

## Eastern Connecticut Healthcare Partnership (ECHP)

### October 24, 2025 Meeting Summary

*CT State Three Rivers, Norwich*

#### MEETING SUMMARY

- David Allard (EWIB) shared labor market information on recent job postings and 2022-2032 projections for healthcare occupations. Top job postings in 2025 were for: (1) Registered Nurses; (2) Home Health and Personal Care Aides; (3) Physical Therapists; (4) Nursing Assistants; and (5) Health Technologists and Technicians.
- Participants discussed hiring / retention challenges and potential solutions – first as a full group and then in small groups by education level (certificate programs, associates, bachelors/masters). Key themes from these discussions included:
  - **Strengthen employer-educator partnerships to better prepare students for healthcare jobs.** This can include job shadowing and mentoring, internships, guest speakers, employer feedback on skills gaps (e.g., job readiness, communication skills), and employers referring candidates who lack credentials to education programs.
  - **Expand job readiness training** – potentially through the creation of a “readiness credential.”
  - **Publicize tuition reimbursement programs and career advancement opportunities.** Options included a marketing campaign, infusing discussions as part of the hiring and onboarding process, and via employee-created social media (e.g., healthcare influencers).
  - **Expand educational programs in the region for key occupations.** Employers noted shortages for different positions – including surgical techs, respiratory therapists, and dentists – with limited educational offerings in the region.

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#### WELCOME

Erin Sullivan (CT State) welcomed everyone to the Three Rivers Campus, and ECHP Co-Chair Diane Manning (United Services) welcomed everyone and shared an overview of the Healthcare Partnership.

#### HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE NEEDS

David Allard (EWIB) reviewed labor market information on recent job postings and 2022-2032 projections for healthcare occupations (see [page 2 of the meeting packet](#) for details). Key data included:

- The top job postings for April – August 2025 were for: (1) Registered Nurses; (2) Home Health and Personal Care Aides; (3) Physical Therapists; (4) Nursing Assistants; (5) Health Technologists and Technicians; (6) Medical and Health Services Managers; (7) Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses; and (8) Nurse Practitioners. David noted that job postings data can often overstate the number of vacant positions.

- 2032 projections for the most annual job openings were: (1) Home Health and Personal Care Aides, Nursing Assistants; (2) Registered Nurses; (3) Medical Assistants; (4) Social and Human Service Assistants; (5) Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors; (6) Dental Assistants; (7) Pharmacy Technicians; and (8) Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses.

Participants then reflected on healthcare workforce challenges and opportunities. Employers and support partners completed a feedback worksheet and then discussed the following questions:

*What keeps you up at night when you think about the future of the workforce?*

- Too few prospective employees given the need (i.e., Baby Boomers retiring / increased demand for healthcare services with aging population).
- Students not prepared for roles (e.g., lacking confidence, not realizing what jobs entail and quitting within 30 days).
- Lack of funding / low reimbursement rates and increasing costs of employee benefits.
- Lack of training / education programs in allied health fields.
- Employee burnout.
- Lack of policy / standards of care for home health aides.

*How can we better support career advancement for current healthcare workers?*

- More in-house training and flexible schedules to facilitate participation in training.
- More classes held in the community and at employers (i.e., students get to see healthcare environments / real-world context).
- Address the gap between the completion of training program and employment in the field (e.g., mock interviews, job coaching).
- Strengthen partnerships between employers and educators.
- Increase tuition reimbursement opportunities and publicize existing tuition reimbursement programs.
- Improve access to child care for employees with young children.

*If we could make one change to immediately improve hiring or retention in the region, what would it be?*

- Connect quality job candidates without required qualifications (e.g., certificates) to training programs; hire these candidates as trainees or after they earn credentials.
- Increase educator-employer connections – as guest speakers and host sites for clinical placements.
- Increase reimbursement rates / employee wages.
- Increase tuition support.

*If our pathways and pipelines were stronger three years from now, what would be different about how people enter and advance in healthcare careers?*

- New hires would enter with a greater understanding of their “real-world” jobs – through increased clinical / job experiences / simulations while they are in school.
- Increased and improved clinical partnerships – with stronger recognition and support for preceptors.
- Increased job shadowing, mentoring, and guest speaker opportunities that expose students and jobseekers to the wide range of healthcare jobs.
- Increased awareness and identification of contacts and entry points for different training / education programs.
- Increased creativity in job descriptions / including specific information to help candidates see opportunities in these jobs.

### SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSIONS: Pain Points in Hiring & Retaining Staff, Opportunities and Solutions

Participants built on the full-group discussion – addressing challenges and opportunities to improve the healthcare pipeline in three small groups: (1) certificate programs / entry-level positions; (2) associates degrees; and (3) bachelors / masters degrees. The themes from each group’s discussions are summarized below.

**Group 1: Certificate Programs.** Employers first shared “pain points” in hiring and retaining staff:

- **High no-show rates for interviews / onboarding.** Some candidates may find better options at other employers (e.g., Amazon, casinos) or just apply to fulfill Unemployment Insurance requirements.
- **Lack of job readiness skills.** This is a challenge for some entry-level employees. For example, some employees are not punctual.

Educators and employers then discussed opportunities to strengthen the pipeline:

- **Expand job shadowing, internships and other opportunities to get real-world experience.** Hartford HealthCare (HHC) reported that job shadowing has been a great process to prepare new employees coming into the healthcare workforce (although the clearance and screening process is onerous). New employees can pick two different departments to shadow. Charter Oak has had success working with HHC on internships as part of Career Connect. They work with managers in the hospitals to take on entry level employees and interns; these new employees tend to have higher retention rates by building relationships with managers. Job shadowing and internships can also help students build their confidence before starting a job.
- **Strengthen partnerships across educators, employers, and support partners.** CT State Quinebaug Valley has worked with the Business Services Team (Jeff and Joelle) at the American Job Centers to connect students with different training and OJT opportunities, and to better understand employer needs. Participants suggested strengthening feedback loops from employers to educators on skill gaps, and having employers refer candidates that do not have required credentials to training programs.
- **Expand job readiness training / develop a readiness “credential.”** At Norwich Free Academy, there is a required employment skills training session where they explain to students the “why” for each employability skills lesson. CNA Bootcamp includes sessions on interviewing, how to dress, and job expectations. Both bring in employers to speak to students about expectations and why these are important. Participants agreed that it would be helpful to expand these educator-provider partnerships and develop a standard job readiness credential.
- **Highlight benefits and advancement opportunities when hiring.** Given low reimbursement rates (that limit entry-level wages), employers can highlight benefits, opportunities to earn higher wages (e.g., overnights), and career advancement opportunities in their recruitment, hiring and onboarding processes.
- **Connect job candidates without required credentials to training programs.** Participants discussed developing a process for referring candidates to training programs, with an option for re-applying after attaining required credentials.

**Group 2: Associates Degrees.** Employers first shared “pain points” in hiring and retaining staff:

- Participants from Hartford HealthCare (HHC) and Yale Health (L&M) reported too few **surgical tech and respiratory therapist** graduates / candidates. There are not enough programs for these occupations, and

not enough students entering programs that exist. Another challenge is that most new programs will be at the BA level – requiring 4+ years for the first cohort of students to graduate. We need to increase awareness of these and other allied health careers – through more robust job shadowing (showing the range of respiratory therapist work) and more on-the-job training.

- An employer from United Services noted **low retention rates** for recent graduates for community-based social work / case management positions. New employees report “this is not what I expected” and many prefer working remotely vs. in the office / community.

Educators and employers then discussed opportunities to strengthen the pipeline:

