



MONTANA HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLAN

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MONTANA HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MONTANA OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH

AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Montana's healthcare workforce is essential to the health and wellbeing of communities across our state. From our smallest frontier towns to our largest regional centers, healthcare providers, and the systems that support them, are critical to ensuring that all Montanans have access to high quality care.

The Montana Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan represents the continued commitment of partners across the state to address workforce challenges through collaboration, data, and shared leadership. This plan was developed with guidance from the Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee and reflects the insights of the healthcare workforce, educators, and community leaders working across Montana.

This plan replaces the **2017 Montana Healthcare Workforce Statewide Strategic Plan**. The development of this updated plan began with listening and learning. Three comprehensive assessments were conducted to better understand the current landscape: **a statewide healthcare workforce assessment**, a **post-secondary education partner assessment**, and the **Montana Healthcare Workforce: Professions and Training Pathways Report**. These assessments provided a foundation of data and analysis that helped identify both current workforce challenges and opportunities for strengthening the pipeline of healthcare professionals in our state.

Building on this foundation, we engaged partners across Montana through a series of listening sessions and discussions designed to ensure that the perspectives of both the healthcare workforce, and those working to support the workforce, were heard. These conversations created multiple opportunities to explore emerging themes, identify priorities, and validate insights from the field. Throughout this process, the Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee played a central role in shaping the direction of the plan and helping translate the insights gathered from across the state into meaningful strategies.

The result is a strategic plan organized around five priority areas: Engage, Educate & Train, Recruit, Retain, and Sustain. The first four priorities build on the framework established in 2017 and continue to focus on strengthening the healthcare workforce pipeline and supporting communities across Montana. The addition of the fifth priority area, Sustain, reflects a growing recognition that long-term progress requires intentional attention to funding, evaluation, and the systems needed to support ongoing workforce development efforts.

This strategic plan also comes at an important moment for Montana. The early implementation of the **Rural Health Transformation Program** presents new opportunities to strengthen the connection between healthcare delivery, workforce development, and community health. As this program evolves, it will serve as an important partner and catalyst for many of the strategies outlined in this plan.

While this document outlines priorities and strategies, it is ultimately a call to action. Addressing Montana's healthcare workforce challenges will require continued collaboration. Together, we can build a workforce that is prepared, supported, and positioned to meet the needs of Montana's communities today, and into the future.



We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations who contributed their time, expertise, and perspectives throughout this process. Their engagement and commitment continue to strengthen Montana's ability to ensure access to quality healthcare for all who call this state home.

Kailyn Mock, Director

Montana Office of Rural Health / Area Health Education Center

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METHODOLOGY

The development of the Montana Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan followed a structured process designed to ensure that the plan reflects both data and the lived experiences of those working across Montana’s healthcare and education systems. This approach is illustrated in the planning framework shown in Figure 1, which outlines the four phases of the workforce planning cycle: **Assessment**, **Strategic Plan**, **Action Plan**, and **Community Impact**.



Figure 1. Planning Framework

ASSESSMENT

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

The planning process began with a comprehensive assessment of Montana's healthcare workforce landscape. The assessments were conducted to better understand the current challenges and opportunities shaping the healthcare workforce in Montana:

- **Montana Healthcare Workforce Assessment**, which examined workforce supply, demand, and emerging workforce needs across healthcare professions.
- **Post-Secondary Education Partner Assessment**, which evaluated the capacity of Montana's colleges, universities, and training programs to educate and prepare the future healthcare workforce.
- **The Montana Healthcare Workforce: Professions and Training Pathways Report**, which provides a broad, up-to-date overview of Montana's healthcare sectors and professions, including workforce data and education pathways, to inform understanding of workforce needs, gaps, and opportunities across the state.

These assessments provided a data-driven foundation for the strategic planning process and highlighted key workforce shortages, education pipeline challenges, and opportunities to strengthen workforce development efforts across the state.

These reports informed the themes and priorities explored throughout the planning process and helped guide discussions with stakeholders across the state.

LISTENING & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Following the assessment phase, a series of listening sessions and stakeholder discussions were conducted to validate findings, identify emerging issues, and gather additional perspectives.

