



Healthcare Workforce Summit

October 16, 2025 | Dimond Center Hotel, Anchorage

The Healthcare Workforce Summit brought AHHA members and key partners together to collaborate, share insights and innovations, and discuss effective strategies for strengthening Alaska's healthcare workforce. Participation included representatives from hospitals, nursing homes, tribal health organizations, universities, Area Health Education Centers (AHEC), the Alaska Department of Health, the Alaska Department of Labor, the Alaska Workforce Alliance, the Alaska Center for Rural Health & Health Workforce, the Anchorage School District, and the Alaska Community Health Workers Network.

Materials cited in this summary can be found online at alaskahha.org/workforce-summit.

Agenda

Elizabeth King, AHHA's Vice President of Operations, started the Summit by welcoming attendees and providing some history of AHHA's workforce development efforts. Elizabeth noted that much has happened over the past almost 7 years, using the strategic framework of pipeline, pathways, and protection of the workforce. She concluded her remarks by setting the tone for a day of connection, idea development, and planning for sustainable change.

What are the most pressing workforce issues in Alaska today?

In table groups, attendees discussed pressing workforce issues and innovative strategies or solutions they are interested in exploring. The ideas were captured on sticky notes and summarized here:

Issues

General:

- Mindset or perception that "it can't be done" blocks new ideas
- Organizational competition
- AI – changes in how work is done & need for people to do things differently
- Behavioral health staffing challenges and worker shortages

Recruitment:

- Knowledge of all health workforce possibilities
- Student interest in healthcare careers
- Recruiting from outside Alaska

Retention:

- Rural areas without road access to ANC especially challenged
- Community immersion needed

- Turnover on-going
- Need to help employees find the right fit
- More mentorship for employees

Training:

- Aligning training programs with state needs
- Lack of in-state training for specific occupations such as respiratory therapy
- Training the right people for the right place
- Balancing needs of students with training requirements

Connections between employers and education/training programs:

- Organizational bandwidth to assist in transition to practice
- Education/industry partnerships
- Clinic/hospital buy-in for shadowing, internships, etc.
- More pathways for job shadows in Anchorage (not just Providence)
- Connecting youth to workforce; employers are roadblocks
- Education/workforce practice gaps
- Need more employer champions

Workforce support needs:

- Social emotional preparation for jobs
- Supportive services such as housing, childcare
- Changing expectations of workforce

Patient needs – changing/increasing:

- Patient care getting harder, not easier
- Acuity of patients increasing
- Senior care community-wide needs
- Mismatch of workforce with patient needs – unreasonable expectations
- Transitional care, resources & plans – needed more
- Faith based care limits care options for patients at largest hospital

Academic programs:

- Lack of clinical preceptors/mentors
- Nursing faculty capacity

- Student success & progression challenges
- Breadth of in state delivery challenges
- Student readiness
- Changing student needs
- Student basic needs

Rural:

- Challenges of living in rural communities
- Lack of access to higher education
- Opportunities for exposure to technical jobs
- Need to cultivate local talent and build out infrastructure to retain local workers

Changing workforce needs and expectations:

- Remote workforce – maintain connections & education
- Morale decreasing – perceptions of overworked, under paid, favoritism
- AI vs critical thinking – impact on workforce
- Managing generational differences and meeting younger generational expectations
- New employees – want to work remote but need to be physically present
- Desire for part-time flexible scheduling for nurses
- More hybrid schedules & flexibility
- Over reliance of travelers

Demographic changes:

- Decrease in younger people
- Population decreasing/changing – more elderly

Apprenticeships/on the job training:

- Training and upskilling take time, support, resources, & employee motivation
- Need apprenticeship sponsors
- Need more journey workers to train the next generation
- Cost to support workforce development particularly technical instruction and certificates

Innovative Strategies or Solutions

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Alternative schedules & rotations

