

# West Central Health Care Workforce Forum

- *Becker County*
- *Clay County*
- *Douglas County*
- *Grant County*
- *Otter Tail County*
- *Pope County*
- *Stevens County*
- *Traverse County*
- *Wilkin County*

## Regional Profile

Current Population (2000): 208,730  
Projected Population (2025): 206,010

Regional Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): -1.3 percent  
State Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 9.9 percent

Regional Count of Employers: 6,393  
Regional Employment Estimate: 77,862  
2000 Regional Unemployment Rate: 3.5 percent  
2000 State Unemployment Rate: 2.7 percent

Regional Health Care Employment: 9.1 percent of total  
State Health Care Employment: 8.4 percent of total

## West Central Initiative Labor Force Study

- Almost half of all regional employers reported experiencing a shortage of workers in 1999.
- 2,797 openings were reported, a 100 percent increase from 1996.
- Lack of qualified applicants was the most frequently cited reason for the shortages.

## February 2, 2001 Fergus Falls Community College Fergus Falls

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 West Central region's population is projected to decrease slightly during the next twenty-five years. The local economy has remains strong with an unemployment rate below four percent. Despite positive signs, the region faces a number of challenges. In particular, the proportion of the population ages 45 and older is projected to increase from 40 percent to 50 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.

In addition, 35 percent of the region's workforce will retire between 1990 and 2010. In order to replace these retiring workers, all of those under the age of 20 would need to stay in the area.

## West 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, five 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.

### **Attracting Students into Healthcare**

Four of the five small groups identified the need to generally draw more students into health care careers in rural areas. Specific strategies included:

- *Target specific groups — including 4H, scouts, parish nurses, church youth and parents working in health careers — with health care career information.*
- *Market NWTC on line courses to high schools.*
- *Develop a statewide application for health care and nursing education.*
- *Improve the public's perception of health care work and increase awareness of shortages.*
- *Expand the presence of health care at local and regional career fairs and K-12 career days.*
- *Promote the use of health care career information and aptitude tests in middle schools.*
- *Explore ways of recruiting trained workers who are interested in pursuing a second career in health care.*
- *Implement a core health care curriculum.*

### **Retention**

Two of the small groups identified retention of current health care employees as a high priority. Specific solutions included:

- *Develop strong employee retention plans; share best practices.*
- *Increase the wages for health care workers, especially for those in nursing care facilities.*
- *Increase the use of technology equipment to improve working environment.*
- *Offer competitive benefits to both full- and part-time workers.*
- *Raise the level of respect for nursing.*
- *Explore creative staffing solutions that allow workers to balance family and work.*
- *Inform workers of additional health careers and training opportunities.*
- *Develop on-line training programs and career ladders.*
- *Accommodate aging/disabled workers.*

### **Recruiting Non-Traditional Students**

Two out of five small groups identified the need to create or enhance educational programs for non-traditional health care students including immigrants, students in a second career and students with children.

- *Promote the missions and values of health care and a health care career to a broader audience through local social service agencies.*

- *Offer more financial assistance to those pursuing a health care education.*
- *Create daycare on site at schools and healthcare facilities.*
- *Develop and target more ESL programs to specific occupations.*
- *Educate the public on the growing elderly population and the need services for this age group.*

### **Resources for Training**

Three out of five 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:

- *Utilize workforce center training resources.*
- *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 clinical sites.*
- *Expand and promote partnerships with educational institutions and health care employers to offer education at worksite.*
- *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. (i.e., Project LINC, Nurse Practice Act).*

### **High Priority Workforce Shortages**

Two out of the five small groups reported that specific occupations were the highest priority to address, especially CNAs, RNs, LPNs and EMTs. Specific solutions included:

- *Promote greater collaboration between health care providers and educational systems in order to streamline educational requirements and improve retention in rural health care.*
- *Help prepare students for a healthcare education by offering an introductory health care orientation and math tutoring.*
- *Recruit top students for health careers.*

- *Explore use of technology to utilize current staff more efficiently.*
- *Increase awareness of healthcare worker shortages through Workforce Center, WesMn.net and video commercials.*

## **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.

## **Forum attendees included representatives from:**

*Alexandria Technical College  
City of Hawley  
Douglas County Hospital  
Emmanuel Community  
Fergus Falls Community College  
Fergus Falls Medical Group  
Fergus Falls Regional Treatment Center  
Glacial Ridge Hospital  
Grandview Assisted living  
Kessel Group Home  
Lake Region Hospital  
Minnewaska District Hospital  
MN Center for Rural Health  
MN Workforce Center  
MNSCU  
Northwest Technical College  
Office of Rural Health & Primary Care  
Rural Health Alliance  
Rural MN CEP  
St. Francis Medical Center  
St. Michael's Hospital  
Stevens Community Medical Center  
Stevens County Ambulance  
Teamworks, Inc.  
Traverse Care Center  
Tri County Hospital  
West Central Initiative  
Workforce Center*

## **Shortage Solution**

### ***Rural Paramedic Training Program Morris, MN***

We conducted a paramedic-training program in Morris about 2-3 years ago with support and funding from Cargill, Stevens Community Medical Center, Stevens County, Hennepin County Medical Center, Ridgewater College, West Central EMS Corp, and the Otto Bremer Foundation. We trained eight community members in our community over 12 months to become certified as paramedics. All eight successfully passed all examinations and became State of MN and Nationally Registered Paramedics following the course. All except two are still working for our community in emergency services. The two that left worked about 1 year with us and now are working in Brainerd healthcare. The program worked and was very effective. We need more programs to support training in rural areas for healthcare. We have an idea for training paramedics and EMT's and LPN's to become RN's. The program could be conducted locally. Contact me for more information about the RN program or Paramedic training. I would be happy to discuss this with you if it is of interest.

#### ***For more information about the project, contact:***

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Morris, MN 56267-0231

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## Forum Sponsors

### Local and Regional Sponsors:

*Fergus Falls Community College  
West Central Initiative  
WesMN.net  
Northwest Technical College  
Rural Health Alliance  
MN Workforce Center*

### 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

- West Central Contact — WesMN.net, West Central Initiative, 800-735-2239, [www.wesmn.net](http://www.wesmn.net)
- 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)