

Health Workforce Council Health Professionals - Initial Findings

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Experiences of rural health professionals

- **Goal:** Learn from recent rural graduates/workers about the experiences that led to their role in the healthcare workforce
- Center the experiences of workers from populations that reflect the demographics of their rural area
- June Council meeting was held in-person in Yakima
 - Yakima is a majority minority county, 61% of the residents are persons of color, 53% identify as Hispanic/Latine
 - Greater than 3/4 of all young people in the county are youth of color
 - People of color now constitute a majority of workers in the county's healthcare sector



2024 Health professional panel

- In June, five panel members from Hispanic/Latine and Native American communities shared about their educational and work experiences
- Panelists had completed a variety of behavioral health education pathways; today's presentation captures themes, but cannot do justice to all that was discussed at the in-person meeting
- We know perspective gaps remain:
 - Washington's rural communities have great demographic variability
 - Panelists succeeded in their pathway and are early career in the workforce; experiences for current HS/postsecondary students may differ
 - Panelists are in behavioral health pathways; other professions may face role-specific obstacles in other health sectors that weren't discussed



Mentorship (in all its forms) matters

- Mentorship is incredibly important across educational, community, and employer environments
 - All panelists highlighted key experiences that guided them to college, resources, and careers; the support of mentors helped them keep going and overcome obstacles

"Mentorship wasn't a continuous thing. It was different people along the way."

"My grandmother was my main mentor ... She said, "Don't do what I did, be more."

"I worked with clinical folks, and they took me under their wing. Planting seeds. 'You're really bright. You can go far.'"

Connects to employer recognition of organizational culture/leadership



Mentors can cause harm

- Not all traditional mentoring relationships were supportive/helpful during challenging times
 - At times peers were better supports than faculty



Students need a range of assistance

- Tangible supports are vital to first-generation college students
 - College Success Foundation provided key help in high school with demystifying the college application process
 - Postsecondary student support programs, such as TRIO, CAMP, and MESA, are lifelines to help with gaps in students' educational backgrounds and comfort on campus

"I moved a lot when I was young and had big gaps in math and science. I had to start from general math and work my way up ... (through) TRIO I received tutoring."

Math is a key challenge for entering health science pathways. This was highlighted by a Yakima Valley College presenter in a separate panel; rural districts' math challenges are also visible in OSPI data.



Students need a range of assistance

- Tangible supports, continued:
 - Transportation remains a key rural barrier; buses are unreliable and lead to attendance challenges and difficulty getting to clinical training experiences
 - Childcare can make the difference in being able to pursue school or not
 - Students piece together formal and informal resources to make it work
 - Flexible work schedules help with finances, but also add to the overall load

"I worked 7-4, then [would] go to college at 5. I was hungry when I went to class, empty stomach, empty brain."

"I worked a part-time job, took work in warehouses during cherry season to save up a little money. [Employer] worked with me to work evenings so I could go to school in the morning."



Meet students where they are

- Schools, employers, policymakers must meet needs of students working while attending health professional training programs
 - All panelists worked part or full time while also attending school
 - Knowing assignment schedules far in advance helps students plan
 - Stipends may not be enough to cover all the fees for those on STEM pathway
 - Employer support for school time and clinical experiences can be key for workers to be successful attending school

"[Employer] reached out after graduation to work on licensure hours [for social work] ... very thankful they reached out. I had no idea how I was going to do that."



Meet students where they are

- Expecting students to take out graduate student loans is potentially limiting participation of students from communities underrepresented in healthcare

"I was very afraid of getting a loan. ... So afraid to go into debt. Student loans shouldn't be scary, but they are."

Chart reflects data about those who are willing to take on loans for education and then seek loan repayment. It's unknown how many students don't pursue education due to worries about taking on debt.

2023 Washington Health Corps Average Applicant Loan Balance for Select Professions

Profession	Average Loan Balance
DO Physician	\$350,000
Dentist	\$320,500
MD Physician	\$300,000
Clinical Psychologist	\$288,100
Mental Health Counselor	\$113,700
Nurse Practitioner	\$97,000
Clinical Social Worker	\$92,900
Substance Use Disorder Professional	\$52,000

Source: Washington Student Achievement Council



Overarching theme of belonging

- Importance of belonging was threaded through all discussions
 - Panelists had to learn how to navigate educational and employer cultures that were different than their communities; that takes a lot of effort
 - Mentors, faculty, and peers with shared backgrounds can be a bridge but were not common in these panelists experiences
 - Colleagues at healthcare employers who encouraged panelists in entry-level roles to learn more and develop in a profession also offered a bridge

"It's like living in two different worlds."

"I would have loved to see more leaders of color ... if we want to serve a diverse community, we need to see diverse people in leadership."



Small group discussion

Second round of discussion with your small group

1. What connections do you see between comments of rural employers and the students/workers? What disconnects?
2. What additional information about rural student/worker experiences should we seek?
3. Does hearing about these student-worker experiences change your thinking from the employer-focused discussion earlier?
 - If so, what changes would you make to a goal for the Council?

Questions?

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