



## Tackling Washington's Health Care Worker Shortage

### Background

As Washington continues to grapple with a shortage of health care workers and an aging population demanding more services, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board), the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force and its partners continue to focus attention on the importance of investing wisely in the state's health workforce development pipeline.

### The Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force

State law holds the Workforce Board responsible for bringing together stakeholders focused on the state's health care workforce, maintaining the state's strategic plan to address health care shortages, and monitoring progress made on this plan. This work is done through the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force (Task Force).

The Task Force is made up of leaders from education and training institutions; health care, migrant and community health services; labor and professional associations, and employer representatives. The Task Force is led by a Chair and Vice Chair who head educational institutions.

Since forming in 2003, the Task Force has brought attention to current and looming health care shortages and has worked with stakeholders to develop and update a state strategic plan, and track progress. The main role of the Task Force is to identify priorities and bring together stakeholders to advocate for and develop solutions.

This work is showing results. Task Force data shows that completions between 2003 and 2008 increased by 50 percent in Associate Degree Nurse and Bachelors of Science in Nursing, significantly increasing the supply of nurses throughout Washington. Continued strong demand means that even with this increase, the state still faces a nursing shortage, as can be seen in the Workforce Board's latest skill gap analysis.

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/NursingOccupationShortages.asp>

See more about the Task Force, the strategic plan and past annual reports at:

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFAbout.asp>

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## Key Policies and Programs

- **High Demand Programs of Study Target Funding.** Between 2003 and 2008, about 70 percent of funds directed to high demand programs of study were targeted at health care education and training programs. By distributing funds through competitive requests for proposals, these high-demand programs were able to secure matching funds and leverage additional private and other federal fund sources. During the last 2009-10 Legislative sessions, High Demand Programs of Study were not funded. However, increased funding for the state's Worker Retraining Program continues to highlight health care education as a targeted high employer demand program.
- **Health Care Industry Skill Panels Deliver Strategy to Local Level.** Seed funding from the federal Workforce Investment Act and the state operating budget, in addition to state legislation, helped establish health care focused partnerships called Industry Skill Panels.

The Skill Panels have used the state's Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force plan as a template to develop their own local plans and implement solutions. This work has meant that these local areas have been poised to take advantage of grant funding or private funding opportunities that become available because the relationships, the discussions, the barriers and the solutions have already been identified. Skill Panels have implemented a variety of programs, including:

- Mentorships for new health care workers.
- Local financial aid.
- "Teach the Teacher" programs to help math and science teachers impart the relevance of math and science in a health care setting.
- Health care exploration and preparation for youth.
- Incumbent worker training grants, recruitment of men into nursing, recruitment of diverse populations in health care fields.
- Career pathways for disadvantaged youth from certified nurse to licensed practical nurse to preparation for further education.

The first two Skill Panels were established in 2000. By 2003, all 12 Workforce Development Areas had a health care industry Skill Panel. Today eight of these remain active, with partnerships from the other four still providing benefits. Contact information for Health Care Industry Skill Panels available at:

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFSkillPanels.asp>

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- **HEET-ing up Workplace Support with Pilots.** The Legislature has provided funds, even through difficult budget times, to support the expansion of the Hospital Education and Training (HEET) pilots. The Health Workforce Institute, affiliated with the Washington Hospital Association, and SEIU 1199 and the union's training fund, have worked together to enable entry level health care personnel in hospitals to access education and training. HEET is friendly to working adults, providing support from their workplace, to help them move up and fill high demand health care positions. This helps low-income adults who otherwise might not go back to school, as well as providing employers with the skilled workforce they need to meet patient demand. The funding is allocated by competitive requests for proposals managed by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). See: <http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e-wkforcehospitalemployee.aspx>

First pilot evaluation:

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~lerc/public/pdfs/heetwhitepaper.pdf>

- **Combining Basic Skills Training with Occupational Training.** While the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) was not developed just for health care education and training, health care programs have been a major focus for the expansion of this nationally recognized innovation, which combines occupational skills training with adult basic skills education. A Workforce Board analysis found Adult Basic Education programs alone have not successfully increased the employment and earning rates for participants. Additionally, SBCTC found that Adult Basic Education students were not connecting with postsecondary education. However, when these programs are integrated with occupational skills training, students realized a very significant improvement in earning and employment outcomes. In 2009, a Community College Research Center evaluation found significant improvements for I-BEST students in educational outcomes, when compared to students who took only Adult Basic Education.

