

Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force

2008 Update



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Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

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For annual reports, presentations and meeting information please go to the Task Force page on the Workforce Board's website. Look for Health Care Task Force under "What We Do" at www.wtb.wa.gov.

Health Care Affords Solid Job Opportunities

In a difficult economic climate, with large numbers of dislocated workers and high unemployment rates, health care still affords solid job opportunities. The crisis of health care personnel shortages reaches into all regions of our state and across a wide variety of health care professions and support personnel. A 2007 Hospital Workforce Survey reveals vacancy rates “rose or remained unacceptably high in 16 of 21 nursing and allied health professions.” We have an opportunity amidst this economic crisis to direct more young people, more dislocated workers, and low-skilled adults to education and training that prepares them for high paying, secure jobs in health care.

The Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force’s goal is to address the severe current and projected shortages of health care personnel in Washington as outlined in 2003 legislation. The group is made up of 20 leaders from business, labor, education, and government. In 2007 the Task Force updated the state’s plan to reflect changes that have occurred in the industry since the original Task Force plan was created. This is a strategic plan for the Legislature, state and local agencies, educators, labor, employers, and workers, with six goals, 32 strategies, and outcome measures to track progress. The Task Force meets at least twice a year, tracks progress on the plan, convenes ad hoc committees as special needs arise, and reports to the Legislature annually.

Task Force Plan

The updated plan of the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force addresses educational capacity challenges, recruitment and local priorities. The plan contains 32 strategies and outcome measures to track our progress. Our goals are:

1. Increase educational capacity in health care training programs to enable more people to gain qualifications to work in health care occupations.
2. Recruit more individuals, especially targeted populations, into health care occupations, and promote adequate preparation prior to entry.
3. Develop a data collection and analysis system to assess health care workforce supply and demand.
4. Retain current health care workers.
5. Enable local communities and organizations across the state to implement strategies to alleviate the health care personnel shortage in their areas.
6. Ensure continued collaboration among state and local health care workforce partners.

Legislative Priorities for 2009

Our state has an opportunity to combat unemployment while easing our shortages of health care personnel. Policymakers could consider directing federal stimulus funds to expand health care education program capacity and to support other initiatives that prepare young people, dislocated workers and low-skilled adults for secure jobs in health care.

- ❖ Expand health care education and training programs. Directing additional High Demand Funding allocations to health care is a key method for expansion.

- ❖ Help entry-level employees to prepare for high demand health care positions through support of incumbent worker training initiatives such as the Health Care Employment, Education and Training Initiative.
- ❖ Support financial aid programs such as the Health Scholarship Loan Repayment Program, Opportunity Grants and Expansion of the State Need Grant to part-time students.
- ❖ Support local and targeted initiatives of:
 - Health Skill Panels and Workforce Development Council Initiatives.
 - Center of Excellence of Allied Health at Yakima Valley Community College (clinical coordination, conferences for allied health educators, support of the health career planning website for youth www.WAHOTT.com).
 - Labor-Management training partnerships.
 - Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities.
 - State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and community college clinical coordination.
 - Washington Center for Nursing.
 - Health Work Force Institute.

Tracking Our Progress

The Legislature supported Task Force priorities¹ during the 2008 session, including:

- Allocating \$1.5 million to support the joint initiative of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and Washington State Hospital Association to provide incumbent worker training through Health Employment, Education and Training (HEET).
- Providing an additional \$1.25 million to the Health Scholarship and Loan Repayment Program.
- Providing \$236,000 for additional postage to improve response rates on the Health Workforce Survey, which collects data in such areas as ethnicity, specialty and education of health care professionals around the state. However, the state Department of Health has decided not to continue the survey due to severe current and projected budget cuts.²

Related 2008 legislative initiatives align with our strategic plan:

- 2008 supplemental budget appropriation to support the Welcome Back program at Highline Community College to help immigrants who are health care professionals to transfer their skills and work as health care professionals in Washington.
- Legislation to study ways of recruiting foreign dentists (HB 2881).
- Legislation to develop nurse staffing agreements (E2SHB 2123).
- Legislation to boost training for long-term care workers (SB 6804).

¹ The 2007 Task Force report provides a more in-depth analysis of progress and initiatives to address health care personnel shortages in Washington. Available at: <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFAbout.asp>

² In 2007, the Health Department teamed up with the Workforce Board to survey dental hygienists, registered nurses and licensed practical nurses. In 2008, the survey targeted pharmacists, ARNPs, chiropractors, occupational therapists, physical therapists and occupational therapist assistants.

High Demand funds set aside by the Legislature to fund full-time equivalents (FTEs) in programs determined to have high employer demand have helped increase FTEs and completions in health care occupations. In 2007, High Demand allocations at community and technical colleges totaled \$2.2 million for health care programs. Allocations to expand medical, dentistry, and nursing programs at four-year public universities totaled \$13.7 million. These new investments bring the total state allocation for health care programs expansion in 2007 to just under \$16 million. That's a significant amount, totaling more than half the \$31 million in funding received since 2003. In addition, the High Demand funds allocated through the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges through a competitive process are designed to leverage private matching dollars and in-kind contributions.

Between 2001 and 2006, the state's colleges and universities notched significant gains in boosting the number of some high demand health care professions. For example, registered nurses graduating from associate's degree programs rose from 729 to 1,318 during the five-year period. Those earning bachelor's degrees in nursing expanded from 611 to 925.³

Other significant developments in 2008 include the expansion of the Opportunity Grant program. **Opportunity Grants** provide tuition, books, and supplies to those studying high employer demand programs of study and have made it possible for more low-income students to enter the health care field.

At the same time, local areas increased their efforts to address priority shortages, often depending on local funding support from private sources, federal Workforce Investment Act or grant dollars. **Health Care Industry Skill Panels** brought together education and health industry representatives to initiate needed and innovative projects such as "teach-the-teacher" in Spokane that brings high school math faculty into hospitals and provides tools to show students that math is relevant in a variety of health care careers.

Bottom Line: The Gap Between Supply and Demand Persists

Despite these efforts, the gap between supply and demand remains large for many health care occupations. (See Figure 1.) We must expand capacity at our community colleges and universities to prepare an additional 500 registered nurses, 300 physicians, and nearly 80 physical therapists, among others, each year through 2014 to meet demand. We also need more qualified teaching faculty and lab space. The state also must find ways to give newly trained health care professionals the clinical placements and supervised training they need to become credentialed.

³ The 2007 Task Force report, Part 3, provides a complete analysis of completion in 36 health care education and training programs Available at: <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFAbout.asp>

Figure 1: Gap Analysis

| Health care occupations | Annual Need of Additional Newly Prepared Workers to Close the Gap by 2014 |
|---|--|
| Registered Nurses | 512 |
| Physicians and Surgeons, All Specialists | 311 |
| Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists | 186 |
| Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technicians | 93 |
| Medical Equipment Preparers | 83 |
| Physical Therapists | 78 |
| Speech-Language Pathologists | 78 |
| Chiropractors | 63 |
| Dentists, Including All Specialists | 61 |
| Respiratory Therapists | 56 |
| Physical Therapist Aides | 53 |
| Surgical Technologists | 52 |
| Radiologic Technologists and Technicians | 51 |
| Pharmacists | 48 |
| Occupational Therapists | 42 |
| Dietitians and Nutritionists | 40 |
| Optometrists | 40 |
| Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians | 30 |
| Psychiatric Technicians | 16 |
| Diagnostic Medical Sonographers | 14 |

Source: Workforce Board Gap Analysis 2007