



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**



NORTH CAROLINA  
**DEPARTMENT of  
COMMERCE**

# Investing in North Carolina's Caregiving Workforce:

Recommendations to strengthen North Carolina's  
nursing, direct care, and behavioral health  
workforce

January 2024

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# Letter from the Secretaries

Successful health outcomes and successful economic development outcomes go hand in hand. While data, technology, and infrastructure play key roles, without question, the biggest factor for delivering success comes down to the people engaged in the work. A talented and well-trained workforce makes all the difference, which is why the state's strategic plan for economic development carries the title, the 'First in Talent' plan. It's also why the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services partnered to create the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council to build a first-in-class caregiving workforce.



We're pleased to publish this important report on North Carolina's caregiving workforce from the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council, a group of leaders we assembled in 2022 from government agencies, educational institutions, and a host of other organizations deeply engaged in health care issues in North Carolina.



Industry sectors across the economy face workforce availability and training challenges, but the unique needs, requirements, and responsibilities of North Carolina's caregiving workforce demand

special attention from all of us. The state's nursing workforce serves 46 community health and hospital systems across the state, but by 2033 could be 12,500 people short of the number of registered nurses needed. Currently, when it comes to behavioral and mental health, 94 of the state's 100 counties are designated as health professional shortage areas. The demand for people who serve as Direct Care Workers is only projected to grow, with estimates predicting more than 186,000 job openings in this area between 2018 and 2028.

The insights and recommendations offered in this report provide policymakers and practitioners with solid steps for moving forward to address and overcome the workforce challenges we face with the state's caregiving workforce. It also comes at a significant and timely moment for our state, with our Medicaid program expanding at the end of 2023. We applaud the hard work and thoughtfulness that members of the Council applied in researching and considering the recommendations published in this report.

We're pleased to offer this roadmap to strengthen our state. We're confident that by following these recommendations, and with hard work and collaboration, our state can provide every North Carolinian with the care they deserve to live healthier and more abundant lives.

Handwritten signature of Kody Kinsley in black ink.

**Secretary Kody Kinsley**  
North Carolina Department of Health  
and Human Services

Handwritten signature of Machel Baker Sanders in black ink.

**Secretary Machel Baker Sanders**  
North Carolina Department of  
Commerce

# Purpose & Objective

The state of North Carolina recognizes the pressing importance of nurturing a robust and resilient caregiver workforce. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and the North Carolina Department of Commerce (“the Departments”) have positioned the development of this essential workforce as a top priority, aimed at addressing the caregiving needs of both today and the generations to come.

As part of this forward-looking endeavor, the Departments spearheaded the convening of a coalition of leaders drawn from state public agencies, educational institutions, and various organizations to collaboratively craft a strategic blueprint to guide the growth of a thriving caregiving workforce within the state. The journey toward this visionary goal was coordinated by North Carolina’s Area Health Education Centers Program, which engaged Deloitte Consulting to provide facilitation of the agencies, groups, and experts involved.

In late 2022, the Departments launched the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council, an assembly of caregiving experts from governmental agencies, educational institutions, and organizations. The Council offers a diverse and well-rounded perspective to address the state’s current and future caregiving needs. The Leadership Council was formed as a first step in hopes to generate public sector alignment. As this work moves forward, it will be imperative to bring in additional perspectives and partners to advance the solutions presented in this report.

The Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council convened in-person to conduct in-depth explorations of challenges, reviewing ongoing efforts, assessing practices in other states, and identifying potential solutions. Aided by three working groups covering the nursing, behavioral health, and direct care focus areas, the action items and recommendations in this report are the product of careful selection and endorsement by the Council’s caregiving and workforce leaders. These recommendations are grounded in the prioritization of high-impact initiatives and the Council’s capacity to implement them effectively, with a goal to establish a sustainable structure and governance model for the realization of the blueprint presented in this report.



# Caregiving Workforce Focus Areas

Based on the high-level review and data analysis of the greatest health workforce challenges, the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council curated information and data across the state to take a closer look into the shortages and challenges across three key focus areas: data showed the greatest need by the nursing and behavioral health caregiving workforce, followed closely by needs for more direct care professionals. More details of this data analysis can be found in the appendix.

## Nursing

With approximately 153,000 registered nurses (RNs) and 23,000 licensed practical nurses (LPNs),<sup>1</sup> North Carolina boasts a substantial nursing workforce, spanning 46 community health and hospital systems.<sup>2</sup> However, it faces a formidable challenge in the form of an estimated shortage of approximately 12,500 RNs and 5,000 LPNs by 2033. Even with a potential 10% increase in new nurse graduates, the state would still encounter a significant deficit of approximately 10,000 RNs.<sup>3</sup> This shortage spans multiple regions, making it imperative to address the critical need for nursing professionals.

## Behavioral Health

The state's mental health landscape underscores the urgency of focusing on Behavioral Health. A staggering 94 out of North Carolina's 100 counties are designated as mental health professional shortage areas (HPSA).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, 68 counties do not have child and adolescent psychiatrists, exacerbating the challenge.<sup>5</sup> North Carolina ranks 38th nationally in access to mental health care, with a significant portion of youth experiencing major depressive episodes unable to access the necessary treatment.<sup>6</sup> Addressing this issue is vital to ensure comprehensive mental health support for North Carolinians.

## Direct Care

Research from the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI) highlights the burgeoning demand for Direct Care Workers (DCWs) in North Carolina. Between 2018 and 2028, the state projects over 186,000 job openings in this sector.<sup>7</sup> This demand includes nearly 21,000 new positions to meet increasing needs and 165,500 vacancies arising as current workers transition careers or exit the workforce.<sup>7</sup> These statistics emphasize the essential role of DCWs in delivering essential care services and underline the necessity of addressing workforce shortages in this sector.

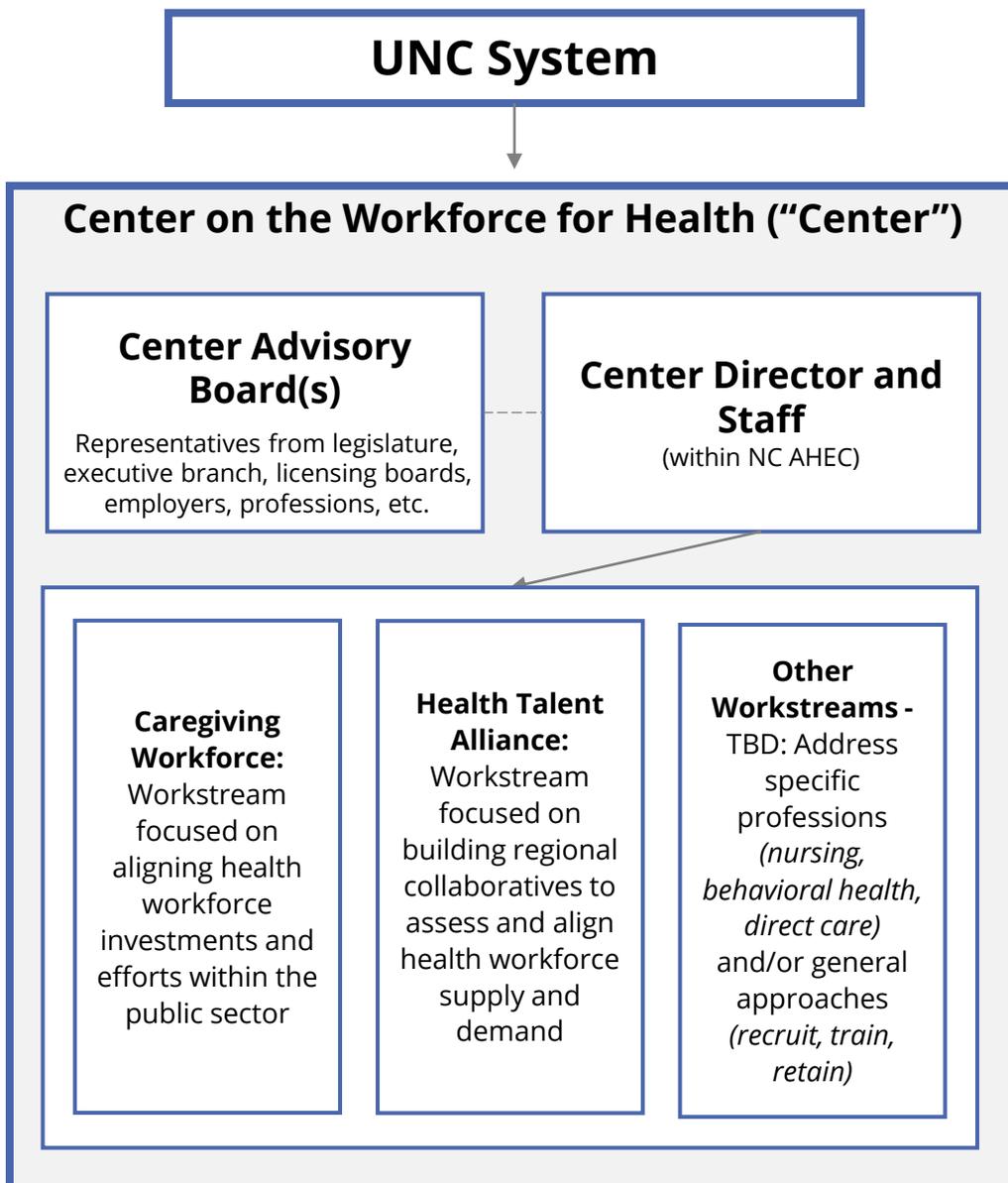
*By focusing on nursing, behavioral health, and direct care roles, the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council aims to tackle the most urgent and impactful areas of workforce development, ensuring that North Carolina can meet the evolving health care needs of its citizens.*

# Governance Considerations

The viability and long-term success of these initiatives hinge on establishing a robust governance structure capable of withstanding government transitions and ensuring sustainability. A University of North Carolina (UNC)-affiliated model, deeply connected to students, teaching institutions, NC Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and the Center on Workforce for Health, has been deemed the most viable option moving forward. AHEC plays a pivotal role in supporting preceptors, and students interested health careers, along with providing professional development, and delivering practice support. The Center on Workforce for Health will provide the platform where leaders can share coordinated state efforts with the private sector. This structure will not only preserve the continuity of these solutions but also guarantee their effectiveness and impact even as administrations change.

## UNC-Affiliated Model

The NC Center on the Workforce for Health will provide the platform where leaders can work collaboratively to address health workforce issues. The Caregiving Council will continue its focus on aligning the public sector work and will coordinate with other public and private sector leaders through the Center.



