Health Workforce Council

Tuesday, April 1 | 9 am to 1 pm

TVW Recording: Health Workforce Council - TVW

Welcome and Announcements

Dr. Suzanne Allen, MD, MPH, Council Chair, opened the meeting, welcoming everyone to the first council meeting of 2025. Dr. Allen introduced new council members and recognized the retirement of Suzanne Swadener. Renee Fullerton, Health and Social Policy Associate and Workforce Board Council staff, updated about the changes in meetings for 2025. Fullerton noted there is an addition of an in-person meeting in August of 2025 and the June 2025 meeting would be virtual. Fullerton reported the focus for 2025 is on our rural strategy development. Fullerton continued today's meeting would be learning about a rural workforce development within the youth space. Moving through the rest of year, there will be a coherent flow, ideally moving towards a well-vetted set of recommendations to report to policymakers at the end of year.

Sentinel Network Updates

Dr. Allen gave a brief update on the Sentinel Network, noting it provides intel to employers and educators across Washington state. Dr. Allen introduced Ben Stubbs, MPH, Health Workforce Sentinel Network Program Director. Stubbs discussed the partnership between the Workforce Council and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. The Sentinel Network serves to inform the state around health workforce needs and successes.

Stubbs noted there is a change in the cadence of how often employers are requested to provide feedback, their challenges and successes. Instead of twice a year, there will be one survey, and will begin on April 28. Stubbs noted working with many partners to develop a set of questions to help understand current workforce issues and needs. Stubbs encouraged our support in getting the survey out to the central network.

Rural Youth Health Professions Pathways Round Table

- Moderator: Dan Ferguson, Council member, Allied Health Center of Excellence
- Michelle Spenser, Council member, Health Sciences Program Supervisor, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Desiree Sweeney, Chief Executive Officer, NEW Health
- Kimberly Hetrick, Director, Career Connect WA
- Korina Padilla, Health Sciences Career and Technical Education teacher, Granger School District

Dr. Allen reminded the council about the strategic priorities, specifically about the rural strategic priority to identify and advocate for policy recommendations that enable rural students and

workers to access and succeed in health professional training programs and career advancement opportunities within their communities. Dr. Allen continued the focus was to explore the experiences of rural youth educators, employers and state experts bringing health professional training opportunities into the rural areas. Dr. Allen noted Fullerton's work conducting interviews with rural school districts to learn more about the expansion of health professional career and technical education.

Dr. Allen noted there would be a round table discussion with students, employers and state agencies and would be moderated by Dan Ferguson, Allied Health Center of Excellence, Council member.

Student Round Table

The first-round table panel consisted of three students: Makayla Duke, Jenkins Jr./Sr. High School, Chewelah, WA; Amaretto McGuinness, Grandview High School, Grandview, WA; and Isabella Webb, Sultan High School, Sultan, WA. Ferguson asked several questions of the students to include:

1. Where are you from and where do you go to school? About how many students are in your class? What's your community like?
2. What makes you interested in the healthcare as a career? Who influenced you? What's been your experience at your schools around your healthcare journey?
3. Have you had any opportunities to shadow or just observe anyone actually working in health care at a health care organization?
4. What kind of professions have you heard about in your exposure either outside of the school system or as a part of your education at your schools?
5. How did you get involved in HOSA? What is HOSA?
6. If you had a magic wand to change things for the students who come after you at your school, what would you do?
7. How have the high school and beyond plan helped or influenced your high school careers and your plans for health care careers?

Each of the students went into detail about their personal experiences within their communities, who were their mentors, how they have navigated their experiences and how helpful HOSA has been for each of them. They gave poignant responses to the magic wand question and enlightened response to the High School and Beyond Plan experience.

Each student outlined a different healthcare path and experience coming to their decisions on what career they want to obtain within the healthcare field.

Employer, Educator and Agency Round Table

Ferguson moved the round table onto the next portion bringing in employers, educators and state agencies.

