

Governor's Task Force on the Healthcare Workforce

Concept Recommendations, July 11, 2024

Education and Training

Faculty

Recruitment of health professions faculty was identified as a significant challenge.

1. Proposed Policy Name: **Health educator incentive programs**
 - a. Description: Recruiting nurses into faculty roles is challenging because nurse faculty salaries are typically lower than nurse salaries in patient care or other settings. For similar reasons, technical colleges report shortages for allied health and other health professions faculty. State sponsored loan repayment programs for faculty may be helpful to incentivize qualified health professionals to serve in these positions. This proposal would expand on the [Nurse Educators Program](#).
2. Proposed Policy Name: **Compensation for health professions faculty**
 - a. Description: Review compensation levels for nursing, allied health, and other health professions faculty at Wisconsin Technical Colleges and University of Wisconsin campuses and develop a plan to ensure pay is competitive. Faculty salaries are often lower than practitioner salaries, which leads to difficulty recruiting or retaining health professions faculty.

Strengthen Clinical Training & Experience

Clinical training and other hands-on experiences are an important part of the educational process for most health care occupations.

3. Proposed Policy Name: **Support preparation of clinical behavioral health counselors ([Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants](#))**
 - a. Description: Supervised clinical experience is required for individuals seeking licensure as a clinical counselor or clinical social worker. Newly graduated individuals completing supervised experience for clinical licensure must either identify a licensed clinical professional that is willing to be their supervisor or find employment that offers supervision. Providing supervision takes time and typically has some impact on the clinical productivity of practicing professionals and their organizations. The QTT grant program supports organizations and professionals involved in

supervision by covering costs associated with supervision and providing support to individuals receiving supervision (paid clinical experiences and benefits). State funding is needed to continue this important program.

4. Proposed Policy Name: **Grants to support clinical partnerships and preceptors**
 - a. Description: Clinical training is an important part of the educational process for most health care occupations, yet Wisconsin has a shortage of clinical sites for students. A grant program could facilitate clinical training collaborations between higher education and health care employers and help pay preceptors in recognition of their service supervising and training health care students.
5. Proposed Policy Name: **Expand experiential learning (simulation)**
 - a. Description: Higher educational entities offer simulation labs and other experiential learning tools as a supplement to classroom and clinical experience. Additional funds could help schools to expand simulation labs and help students gain practical experience.

Reduce Barriers to Training for Wisconsinites

6. Proposed Policy Name: **Wraparound services programs for students**
 - a. Description: Some students experience social barriers, such as transportation and childcare, to completing education and training in health care related fields. Wraparound services are designed to support students experiencing these barriers. State supported wraparound services programs, which have been successful for Wisconsinites, require continued and sustainable funding of our state higher education partners.
7. Proposed Policy Name: **Train direct care professionals and nurse aides through [WisCaregiver Careers](#)**
 - a. Description: Funding to employers to cover Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) and other direct care professional training costs and recruitment and retention bonuses. Without a plan for continued funding, training costs revert to employers and workers will no longer receive state-sponsored bonuses.
8. Proposed Policy Name: **Reduce GED/HSED costs for students**
 - a. Description: Encourage Wisconsinites to complete a Certificate of General Educational Development or High School Equivalency Diploma by reducing training and/or testing costs.
9. Proposed Policy Name: **Increase training grants for allied health professionals and advanced practice clinicians**
 - a. Description: The Department of Health Services administers the [Allied Health Professional Education and Training Grant](#) and the [Advanced Practice](#)

[Clinician Training Grant](#). The goal is to increase training opportunities for allied health positions and to expand the use of physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses in rural areas. However, state law restricts award amounts and requires a high match rate. Modifying the programs to allow for additional flexibility and increasing funds to help DHS administer additional grants would help support these critical professions.

Expand Apprenticeship Programs in Wisconsin

Apprenticeships are a work-based learning model that support workers and employers. Wisconsin is a leader in apprenticeships, including for health care occupations. Expansion of both Wisconsin State Registered Apprenticeships (RA) and Youth Apprenticeships (YA) will ensure these opportunities are available to support more workers and employers.

10. Proposed Policy Name: **Additional state funding for state registered apprenticeship programs.**

- a. Description: Increase infrastructure support for apprenticeship programs to boost interest, understanding, and navigation of health care apprenticeships. Increased staffing would boost individual outreach to employers, build and grow pre-apprenticeship opportunities to train individuals for registered apprenticeship opportunities, and allow for more nimble policy and program changes. Increased funding to support and enhance the development of new and existing curriculum and IT processes will help the state respond to the increased demand in pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, and youth apprenticeships and enhance the worker and employer experience. Incentivize local consortia to engage sponsors and bridge YA-to-RA programs to encourage youth to continue their career pathway as an adult. Fund instruction-related costs for youth apprentices to ensure equitable access to YA pathways. Support registered apprentices by covering the costs of any required licenses, certifications, and exams. Increase funding for apprenticeship completion award program. Fund On-the-job Learning (OJL) Reimbursements to health care sector employers to incentivize them to establish new RA programs.