### UNC University

- Serves structural hub and spokes for integrating workforce efforts into the educational system, including its community partners

### Advisory Board

- Statewide and local leaders to steer the Center's priorities and work
  - **Working groups** - focuses on nursing, behavioral health, and direct care
  - **Key partners** - NCDHHS, Department of Commerce, Department of Public Instruction, the Sheps Center, North Carolina Institute of Medicine, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), NC AHEC, UNC System, the NC Community College System, and UNC university system members included Historically Black College and Universities

### Program Staff

- Operationalize the direction from the Advisory Board; oversee and support the operation of and coordination among the Workstreams; drive research, coordinate program creation and implementation; communicate; serve as link between state and local efforts

### Workstreams

- Dedicated entities to address identified priorities and needs

# Notable State Investment

North Carolina has approved significant Medicaid reimbursement rate increases for behavioral health services, marking the first rise in over a decade. These changes aim to strengthen the workforce and improve access to care. The approved funding includes elevating Medicaid payment rates to 100% of Medicare for relevant services and providing inflation-based increases for certain enhanced behavioral health services without a Medicare equivalent. Notably, inpatient behavioral health services' reimbursement is expected to increase by 30%, and psychiatric diagnostic evaluation will more than double. These changes took effect from January 1, 2024. Funding for diagnostic evaluations and developmental/psychological testing and evaluation will be increased beyond the Medicare rate pending approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Rates for enhanced substance use disorder services and residential substance use disorder services have separately undergone or will soon undergo new rate setting as Medicaid clinical coverage policies are updated. The 2023-2025 budget also allocates investments for alternatives to emergency department interventions and support for direct professionals, including peer support professionals, crucial for the behavioral health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injury care system.<sup>1</sup>

“ *These rate changes are a lasting and transformational investment in behavioral health services and whole-person care in North Carolina. This will improve the foundation of care so every child and adult can get the necessary mental health and substance use disorder treatment when and where they need it.* – Kody H. Kinsley, NCDHHS Secretary ”

“ *For many, the introduction to behavioral health care is through the crisis system and hospital emergency departments. We must improve access to routine mental health care and substance use treatment in every North Carolina community, so services are available when people need them.* – Kelly Crosbie, Director of the NCDHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services ”

## 600,000

North Carolinians who will gain access to Medicaid health care services

## \$835M

One-time and recurring funds approved for NCDHHS in the 2023-2025 budget for behavioral health services

## 2.3M

People will experience improved access due to the Medicaid rate increases



1. NCDHHS Behavioral Health Reimbursement Rates, 2023

# Nursing | Context

## Background

Despite the United States' 4.4 million registered nurses and 900,000 LPNs, predictions indicate a national shortage of nearly 918,000 nurses by 2030. Each state, including North Carolina, has broad and regional challenges that must be overcome. Given an estimated turnover rate of 18% and the fact that 32% of RNs have expressed their intention to leave their jobs, a keen focus on retention is critical.<sup>1</sup>

**18,000**

There are 18,000 RNs and LPNs licensed in North Carolina but working outside the state. There are also 93,000 inactive licenses.<sup>2</sup>

**17,500**

By 2033, North Carolina faces a shortage of approximately 12,500 RNs and 5,000 LPNs.<sup>3</sup>

**23%**

In North Carolina, 23% of licensed RNs are not currently working, along with 26% of LPNs.<sup>2</sup>



Approximately 50% of new North Carolina nurse licenses are via exam, and 50% are via interstate compact.<sup>3</sup>

## Challenges

North Carolina faces a myriad of challenges related to its nursing workforce including low wages, a pending retirement wave, limited career advancement opportunities, administrative burden, and a concerning prevalence of workplace violence. These issues, compounded by faculty shortages in nursing schools, have led to increasingly high burnout rates among nurses, demanding immediate attention and action.

### Low wages

In 2021, pay for North Carolina's RNs ranked 93 cents on the dollar compared to the national average. RNs' salaries in North Carolina averaged \$72,220 per year, lower than the national average for RNs, at \$77,600 per year.<sup>4</sup>

### Career Progression & Advancement

Approximately 38% of nurses in North Carolina expect to retire in the next five years, of whom 20% intend to leave because of lack of promotion or advancement options, while 13% cited work life balance as a main reason to leave.<sup>6</sup>

### Safety

In a 2022 survey by North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA), 49% of respondents said they have personally witnessed violence in the last two years, with more than 27% reporting that they were the victim of workplace violence.<sup>5</sup> This issue threatens the physical and mental well-being of nurses, and the recurring message from NCNA members is that the problem is getting worse.

### Training & Enrollment

Faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country are limiting student capacity as the need for RNs continues to grow. Budget constraints, aging faculty, and increasing job competition from clinical sites have contributed to this crisis. The nurse faculty vacancy rate in North Carolina was 8.8% in 2022, and most of the vacancies (85%) were faculty positions requiring or preferring a doctoral degree.<sup>7</sup>

### Burnout

The ongoing challenges to the nursing profession are fueling a rising burnout crisis. In an NCNA survey asking respondents to rank their level of burnout from 1-10, the average response was 5.2, with a striking 44% of respondents rating their burnout levels between 8 and 10. Within this 44%, 11.7% of respondents reported experiencing the highest possible level of burnout—a score of 10 out of 10.<sup>8</sup> Burnout was driven by high levels of stress, lack of safety, secondary trauma, administrative burden, and other professional hazards.

1. UNC School of Nursing, "The North Carolina Nursing Workforce: Realities, Challenges, Opportunities"; 2. NC Board of Nursing Licensure Statistics; 3. UNC Sheps, "What the Data Say About the Nursing Workforce," Fraher, 2023; 4. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics," 2021; 5. NICOM Nursing Taskforce - Key informational interview, 2023; 6. North Carolina Nurses Association, "Survey: Nurses Burning Out at Unsustainable Rate" 2022; 7. American Association of Colleges of Nursing, "AACN Nursing Faculty Shortage Fact Sheet," 2023; 8. NCNA Survey: NC Nurses Overwhelmed and Burning Out, 2022

# Nursing | Existing Solutions

While North Carolina faces a severe nursing workforce shortage, important current initiatives and investments exist to help alleviate ongoing challenges. Select efforts include:

## How North Carolina is Addressing these Challenges Today



### Recruit & Train

- **NC Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Scholars Program:** The NC AHEC Scholars Program recruits, trains, and supports a diverse group of students from across the state, creating a multidisciplinary team of health professionals committed to community service. This program selects applicants to participate in a two-year educational program. Scholars are eligible to receive a subsidy, subject to academic or institutional approval and includes 40 hours of didactic and 40 hours of clinical work each year.<sup>1</sup>
- **Financial Incentives:** Various scholarship and loan forgiveness programs in North Carolina incentivize students to participate in the nursing workforce.<sup>2</sup>
- **Task Force on the Nursing Workforce:** This North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) task force examined the need for nurses, their qualifications, the capacity of the state's educational institutions to produce adequate numbers of qualified nurses, barriers to career advancement, and the workplace environments within which nursing is practiced.<sup>3</sup>
- **Clinical Instruction Partner (CIP) Program:** This statewide program connects employers and nursing schools to develop a new education model for nursing where partners share nurses to teach students and deliver patients care. In FY23, CIP developed 13 new academic practice partnerships and 34 Clinical Instructor partners were recruited.<sup>4</sup>

## How Can North Carolina Learn from Leading National Peers



Colorado offers loan repayment for nursing faculty (up to \$50,000 full-time, \$25,000 part-time) with at least master's degrees who teach for two years.<sup>8</sup>



Virginia's General Assembly established a \$500,000 Nursing Preceptor Incentive Program to provide financial incentives for practitioners who serve as otherwise uncompensated preceptors for Advanced Practitioner Registered Nurse (APRN) students to help increase access to care, address the primary care shortage, and manage chronic diseases.<sup>9</sup>



### Retain & Innovate

- **NC AHEC Nurse Refresher Program:** This program helps nurses who have left the profession or want to return after a long break. The program provides refresher courses and clinical experiences to update knowledge and skills, thereby increasing employability and retention.<sup>5</sup>
- Data collection in North Carolina is facilitated through the Health Professional Data System, Sentinel survey, and Nursecast model, supported by the **Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research** (Sheps Center). *Please see page 13 for a profile on the Sheps Center.*
- The **Nursecast model**, focusing on RN/LPN dynamics, provides analysis of factors such as supply and demand in the nursing workforce.<sup>6</sup>
- **The NC Credentialed Public Health Nurse Program:** The first of its kind in the nation, this award-winning credential program ensures public health nurses have access to the specialty's current scope and standards of practice information and supports continuing competency.<sup>7</sup>



The California Healthcare Workplace Violence Prevention Act requires health care employers conduct a risk assessment, implement a violence prevention plan, and provide training responding to workplace violence. A study found that Californian hospitals had a 32% reduction in workplace violence as a result.<sup>10</sup>



In Virginia, the SafeHaven program was established to provide confidential peer coaching and counseling to health care workers suffering from stress and burnout.<sup>11</sup>

# Nursing | Recommendations

## Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Action Areas

The Nursing Working Group met virtually five times to discuss potential avenues for enhancing and strengthening the nursing pipeline. Comprising leaders from institutions like the UNC System, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), NC AHEC, Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and the Sheps Center, they engaged in extensive discussions and collaboratively crafted six recommendations to enhance the nursing workforce.

### INITIATIVE #1: Establish academic coaches for community college students

#### CHALLENGE

According to research conducted by the UNC System, the second most common reason why students left their nursing programs was academic issues or nursing course failure (the first reason being personal or financial circumstances).<sup>1</sup> Once enrolled, based on average historical attrition rates, every 100 additional nursing enrollees at a UNC System institution will yield approximately 86 additional nursing graduates. At a NC community college, every 100 additional enrollees will yield approximately 56 additional graduates.

#### STRATEGY

The Departments can create a network of North Carolina nurses to serve as coaches to mentor community college students over the course of one to two years, providing needed academic support and mentoring. Community colleges will identify at-risk students early on and employ support strategies including tutoring, instruction on study and test taking skills, time management, and work/life balance. Coaches will serve as a resource and tailor support strategies specific to their student. Coaches will guide nursing students throughout their journey to graduation as well as act as a collaborator with faculty on academic performance.

#### IMPACT

This initiative aims to establish a dynamic network of retired nurses and graduate students who will empower community college students with personalized academic support, ultimately enhancing academic performance, fostering timely graduation, and strengthening collaboration with faculty to ensure the success of nursing students. Additionally, these mentors will offer guidance to students, addressing not only their academic challenges but also sharing insights into the nursing profession and overcoming challenges in the field.

#### ACTION STEPS

1. Partner with NCCCS to identify community colleges at which to pilot academic coach expansion.
2. Identify funding for community colleges to train coaches.
3. Develop a plan to identify, recruit, and train coaches through partnerships with community colleges, local associations, and employers who can teach coaches about the resources available to the students.
  - a) Identify opportunities for continuing education credits and/or stipends for coaches.
  - b) Prioritize the recruitment of diverse nursing mentors to strengthen the outcomes and experiences of nursing students.
4. Identify at-risk nursing students and develop a marketing plan for how to reach them through this program.
5. Identify key performance indicators to monitor and track student outcomes.