Ferugson started this round table with asking Michelle Spencer, Council member, Health Sciences Program Supervisor, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; Kimberly Hetrick, Director, Career Connect WA questions; Desiree Sweeney, Chief Executive Officer, NEW Health; Korina Padilla, Health Sciences Career and Technical Education teacher, Granger School District and Caitlin Harrison, Workforce Development Manager, Jefferson Healthcare. Ferguson asked each person to introduce themselves and then asked several additional questions regarding their experience with CTE.

Spencer addressed what CTE is and how it has evolved. Formerly known as "vocational education," CTE has grown from programs focused on agriculture and home economics to a wide spectrum of career pathways including health sciences, business, STEM, skilled trades, and more. Key points discussed include Washington State recognizes six major CTE program areas, including Family & Consumer Sciences and Health Sciences and emphasis on teamwork, communication, and career readiness—skills relevant to any postsecondary path. Spencer also discussed misconceptions such as CTE is not limited to students who don't plan on attending a four-year college. Many CTE students do pursue higher education, often entering with practical experience that reduces debt and enhances employability and programs like Running Start, CTE gives students a jumpstart—whether into the workforce, apprenticeships, or further education.

Spencer further clarified how health-focused programming is generally offered under the CTE umbrella because of its funding structure, industry ties, and built-in leadership development components. While some schools may offer health education under a general or occupational elective label, the CTE model is the preferred standard for its sustainability and alignment with industry needs.

Ferguson moved the conversation to Kimberly Hetrick. Hetrick shared how Career Connect Washington and its role in the state workforce system. Hetrick reported Connect Washington (CCW) is embedded within each of the state's nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) via Career Connected Learning Coordinators. Hetrick further noted OSPI is a key partner in developing and implementing these pathways, ensuring alignment with: CTE frameworks and credentialing and certification requirements for educators. Hetrick also noted special attention is given to rural districts, where challenges like recruiting and retaining qualified CTE teachers, and meeting certification standards, are especially difficult.

Ferguson invited Korina Padilla to answer questions. Padilla shared her experience at Granger High School with Health Science CTE. Padilla described a strong student engagement in health sciences – over 45% of students indicated interest in the pathway. Padilla further notes classes are consistently full, despite her having to split time between CTE and general education science teaching due to limited staffing.

Padilla shared the work giving students real-world exposure and work based learning to include HOSA and organized events bringing in professionals to the classroom. Padilla also shared her challenges to include lack of local job shadowing and internships despite student interest and constant barriers and dead ends when trying to initiate job shadowing or internship pipelines.

Continuing the questions phase, Ferugson turned to Desiree Sweeney. Sweeney discussed the key challenges in rural and frontier CTE and Workforce Development. Items Sweeney shared include rural regions face scarcity in both health care services and health care education programs and just as there are not enough health workers in these areas, there's a lack of qualified professionals to teach health-related CTE courses. Sweeney outlined how students often face challenges due to transportation issues, long school days and lack of nearby healthcare facilities. Sweeney continued discussing infrastructure limitations such as unreliable or nonexistent internet.

Sweeney shared the success of NEW Health with their skills centers and satellite partnerships. Sweeney outlined how NEW Health built an internal workforce development program and the successes and challenges they've had to overcome.

Ferguson asked Caitlin Harrison the key challenges in rural and frontier health workforce development. Harrison noted Jefferson County is the 5th oldest county in the U.S., driving high demand for healthcare services and simultaneously, the area has a low proportion of working-age residents, as it's largely a retirement community. Harrison discussed the disconnect with youth and low postsecondary engagement, geographic and infrastructure barriers and the lack of local CTE courses.

Harrison noted a collaboration with Career Connect Washington that has helped to build bridges between education and industry, launched programing where none existed and helped to navigate bureaucracy and structural barriers.