Engagement opportunities included discussions with:

- The **Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee** (MHWAC), a statewide group of healthcare, education, and workforce leaders that guides strategy and coordination efforts.
- The **Montana Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Scholars**, a group of trainees participating in a certificate program that prepares and promotes a diverse, skilled primary care workforce in rural and underserved communities in Montana.
- Participants at the **Montana Healthcare Conference**, an annual event and the state's largest gathering of healthcare professionals. Organized by the Montana Hospital Association, in collaboration with the Montana Primary Care Association, the conference convenes stakeholders from across sectors to learn, network, and address healthcare challenges and opportunities.
- Additional key stakeholder groups representing healthcare providers, post-secondary education institutions, workforce development partners, and community-based organizations.

STRATEGIC PLAN

IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES & DEVELOPING A PLAN

Insights from the assessments and stakeholder engagement process were synthesized to identify the key priorities and strategies included in this strategic plan. Throughout this process, the Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee provided ongoing guidance and helped ensure that the plan reflects the needs and perspectives of partners across the healthcare workforce system.

The resulting strategic plan is organized around five priority areas designed to strengthen Montana's healthcare workforce.

ENGAGE

Engage partners from across Montana in driving solutions for addressing Montana's healthcare needs.

Strategies

- 1.** Strengthen and expand the Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee's engagement and membership.
- 2.** Cultivate partnerships with and among employers, higher education institutions, and training programs to align around Montana's healthcare needs.
- 3.** Leverage and mobilize collaborative relationships to expand resources and funding for workforce solutions.
- 4.** Build enduring partnerships with tribal communities to strengthen healthcare workforce efforts.
- 5.** Engage with partners outside of Montana to share innovations, identify emerging workforce solutions, and strengthen Montana's competitive position in healthcare recruitment and retention.
- 6.** Leverage statewide communication mechanisms to align partners, share information, and incorporate ongoing feedback.

RECRUIT

Support and expand pathways into Montana's health education programs and healthcare professions.

Strategies

1. Expand and enhance healthcare pathway programs for secondary students to increase awareness and preparation for healthcare careers.
2. Increase outreach and partnerships with secondary schools to connect students to training programs, job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities.
3. Partner with healthcare facilities to develop facility-led job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities for secondary students.
4. Enhance the use of recruitment platforms and incentive programs to attract healthcare professionals and healthcare trainers / educators / preceptors.
5. Identify and utilize best practices and innovative strategies to ensure Montanans can pursue and thrive in healthcare careers in their home communities.
6. Promote, expand, and sustain opportunities for existing interstate exchange programs for Montana students to pursue education requirements not currently available / limited availability in the state.
7. Support healthcare facilities in utilizing loan repayment resources as a recruitment tool through building awareness of programs, providing support in becoming an approved site and offering technical assistance.
8. Increase rural clinical training opportunities by supporting host sites and reducing barriers for students to train in rural, frontier, and tribal communities.



Secondary education refers to a school intermediate between elementary school and college and usually offering general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory courses (**SECONDARY SCHOOL Definition & Meaning – Merriam-Webster**).



Post-secondary education refers to any education pursued following secondary school (e.g., universities, colleges, community colleges, and vocational schools) (**POST-SECONDARY Definition & Meaning – Merriam-Webster**).

EDUCATE & TRAIN

Educate and train Montana's current and future healthcare workforce.

Strategies

1. Expand education and training to develop soft skills for secondary and post-secondary students.
2. Create pathways for students that highlight high-demand healthcare occupations with accessible education that can be completed alongside their secondary school requirements.
3. Increase access to rural residency opportunities.
4. Implement rural readiness training tracks for post-secondary students.
5. Leverage remote technology to expand satellite educational opportunities and increase locally available training and education, including advancing apprenticeship and work-based learning models.
6. Enhance training and support for rural facilities and preceptors to enhance clinical education experiences.
7. Launch a voluntary designation program recognizing healthcare facilities as teaching and training sites, with participating sites receiving enhanced support and resources.
8. Address clinical training capacity limits, including staff burnout and workload challenges, to ensure sustainable student placement models.

RETAIN

Retain a competent and skilled healthcare workforce.