#### LEVEL OF EFFORT

This initiative requires a point of contact at each community college to manage the identification and training of coaches along with the project management of the program. Funding will be needed to market the program to students and may be allocated from pre-existing budgets. It is recommended that this program begin as a pilot at one community college to determine the investment needed and subsequent return on investment (ROI).



# Nursing | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #2: Enhance and invest in clinical partnerships

### CHALLENGE

In North Carolina, challenges exist for nursing students to access opportunities for upskilling and credentialing within the field, given the prohibitive cost of nursing education. Other key limiting factors in producing more enrollees include employing increased numbers of teaching faculty and retaining existing faculty, providing increased opportunities for clinical placements, and constructing new instructional space or repurposing existing instructional space.<sup>1</sup>

### STRATEGY

AHEC should secure additional funding to support the expansion of the existing NC AHEC Nursing Clinical Instructor Partner (CIP) Program. Dedicated funding is essential for supporting new partnerships, training nurses to become faculty, marketing the program, and identifying additional stakeholders to participate in the program.

### IMPACT

The intended impact is to increase educational capacity and increase the number of nurses who are trained and licensed each year. Additionally, partnerships would improve the retention of RNs by allowing them an alternative to the bedside and opportunity to teach in nursing programs and develop their career without leaving patient care.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Communicate the success stories, metrics, and ROI from the existing NC AHEC Nursing CIP Program.
2. Identify future cohort of partnerships and the necessary resources to launch new partnerships and/or sustain current partnerships.
3. Expand the funding pool for the NC AHEC Nursing CIP Program.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

In the short term, resources are needed to secure funding for the existing partnership program and its continuation. As the partnerships are expanded throughout the state, additional support, resources, and funding will be required.



### PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Duke Health and Durham Technical Community College formed a partnership with the goal of addressing nursing shortages across North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> This Academic Practice Partnership consisted of three key objectives: (1) **expand enrollment and retention at Durham Tech**, (2) **create new pathways** to nursing employment at Duke Health, and (3) **advance equity and diversity** in hiring. Clinical staff from Duke Health assumed faculty roles at Durham Tech, providing students with opportunities for mentorship and career exploration, while new equipment and dedicated roles were introduced to support Duke Health employees pursuing education at the college.

### IMPACT

This Clinical Instructor Partnership **expanded educational capacity** at Durham Tech, helping more students gain access to nursing careers and improved student retention. It introduced innovative pathways to nursing employment within Duke Health, fostering career growth for health care professionals.



### PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Hugh Chatham Health pioneered a collaborative initiative with Surry Community College and Surry-Yadkin Works, the first community-based internship program in North Carolina. The partnership created pre-apprenticeship opportunities at Hugh Chatham Health which has allowed students to access apprenticeships or part-time positions to continue their education through the Surry-Yadkin Works program. The initiative is part of the U.S. Department of Labor's Apprenticeship program and North Carolina's ApprenticeshipNC, offered through the NCCCS Office.

### IMPACT

This innovative partnership allowed fourteen students to complete pre-apprenticeships, with ten of them, including adult learners, securing part-time positions at Hugh Chatham Health while continuing their health care education.

Note: While the partnership between Duke Health and Durham Technical Community College is just one example of an effective partnership, other impactful partnerships exist throughout the state including in rural counties. 1. University of North Carolina & North Carolina Community Colleges, "Recommendations on Increasing Nursing Graduates in Response to SL 2022-74," 2023; 2. Durham Tech, "Durham Tech, Duke University Health System Partner to Create Nursing Talent Pipeline," 2023; 3. Fourteen Surry-Yadkin Works Students Sign with Hugh Chatham Health as Apprentices and PRNs, 2023.

# Nursing | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #3: Improve employee retention and engagement

### CHALLENGE

The challenge of nursing retention and engagement in the health care sector deserves paramount concern. New graduate RNs are responsible for some of the substantial turnover rates (defined as when staff leave their employer), ranging from 39.8% within their first year to a staggering 58.7% within the first two years of their careers.<sup>1</sup> These statistics underscore the significant challenges that health care institutions face in retaining and engaging their nursing staff, which both leads to financial burdens and impacts the quality of patient care. Among the top reasons for nurse turnover are low wages and administrative burden.

### STRATEGY

To increase the retention of the nursing workforce in North Carolina, two strategic approaches should be considered. In the short term, adjusting public sector nursing salaries to match inflation rates would help address immediate concerns and provide an incentive for nurses to remain in the workforce. Adjustments would also serve as an example for the private sector to follow. In the long term, investing in the NC AHEC Practice Support Program, which is a partnership with NCDHHS, is recommended to tackle deeper issues related to workplace culture, fostering an environment that is more conducive to nurse retention and job satisfaction. This program provides contractors to help primary care practices with activities related to quality improvement, medical record transitions, and/or Medicaid Transformation to decrease burden on the current workforce.

### IMPACT

Implementing these strategies will address low wages, retention incentives and administrative burden faced by nurses, as well as enhance their job satisfaction and overall quality of care in North Carolina's health care system.

### ACTION STEPS

#### Nursing Wages

1. Convene a working group (recommend NCDHHS to lead) to conduct an assessment on nursing wages.
2. Identify monetary adjustments and/or retention incentives.
3. Recruit team to draft legislation and advocate for improvements.

#### Practice Support Program

1. Identify a working group (recommend NC AHEC to lead) to expand its Practice Support Program.
2. Evaluate current program successes and areas for new opportunities to determine future enhancements/support needed for the program.
3. Prioritize components that will enhance nurse retention (e.g., alternative or flexible scheduling, part-time positions, team-based care, etc.).

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Over the course of the next 12 months, a multi-stakeholder approach will be required to advocate for increases in nurses' compensation. Long-term, additional investments will be needed to support and expand the NC Practice Support Program.

## LPN Shortage Estimates<sup>2</sup>:



Today:  
~1,300

2033:  
~5,000

# 70%

of survey respondents report that Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) turnover is a "moderate/urgent problem"<sup>3</sup>

# 49%

of UNC survey respondents report intent to leave the CNO role in 3 years<sup>3</sup>

# 2 years

average time at the bedside for a new nurse before leaving<sup>1</sup>

# Nursing | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #4: Invest in social resources and NCCARE360 expansion

### CHALLENGE

Numerous barriers hinder access to essential health care services for many North Carolinians, potentially exacerbating health disparities and poor health outcomes. These obstacles, which include limited access to transportation, childcare, and health care resources, alongside the lack of health insurance, disproportionately affect under-resourced communities. It is important to note that similar challenges also arise for students pursuing nursing education and training, impacting their ability to focus and succeed academically. Addressing the social factors influencing health necessitates that nurses themselves feel supported and can meet their basic needs, as this is crucial for their academic success and future contributions to health care.

### STRATEGY

To support nursing students both at community colleges and 4-year institutions, additional investment is needed for social services such as transportation, childcare, food security and housing. The state should invest in the expansion of unmet social needs. In addition, to deliver these services in a more streamlined and effective manner, the state should invest in a tool such as NCCARE360, which is the nation’s first statewide coordinated care network that connects individuals to local services and resources through a shared technology platform. This close loop referral system tracks the outcome of that referral and connection to resources.

### IMPACT

By making investments, this social support ecosystem will alleviate the navigation and scheduling burdens on nursing students. By investing in essential needs to support nursing students, NCDHHS can increase accessibility, reduce barriers, and strengthen the education pipeline. Streamlining services with tools like NCCARE360 can improve support efficiency, potentially boosting student retention and graduation rates.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Identify a specific region or area, of highest need, to start an intervention or support.
2. Determine the investment needed for addressing the identified need. Assess the feasibility of additional investment and identify both public and private funding sources.
3. Partner with NCCARE360 to determine the investment needed to onboard the community resources to the shared platform to effectively connected people to resources. This collaboration will help ensure a comprehensive and well-supported approach to addressing the issue.
4. Identify any additional partners that provide an interconnected network of both health and social services.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

In the short-term, NCDHHS should work with NCCARE360 to identify one region to pilot this initiative in Spring 2024.

## Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research

### MISSION

The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research seeks to improve the health of individuals, families, and populations by understanding the problems, issues, and alternatives in the design and delivery of health care services.

### OVERVIEW

The Center is a unit of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Center’s director reports to the Vice Chancellor for Research. Oversight responsibility of the Center is vested in an Advisory Board whose members include senior faculty and administrators from the five health science schools, departments from the Division of Academic Affairs, as well as representatives of the health services community at large.

### APPROACH

The Center maintains an interdisciplinary program of research, consultation, technical assistance, and training that focuses on questions concerning the accessibility, adequacy, organization, cost, effectiveness, and equity of health care services and the dissemination of this information to policymakers and the public.

# Nursing | Recommendations

## **INITIATIVE #5: Increase the number and availability of nurse and faculty loan repayment programs and stipends**

### **CHALLENGE**

As noted in the Future of Nursing report published by the National Academy of Sciences, cost is a main component in decisions about pursuing nursing education. Underrepresented minorities are particularly impacted by financial barriers to entering the nurse field. As the cost of obtaining a degree and the subsequent student debt remains the greatest barrier to pursuing a degree, potential nursing students can face insurmountable barriers to entry.<sup>1</sup>

### **STRATEGY**

North Carolina currently maintains several loan repayment programs relevant to nursing students. This includes the state-funded Nurse Education Scholarship Loan Program (NESLP), Nurse Educators of Tomorrow (NET), and Nurse Scholars Program (NSP/MNSP), in addition to the Health Resources and Services Administration-funded State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP).<sup>2,3</sup> Loan repayment programs can incentivize and support those unable to dedicate full energy or resources to a traditional education period. By understanding existing programs' utilization, capacity and funding, current advertising strategies, program barriers and constraints, eligibility requirements, and demographic breakdown would give a holistic viewpoint into an important lever for equity and evolve the programs to match the needs of intended users.

### **IMPACT**

By reviewing loan repayment program utilization and understanding barriers, NCDHHS can help the state evolve an existing high-impact lever for increasing accessibility into careers in nursing, particularly for those already working in the caregiving field.

### **ACTION STEPS**

1. Increase partnerships with the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA, for state-funded programs) and program owners from the NCDHHS SLRP.
2. Conduct a data call for program utilization, capacity and funding, current advertising strategies, eligibility requirements, and demographic breakdown.
3. Conduct limited interviews with the NCSEAA and NCDHHS program owners to understand program constraints, implications from options like stipends, etc.
4. Consider a survey to loan repayment program applicants to further understand program constraints.
5. Consider informational interviews with financial aid subject matter experts or education administrators from the NCCCS, UNC System, NCICU, and nursing education programs.
6. Develop and analyze nurse loan repayment program usage and constraints to make recommendations for increasing program reach and impact.
7. Develop an approach for funding requests from the North Carolina General Assembly.