State Board for Community and Technical College contact information:

[http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e\\_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx](http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx)

Community College Research Center evaluation regarding educational outcomes: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=692>

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- **The Center of Excellence in Allied Health at Yakima Valley Community College.** This Center serves as a hub to support health care education and training at the community and technical college level, to share best practices, and discuss methods for expansion and improvement of health care education. The Center also maintains a health care career and education web site, [www.wahott.com](http://www.wahott.com).  
<http://www2.yvcc.edu/coe/default.aspx>
  - **Online Health Career Recruitment and Outreach site.** Washington's Health Opportunities for Today and Tomorrow is a website that lets you know what is HOTT in the health care field. The website provides information on a variety of education and training programs (at all levels) available in the state. The site provides an interactive way for students to explore health care careers and determine what it takes to get ready for postsecondary work in a health care program. [www.wahott.com](http://www.wahott.com)
  - **Delivering Nurse Education to the State's Farthest Reaches.** The Rural Outreach Nurse Education (RONE) program was developed by Lower Columbia Community College in Longview to provide distance learning associate degree nursing education directly into rural communities scattered throughout the state in partnership with local health facilities. Students who enrolled in this program typically worked as certified nurses or licensed practical nurses. This program is allowing communities to "grow their own" health care workforce.  
<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/RONEnursingfrombestpracticebooklet.pdf>
- In 2009, RONE won a Governor's Best Practice Award in workforce development.  
<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/GovernorsBestPracticesAwards2009.asp>
- **Pathways from Long-Term Care to Acute Care.** In 2010, the Workforce Board received a competitive federal Recovery Act grant to:
    - Support the expansion of the RONE program to an urban area.
    - Develop pathways from long-term care to acute care.
    - Implement the first Home Care Aide apprenticeship in the country.

The partners include the SEIU 1199 Training Fund, the SEIU Health Care NW Training Partnership, the Health Workforce Institute (affiliate of the Washington Hospital Association) and at least 10 community and technical colleges across the state, and six Workforce Development Councils.

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This initiative targets workers already working in the health care field, or setting, in support or maintenance roles. Most of these workers are committed to their health care employers but face a variety of barriers in accessing postsecondary education to move them up the health care career ladder.

The new initiative dovetails with Washington's goal to move more low-skilled adults (more than 1.4 million have a high school diploma or less) into education and training that provides a living-wage career. At this time, health care is one of the few fields where there is still job growth and also good paying jobs. (See the state Employment Security Department's job vacancy survey.) Get more information on the initiative at: <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HealthTrainingCoalition.asp>

- **Expanding Workforce Diversity.** The Health Workforce Diversity Advisory Committee of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities has developed recommendations that would increase the diversity of the health care workforce in order to reduce health disparities among our state's populations. Madeleine Thompson is Eleni Papadakis' designee on this Council and she chairs the Health Workforce Diversity Advisory Committee. <http://healthequity.wa.gov/>
- **Opening Doors to All Talent.** The Welcome Back Center at Highline Community College is dedicated to helping immigrants who have health care training and qualifications from other countries to transition to health care careers in Washington. The Center helps to identify suitable careers, design bridge programs, help with articulation and credit for prior learning, and also to offer support toward state licensing or credentials to work in the health care field. <http://welcomeback.highline.edu/>

### Some Major Organizations that Include Workforce Shortages on their Agenda

The Washington Center for Nursing  
<http://www.wacenterfornursing.org/>

The Health Workforce Institute, affiliate of the Washington Hospital Association  
<http://www.hwfi.org/page.cfm>

The Association of Migrant and Community Health Centers  
<http://wacmhc.org/>

Department of Health Rural Health Section:  
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/ocrh/Default.htm>

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There are many more policies, programs and organizations but the above provides a picture of some of the major work taking place.

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