

# CALL TO ACTION

# ADDRESSING HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Healthcare industry leaders anticipate significant increases in the need for healthcare services due to Florida's continued population growth, the aging of Florida's population, and increased access to care. Yet, the supply of healthcare workers is not keeping pace as they too are aging toward retirement or reduced hours of work.<sup>1</sup> In addition, low passage rates of the statewide licensure examination reduces the production of licensed professionals.<sup>2</sup> Compared nationally, Florida's nurse licensure exam passage rates rank among the lowest.<sup>3</sup> For many healthcare professions, data are not collected, making it difficult to measure, predict, or address shortages and industry needs. For instance, little is known about the many allied health professionals who are integral members of the healthcare workforce team and critical partners in meeting the health needs of Floridians.

**A critical shortage of healthcare workers is a public health crisis.** As such, the state of Florida has an obligation to address workforce needs.

Public health implications of shortages include:

- ▶ **Reduced access to care:** Qualified staff shortages and increased turnover result from reduced talent pipelines, market competition, and decreased job satisfaction. Rural communities are also uniquely affected as workers of all occupations tend to be drawn to urban settings for higher wages and greater personal amenities.
- ▶ **Diminished quality of care:** Reduced numbers of caregivers with wisdom and experience and increased reliance on new and younger graduates increases the error risk in care delivery. Reduced mentorship opportunities and higher workload pressures due to shortages also subject caregivers to providing increasing levels of care without proper education or training.
- ▶ **Increased cost of care:** Overdependence on urgent/emergent care settings for primary care and preventable services, higher complication and readmission rates, and costly hiring practices due to market competition increase preventable expenditures. Delayed access also increases the levels of costly care expected of increasingly specialized care providers.

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<sup>1</sup> Nearly two-thirds of physicians are age 50 and older (FL Department of Health, 2017) and 46% of Florida's registered nurses (RN) are age 51 or older. Florida is particularly sensitive to rapid rates of reduced nursing workforce as the Baby Boomer generation begin to phase out of the workforce. While many older adults are working longer than ever before, older nurses reduce their work hours and tend to move away from hospital (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2014), bedside, or critical care settings.

<sup>2</sup> 2017 average nurse exam (NCLEX) passage rates were 74% for registered nurses and 75% for licensed practical nurses

<sup>3</sup> 47th out of 51 for LPNs; 51st out of 51 for RNs (Florida Center for Nursing, 2018)

It is essential that the state of Florida commits to ensure an *adequate, qualified, engaged, and resilient* workforce to meet Florida's healthcare needs today and in the future with the goal for optimal health and wellness. Addressing the four facets of this goal will improve access to quality care, improve optimum care outcomes and reduce the cost of healthcare delivery.

▶▶ The healthcare workforce must be *adequately* staffed proportionate to Florida's population needs. An adequate workforce must meet minimum licensure, certificate, and/or required job qualifications consistent with health industry standards. To accomplish this, Florida must:

- **Support coordinated data collection and analysis efforts of current and projected healthcare workforce** and expand on usage of technological advancements in data management and analysis to maximize information resources.
- **Support regular, mandatory collection of actionable and meaningful information** from healthcare workforce personnel and employers, and ensure data are available for industry action in a timely and consistent manner.
- Engage in innovative efforts to **recruit and retain a robust healthcare workforce**.
- **Provide incentives** for healthcare employment, particularly in entry level positions.

▶▶ Florida must facilitate and retain a *qualified* workforce with experiential knowledge, academic credentials, and/or required certification beyond minimum requirements.

- **Ensure all healthcare professionals and caregivers have the technology, equipment, skills, training, and safe environment needed to provide safe and quality care.**
- Support **training and skill development** for paid and unpaid caregivers to utilize technological advancements and innovative care delivery methods.
- Strengthen the talent pipeline through increased access to educational opportunities, opportunities for advancement, and efforts to combine the wisdom of experienced personnel with innovative perspectives of new and diverse professionals.
- Invest in the education infrastructure for healthcare to produce the talent the state will need.

▶▶ Healthcare leadership and management must keep workers *engaged*, by promoting a just culture of shared and balanced accountability for both individuals and the organization to create an atmosphere of trust, encouragement, and reward.

- Support the **implementation, utilization, and assessment of telemedicine and innovative technological caregiving methods.**
- Create education systems to embrace new technologies, including development of key partnerships that train new skills and stay updated on emerging advancements, such as robotics, simulation, and information technologies.
- Create a work environment with tools and resources for individuals to be successful.
- Establish a system of "Collective Impact" by identifying platforms for public and private investment in talent for the region to minimize competition and maximize investment.
- Support and champion high-quality leadership who keep their team intact, motivated, and achieving quality care goals.

- ▶ Finally, a **resilient** healthcare workforce requires resources to avoid illness, maintain productivity and operate with mental toughness to ensure readiness to deliver quality care.
  - Strengthen work environments to **promote the health & safety of the workforce**.
  - Explore and address physical stressors, burnout, and other reasons for turnover, and utilize technological advancements to alleviate workforce issues.

### Florida's policymakers, educators, and employers must ensure a robust healthcare workforce.

Addressing workforce issues is critical to improving the quality of healthcare for all of Florida and reducing the state's preventable expenditures. This is a call to action to the state of Florida policymakers, private and public industry, and educational settings to establish, assess, and act on meaningful contributions to alleviate healthcare workforce issues and strengthen the industry to position Florida as a leading state to work in healthcare. This call to action supports industry leaders' claims that healthcare workforce issues largely contribute to a public health crisis which the state of Florida and healthcare leadership have an obligation to address. Without an adequate, qualified, engaged, and resilient workforce, the state and recipients of care are at greater risks of higher healthcare costs and decreased access to quality care.

This Call to Action is presented by a diverse group of healthcare stakeholders originally convened at the 2018 Florida Chamber Foundation Future of Florida Forum. **The state of Florida should use this Call to Action as a guiding framework for actionable steps to reduce shortages, alleviate issues, and strengthen healthcare workforce.** Action to be taken should involve a global, interprofessional body of stakeholders identifying strategic, tangible workforce interventions in support of Florida's optimal health and wellness. Interventions should be directed toward data collection, management and analysis, innovation and technology, and measures supporting the healthcare workforce.

*This paper was written with input from representatives of the organizations listed below who volunteered to participate at the close of the Future of Florida's Healthcare Workforce sessions held at the Florida Chamber Foundation 2018 Future of Florida Forum, September 26-27, 2018.*

- AdventHealth Orlando Human Resources
- Baptist Health
- Brevard Healthcare Workforce Consortium
- Florida Board of Nursing
- Florida Center for Nursing
- Florida Chamber Foundation
- Florida Dental Association
- Florida Hospital Association
- Floridians for Dental Access
- Healthcare Workforce Research Initiative
- Orlando Health
- REUNIONcare
- South Florida State College

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