

## Understanding Our Key Healthcare Workforce Challenges

*Giving Care: A Strategic Plan to Expand and Support New Hampshire's Healthcare Workforce* report, identified eight key healthcare workforce challenges. The plan's action agendas outline objectives and strategies to address these challenges. HealthForce NH is dedicated to developing sustainable solutions.



### WORKER STRESS & BARRIERS TO SUPPORT



### LOW WAGES & HIGH COSTS OF LIVING



### THIN PIPELINE & BARRIERS EDUCATION AND/OR TRAINING



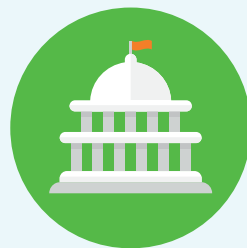
### REIMBURSEMENT ISSUES



### REGULATORY BARRIERS & CONSTRAINTS



### POLICY BARRIERS



### SILOED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS



### NO CENTRALIZED DATA REPOSITORY



## Understanding Our Key Workforce Challenges

To ensure the state plan will effectively strengthen and build the state's health care workforce, planning group members detailed the challenges the plan must address. **They recognized that staffing shortages across the state and across the health care sector are impacting service delivery and access to health, mental health, and oral health services, as well as long-term/congregate and in-home care.** Such shortages create strain for existing staff, which in turn, leads to greater turnover and complicates succession planning. While the bench of health care workers is simply not deep enough to meet the state's needs, it also lacks sufficient diversity to address the needs of New Hampshire's increasingly diverse population. The health care workforce is impacted by several significant challenges, including:

### **Stress, mental health, and barriers to care:**

In the last two years, health care workers have endured heightened stress due to risks to their own health, caring for critically ill patients, too few resources, and a constantly evolving understanding of the virus, prevention measures, and treatment options. Workers experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges also experienced the challenges that face the general population, namely stigma and problems accessing care.



### **Low wages and high costs to live in New Hampshire:**

Many health care workers in low-paid entry-level and support positions that put them at risk for exposure to COVID-19 were forced to work multiple jobs to make ends meet while others transferred to other industries for more money and less danger. Low wages also make it difficult for health care employers to compete with employers in other states and other professions. Health care workers struggle to afford a range of necessities to live in New Hampshire, including quality and affordable housing, transportation, and childcare, all issues that should be addressed by public policy.



### **A thin pipeline and barriers to post-secondary education and training:**

Too few potential workers have an interest in or adequate understanding of the range of roles available within health care. Investment in efforts to diversify the workforce, including outreach and marketing, have been insufficient. The high cost of education poses a barrier to entry and advancement in health care roles. Too few training and education opportunities exist (e.g., apprenticeships, post-secondary programs, clinical placements), as well as too few supervisors to train health care workers. There is poor alignment of the existing education/training programs with workforce shortages. Employers lack capacity to ensure an adequate pipeline of workers for their organizations. Competition among employers for employees creates a barrier to collaboration among health care organizations to share best practices and address their common workforce challenges.



### **Reimbursement issues:**

Low reimbursement rates; lack of reimbursement for critical services; and a lack of parity for mental health services affect the wages employers can offer and their ability to



recruit and retain workers, as well as the ability of health care workers to make ends meet. By rewarding procedures and quantity over outcomes and quality, current reimbursement structures do not incentivize coordination and integration of care, practices that are essential to quality outcomes. By pressuring providers to maximize the number of patients they see in the course of a day, the current structure adds to provider stress and discourages them from participating in professional development opportunities and providing clinical placements and supervision.

### **Regulatory barriers and constraints:**

Complying with burdensome regulations and documentation means providers have less time to spend with patients and presents additional barriers to attracting and retaining staff. Licensing and credentialing processes and requirements discourage qualified professionals from seeking employment in New Hampshire and cause major delays in being able to recruit, on-board, and bill for services provided by new employees, particularly those from other states.



Multiple policy-related issues challenge the workforce. For example, insufficient funding for the state's



community college and university systems, health care apprenticeship programs, and help to relieve students of education-related debt impede the ability to train an adequate number of workers. Government employment policies, such as prohibiting the filling of positions until vacancies exist, cause delays in hiring and create gaps in staffing. Temporary policy and regulatory changes that supported telehealth during the pandemic should be made permanent.

### **Siloed workforce development efforts:**

While many initiatives exist within the state to bolster the health care workforce, they are largely siloed and lack coordination.



### **Data:**

Data related to the health care workforce are collected by multiple entities in varying ways; no central repository exists. Therefore, it is difficult to know which data exist and where they can be found. Data can be hard to access, interpret, and use to understand workforce needs and inform policy and planning. There is a lack of common vocabulary/nomenclature/definitions, an insufficient level of detail, and too few data scientists to assist with understanding and interpreting data.