### **LEVEL OF EFFORT**

Develop an analysis including a dollar value of loan repayments and recommendations to be included with the next state budget request. Cost considerations for this initiative include NCDHHS staff time to review, analyze, and develop recommendations about loan repayment programs. Consider the nuanced needs of rural and urban regions.



# Nursing | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #6: Readjust nurse faculty salaries and schedules

### CHALLENGE

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing cites several key reasons for faculty shortages: increasing average age of faculty members and associated increasing retirement rates, high compensation in alternate settings that attracts current and potential nurse educators, and an insufficient pool of graduates from master's and doctoral programs.<sup>1</sup> A 2020 National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice report calls the faculty shortage a "long-standing crisis threatening the supply, education, and training of registered nurses" and recommends federal efforts as well as a coordinated private-public response to address the shortage.<sup>2</sup> According to NC Nursecast, there is a projected gap of 8.9% (or 132 RN educators) by 2033, with the possibility of a 22.6% gap of 297 educators should retirements occur five years early.<sup>3</sup>

### STRATEGY

The state can retain and attract more faculty to the profession to support the education of future nurses through competitive salaries and flexible schedules, such as evening classes. A compensation study is also needed to understand the gap between clinical and faculty positions. Once the gaps are identified by region, funding could be determined either through setting minimums and/or creating blended funding opportunities for public and private institutions. In addition to raising pay, as a part of receiving funding, institutions will be required to review and report on availability of demand for evening and non-traditional scheduling for classes. Furthermore, consideration for compensation should be extended to adjunct faculty and preceptors who often fill critical gaps within nursing education systems.

### IMPACT

By focusing on compensation, North Carolina can address the primary barrier to working in nurse education: low pay. The state can both incentivize new entrants to nurse education and retain those currently working in the field who, due to inadequate compensation, may face choosing between a clinical or educational salary.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Assemble a committee of private and public nursing educational institution representatives and partner with NCICU in identifying key stakeholders.
2. Ahead of approaching the General Assembly for funding, the committee may:
  - a) Conduct a compensation study with a focus on regional and equitable insights to understand the regional pay gaps between faculty and clinical staff, also considering the type of institution, work schedules, hours worked, and other benefits.
  - b) Conclude what a reasonable difference should be between faculty and clinical staff compensation.
  - c) Using the current pay difference between faculty and clinical staff and the optimal future state, calculate funding requirements for a raise for UNC and Community College System faculty, with a grant pool and criteria for faculty within NCICU organizations.
  - d) Study barriers of current faculty schedules and consider tying schedule recommendations to funding requirements if a true barrier to recruitment and retention is revealed.
3. Detail a plan for the General Assembly:
  - a) Tie nurse faculty pay to market-rates via an annual compensation study.
  - b) Use faculty retention rates provided by educational representatives combined with research to reveal salary as a key driver for faculty turnover and a roadblock to recruitment.
  - c) Pose the option of becoming nurse faculty against the aging nurse workforce, for whom teaching could provide balance.
  - d) Provide the amount of funding required based on the committee's compensation study.
  - e) Highlight any future recommended action for the General Assembly, such as differentials for working non-traditional hours, incentives for underrepresented demographics, etc.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Once the level of pay increases has been confirmed, NCDHHS will present an appropriations request to the General Assembly for the FY 2025 cycle.

# Behavioral Health | Context

## Background

North Carolina is currently experiencing a behavioral health crisis marked by a surge in demand and a shortage of care professionals in the field. Two in five of North Carolinians live in a mental health professional shortage area. Beyond that, 22 counties have no practicing psychiatrists. Rural counties in North Carolina have 0.58 psychiatrists for every 10,000 residents, and 68 counties do not have a child and adolescent psychiatrist present.<sup>1</sup>



Kaiser Family Foundation reports a national increase in depression, anxiety, and opioid use since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

**52%**

Of the 14.2% of youth in North Carolina who were diagnosed with a major depressive episode in 2022, 52% did not receive mental health services.<sup>1</sup>



The 2021 youth suicide rate among ages 10 to 17 is its highest in two decades.<sup>3</sup>

**13%**

North Carolina mental health providers only meet 13% of the mental health needs in the state compared to the national average of 28% demand that is met by providers.<sup>4</sup>

**Considerable demand strains the already limited workforce**

## Challenges

North Carolina's behavioral health workforce is experiencing numerous challenges, including low reimbursement rates, high administrative burden, lack of visibility surrounding career paths, and limited career advancement opportunities for unlicensed professionals.

### Low reimbursement rates

In North Carolina, reimbursement rates have not been updated since 2013.<sup>5</sup> Lower Medicaid payment rates (relative to other payers) as well as and mental health providers limit participation in Medicaid and further exacerbate existing workforce shortage. However, in late 2023, the state of North Carolina appropriated \$220M annually to increase behavioral health Medicaid rates, with the new rates in effect as of January 1, 2024.

### Administrative burden

Administrative burdens can inhibit providers from accepting insurance. Often, the administrative burdens are higher for Medicaid than other payors.<sup>6</sup>

### Barriers to entry & return on investment

Licensed behavioral health professional positions require a master's degree in counseling, psychology, social work, family therapy, or other human services related field. These degree programs often leave students with significant student loan debt.<sup>5</sup>

### Limited opportunities for advancement in unlicensed positions

For the unlicensed behavioral health workforce, including qualified professionals, associate professionals, and paraprofessionals, career progression exist, but is not clearly articulated nor based on certification. Talented employees can feel stagnant without advancement options and leave for higher paying roles elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> The current certification process for peer support specialists can be difficult to navigate in North Carolina. There are currently only four to six approved curriculums and few agencies hiring peer support specialists.<sup>7</sup>

# Behavioral Health | Existing Solutions

While myriad challenges exist that negatively impact North Carolina's behavioral health workforce, various solutions have been developed to help alleviate ongoing challenges. Select efforts include:

## How North Carolina is Addressing these Challenges Today



### Recruit & Train

- **Department of Public Instruction NC School Mental Health Initiative (NC SMHI):** The NC SMHI is a multi-disciplinary partnership of stakeholders related to the provision of mental health services to children and youth. This initiative aims to provide policy/legislative support and recommendations for accessible, high-quality, and coordinated mental health services.<sup>1</sup>
- **State Loan Repayment Program:** SLRP focuses on behavioral health providers who provide psychiatric care as well as integrated care to people in rural and underserved communities. The Office of Rural Health receives federal funds to administer this program.<sup>2</sup>



### Retain & Innovate

- **NCDHHS Addiction Education Minority Fellowship Program:** The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services provides an opportunity for institutions to give tuition scholarships for students from ethnic/racial minority groups to pursue degrees that support work in the addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery fields.<sup>3</sup>
- **NCDHHS Expansion of Practitioner Education:** The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services developed an initiative to expand the integration of substance use disorder education into the standard curriculum of relevant health care and health services education programs.<sup>3</sup>
- **NC Medicaid Expansion:** As of December 1, 2023, Medicaid will be expanded to provide health care access to 600,000 North Carolinians. The expansion is expected to deliver better health care services, bolster rural hospitals, and infuse the state's economy with substantial funding.<sup>4</sup>

## How North Carolina can Learn from Leading National Peers



In Arizona, the state offers a tax credit to employers who hire behavioral health workers who meet certain qualifications.<sup>5</sup>



In Massachusetts, student loan repayment includes a competitive application to pay between \$30,000-\$50,000 for behavioral health providers in exchange for a commitment to practice in a community-based setting for four years.<sup>6</sup>



In Maine, the state's Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHS) reduced the number of required assessments for Substance Use Disorder Treatment, allowing providers to spend more time with patients and less on documentation.<sup>7</sup>



In California, the state's Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) expanded reimbursement for telehealth services provided by behavioral health providers, which can reduce the need for in-person visits.<sup>8</sup>

# Behavioral Health | Recommendations

## Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Action Areas

The Behavioral Health Working Group met virtually five times to discuss potential avenues for enhancing and strengthening the behavioral health workforce. Comprising leaders from the NC Division of Mental Health, NC State Board of Education, UNC System, NC Community College System, NC AHECs, and the Sheps Center, they engaged in extensive discussions and developed five recommendations to enhance the behavioral health workforce.

### INITIATIVE #1: Advance the data landscape for the behavioral health workforce

#### CHALLENGE

The absence of an aligned and well-governed system for organizing behavioral health workforce data in North Carolina impedes effective decision making and problem solving. In the absence of a unified data repository, behavioral health stakeholders face challenges in accurately evaluating workforce needs, identifying distribution disparities, and understanding trends, which hampers their capacity to make prompt and well-informed choices.

#### STRATEGY

To have a stronger data strategy, continued expansion of the Sheps Center key priorities is critical, as well as harnessing connections within the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council to combine multiple data sources and create data lakes. The Sheps Center currently tracks health workforce data for many health professions, including psychologists and psychological associates for behavioral health. Supporting the expansion to the broader community of behavioral health workers would unlock new insights into this diverse field.

#### IMPACT

By investing in the expansion, collection, and aggregation of behavioral health data under an aligned strategy, key stakeholders will better understand existing workforce barriers and will be able to prioritize recruitment and retention opportunities that yield a high return-on-investment.

#### ACTION STEPS

1. Conduct an inventory of the existing workforce data that is being collected statewide and the resources required to align existing efforts.
2. Determine what data elements are needed and articulate the purpose for data collection.
3. Engage other licensure boards and the NC Department of Commerce to fill existing gaps within the behavioral health profession data system.
4. Secure funding to create a centralized data governance structure that incorporates data from various entities in North Carolina such as the Sheps Center, UNC System, NCICU, NCCCS, and the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Center on Workforce for Health.
5. Convene the Council and leverage the academic and employer connections to improve data collection and dissemination.

#### LEVEL OF EFFORT

This initiative supports the continuation of the work at the Sheps Center focused on improving the availability of workforce data and enhancing the coordination among relevant stakeholders (i.e., NCCCS, UNC System, etc.).



## UNC Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center

*The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center (UNC-BHWRC) is a dynamic hub of innovative, data-driven research on the workforce responsible for providing mental health and substance use services.*

#### MISSION

To improve the behavioral health and well-being of the U.S by conducting research to strengthen the current and future behavioral health workforce through exploration of the disparities that perpetuate inequities in behavioral health treatment, access, and quality

#### OVERVIEW

- UNC-BHWRC produces research to inform policies that support the behavioral health workforce
- UNC-BHWRC produce timely, policy-relevant projects to address emerging issues and challenges to the behavioral health workforce
- UNC-BHWRC is funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

#### LEADERSHIP

**UNC-BHWRC Director:**  
Brianna M. Lombardi,  
PhD, MSW

**Deputy Director:**  
Lisa de Saxe Zerden,  
PhD, MSW

# Behavioral Health | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #2: Define the unlicensed behavioral health workforce and professional pathways

### CHALLENGE

The behavioral health field is made up of a multitude of career options, both licensed and unlicensed (see graphic below). By working to understand the menu of career options that students and workers have when learning about behavioral health careers and career pathway points of entrance, the state can better socialize and support promotion of both those entering and continuing in the field.