Expand Non-Apprenticeship Work-based Learning Opportunities

11. Proposed Policy Name: [Worker Advancement Initiative Grant](#)

- a. Description: Support the continuation of the Worker Advancement Initiative (WAI), which provides grants to the local workforce development boards to assist individuals in their communities successfully enter and advance in Wisconsin's health care workforce. Examples of support may include, for

example, participants' wrap-around services like transportation and childcare, sector-based, tailored, training programs, and training stipends so that participants can afford to attend new skills training. Invest in these training programs with demonstrated success within the health care sector that are not otherwise eligible for federal WIOA reimbursement.

Other

12. Proposed Policy Name: **Strengthen licensure pathways for veterans and service members**

- a. Description: Many veterans and service members have training and experience that may be translated into licensed health care occupations. Pathways for translating military experience into educational credit and bridge programs that are aligned with state licensure requirements can help qualified veterans and service members enter high demand licensed health care occupations.

13. Proposed Policy Name: **Strengthen dual enrollment opportunities**

- a. Support health science education by strengthening dual enrollment programs in secondary schools. These help high school students complete post-secondary coursework and earn certifications and/or licenses.

14. Proposed Policy Name: **Increase student access to health science**

- a. Description: Increasing awareness of health care careers among youth is critical to developing the next generation of the workforce. There are 158 school districts (41%) where students do not have access to a quality career pathway in health science. This reflects fewer programs in rural and under-resourced areas of the state due to teacher retention and lack of funds. Increased funding would help boost student access, interest, participation, and credential attainment for health careers. For example, additional funds could support the [Area Health Education Centers \(AHEC\) program](#) and [HOSA – Future Health Professionals](#), which educate secondary and post-secondary students about health care careers. Targeted state support for youth would ensure more Wisconsin students are aware of the variety of health care careers available.

Recruitment and Retention

Payer Strategies to Support Recruitment and Retention

1. Proposed Policy Name: **Expand Medicaid to support health care workers and fund workforce initiatives**
 - a. Description: Medicaid expansion would save Wisconsin an estimated \$1.6 billion in state funds over two years, and the state can decide how to spend these savings. A portion could be used to fund strategic workforce initiatives, such as any of the other task force recommendations. Medicaid expansion would also encourage workforce participation among health care workers who sometimes limit hours of employment to retain public benefits.
2. Proposed Policy Name: **Rate increases to strengthen the workforce for aging Wisconsinites**
 - a. Description: Higher rates for home and community-based services (HCBS) can encourage recruitment and retention of direct care professionals and meet the needs of our aging population. The HCBS workforce provides services for individuals that enable them to age in place or at home. Most people prefer to stay in their homes as long as possible. The cost of providing HCBS is typically lower than the cost of providing facility-based services (in nursing homes), but wages are typically lower. The Department of Health Services has developed a [minimum fee schedule](#) for HCBS to facilitate higher wages and help meet the growing need for services.
3. Proposed Policy Name: **Rate increases to strengthen the behavioral health workforce**
 - a. Description: The state's ability to recruit and retain behavioral health providers is influenced by Medicaid and commercial insurance reimbursement rates. Medicaid reimbursement rates typically fall behind Medicare, private insurance, and self-pay rates. Lower reimbursement rates can translate to lower wages for behavioral health professionals. While Wisconsin has made progress in recent years in increasing rates, additional rate increases for behavioral health services will help providers increase wages and support recruitment and retention of professionals.

Recruiting and Retaining in Areas of Need

4. Proposed Policy Name: **Expand state loan repayment/forgiveness for professionals serving in state-defined shortage areas**

- a. Description: Many health professionals use student loans to finance their education. Educational debt may impact health professionals practice decisions, including where they decide to practice. Rural communities have smaller populations and lower cost of living but typically offer lower incomes to health professionals. Health professionals with educational debt may choose to practice in more populated communities where higher incomes are offered. State sponsored student loan repayment/forgiveness programs are a common state strategy to support recruitment of health professionals into areas of greatest need. These programs incentivize recruitment by offering relief from student indebtedness in exchange for service in state defined areas of need.
5. Proposed Policy Name: **Increase compensation for health professions with high vacancy and turnover rates**
 - a. Description: Increased compensation would help provide needed services to residents and support recruitment and retention of qualified professionals. With regard to state funds, compensation for health professionals at state-run facilities, including those operated by the Departments of Health Services, Veterans Affairs, and Corrections, is typically low, resulting in high vacancy rates, increased overtime, less effective service delivery, and staffing agency use. Increased wages would help the state maintain high-quality inpatient facilities and provide care for vulnerable populations. Other employers should also increase wages to help address high vacancy and turnover rates among health professionals.

