

# South Central Health Workforce Forum

- *Blue Earth County*
- *Brown County*
- *Faribault County*
- *Le Sueur County*
- *Martin County*
- *Nicollet County*
- *Sibley County*
- *Waseca County*
- *Watowan County*

## Regional Profile

Current Population (2000): 187,190  
Projected Population (2025): 192,550

Regional Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 2.9 percent  
State Growth Rate (2000 to 2025): 9.9 percent

Regional Count of Employers: 6,631  
Regional Employment Estimate: 101,998  
2000 Regional Unemployment Rate: 2.3 percent  
2000 State Unemployment Rate: 2.7 percent

Regional Health Care Employment: 7.8 percent of total  
State Health Care Employment: 8.4 percent of total

## December 8, 2000 South Central Technical College, Mankato

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 South Central region's population is projected to grow at a moderate rate during the next twenty-five years. The local economy remains strong, with an unemployment rate below three 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 44 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.

## South 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, four groups reported their results to the entire group. Using the pages of detailed information provided, five critical issues were distilled. What follows is a summary of their work.

### **Regulatory and Reimbursement Reform**

All four small groups reported that decreasing or streamlining regulations and changing reimbursement rates 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.*
- *Equalize urban and rural reimbursement rates.*
- *Streamline administrative procedures and reporting requirements to allow staff to provide more direct patient care.*

### **Enhanced Recruitment and Retention**

Three out of four 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.*
- *Promote health care careers, especially nursing careers, to men.*
- *Provide competitive wages and comprehensive benefits for all positions.*

#### **Retention**

- *Increase the wages for health care workers, especially for those in nursing care facilities*
- *Expand the number of benefits offered to both full- and part-time workers.*
- *Enhance or create loan forgiveness programs for health care graduates to work in rural areas.*
- *Expand loan forgiveness programs to include other health professionals like pharmacists and radiological technicians.*

### **Competitive Wages and Employee Benefits**

Two out of four 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 Educational Capacity**

Two out of four 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 state funding for nursing programs and nursing slots in Minnesota schools.*
- *Offer flexible training opportunities, including distance learning and non-traditional class times, for students.*
- *Expand and promote partnerships with educational institutions and health care employers.*

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

One out of four 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 mission 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.*

### Forum attendees included:

*LaVonne Craig, Nicollet County Commissioner  
Judy Hanson, Nicollet County Commissioner*

### Representatives from:

*Agri-News  
Arlington Good Samaritan  
Blue Earth County Extension  
Catholic Charities  
Fairbault County Extension  
Fairmont Sentinel  
Frost-Benco Electric  
Good Samaritan Community Center  
Immanuel St. Joseph's  
Lutheran Home Association  
Madelia Community Hospital  
Mankato House Health Care Center  
Mankato Workforce Center Job Service  
Mapleton Drug  
Mid-Minnesota SAIL  
Minnesota Agri-Women  
Minnesota Extension Service  
Minnesota Rural Futures  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Minnesota Valley Health Care Center  
New Richland Care Center  
New Ulm Public Health  
Oaklawn Health Care Center  
Pleasant View Good Samaritan Center  
Reelings Three Links Health Care Center  
Region 9 Area Agency on Aging  
Region 9 Development Commission  
Sibley County Extension Service  
South Central Technical College  
St. Lukes Lutheran Care Center  
St. Peter Community Hospital  
The Plaindealer  
Trimont Health Care Center  
University of Minnesota  
University of Minnesota, Rochester*

### 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.

## Stay Connected

To Health Care Workforce Issues, Projects and Groups

- South Central Contact: Tammy Sonnabend, Minnesota Rural Futures, (507) 549-3119 or [tsonna@gotocrystal.net](mailto:tsonna@gotocrystal.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)



## **Forum Sponsors**

### **Local and Regional Sponsors:**

*Region 9 Development Commission*

*Region 9 Area Agency on Aging*

*Minnesota Rural Futures*

*Minnesota Agri-Women*

*Minnesota Extension Service*

*Agri-Business Department, South Central Technical College*

*Farm Business Management Program, South Central Technical College*

### **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*

