

Strengthening Pennsylvania's Healthcare Workforce

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Background

The nation's healthcare system is being challenged in unprecedented ways. Healthcare providers across the country are sounding the alarm about the critical staffing shortages in the field. The American Hospital Association (AHA) suggests that the staffing crisis – including critical shortages of physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals – could jeopardize access to care and lead to poor health outcomes. According to an analysis by EMSI for the AHA there is a projected shortage of up to 3.2 million healthcare workers by 2026¹. Additionally, the AHA projects that America will need to hire at least 200,000 nurses per year through 2033 to meet increased demand and to replace those leaving the profession. The American Nurses Association has called the nursing shortage a “national crisis².”

Unfortunately, some of the largest projected shortages are expected to be in Pennsylvania. According to EMSI, Pennsylvania is projected to have a deficit of more than 277,711 healthcare workers such as medical assistants, home health aides and nursing assistants by 2026. The Commonwealth is also projected to have a deficit of 20,345 registered nurses; the largest projected gap of registered nurses in the country.³

Data from the Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information & Analysis projects a 13 percent increase in healthcare and social assistance positions by 2030. The projected change in employment for selected positions supported by community college programming are listed below⁴:

	Employment		Change		Avg.
	2020	2030	Level	Percent	Annual Change
Healthcare & Social Assistance	1,013,100	1,144,420	131,320	13.00%	13,132
Ambulatory Health Care Services	329,860	385,580	55,720	16.90%	5,572
Offices of Physicians	116,760	128,610	11,850	10.10%	1,185
Offices of Dentists	30,170	34,210	4,040	13.40%	404
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	39,980	49,140	9,160	22.90%	916
Outpatient Care Centers	44,450	54,050	9,600	21.60%	960
Medical & Diagnostic Laboratories	10,000	11,700	1,700	17.00%	170
Home Health Care Services	66,350	82,770	16,420	24.70%	1,642
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	22,160	25,100	2,940	13.30%	294
Hospitals	275,820	292,330	16,510	6.00%	1,651
General Medical & Surgical Hospitals	240,240	252,530	12,290	5.10%	1,229
Psychiatric & Substance Abuse Hospitals	14,010	14,670	660	4.70%	66
Other Hospitals	21,570	25,120	3,550	16.50%	355
Nursing & Residential Care Facilities	191,470	211,750	20,280	10.60%	2,028
Nursing Care Facilities	65,420	67,030	1,610	2.50%	161
Residential Mental Health Facilities	53,100	57,480	4,380	8.20%	438
Community Care Facility for the Elderly	65,930	80,450	14,520	22.00%	1,452
Other Residential Care Facilities	7,020	6,800	-220	-3.10%	-22
Individual & Family Services	162,790	195,270	32,480	20.00%	3,248
Emergency & Other Relief Services	7,200	8,110	910	12.60%	91
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	9,910	9,610	-300	-3.00%	-30

¹ Mercer (2021) *US Healthcare Labor Market*. <https://www.mercer.us/content/dam/mercer/assets/content-images/north-america/united-states/us-healthcare-news/us-2021-healthcare-labor-market-whitepaper.pdf>

² American Nurses Association (2022) *Nurse Staffing Crisis*. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nurse-staffing/nurse-staffing-crisis/>

³ Mercer (2021) *US Healthcare Labor Market*. <https://www.mercer.us/content/dam/mercer/assets/content-images/north-america/united-states/us-healthcare-news/us-2021-healthcare-labor-market-whitepaper.pdf>

⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, Center for Workforce Information & Analysis (2020-30) *Long-term Occupational Employment Projections for Pennsylvania*.

https://www.workstats.dli.pa.gov/Documents/Projections/Occupational/PA/PA_LTOP.pdf

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Pennsylvania must plan for future growth in the healthcare industry, while simultaneously addressing the immediate need for healthcare workers, which is significant. According to Lightcast's online database, there were 298,771 unique healthcare job postings in Pennsylvania from August 2021-August 2022, many of which require the training or credentials available at Pennsylvania's community colleges.⁵

While a postsecondary credential is essential for workers to participate in the 21st century workforce, many careers – including those in the healthcare sector – do not require a four-year baccalaureate degree. Many of the job postings referenced in the Lightcast data set require training or a credential offered by Pennsylvania's community colleges.

Hospitals and other healthcare facilities and providers are reporting persistent staff vacancies and difficulties in filling positions. The healthcare workforce crisis in Pennsylvania is a serious threat to the well-being of the Commonwealth and its residents. This threat must be addressed to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have access to care, including those in the Commonwealth's rural and urban communities. A comprehensive approach and strategic investments are needed to ensure that our healthcare providers have a qualified workforce to deliver high-quality care to all Pennsylvanians.

Community college programs provide a way out of this crisis. Community colleges can help to increase the pipeline of nurses and allied health professionals to address this significant workforce challenge.

Community colleges offer students flexible and manageable career pathways that often result in immediate employment and enhance local, regional, and state economies throughout Pennsylvania. For example, community colleges grant more than 75 percent of nursing associate degrees in the Commonwealth. Community colleges nurses are highly trained, highly skilled and pass the NCLEX – the nursing certification exam – at rates comparable to or higher than the national average.

In addition to nursing, community colleges have dozens of other high-quality credit and noncredit health career programs including nurse aide, practical nursing, multiskilled health technician, respiratory therapy, radiologic technology, healthcare management, histotechnician, diagnostic medical sonography, dialysis technician, EKG Technician, cardiology technician, certified medical assistant, medical billing certificate, paramedic, pharmacy technician, physical therapy assistant, phlebotomy technician, surgical technologist, dental assisting, and dental hygiene, among others. Leveraging the experience and expertise of Pennsylvania's community colleges is an efficient and cost-effective way for the Commonwealth to train talent to build and sustain a high-quality healthcare workforce pipeline.