### STRATEGY

In order to enhance the recruitment and advancement of the unlicensed behavioral health workforce, NCDHHS should create a set of comprehensive materials to help learners, academic counselors, employers, and other stakeholders understand professional pathways and opportunities for advancement within the behavioral health field.

### IMPACT

Already demonstrating a dedication for the field, unlicensed workers specifically have the potential for investment as one facet of the future behavioral health licensed workforce. Supporting unlicensed workers also offers the option of supporting diverse talent who may be unable to dedicate years of focused time to formal education without supplemental income.

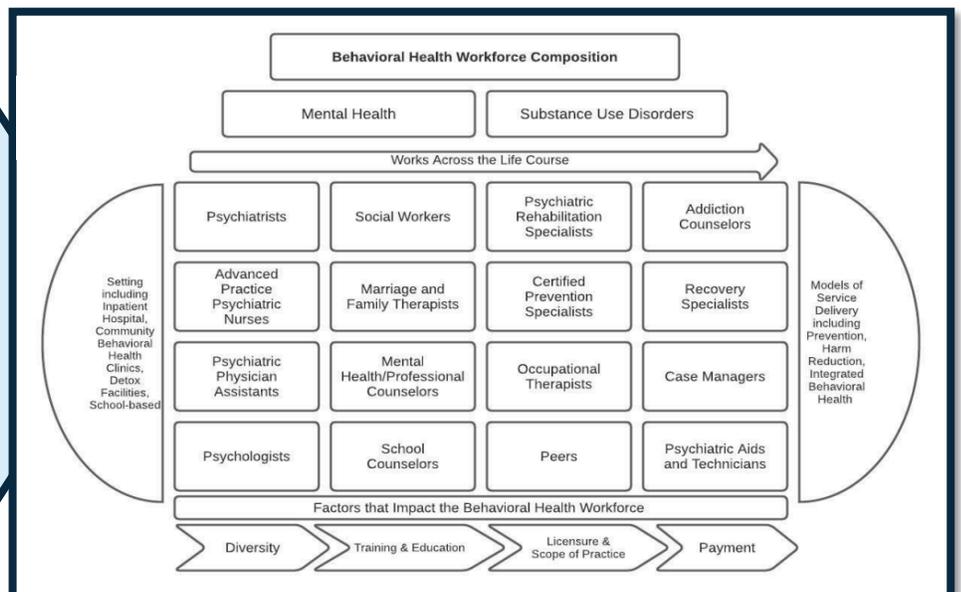
### ACTION STEPS

1. Assemble community college faculty and directors to map associate degree programs to the potential roles that graduates could fill.
2. Partner with employers and NCDHHS to map out places of employment and opportunities for professional advancement.
3. Consider conducting surveys to understand 1) where graduated students are employed and 2) certification, licensure, and career pathway awareness.
4. Develop a map of entrance and exit points into unlicensed behavioral health roles and into licensed ones to understand North Carolina's behavioral health career pathways.
  - a) Identify points of attrition along the career pathways and initial mitigation recommendations.
5. Support NCCCS in developing a mental health certification program for community college students.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Given the existing financial investment and commitments to the behavioral health workforce in North Carolina, the level of investment should remain minimal. Over the next six months, NCDHHS should partner with the Sheps Center to address these action steps. Additional stakeholders such as NCCCS, NCICU, and NC AHEC should be engaged in this process.

As displayed by the **UNC Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center**<sup>1</sup>, there are many settings and licensed and unlicensed behavioral health career options. Further understanding the various entry points would enable the state to support the entirety of the workforce.



# Behavioral Health | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #3: Incent recruitment and retention for publicly funded mental health roles, including both licensed and unlicensed professionals

### CHALLENGE

Public sector behavioral health professionals and providers work in demanding and difficult environments that include challenges like large and complex caseloads, ongoing workforce shortages, high acuity of care needs, lack of quality supervision, and connection with other professionals. All of this has contributed to increasing burnout and fatigue. Additionally, pay increases nationally for state and local government employees have not kept pace with those of private workers, who generally have enjoyed much stronger gains in recent years. A 2022 Pew Charitable Trust analysis of Labor Department data shows that the year-over-year growth rate for hourly private sector salary and wages in each of the past four quarters has exceeded that for state and local governments by the largest margin on record.<sup>1</sup> Concerns over pay have compounded an already difficult situation for governments in recruiting and retaining staff and put additional strains on public services.

### STRATEGY

NCDHHS should garner support and funding for debt relief, competitive compensation, professional development, quality supervision, and career advancement.

### IMPACT

Enhancing the overall well-being and career satisfaction of public sector mental health providers will ultimately improve successful recruitment and retention efforts for this workforce.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Understand the disparities in pay and other benefits between private and publicly funded mental health roles, to help develop a business case for increased pay and benefits.
2. Expand the candidate pipeline of peer support specialists to include diverse workforce segments such as carefully screened formerly incarcerated individuals, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and immigrant populations through partnerships with external organizations.
  - a) Build relationships with advocacy groups to reach these populations, disseminate career marketing materials, and explore partnerships with external organizations (including academic institutions) to streamline hiring.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Initial research and coordination of stakeholders could be accomplished within three months, while designing and implementing programs across the public sector and developing partnerships to expand the pipeline would extend efforts through 2024.



1. Pew Charitable Trusts, "Government Wage Growth Lags Private Sector by Largest Margin on Record," 2022

# Behavioral Health | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #4: Increase training and credentialing for peer support professionals

### CHALLENGE

There is a lack of consistent and available courses across the state for peer support professionals in North Carolina, who provide a significant level of mental health care.

### STRATEGY

NCDHHS and the Department of Commerce should offer free or very low-cost training programs specifically designed for peer support professionals to enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies. State agencies should refine set of criteria, core competencies, and skills required for peer support professionals, ensuring consistency in the understanding and application of these criteria across the state. State agencies should define new qualifications needed to support peer support professionals as they progress in their careers.

### IMPACT

Providing new standardized credentialing for peer support professionals will help eliminate barriers to entry to the field, ultimately expanding the unlicensed workforce and enabling individuals to enhance their core competencies. This strategy not only fosters professional growth but also ensures uniformity in qualifications, contributing to the overall standardization and effectiveness of the behavioral health workforce.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Under NCDHHS's lead, identify the benefits agencies could expect if they support their unlicensed workforce.
2. Map and tie the high impact roles that peer support professionals occupy that, with training and credentialing, could be made publicly available and serve as springboards to career-track positions.
3. Identify regulatory barriers, if necessary, where unlicensed workers are barred from using reasonable experience as a qualification for certification, for example, past lived experiences.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

This initiative would span multiple years due to the partnerships, training identification and development, and regulatory considerations, with the goal of launching online trainings in early 2025.



### SPOTLIGHT: PEER SUPPORT TRAINING

Peer support specialists are those who have experienced mental health issues, trauma, and/or substance-use issues and through training help others through similar situations.

**Massachusetts's Department of Mental Health** offers a free Peer Support Training and Certification Program to become a Certified Peer Specialist. Twice-weekly classes meet for 5.5 weeks for several cohorts throughout the year.<sup>1</sup>

**New York created PeerTAC**, funded by the state's Office of Mental Health and led by New York University and Rutgers University along with other peer-run organizations. PeerTAC was organized to provide training for Peer Support Services as a billable service.<sup>2</sup>

### IMPACT

By leveraging the peer support services training model for peer support services and other pathways, North Carolina can provide targeted support to unlicensed workers delivering behavioral health services with training opportunities that advance their careers in a free and flexible way.

### REIMBURSEMENT BEYOND PEER SERVICES

A 50-state scan found that North Carolina's Medicaid Agency reimburses for peer services and community/rehabilitative supports from its non-licensed substance use disorder workforce.<sup>3</sup> Other states also reimburse for crisis intervention, screening, evaluation, and assessment, case management/care coordination, and counseling services.

# Behavioral Health | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #5: Establish regular intervals for behavioral health rate adjustments

### CHALLENGE

Recently approved North Carolina legislation increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health services (see page 7 for additional details), however continued review and assessment of behavioral health rates is required to ensure appropriate compensation for providers. With rising operation costs, inflation, and administrative burden, the cost of providing care has increased, straining providers' abilities to remain in business, particularly in rural areas.

### STRATEGY

To address stifled rates, key stakeholders should develop an agreement that behavioral health rates will be regularly reviewed and adjusted over specified time periods as necessary, to ensure competitive rates and increase practitioner retention.

### IMPACT

Increasing government insurance reimbursement rates, and thus salaries of behavioral health workers, will impact the recruitment and retention of workers to the field. It would also impact practitioners choosing to take insurance instead of operating as cash-only, which would also increase access to care.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Engage both NCDHHS and NC Medicaid Managed Care Behavioral Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Tailored Plans that manage the calculation of three-year Medicaid rate increases.<sup>1</sup>
2. Launch a study to understand the operating expenses for Medicaid-reimbursable behavioral health services.
  1. Conduct interviews and focus groups to further understand financial constraints.
  2. Compare North Carolina's behavioral health rates and inflation rates with those of peer states.
  3. Determine the financial need and funding avenues for increasing rates, as well as measures to which to tie regular increases (e.g., inflation, peer state rates, market).
3. Develop an approach and request funding increases from the General Assembly.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

This initiative requires NCDHHS to conduct and complete a study in 2024 and subsequently determine the funding required from the General Assembly in the following budget cycle.



## RATES IN THE NEWS

NCDHHS announced that effective December 1, 2022, three psychiatric collaborative care codes under Medicaid reimbursement would receive an increase to 120% of the Medicare rate, an indicator of the state's dedication to behavioral health.<sup>2</sup>

### What's next?

Behavioral health more broadly, beyond psychiatric collaborative care, would benefit from rate increases.

### Why act?

Kaiser Family Foundation notes that lower Medicaid payment rates, as well as disparities in pay between physical and mental health providers, could limit participation in Medicaid and exacerbate workforce shortages.<sup>3</sup>

# Direct Care | Context

## Background

According to PHI, an organization focused on strengthening direct care, North Carolina will be required to fill 186,000+ direct care worker (DCW) openings from 2018 to 2028. That includes nearly 21,000 new jobs to meet rising demand and 165,500 vacancies due to attrition from the existing workforce. Low wages and poor working conditions have been the primary drivers leading workers to seek alternative career opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

**119,000**

There are approximately 119,000 direct care workers providing care to the citizens of North Carolina.

