

Healthy Communities Workforce Forum

- *McLeod County*
- *Meeker County*
- *Sibley County*

Regional Profile

Current Population (2000): 70,830
Projected Population (2025): 77,090

Regional Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 8.8 percent
State Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 9.9 percent

Regional Count of Employers: 2,037
Regional Employment Estimate: 29,366
2000 Regional Unemployment Rate: 4 percent
2000 State Unemployment Rate: 2.7 percent

Regional Health Care Employment: 4.1 percent of total
State Health Care Employment: 8.4 percent of total

December 1, 2000
Peace Center, Hutchinson

Attendance at forum: 70

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, gradually 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 for 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 population in the Healthy Communities Region is projected to grow at a rate slightly lower than the state during the next twenty-five years. The local economy remains strong, with an unemployment rate of four percent. Despite positive signs, the region faces a number of challenges:

- *On average, regional employers have to wait six months to fill nursing assistant, registered nurse and licensed practical nurse openings.*
- *More regional employers report using signing bonuses and tuition reimbursements and scholarships to attract workers -- over two thirds of registered nurse and licensed practical nurse openings offered tuition reimbursement or scholarships.*
- *The proportion of the population ages 44 and older is projected to increase from 45 percent to 52 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.*

Healthy Communities 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

- *Offer an enhanced employee benefit package that includes flexible work schedules and child and/or adult day care.*
- *Improve the public's perception of health care and health care workers.*
- *Establish a health curriculum for students in the K-12 system that would allow them to gain nurse assistant training and further encourage them to enter a health career.*

Retention

- *Provide a positive work environment and encourage a team approach to delivering health care in the workplace.*
- *Allow for a greater use of flexible hours by current staff.*
- *Mentor current staff about opportunities to move up the health care career ladder.*

Regulatory Reform

Four out of 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 through a universal application and reporting system.*
- *Reform regulatory obstacles and legal mandates that require staff to complete paperwork instead of providing necessary patient care.*
- *Equalize urban and rural federal reimbursement rates.*
- *Give states greater autonomy to establish regulations and enforcement procedures.*

Competitive Wages and Employee Benefits

Three out of six small groups reported that raising wages and/or enhancing employee benefits would help health care providers who are competing with other types of employers for workers in the labor market. Specific solutions included the following:

- *Increase the level of pay for all health care workers.*
- *Create a comprehensive employee benefits package that is at least equal to those offered by non-health care employers.*
- *Increase the number of loan forgiveness programs available to staff.*

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.

Increased Educational Capacity

Two 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.*
- *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.*
- *Support the job-skills project at Ridgewater College.*
- *Increase the availability of training through innovative learning techniques and distance learning.*

Develop Regional Alliances

One small group reported that competing for health care workers within the region had result in a zero-sum gain for the regions employers. Specific solutions included the following:

- *Foster greater cooperation among regional employers in order to address the shortage of health care workers.*
- *Develop and retain a local workforce that has a commitment to the community.*
- *Reduce the reliance on temporary agencies and/or nursing pools through the development of an employer-supported pool.*
- *Encourage sharing of best practices between facilities.*

Forum attendees included:

*Congressmen David Minge
State Senator Steve Dille
State Representative Howard Swenson
State Representative Bob Ness
Dave Gabrielson, Meeker County Commissioner
Amy Wilde, Meeker County Commissioner
Harold Pettis, Sibley County Commissioner
Bud Bruhjell, Sibley County Commissioner*

Representatives from:

*Arlington Good Samaritan
Arlington Municipal Hospital
Augustana Homes
Burnes Manor Nursing Home
Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services
Glencoe Regional Health Services
Hutchinson Area Health Care
Hutchinson High School
Hutchinson Medical Center
Hutchinson Workforce Center
McLeod County Public Health
Meeker County Memorial Hospital
Meeker County Public Health
Meeker County Social Services
Meeker-McLeod-Sibley CHS
Ridgewater College
Sibley County Public Health
Therapeutic Options
WCMN School-to-work
Winthrop 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 Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Healthy Communities Team 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.

Stay Connected

To Health Care Workforce Issues, Projects and Groups

- **Ridgewater College's Improvement Model for Workforce Development in Rural Health Care will focus on the recruitment and retention of students and employees in the health care field.** Contacts: Lynn Johnson, Director of Nursing, Ridgewater College (320) 231-6034; Nicole Weydt, Health and Human Development Education Coordinator, Ridgewater College (320) 234-0309. *Grant Partners: Affiliated Community Medical Centers, Augustana Lutheran Homes, Bethesda Homes, Family Practice Medical Center, Glencoe Regional Health Services, Hutchinson Area Health Care, Lakeview Ranch, Meeker County Memorial Hospital, Rice Memorial Hospital. Grant Sources: Minnesota Job Skills Partnership Grant, Minnesota Job Skills Pathways Grant, Health and Human Services Training Program Grant.*
- **The Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Healthy Communities Team is starting to implement some of the strategies discussed, and will be developing a more formal plan for the three county area after the statewide rural health conference in June.** For more information contact Ann Bajari at (320) 693-5392.
- **The Minnesota Rural Health Conference (Health People/Vibrant Communities 2001) in Duluth on June 25-27 will have one day devoted to health care workforce issues.** Contact Karen Welle, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care, Minnesota Department of Health, at (651) 282-6336 or by e-mail at karen.welle@health.state.mn.us.

Partnership organizations and web sites

Healthcare Education-Industry
Partnership, MNSCU
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, MDH
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/orh_home.htm



Forum Sponsors

Healthy Communities Meeker, McLeod, Sibley Counties Partners:

*Arlington Municipal Hospital
Glencoe Regional Health Services
Hutchinson Area Health Care
Meeker County Memorial Hospital
McLeod County Public Health
Meeker County Public Health
Sibley County Public Health*

*Hutchinson Medical Center
Allina Medical Clinic, Litchfield
Ridgewater College
Minnesota Extension Service – McLeod County
Minnesota Extension Service – Meeker County
Minnesota Extension Service – Sibley County
Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health
Services*

Minnesota Health Professions Workforce Partnership:

*Healthcare Education-Industry Partnership, MNSCU
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, MDH*