Recommendation/Request

The Commonwealth must employ a variety of initiatives and make strategic investments to recruit and train more workers for the healthcare industry. The Commission recommends the implementation of the following initiatives to address and reverse the Commonwealth's healthcare workforce gap:

⁵ Lightcast™, accessed 10-12-2022

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 **Provide funding for expansion of healthcare career exploration and development activities and programs in secondary schools and community colleges**, including funds for dual enrollment, and the establishment and expansion of healthcare academies.

- **Career Exploration (\$10M)**
Providing secondary school students with early opportunities to explore careers in high-demand healthcare fields and explore different disciplines increases the likelihood that they will enter those fields and complete their program of study. At the community college level, funds are needed to increase support and advising for students in healthcare programs to help them navigate healthcare career pathways.
- **Dual Enrollment (\$15M)**
Notwithstanding the \$7 million investment in dual enrollment provided in the FY 22-23 budget (for which no information is available as of 10/21/22), Pennsylvania still does not have a statewide, funded dual enrollment program which is a significant barrier to educational attainment. Dual enrollment has a strong positive correlation with student success and therefore, the state should expand dual enrollment and specifically incentivize enrollment in dual credit offerings that are aligned with healthcare workforce needs by reducing cost barriers for students especially for students from underrepresented groups or low-income backgrounds.

There are several models in place that could be scaled and expanded across the state, including but not limited to:

- Community College of Beaver County - [CCBC Health Academy](#). This program provides high school students in grades 11-12 who are interested in careers in nursing, practical nursing, radiologic technology, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, nurse anesthetist, and physician the opportunity to enroll in coursework at CCBC that can help them refine their area of career interest and accumulate college credit. College credit earned through the Health Academy can be applied to degree programs at the college and at other postsecondary institutions.
- Community College of Allegheny County - [Healthcare Careers Academy](#). This program provides a 2-week summer experience for 10-12th grade students to expose students to career options in healthcare. Students gain hands-on experience in the various laboratories, shadow in a hospital setting, find potential mentors within the field, and have discussions with hospital healthcare professionals.

 **Implement a scholarship program** (\$35M) for individuals seeking a credential in a healthcare field at a Pennsylvania community college. Cost is still a barrier for too many Pennsylvanians, including students entering postsecondary study for the first time, those looking to change careers and those already in healthcare fields seeking to upskill. Particularly for direct care workers who may be living at or near the poverty level, there are often no resources to pursue additional education. Supporting students who are committed to advancing their education through scholarships for tuition, fees, supplies (stethoscope, uniform, shoes, and certification and licensure exams) will help supply the healthcare pipeline.


 **Expand opportunities for Pennsylvanians to earn a BSN at a community college** (\$25M), such as expansion of Bachelor of Science (BSN) partnerships on community college campuses or authorization for community colleges to award the BSN. Both options have the potential to increase the number of nurses with bachelor's degrees in

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healthcare by creating additional opportunities for nurses with associate degrees to seamlessly complete their BSN. According to the National Education Progression in Nursing Collaborative (NEPIN), 65 percent of new nursing students chose the associate degree in nursing (ADN) pathway into the profession.⁶ Community colleges already have the infrastructure, simulation tools and technology to offer this type of programming and have connections to healthcare systems and clinical partners.

- **Provide funding for ADN-BSN partnerships on community college campuses.**
Grant funding should be made available to community colleges to partner with a four-year colleges and universities to design a BSN completion program with input from local employers that rely on BSN-educated employees. Funds could be used for personnel costs required to deliver BSN programs on community college campuses, outreach, recruitment, and student financial aid.
- **Authorize community colleges to award the BSN.**
Community Colleges should be authorized to confer bachelor's degrees, particularly in health- and technology-related fields where community colleges have facilities, equipment, and expertise such as nursing. The authority to confer baccalaureate degrees will allow the colleges to respond to regional applied technology and workforce needs. The experience of the more than 24 states that have given their community colleges baccalaureate degree granting authority, including the 11 states that allow community colleges to offer a four-year nursing bachelor's degree, suggests that it is an appropriate policy intervention to meet the education and workforce needs of employers, as well as students who otherwise may not have the resources or ability to attend a traditional four-year university. Several of Pennsylvania's neighboring states; New York, Ohio, West Virginia, and Delaware have already implemented this policy change to help increase postsecondary affordability and access; the Commonwealth should do the same.

 **Provide capital funding for the colleges to invest in facilities and equipment** (\$15M). It is imperative that students in workforce programs – especially in healthcare programs – have access to high-quality, industry standard laboratories, equipment, virtual reality simulations, and mannequins. These resources help students develop their skills, competencies, and confidence before entering a clinical setting. However, these resources are costly and often require annual maintenance. Capital funding will provide the colleges with the resources to modernize their facilities and equipment to meet student needs.

Total investment: \$100M

Benefits

Implementation of the initiatives identified above will increase the quality and sustainability of the Commonwealth's healthcare workforce, thereby allowing Pennsylvania to meet the healthcare needs of its citizens. A talented, qualified, engaged, and diverse healthcare workforce will help ensure that all Pennsylvanians have access to quality care, reduce errors, minimize re-admissions, reduce occupational injuries, result in cost savings for employers, and improve health outcomes for all Pennsylvanians.

⁶ National Education Progression in Nursing (2016-2020) *Trends in Nursing Academic Progression*.
<https://anyflip.com/crpa/ktaa/basic>

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If there is continued instability in the healthcare workforce, there will be negative impacts on access to care, quality of care, and quality of life for Pennsylvania residents.

Method of Change and Proposed Timetable

The initiatives should be legislatively authorized and funded no later than the FY 23-24 budget.