**61%**

People of color make up a significant 61% of the direct care workforce.<sup>2</sup>

**92%**

Women make up 92% of the direct care workforce in North Carolina.

**\$13.62**

For 2022, the median wage of DCWs in North Carolina was \$13.62.<sup>6</sup>

## Challenges

Faced with low wages, safety concerns, and a lack of recognition, the direct care workforce has experienced disproportionate levels of attrition and turnover. Beyond these challenges directly related to the job, these workers also may have limited prospects for advancement, with no clear career path.

### Low wages

In 2022, median hourly wages for DCWs in North Carolina was \$13.62.<sup>6</sup> This includes Nursing Assistants, who earned a median wage of \$15.31 and Home Health and Personal Care Aides, who earned \$12.06 per hour. It is important to note that these are median figures, and thus many DCWs earn significantly less than this.

### Lack of benefits

In 2021, 17% of DCWs in North Carolina had no health insurance, and 25% relied on public coverage.<sup>3</sup> Just half of DCWs obtained health insurance through their employer or union.<sup>6</sup>

### Inadequate training

Few states require DCWs to participate in the continuing education that would increase their skill sets over time.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there are few federal or state training requirements for many categories of DCWs.

### Lack of professional advancement

DCWs do not have a clear trajectory or career ladder. Many DCWs do not have official credentials or certifications and report that the experience and training they do earn or complete does not garner higher wages or follow them if they change jobs.<sup>4</sup>

### Lack of respect and value

The services that DCWs provide to individuals across the country are essential yet are often undervalued by society.<sup>5</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, all states immediately identified hospital workers as a priority for the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). However, the PPE priority designation frequently failed to include DCWs in nursing homes or home and community-based care settings, signifying less respect and value.<sup>4</sup>

### Aging population

As the aging population continues to grow, there is a significant increase in the number of individuals who will require direct care services in the coming years. This demographic shift poses a pressing demand for well-trained and dedicated DCWs to meet the evolving health care needs of the elderly.

# Direct Care | Existing Solutions

While the direct care workforce is challenged to recruit and retain workers, various investments and solutions have been developed both in North Carolina and nationwide. Select efforts include:

## How North Carolina is Addressing these Challenges Today



### Recruit & Train

- **WE CARE:** Workforce Engagement with Care workers to Assist, Recognize and Educate. This initiative addresses areas of concern in building communities that are inclusive of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), physical disabilities, and older adults with support needs in the State of North Carolina, including affordable, accessible housing, transportation, direct support workers, and natural supports.<sup>1</sup>
- **NC AHEC DCW Recommendations Report:** NC AHEC investigated worker certification of DCWs as a means of addressing the recruitment and retention of home- and community-based care workers. A report was developed to include recommendations for policy and practice, as well as an understanding of the challenges facing DCWs both in and outside of home and community-based settings.<sup>2</sup>
- **NC CareGivers:** NC CareGivers is a program designed to help participants follow a step-by-step process to become a CNA, the first stepping-stone to many career opportunities in health care. A grant-funded project run by FutureCare of North Carolina; NC CareGivers has added ~3,000 CNAs to the workforce over the past three years. All participants are reimbursed upon completion of their training and are eligible for a retention bonus from participating SNFs after six months of employment.<sup>3</sup>



### Retain & Innovate

- **NC Medicaid:** NC Medicaid increased DCW wages for approximately 60,000 workers through the provider rate increases.<sup>4</sup> While this was a significant increase, additional improvements are needed to keep up with inflation as well as competitive fields.
- **NC Four Phase Comprehensive Training and Competency Program for Direct Care Workers:** Under the Personal and Home Care Aide State Training Program Grant in 2015, NCDHHS developed a four-phase training program to advance DCW competencies in partnership with NCCCS.<sup>5</sup>

## How Can North Carolina Learn from Leading National Peers



Missouri has a direct care workforce development program called "Caring for Missourians" which aims to increase the number of qualified health care professionals, including direct care workers, in the state.<sup>6</sup>



Rhode Island has a Behavioral Health Certificate Training Program that offers up to \$100,000 to support various care agencies. It includes \$500 per employee for completing the Rhode Island College Behavioral Health Certificate program and an additional 15.7% for associated payroll and administrative expenses.<sup>7</sup>



Six states are using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to provide pay increases to DCWs who complete specific courses and trainings.<sup>8</sup>



California's Data Dashboard on Aging tracks the number of direct care workers by type (including home health aids and personal care aids) and created a visualization that shows licensed workers per 1,000 older adults by county and where to focus their recruitment efforts.<sup>9</sup>

Note: Additional North Carolina nursing workforce initiatives are included in the appendix.

1. Duke School of Public Policy, WE CARE; 2. NC AHEC Recommendations for HCBS Worker Certification, 2023; 3. NC CareGivers; 4. NCDHHS, "Special Bulletin COVID-19 #239: Update on Temporary Rate Increases," 2022; 5. NC Community Colleges, "NC Four Phase Comprehensive Training and Competency Program for Direct Care Workers"; 6. Missouri State Board of Nursing Newsletter, Volume 14, No. 1; 7. State of Rhode Island, "Behavioral Health Training for HCBS Direct Care Workers: Program Guidance", 2020; 8. Advancing States Analysis of State ARPA Plans, 2021; 9. Let's Get Healthy California, "Caregiving that Works"

# Direct Care | Recommendations

## Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council Action Areas

The Direct Care Working Group met virtually five times to discuss potential avenues for enhancing and strengthening the DC workforce. Comprising leaders from the NC Department of Commerce, NC Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Public Instruction, UNC System, NC Community College System, NC AHEC, and the Sheps Center, they engaged in extensive discussions and collaboratively crafted four recommendations to enhance North Carolina's DCWs.

### INITIATIVE #1: Define what the direct care workforce is

#### CHALLENGE

The challenge of defining the direct care workforce in various instances has become increasingly complex, with different titles and roles across various settings making it difficult to establish a standardized framework. With more than five registries in North Carolina alone and the absence of Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes for these roles, there is a pressing need for the allocation of resources to create an overarching framework that can effectively categorize and track diverse DCWs to ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection and analysis.

#### STRATEGY

In order to develop an inventory of DCWs, the state should establish an umbrella definition in which NCDHHS can continue to document this landscape.

#### IMPACT

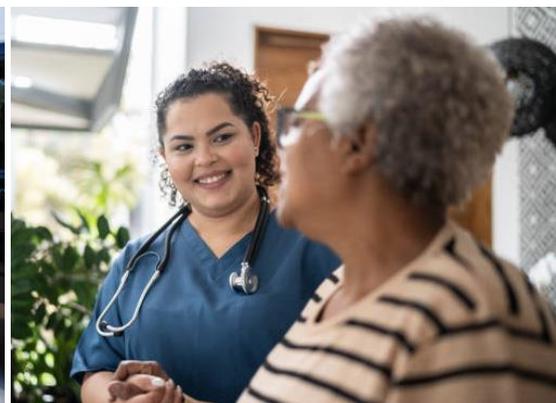
A direct care workforce inventory will serve as a foundation to improve data collection, career advancement, and pay equity, ultimately improving recruitment and retention of direct care professionals.

#### ACTION STEPS

1. NCDHHS will define the state funded roles within home and community-based services, nursing facilities, and intermediate care facilities and expand to other sectors (i.e., aging, childcare, etc.) and payers (private insurance).
2. NCDHHS will create a survey which will serve as the basis for the direct care workforce inventory.
3. NCDHHS will partner with public and private employers to standardize job descriptions and credentials for direct care professions.

#### LEVEL OF EFFORT

This initiative requires a multi-stakeholder approach and support from organizations and entities such as WECARE, the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services, the Division of Aging and the Division of Health Benefits. While the initial action steps can be quick wins and achieved within the next 12 months, additional time and investment will be required to engage existing DCWs and ensure that employers adopt standardized definitions and job descriptions for each role.



# Direct Care | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #2: Advance the data landscape for the direct care workforce

### CHALLENGE

North Carolina lacks reliable and actionable data surrounding its direct care workforce. To effectively address the numerous challenges impacting the direct care workforce, the state must first amass vital information regarding DCW employers, demographics, compensation, and other relevant information.

### STRATEGY

To strengthen a DCW data strategy, the state should continue to support the work of the Sheps Center, harnessing connections within the Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council to create avenues for sourcing data and develop a repeatable model to regularly collect and analyze data.

### IMPACT

DCWs are not currently tracked or understood in a consistent way. Defining the workforce, followed by planning for thorough data collection, will allow the state to develop targeted solutions to challenges that can only be revealed by more clearly knowing the workforce.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Use the definitions created in Initiative #1 to develop a model for collecting workforce data that would exist outside of the employee licensure process (i.e., through employers and employees).
2. Develop a plan to scan employers with DCWs, such as through leveraging business licenses.
  - a) Consider partnership with PHI National and the North Carolina Coalition on Aging, which has begun work in tracking DCWs in North Carolina.
3. Create the categories of data to harness, with tailored methodologies for DCW challenges (e.g., a special focus on turnover, job satisfaction, pay, and whether employees leave for another field).
4. Once data calls are made and the data is analyzed, convene the Council and direct care representatives for review and discussion, developing an understanding of workforce challenges along with solutions to those challenges.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Due to the process of creating a methodology for collecting data and gathering buy in from a decentralized base of data sources, the Council should target collecting data by the end of 2024.



# Direct Care | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #3: Create a living wage for direct care workers

### CHALLENGE

The direct care workforce is often not paid a living wage which decreases the ability to recruit and retain skilled workers in these positions, potentially compromising the quality of care. Given the below average wages that DCWs earn, it has been further challenging to attract an adequate number of bilingual DCWs to serve the growing Hispanic population in the state. According to the NC Office of State Budget and Management, between 2010 and 2020, the Hispanic population grew by 40% to 1.1 million people (or 11% of the total population). If these trends continue, there will be 2 million Hispanic North Carolinians by 2050, accounting for 14% of the state's total population.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, the financial burden of training can serve as a substantial barrier to entry for prospective direct care workers.

### STRATEGY

With an advanced data landscape and clear definition of direct care roles, the NCDHHS and the NC Department of Commerce should align recommendations and advocate for legislative measures to increase wages for DCWs. Establishing defined expectations around credentialing will enhance the credibility and professionalism of DCWs, strengthening the overall impact of these proposed measures.