Rural High School/Critical Access Hospital Nursing Assistant Program

Dr. Allen introduced Eunice Muriu, MS, BSN, Nursing Consultant from the Washington State Board of Nursing. Dr. Allen gave an overview of how we can support our rural students and workers and make sure they have educational opportunities available. Dr. Allen noted funding is winding down and it's a crucial time for us to figure our what our next steps are in order to continue this work. Muriu continued the conversation by presenting on the Rural Hospital and High School Nursing Assistant Partnership. Muriu started by giving a detailed background of the program. Muriu continued into the challenges they have experienced with this program. Muriu then outlined the recommendations for keeping this program moving forward.

Muriu then introduced Corina Hernandez, RN, BSN, NAC Program Director from Providence Mountain Carmel Hospital and Colville High School. Hernandez shared about the legacy of healthcare training that started in 1980 and continued until 2012. Hernandez noted the program relaunched without funding from the school district, it's fully hospital funded. Currently there are six cohorts earning their CNA licenses before graduating from high school with the long-term vision to include reviving a local nursing program. Hernadez noted strong support with the high schools CTE director and that the hospital has a grow their own valued structure. Hernandez noted concerns with sustainability as funding is stretched.

Muriu then introduced Roxanne Truth Sickles, MSN-BC, Manager of Clinical Education and Nurse Residency, Summit Pacific Medical Center and Elma High School. Sickles noted Summit Pacific is currently a critical access hospital in the midst of a major expansion from 10 to 20 inpatients beds. Sickles noted a strong community and school partnerships relationship has lead to the current program. Sickles reviewed how their program started, noting only 8 students to start and utilizing a formal application and interview process. Sickles described how Summit Pacific provides instruction, clinical supervision, student onboarding and logistics support. Sickles noted the program has key barriers in rural healthcare to include transportation, financial barriers and limited poste secondary access. Sickles noted the Elma School district assists students with van transportation. Sickles noted launching a program like this takes a village from legal, educational, clinical, and administrative players to all align.

Large Group Discussion of Initial Themes and Additional Topics to Explore

Dr. Suzy Ames, Council vice-chair and President, Peninsula College opened the discussion portion of the meeting with reflections on the student panel, emphasizing their resilience and drive. She underscored the importance of supporting *all* students, especially those who may not be as naturally motivated, through mentorship, community support, and early exposure to career paths.

Key challenges were discussed, such as the difficulty rural students face completing prerequisite courses due to distance, family responsibilities, and lack of local educational infrastructure. Ideas like flexible online learning and wraparound support were seen as critical to success.

The session wrapped up with appreciation for these innovative approaches and a call to continue exploring creative, community-rooted solutions to build a resilient, localized health workforce.

Department of Health Credentialing and HELMS Update

Dr. Allen focused the shift of the meeting to updates from the State Department of Health regarding ongoing improvements to the healthcare credentialing process. Dr. Allen introduced Harold Wright, Jr., Council member, Interim Director, Office of Health Professions, Department of Health; Elizabeth Geisler, Deputy Project Director, Business, Health Systems Quality Assurance, Department of Health and Carly McCarthy, Communications Consultant, Department of Health

It was shared that Health Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS) is part of a broader three-pronged strategy to enhance licensing in Washington. HELMS is replacing 16 legacy systems with a single Salesforce-based platform to streamline and secure application, renewal, and credential management processes. HELMS is being rolled out in phases beginning April 2024 through Winter 2025. User benefits and process improvements were outlined with this new process. Delays, adjustment and current challenges were also discussed. Wright emphasized their commitment to transparency, robust communication, and continuous

collaboration to ensure successful system transition and long-term improvements in healthcare credentialing across Washington.

Legislative Session and General Council Updates

Fullerton gave a brief update on seven healthcare bills. Fullerton also reviewed the council recommendation to policymakers.

Closing Comments

Dr. Allen closed out the meeting at 1:03 p.m.