Supporting Innovation

6. Proposed Policy Name: **Support employer-based workforce development solutions with Provider Innovation Grants**
 - a. Description: The workforce needs of employers are generally unique and driven by their industry, the local economy, and the population. Funding to support workforce development innovations must be adaptable to meet the unique needs employers. Provider Innovation Grants offer flexible funds to employers to support strategic workforce development initiatives, such as mentorship programs, preceptor bonuses, paid clinical sites, improved scheduling practices, professional development, and social supports.
7. Proposed Policy Name: **Support regional collaboration for workforce development through Workforce Innovation Grants**
 - a. Description: Support the continuation of Workforce Innovation Grants (WIG) to encourage the development of evidence-based long-term solutions to

regional communities' top workforce challenges to help businesses find qualified workers and assist individuals in obtaining family-sustaining jobs. Allocate specific funding to address health care industry labor and workforce challenges. Flexible funding for regional planning and strategic workforce development would support regional solutions.

8. Proposed Policy Name: **Support direct care professionals with benefits navigation**

- a. Description: Support direct care professionals by funding benefit navigation services through [Covering Wisconsin](#). This funding will help ensure entry-level health care workers continue to have a well-integrated, no-wrong-door experience in seeking enrollment in and across Medicaid and Marketplace options. One-in-three direct care professionals receive public insurance coverage, such as Medicaid. Navigating benefit opportunities can be challenging without guidance and support. Some workers may choose to leave their direct care positions for employment in other sectors or industries where they are offered benefits. Providing resources to health care workers and connecting them to benefit opportunities that work for them, and their families, may help retain these workers in their critical roles.

Regulatory Policy

Support New or Expanded Pathways to Licensure

1. Proposed Policy Name: **Authorize Medicaid reimbursement for community-focused providers**
 - a. Description: Doulas, community health workers, peer specialists, and other community-focused providers help licensed practitioners operate at the top of their licenses by supporting members of their communities, but Medicaid is not currently authorized to reimburse for many of their services. Authorizing Medicaid to pay for community-focused services can increase wages, provide stability, and alleviate shortages among other providers.
2. Proposed Policy Name: **Support pathways to licensure for qualified foreign educated professionals**
 - a. Description: Foreign educated professionals represent a potential pool of workers to grow the health care workforce. Programs (education) and provisions (regulatory) may be established or strengthened to support the recruitment of these professionals into the state in areas of need, including in practitioner roles and in faculty roles.
3. Proposed Policy Name: **Ratify and enter into multi-state licensing compacts**
 - a. Description: Multi-state compacts allow professionals to become eligible to practice in other participating states. Compacts can make it easier for health care providers to practice across states or to relocate. Wisconsin has not yet ratified and entered into the Counseling Compact, which allows professional counselors to become eligible to practice in other states.
4. Proposed Policy Name: **Revise faculty educational requirements**
 - a. Wisconsin sets minimum standards for health professions faculty, including for nursing and allied health programs. These standards limit the number of qualified health professionals who can teach health care students. Revising the limits and allowing campuses more flexibility in hiring decisions could expand the pool of applicants for health professions faculty positions.

Strengthen State Capacity for Regulation

5. Proposed Policy Name: **Enhance licensee experience and reduce time to licensure**
 - a. Description: Providing the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) with needed staffing levels will help improve workforce availability within Wisconsin communities. In particular, the establishment of positions

to support board members' decision making regarding educational requirements may expedite the licensure process for qualified candidates, making Board time more efficient. These positions could perform preliminary review of applicants' educational requirements, prepare summary information, and provide expert recommendations to the Board.

Healthcare Workforce Wellbeing and Monitoring

6. Proposed Policy Name: **Increase support for health care workforce wellness.**
 - a. Description: Physical, mental, and psychological challenges faced by health professionals can be managed with appropriate treatment. Provisions to support the health of health professionals can support workforce health and wellbeing and promote continued practice. In some states, these programs are available for licensed health professionals and supported through licensing fees. In other cases, supports are provided by employers through employee assistance programs or company well-being initiatives.
7. Proposed Policy Name: **Resources to analyze the health care workforce.**
 - a. Description: Monitoring the health care workforce within a state is challenging. Many states use license counts to estimate state-level capacity of health professionals. Unfortunately, not all license holders actually practice or work within the state, and license information (such as license address) may or may not reflect where a professional is practicing. The collection of supplemental workforce information (whether a professional practices in the state, where their practice is located, their specialty, etc.) at time of license renewal is a best practice for states to gather the information needed to assess the workforce, identify shortages, and target and evaluation policy solutions. DSPP is poised to champion workforce data collection for Wisconsin's licensed health professionals. Resources will be required to ensure appropriate staffing and expertise to collect this data and transform it into actionable information for Wisconsin.