### IMPACT

Addressing the issues around wage disparities and professionalizing the direct care workforce by improving training will help elevate the quality of care, job satisfaction, and career opportunities.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Include NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council recommendation for high value, non-degree direct care related credentials.
2. Establish a collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Revenue to analyze wage increases for DCWs and their impact on take-home pay. Examine the relationship between wages and career advancement opportunities to identify strategies for promoting upward mobility within the direct care workforce.
3. Conduct a comprehensive wage analysis to identify and address wage discrepancies within the direct care workforce and explore innovative approaches, such as tying wages to reimbursement rates, to ensure fair compensation for direct care workers.
4. Develop an understanding of what other states have done in this space and the pain points that they have experienced.
5. Elevate training and credentialing opportunities for DCWs.
  - a. Develop credentialing programs for associate professionals, qualified professionals, and other non-licensed roles for DCWs.
  - b. Define clear standards, competencies, and training requirements for each credential to ensure portability, stackability, consistency, and quality in care delivery.
  - c. Engage with DCW organizations, industry associations, employers, and policymakers to collaborate on developing credentialing programs and addressing wage alignment.
  - d. Design uniform training requirements across both the public and private sectors to ensure a baseline level of skill and credentials for all DCWs.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Collaboration can be established in the short-term, while continuing and beginning new research and analysis would take at least one year.



## TENNESSEE INVESTING IN DCW TRAINING

Tennessee's state Medicaid agency and Board of Regents built the Quality Improvement in Long Term Services and Supports (QuILTSS) Workforce Development Training program for DCWs. The program trains in cultural competency and patient-centered care and provides higher compensation for workers supporting TennCare's long-term services and supports programs.



## ACCREDITED TRAINING CURRICULUM: DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

Through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) E-Badge Academy, human service organizations and agencies can issue electronic badges ('E-Badges') based on competencies and education, recognizing the knowledge, skills, and values of their employees.



## TRAINING STANDARDS FOR PERSONAL CARE AIDES: ARIZONA

Arizona began the process of developing personal care aid (PCA) training standards when a Citizens Workgroup on the Long-Term Care Workforce recommended a uniform, state-sponsored training curriculum called the "Principles of Caregiving." The state subsequently established the Direct Care Workforce Committee, which, through public engagement, created PCA training standards involving fundamental skills training and standardized competency tests. These standards were incorporated into state Medicaid policy, resulting in a well-received training system that assures consumers and employers of PCAs' competency in their roles.

# Direct Care | Recommendations

## INITIATIVE #4: Expand apprenticeship programs

### CHALLENGE

To attract DCWs through apprenticeship programs, it is necessary to streamline the transition from high school or community college to direct care employment. In many cases, DCWs experience challenges related to both development within the direct care profession as well as advancement to other health care fields and occupations such as nursing.

### STRATEGY

To support the expansion of apprenticeship programs, NCDHHS should leverage the Council's network and collaborate with both DPI and ApprenticeshipNC at NCCCS. Additionally, NCDHHS should work with local workforce development boards to increase the number of direct care apprenticeships. Existing apprenticeship models that rely on partnerships between academic institutions and employers within the caregiving field can serve as examples for DCWs.

### IMPACT

By investing in and expanding earn-while-you-learn projects, North Carolina can cultivate a pipeline of lifelong employees. Learners who are provided with clear career progression pathways and the opportunity to earn high school credits can seamlessly transition into community college or 4-year education and promising career paths, thereby promoting an integrated and sustainable approach to both education and career development. The investment into apprenticeship programs is essential to address workforce shortages, provide valuable training opportunities, and ensure high-quality care for the future.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Create connections and foster relationships with hospitals, local health departments, community providers, and long-term care administrators so DPI can continue to expand existing efforts.
2. Partner with various associations, including the NC Hospital Association and the NC Association of Public Health Nurse Administrators, to engage private sector employers in apprenticeship programs.
3. Provide financial incentives or stipends for participants to support their participation in apprenticeship programs.

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Earn-to-learn and apprenticeship programs are already underway, but continued investment and resources are needed to cover staff, programmatic, and potential physical infrastructure costs for resources related to implementation.



## APPRENTICESHIP SPOTLIGHT

In Virginia, the Germanna Community College and the Rappahannock Community Service Board (CSB) developed an entry-level mental health technician program that results in employment at the end of the program. Students work up to 24 hours per week for Rappahannock CSB and participate in three hours of lectures per week at the community college. The students are paid \$15 per hour. At the end of the course, they can interview for a role at the CSB. Students can also earn a health care credential at the completion of the course.<sup>3</sup>



Research from the Harvard Project on Workforce studied apprenticeship participants and found the following:

- **64%** of participants transitioned to employment, postsecondary education, or both, **offering multiple pathways** for youth and a high return on investment for employers.
- In year two, apprentices were rated **70% as productive** as traditional full-time trained employees.<sup>2</sup>

# Continued Coordination and Next Steps

With support from the Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services, stakeholders from across North Carolina will continue to help engage in bringing these recommended improvements to the state's caregiving workforce related to nursing, behavioral health, and direct care.

State leaders are committed to raising awareness of the Council's recommended initiatives and organizing momentum for a governance structure to oversee longer-term implementation. Key stakeholders to involve will include:

- Government agencies, Chambers, and public sector health institutions
- Private sector employers such as long-term care facilities
- Philanthropic organizations such as associations and grant makers
- Educational partners
- Other state leadership and organizations for cooperation and learning

The governance efforts for these initiatives will continue to elevate the work of investments already underway in tracking progress of the caregiving workforce developments. For questions about this report or next steps on its implementation, please contact Karen Wade at [karen.wade@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:karen.wade@dhhs.nc.gov).





# North Carolina Caregiving Existing Workforce Initiatives

# Nursing | Existing Solutions (1 of 2)

Organization/Entity/Program	Description
<a href="#">Center for Health Equity through Nursing (A-CHEN) Ambassadors program</a>	The A-CHEN Ambassador Program is a group of individual nurse leaders with a sphere of influence who are committed to leveraging their position to address the structural systems that contribute to health inequity, strengthen and diversify the nursing workforce, improve access to care, services and benefits, and serve as volunteer advocates for the work of A-CHEN.
<a href="#">Health, Science and Mathematics Student Loan Program (HSM)</a>	The HSM Program provides forgivable loans to qualified North Carolina residents who are committed to working full-time in medicine, allied health, nursing, or as science and mathematics educators in North Carolina.
<a href="#">NCWorks Online</a>	NCWorks Online is a one-stop online resource for job seekers and employers in North Carolina. Job seekers can search for jobs, create resumes, and find education and training resources. Employers can find candidates, post jobs, and search labor market information.
<a href="#">North Carolina Area Health Education Center (NC AHEC) Scholars Program</a>	This program selects applicants to participate in a two-year educational program who may receive a subsidy, subject to academic or institutional approval. The NC AHEC Scholar Certificate sets students apart by announcing that each student that has completed the program has developed the knowledge, skills, and attitude necessary to make a difference in health care.
<a href="#">North Carolina AHEC Nursing Clinical Instructor Partner (CIP)</a>	The NC AHEC Nursing CIP program aims to increase nursing faculty through partnerships between academic nursing programs and practice organizations. This innovative clinical education model prepares qualified RNs to serve as clinical nursing instructors without leaving their clinical role in their practice organization. NC AHEC, NC academic nursing programs, and practice organizations partnered to launch the CIP program.
<a href="#">North Carolina Business Committee for Education Pre-Nursing Youth Apprenticeship</a>	The NC Business Committee for Education developed a pre-apprenticeship program designed to expose high school students to the nursing field through both education and on-the-job-learning. Before high school graduation, students receive their CNA certification and upon graduation, and complete instruction in order to obtain either an LPN or RN degree.
<a href="#">North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council</a>	The Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council has used data and expert input to identify strengths and challenges facing this critical workforce and to develop coordinated action. The first three focus areas are the nursing, behavioral health, and direct care segments.
<a href="#">North Carolina Center on Workforce for Health</a>	The NC Center on the Workforce for Health provides a forum for health employers, workers, educators, regulators, policymakers, and others throughout North Carolina to convene, discuss challenges and opportunities, share best practices and lessons learned, identify potential solutions and metrics for success, and monitor progress toward addressing these challenges.
<a href="#">North Carolina Forgivable Education Loans for Service (FELs)</a>	This program provides financial assistance to qualified students committed to working in critical employment shortage professions in North Carolina.

# Nursing | Existing Solutions (2 of 2)

Organization/Entity/Program	Description
<a href="#">North Carolina Future of Nursing Action Coalition</a>	States across nation created Action Coalitions to act on the mission of the RWJ Foundation. In NC the Coalition developed the Equity Minded Nurse Initiative as a major communication and engagement campaign to “foster and unleash the power of Equity-Minded nurses to advance health equity and disrupt structural racism.”
<a href="#">North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) - Task Force on the Nursing Workforce</a>	This North Carolina Institute of Medicine task force is developing an actionable vision for enhancing and supporting North Carolina's nursing workforce by developing recommendations related to nursing education, career progression, workforce diversity, retention, and health care payment models.
<a href="#">North Carolina Rural Practice Incentive Programs</a>	This initiative focuses on state loan repayment programs with tax-free funds for loan repayment made available through the North Carolina Office of Rural Health and Community Care’s administration.
<a href="#">Nurse Education Scholarship Loan Program (NESLP)</a>	This program provides loans to qualified North Carolina residents who are committed to working full-time as nurses in North Carolina.
<a href="#">Nurse Educators of Tomorrow Program (NET)</a>	The NET Program provides forgivable loans to North Carolina students pursuing master's and doctoral degrees to become nursing instructors at North Carolina public and private colleges. Recipients must complete loan forgiveness within seven years of graduation, excluding periods of approved deferments.
<a href="#">Nurse Scholars Program (NSP/MNSP)</a>	The NSP/MNSP initiatives provide merit-based loans to North Carolina students who commit to work as registered nurses or nurse educators in North Carolina. Recipients must complete the loan forgiveness obligation within seven years of graduation from the program, excluding periods of approved deferment.
<a href="#">Sheps Center Nursecast</a>	NC Nursecast is an interactive, web-based tool that forecasts the future supply and demand for RNs and LPNs in various practice settings in North Carolina. The tool draws on historical data from the NC Board of Nursing/Health Professions Data System, population data from the NC Office of Budget and Analysis, and expert input from an advisory committee to provide baseline estimates of how many nurses NC will have and how many nurses will be demanded in NC by region and by setting.
<a href="#">UNC System Recommendations on Increasing Nursing Graduates</a>	This UNC System study provides recommendations on the methods and timeline for increasing the number of public postsecondary nursing graduates by 50%.