- **Increase exposure to different occupations, settings, and the world of work.** Maria Belval (CT State Three Rivers) shared ways her Human Services classes expose students to different settings – including through job shadowing / internships, guest speakers, discussions of both the rewarding and stressful aspects of these jobs, and the use of real-life case scenarios. Maria suggesting working with the Career Development staff person at Three Rivers ([Taylor Venditto](#)) to expand these opportunities. One challenge for job shadowing is the amount of paperwork required (e.g., L&M Volunteer Coordinator has a packet for students to complete before shadowing surgical techs).
- **Expand career exploration for high school students and adults considering healthcare careers.** The Healthcare Partnership has been holding semi-annual Healthcare Career Expos. HHC and the American Job Centers are holding [Career Development Sessions](#) for the general public (see [this link](#) and [this link](#) for examples). We need to expand these types of efforts so more students are enrolling in Human Services and allied health programs (e.g., hosting a Career Expo at Three Rivers). For example, there are career advancement opportunities for respiratory therapists with 9-5 weekday hours. Talent Acquisition departments can expand career development sessions for both incumbent employees (i.e., for career advancement) and the general public.
- **Utilize CT State structure to expand the surgical tech pipeline to Eastern CT.** With statewide consolidation of the community colleges, there may be ways to incorporate components of CT State Manchester’s surgical tech program at the Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley campuses (e.g., students taking general ed classes have hands-on opportunities at their campuses).
- **Launch a marketing campaign to increase awareness of educational grants and employee benefits.** R.T. Brown (seCTer) suggested creating a pilot marketing campaign on tuition reimbursement and other employee benefits (e.g., child care) healthcare employers are offering to promote career advancement and quality of life.

**Group 3: Bachelors / Masters Degrees.** Employers first shared “pain points” in hiring and retaining staff:

- **Lack of job readiness / communication skills / real-world experience.** Many students have limited experience before starting jobs – with online learning, limited experiences working with patients / dealing with the stresses of these jobs, and lack of basic skills (e.g., greeting patients). Many want to work remotely or more flexible hours, which is not possible in most healthcare settings.
- **Difficulty hiring and/or training for specific positions.** It can take a year to hire a dentist, and can take 2+ years for social workers / nurses to learn the job. It can also be challenges to identify mentors for new hires.

Educators and employers then discussed opportunities to address these challenges:

- **Expand in-person education and opportunities to get real-world experiences.** In addition to in-person classes, educator-employer partnerships can include networking events with students and employers, expanded, extended job shadowing (more than one week), and employee TikTok videos showing life in different healthcare settings (i.e., healthcare career influencers).
- **Expand in-house professional development.** For example, UCFS hired a Professional Development Manager.
- **Publicize career advancement opportunities and existing loan repayment programs.**
- Replicate the Manufacturing Partnership's **Employee Ambassador Program** that offers stipends and employee recognition to employees who serve as the "face" of the organization in the community.
- **Bring new education programs to eastern CT**, building on the successful expansion of St. Joseph's MSW program to Mansfield ("it succeeded because Diane Manning championed it.")

## **SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS**

Dave Bechtel shared next steps:

- The **HEAT Team** will meet to identify next steps in improving the healthcare careers pipeline, building on today's discussion.
- Members can email Dave Bechtel ([bechtel@xsector.com](mailto:bechtel@xsector.com)) to join an Action Team and learn more about the topics discussed at the meeting. See [page 4 of the meeting packet](#) for information on our three Action Teams (HEAT, Quality of Life, Policy).

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Industry Partners: Krista Carpenter (Assured Quality Homecare), Gail Douglas (Fairview Health Center), Ginger Frasca and Melissa Meyers (Generations Family Health Center), Barbara Boiselle and Nicole Shaw (Hartford HealthCare), Carrie Dyer (Reliance Health), Cheri Golia (SCADD), Jennifer Granger (United Community & Family Services), Sara Barber and Diane Manning (United Services), Katie Shortman and Shannon Angiolo (Yale New Haven Health)

Support Partners: Nancy Taylor (Charter Oak State University), Angelina Zabbo (CNA Bootcamp of CT), Deb Battit (Community Foundation of Eastern CT), Christopher Mulhall (Community Health Center Association of CT), Laura Reed (CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services), Linda Ladas (CT DOL), Kimberly Griffiths and Jacquie Wetherell (CT State Quinebaug Valley), Maria Belval and Erin Sullivan (CT State Three Rivers), Heather O'Brien and Rebecca Romano (EASTCONN), Joelle Garrett (Eastern CT Chamber of Commerce), Christina Nadeau (Eastern CT State University), David Allard, Carol LaBelle, Melissa Laws, Amanda Murphy, Michael Nogelo, and Linda Riquier (EWIB), Karen Bellnier (Mitchell College), Kara Burkholder (Norwich Free Academy), Jeff Martel (NE Chamber of Commerce), R.T. Brown (seCTer), Anthony De Jesús and Greg Leonard (St. Joseph's University), Tracy Tremblay (United Way of Southeastern CT), Dave Bechtel (Cross Sector)