Strategies

1. Promote well-being by expanding training and resources on mental health, stress, and burnout for both students and professionals.
2. Recruit individuals from rural, frontier, and tribal areas to train, live, and build healthcare careers in the communities they call home.
3. Expand career advancement pathways through apprenticeships, internships, fellowships, work-based learning, and stackable credentials.
4. Support healthcare facilities in adopting innovative staffing models and technologies, including the thoughtful use of AI, to strengthen retention.
5. Foster positive workplace cultures by identifying and sharing scalable models of success.
6. Leverage retention platforms and strategies to support long-term workforce retention.
7. Deepen understanding of workforce stability needs, including housing and childcare, and support development of strategies to address them.
8. Provide tools, resources, and technical assistance for organizations to design and implement local “grow-your-own” workforce initiatives.
9. Identify and share successful models and best practices for fostering a positive workplace culture.

SUSTAIN

Sustain Montana’s healthcare workforce through secured funding, resources, and data-driven evaluation.

Strategies

1. Create a statewide repository to share promising practices, best practices and resources.
2. Support efforts to fund workforce initiatives and programs.
3. Explore statewide strategies to enhance clinical placements, including assessing capacity, identifying gaps, and reviewing best practices for management models.
4. Support systems development to track health professionals throughout their educational and career paths.

ACTION PLAN

FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

This Strategic Plan establishes shared priorities and direction, but this must be translated into actions that are coordinated and measurable.

An Action Plan has been developed to guide initial implementation. This plan outlines specific activities, responsible partners, and timelines, with an emphasis on early progress, alignment across initiatives, and building momentum for longer-term systems change.

The Action Plan is designed to be iterative and responsive, allowing partners to adapt as conditions evolve, opportunities emerge, and new insights are gained. Progress will be regularly reviewed to ensure efforts remain aligned with statewide priorities and continue to advance meaningful outcomes for Montana's communities.

The Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee has been tasked with implementing and monitoring the Action Plan. Please visit the [MHWAC website](#) for the latest information and updates.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

STRENGTHENING MONTANA'S HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

Ultimately, the goal of this work is to support meaningful community impact by strengthening Montana's healthcare workforce and ensuring that communities across the state have access to the healthcare professionals they need. Through coordinated, statewide efforts, this work aims to build a more sustainable and responsive workforce system that aligns with community needs, supports healthcare providers, and improves access to care for Montanans.

The Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee will continue to utilize this Strategic Plan as its guiding document and will actively monitor progress, evaluate impact, and adapt strategies over time to ensure the work remains relevant and effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following individuals for their leadership and contributions throughout this strategic planning process. Their time, expertise, and commitment helped shape the direction and priorities of this work.

- Kailyn Mock, Director – Area Health Education Center
- Mandy Groseth, Assistant Director – Area Health Education Center
- Alexis Tobin, Director – North Central Area Health Education Center
- Katie Glueckert, Director – South Central Area Health Education Center

We also recognize that this effort was informed by many additional partners, stakeholders, and community members who participated in assessments, listening sessions, and discussions across the state. While not all are listed here, their perspectives were invaluable in ensuring this plan reflects the needs of Montana’s diverse communities.

- [Eastern Montana Area Health Education Center | RiverStone Health](#)
- [Healthcare Career Advancement Program \(H-CAP\)](#)
- [Montana Department of Labor & Industry](#)
- [Montana Primary Care Association](#)
- [Montana Primary Care Office | Montana DPHHS](#)
- [North Central Montana Area Health Education Center | Montana Hospital Association](#)
- [North Eastern Montana Area Health Education Center | Montana Health Network](#)
- [Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education \(OCHE\) | Montana University System](#)
- [South Central Montana Area Health Education Center | Montana Hospital Association](#)
- [University of Montana](#)
- [Western Montana Area Health Education Center | University of Montana](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Montana Healthcare Workforce Assessments & Reports

- [Montana Healthcare Workforce Assessment | October 2025](#)
- [AHEC Post-Secondary Education Partner Assessment | October 2025](#)
- [Montana Healthcare Workforce: Professions and Training Pathways Report](#)
- [Montana Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee](#)
- [Montana Healthcare Workforce Statewide Strategic Plan | 2017](#)

Montana Public Health Workforce Assessment and Development Plan

- [Montana Public Health Workforce Development Plan | January 2026 – December 2028](#)
- [Montana Public Health Workforce Assessment Report | 2025](#)

Montana Rural Health Transformation

- [Montana Rural Health Transformation Program](#)