# Behavioral Health | Existing Solutions (1 of 2)

Organization/Entity/Program	Description
<a href="#">Connection to Peer Support</a>	This three-year grant totaling \$1.65 million was awarded to Cumberland County Hospital System (Cape Fear Valley Health) to provide peer support services for consumers presenting to emergency departments with distress related to behavioral health. The pilot project aims to provide improved coordination of ongoing treatment and recovery and to reduce future utilization of ED services for behavioral health needs.
<a href="#">Department of Public Instruction (DPI): North Carolina School Mental Health Initiative (NC SMHI)</a>	The NC School Mental Health Initiative (NC SMHI) is a multi-disciplinary partnership of stakeholders related to the provision of mental health services to children and youth. NC SMHI reflects partnerships across disciplines, including community mental health providers, educators, advocates, lawyers, university officials, and parents, with the goal to provide policy/legislative support and recommendations for accessible, high-quality, and coordinated mental health services.
<a href="#">Duke: Promoting Resilience and Mental Health Among Health Professional Workforce</a>	The purpose of this program is to provide support to entities providing health care, health care providers associations, and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), taking into consideration the needs of rural and medically underserved communities, to establish, enhance, or expand evidence informed or evidenced-based programs or protocols to promote resilience, mental health, and wellness among their providers, other personnel, and members, collectively known as the “Health Workforce.”
<a href="#">Governor’s Institute scholarships for SUD (substance use disorder) training</a>	The Governor’s Institute, through the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, will fund limited and approved requests for continuing education in an effort to further enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities of treatment providers for individuals seeking recovery from substance use disorders.
<a href="#">North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council</a>	The Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council has used data and expert input to identify strengths and challenges facing this critical workforce and to develop coordinated action. The first three focus areas are the nursing, behavioral health, and direct care segments.
<a href="#">North Carolina Community Health Center Association (NCCHCA) Behavioral Health Working group</a>	NCCHCA convenes a workgroup of behavioral health providers, administrators, and staff from federally qualified health centers (FQHC) and partner organizations. The Behavioral Health Workgroup meets quarterly to discuss behavioral health and to contribute ideas, experiences and share best practices.
<a href="#">North Carolina Forgivable Education Loans for Service (FELs)</a>	This program provides financial assistance to qualified students committed to working in critical employment shortage professions in North Carolina.
<a href="#">North Carolina Psychiatry Access Line (NC-PAL)</a>	NC-PAL is a free telephone consultation and education program to help health care providers address the behavioral health needs of pediatric and perinatal patients.
<a href="#">North Carolina STAR Network</a>	The NC STAR Network is a statewide substance treatment recovery initiative with an overarching goal of expanding access to addiction treatment for all citizens of North Carolina through utilization of a Hub and Spoke model. The Hubs are academic centers with a strong focus on providing addiction treatment and education.

# Behavioral Health | Existing Solutions (2 of 2)

Organization/Entity/Program	Description
<a href="#">Primary Care Training and Enhancement - Residency Training in Mental and Behavioral Health (PCTE-RTMB) for adjacent support</a>	The purpose of the PCTE-RTMB program is to train primary care residents in the prevention, identification, diagnosis, treatment, and referral of services for mental and behavioral health conditions for pediatric, adolescent, young adult, and other populations who are at-risk or have experienced abuse, trauma, or mental health and/or substance use disorders.
<a href="#">State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP)</a>	SLRP focuses on behavioral health providers who provide primary and psychiatric care to people in rural and underserved communities. The Office of Rural Health receives federal funds to administer this program. This program is different from the North Carolina Loan Repayment Program (NC LRP), though the names are similar.

# Direct Care | Existing Solutions

Organization/Entity/Program	Description
<a href="#">The Direct Care Worker Equity Institute within the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, Inc. (PHI)</a>	PHI's Direct Care Worker Equity Institute strives to address the structural inequities and profound disparities facing direct care workers to ensure that every one of them can thrive personally and professionally, while delivering the care that millions of older adults and people with disabilities need and deserve.
<a href="#">North Carolina Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NCADSP)</a>	Within an established North Carolina chapter of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NCADSP), goals are to engage and empower direct support professionals (DSP) and providers in greater collaboration; to increase access to nationally recognized and well-constructed educational experiences – e.g., training, continuing, and higher education for each professional; to build connections and collaboration among the DSP community statewide; to promote value in this line of work; and to work toward professional standards.
<a href="#">North Carolina Area Health Education Center (NC AHEC) Direct Care Workforce Recommendations Report</a>	NC AHEC investigated worker certification of DCWs as a means of addressing the recruitment and retention of home- and community-based care workers. A report was developed to include recommendations for policy and practice, as well as an understanding of the challenges facing DCWs both in and outside of home and community-based settings.
<a href="#">North Carolina Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council</a>	The Caregiving Workforce Strategic Leadership Council has used data and expert input to identify strengths and challenges facing this critical workforce and to develop coordinated action. The first three focus areas are the nursing, behavioral health, and direct care segments.
<a href="#">North Carolina Coalition on Aging</a>	The Coalition is a dynamic group of organizations and individuals that work collaboratively to give voice to issues that affect older North Carolinians. The Coalition engages in a variety of activities and efforts that focus on issues of common interest across our membership.
<a href="#">North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD)</a>	The NCCDD works to promote public policies that improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as to educate the public about the needs and abilities of those with developmental disabilities.
<a href="#">North Carolina Four Phase Comprehensive Training and Competency Program for Direct Care Workers</a>	Under the Personal and Home Care Aide State Training Program Grant in 2015, NCDHHS developed a four-phase training program to advance direct care worker competencies through partnership with the North Carolina Community College system.
<a href="#">North Carolina Olmstead Plan Priority Area on Addressing the Direct Support Professional Crisis</a>	The Olmstead Plan is a cross-population blueprint, addressing the health and well-being of children and families, youth, adults, and elders with disabilities.
<a href="#">North Carolina provided time-limited rate increases for Direct Care during the COVID-19 pandemic</a>	NC Medicaid increased direct care worker wages for approximately 60,000 workers through the provider rate increases, including for Intermediate Care Facilities, Home and Community-Based Services, and Skilled Nursing Families.
<a href="#">North Carolina's State Budget included one-time bonuses to DCW</a>	NC Medicaid provided >62,000 Direct Care workers and support staff (employed by 2,500 providers) with legislated bonuses of \$2,100 in recognition of their work and ongoing efforts during the COVID-19 Pandemic [NCDHHS; NC DHB DCW]
<a href="#">WECARE</a>	Workforce Engagement with Care workers to Assist, Recognize and Educate. This initiative will address areas of concern in building communities that are inclusive of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), physical disabilities, and older adults with support needs in the State of North Carolina, including affordable, accessible housing; transportation; direct support workers; and natural supports.

# Appendix

# Caregiver Workforce Strategic Leadership Council

**Secretary Kody Kinsley, NC  
Department of Health and Human  
Services**

**Secretary Machel Sanders, NC  
Department of Commerce**

**Center on Workforce for Health,  
NC Institute of Medicine**

- Michelle Ries

**Department of Public Instruction**

- Melissa Leeds
- Barbara Burt
- Kristie VanAuken

**NC Independent Colleges and  
Universities**

- Sandy Briscar
- Kathy Neal
- Tom West

**NC AHEC**

- Kevin FitzGerald
- Jill Forcina
- Hugh Tilson

**NC Department of Commerce**

- Jeff DeBellis

**NC Community College System**

- Lori Byrd

**NCWorks Commission**

- Annie Izod

**Sheps Center**

- Brianna Lombardi

**State Board of Education**

- John Blackburn

**The Economic Development  
Partnership of North Carolina**

- Christopher Chung

**UNC Health**

- Jill Radding
- Andy Willis

**UNC School of Medicine**

- Cam Enarson

**UNC System**

- David English

**NC Department of Health and  
Human Services**

- Deputy Secretary Mark Benton
- Kelly Crosbie
- Susan Haynes Little
- Jonathan Kappler
- Mike Leighs
- Emily McGee
- Colleen Tapen
- Karen Wade
- Walker Wilson
- Emily Ziegler

## Nursing Working Group Members

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Erin Fraher	Carolina Health Workforce Research Center	Melissa Leeds	Department of Public Instruction
David English	UNC System	Barbara Burt	Department of Public Instruction
Lori Byrd	NC Community College System	Jill Forcina	NC AHEC

## Behavioral Health Working Group Members

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Kelly Crosbie	NCDHHS	Charlene Wong	NCDHHS
Carrie Brown	NCDHHS	Michael Leighs	NCDHHS
Lori Byrd	NC Community College System	Kevin FitzGerald	NC AHEC
Brianna Lombardi	Sheps Center	Keith McCoy	NCDHHS
Sandra Terrell	NCDHHS	Yvonne Copeland	NCDHHS
Karon Hardy	NCDHHS	John Blackburn	State Board of Education

## Direct Care Working Group Members

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Hugh Tilson	NC AHEC	Melissa Leeds	Department of Public Instruction
Jeff Debellis	NC Commerce	Barbara Burt	Department of Public Instruction
Lori Byrd	NC Community College System	Jill Forcina	NC AHEC
Talley Wells	NCDHHS	Caroline Collier	NC AHEC
Emma Sandoe	NCDHHS	Karen Burkes	NCDHHS
Michael Leighs	NCDHHS		

# Supporting Analysis: Top Workforce Areas of Need Identified as Nursing, Behavioral Health, and Direct Care,

While significant needs exist across many workforces, the preliminary analysis based on available data suggests highest repeated needs shown most urgently for the Nursing and Behavioral Health Workforce, followed closely by the Direct Care Workforce.

Category	Analysis	Source	Top Workforce Areas of Need			
			Nursing	Direct Care Workers	Behavioral Health	Other
<b>A. Overall Need: Supply and Demand</b>	1. By NC Supply/ Demand Need, 2023-35	HRSA	✓	N/A	✓	✓ Primary Care Physicians
	2. By NC Job Opening Projections, 2018-28	NC Commerce LEAD	✓	✓		✓ Med. Assistant
	3. By Longest Vacancies per Employers, 7/2022	UNC Sheps	✓	✓		✓ Med. Assistant
	4. By Rate per 10k People Decline, 2001-21	UNC Sheps, PHI (2016-21)	✓	✓	✓	
	5. By Pct. Profession Age 65+, 2021	UNC Sheps, PHI			✓	
<b>B. By Geographic Distribution</b>	1. By Counties without Health Caregiving Workforce, 2021	UNC Sheps		N/A	✓	✓ Women's Health
<b>C. By Demographics</b>	1. By Alignment with Population Demographics, 2018	UNC Sheps	✓	✓	✓	✓ Many

# Additional Opportunities for Future Consideration

In addition to the 15 recommendations prioritized in this report, many other important initiatives exist that are supporting the advancement and development of the caregiver workforce in North Carolina. The following ideas were also discussed as supplemental and additional opportunities for future investment. As progress continues to support the North Carolina caregiving workforce, these areas can be reviewed for future sustainment options.

## **Direct Care:**

- Health care Career Day (virtual or in-person)
- Stipends for DCWs
- Technological enhancements to moderate demand
- Outreach to DCWs who may benefit from coverage under Medicaid expansion

## **Behavioral Health:**

- Provide education debt relief
- Decrease administration burden
- Integrated care models
- Provide clinical care to populations of interest

## **Nursing:**

- Propose legislation to mitigate workforce violence
- Incentives to decrease workplace burnout
- Funding for recurring Nursecast supply/demand projects
- Recruiting men into nursing

