greater family and caregiver involvement in the provision of care.*

**Forum attendees included representatives from:**

*Aicota Health Care Center  
Bemidji State – College of Nursing  
Bethany Good Samaritan  
Brainerd Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce  
Brainerd Regional Human Services  
Centracare Clinic  
Central Lakes College  
Central Lakes Medical Clinic  
Central Minnesota School to Work  
College of St. Scholastica  
Crow Wing County Department of Health  
Crow Wing County Social Service  
Cuyuna Regional Medical Center  
Golden Heart Home Health Care  
Initiative Foundation  
Lakewood Health Systems  
Long Prairie Memorial  
Minnesota Workforce Center  
Northern Pines Mental Health Center  
Productive Alternatives  
Region Five Area Agency on Aging  
Rehabilitation Services  
Rural Minnesota CEP  
St. Gabriel's Hospital  
St. Joseph Hospice  
St. Joseph Medical Center  
TCC  
Whispering Pines/Good Samaritan*

**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 local and regional forum sponsors 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 Story**

Northern Pines Mental Health Center  
Brainerd, Minnesota

According to Interim Executive Director Mark Bublitz, Northern Pines Mental Health Center (NPMHC) continues to face a number of challenges in sustaining a quality, competent staff and providing services to people in the region. Federal and state staffing requirements dictate that NPMHC employ a number of licensed health care workers, including psychologists and social workers. Yet many of these positions have remained vacant even though the agency has spent a considerable amount of money promoting their openings in 2000. Moreover, declining revenues, brought on by stagnant reimbursement rates and the increasing cost of providing services, have significantly impacted NPMHC's hiring efforts. They have also limited the agency's ability to adequately compensate their current staff — NPMHC has only been able to afford two pay increases in the past eight years.

What should be done? Bublitz replies that (1) reimbursement rates need to be improved to better reflect the actual costs of providing care and (2) more incentives should be created to attract (and retain) people seeking employment in rural Minnesota.

*About Northern Pines Mental Health Center*

NPMHC is a community health center serving Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena Counties. For the past 36 years, the agency has provided a full range of mental health services, including psychiatry, outpatient therapy, and community based, in-home supportive treatment.

## Forum Sponsors

### Local and Regional Sponsors:

*Central Lakes College Business and Industry Center  
Brainerd Lakes Area Chambers of Commerce  
Initiative Foundation  
Region Five Development Commission  
TCC  
Minnesota Workforce Center  
Region Five Area Agency on Aging  
McKnight Workforce Development Project - Health, Hospital and Medical Cluster*

### 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

- Central Lakes Contact — Marty Sapletal, Community Development Manager, TCC and McKnight Workforce Development Project – Health, Hospital and Medical Cluster, 2410 Oak Street, Box 706, Brainerd, MN 56401 (218) 829-2410, Ext. 9514; Fax: (219) 829-0494 ; email: [sapletal@tccaction.com](mailto:sapletal@tccaction.com)
- 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.tip.mnscu.edu/healthcare_facts.htm)

**Minnesota Center for Rural Health**  
[www.ruralcenter.org/mcrh](http://www.ruralcenter.org/mcrh)

**Minnesota Hospital & Healthcare Partnership**  
[www.mhhp.com](http://www.mhhp.com)

**Minnesota Department of Economic Security**  
[www.MNWorkforceCenter.org](http://www.MNWorkforceCenter.org)

**Minnesota Colleagues in Caring**  
[www.mnnursing.org](http://www.mnnursing.org)

**Office of Rural Health & Primary Care,  
Minnesota Department of Health**  
[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/orh\\_home.htm](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/orh_home.htm)