- Provide local training for behavioral health to retain workers
- Shorter but more intense training opportunities
- Cross industry collaboration (K12 & university, business, health care)
- Formal residency in cohorts to support one another for new grads
- Address wage balance – input/output
- Train and support partners on how to support students for shadowing, practicums, clinicals
- Cross industry recruitment strategies, ex: support partner of applicants to find a role in another sector
- Mentorship programs
- Meeting potential employees where they are at
- Focus on retention of locals and outsiders
- RN diploma program – support high risk students, part-time attendance, partner with BSN program for degree
- Collaboration across organizations/K12/industry
- High school intensive/district collaboration
- Management training in empowering staff

Keynote Presentation & Workshop: Workforce Well-being: A Holistic Approach to Supporting Our Workforce [Jake Van Epps - Resiliency Center, University of Utah Health](#)

Dr. Van Epps discussed the multifaceted nature of burnout and introduced a holistic, organization-wide approach to fostering a thriving workforce. Drawing from established frameworks like the Job Demands-Resources Theory and the Stanford Model of Occupational Well-being, he shared practical strategies for mitigating burnout by addressing its systemic roots.

Dr. Van Epps' call to action is the creation of a workplace culture of wellness and psychological safety in healthcare systems. He led attendees through a process of developing a plan to move from ideas to concrete, actionable plans for building resilient teams, enhancing workplace efficiency, and promoting a supportive environment where every member can find joy in their work.

- PowerPoint - *Workforce Well-being: A Multi-Level Approach*
- PowerPoint - *From Talk to Action: Building a Culture of Well-being in Your Healthcare Organization*
- Handouts (4) –
 - Job Demands-Resource Theory
 - Stanford Model of Occupational Well-being
 - Listen-Sort-Empower
 - Multi-Level Support for Organizational Well-being
- Worksheet (pdf & Word versions) – *From Talk to Action: A Personal Plan for Well-being*

Pathways Panel Discussion - Career Ladders & Apprenticeships

Panel members shared examples of career ladders, apprenticeship programs, and education/training pathways offered in partnership with academic institutions in place in their facilities. The discussion included additional examples provided by the audience of pathways in place for staff to grow their careers while remaining employed.

Panelists:

- Jessie Beyer, Talent Development Specialist, Foundation Health Partners, Fairbanks
- Jennifer Twito, Director of Training & Workforce Programs, Bartlett Regional Hospital, Juneau
- Levi Gilbert, Special Projects Manager, Maniilaq Association

Questions Discussed:

1. What sparked your organization to create a career ladder or apprenticeship program? How did you decide where to start and who to partner with?
2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced—things like funding, scheduling, or staff buy-in—and how did you work through them?
3. Once these programs are up and running, how do you keep them going? What strategies have you used to make sure they're sustainable and embedded in your systems—so they continue to thrive even when staff or leadership changes?
4. What kind of impact have you seen since these programs launched? Have you noticed changes in retention, recruitment, or staff engagement? And looking ahead, what's next for your organization—are there plans to expand or build new pathways?

Partner Lightning Round Presentations

- Gloria Burnett, Center for Rural Health & Health Workforce
PowerPoint - *CACHE & Interprofessional Continuing Education Accreditation*
- Nyabony Gat, Alaska Community Health Worker Network
PowerPoint - *Community Health Worker Network of Alaska*
- Jacqueline Summers & Mari Selle, Alaska Workforce Alliance
PowerPoint – *Alaska's Workforce Future Plan & Resurrecting the Healthcare Workforce Coalition*

Table Conversations – Pipeline initiatives

Attendees visited 3 tables for 15 minutes of conversation on topics related to the workforce pipeline:

- *K-12 programs and working with school districts* - Jennifer Twito, Bartlett Regional Hospital
- *Summer/school break internship opportunities* - Karen Lapp, Foundation Health Partners
- *School Ambassadors & working with HOSA chapters* - Providence Alaska Medical Center staff: Hannah Meneses, Laarni Power, Barbara McLendon
- *Hiring & job shadow opportunities for minors* - Naomi Digitaki, Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp.
- *Local outreach campaign strategies* - Levi Gilbert, Maniilaq Health Center

Wrap Up

Attendees discussed ideas or strategies heard during the summit that resonated with them or might prompt doing something different or new at their facility/program. They were asked to consider how they might collaborate with other facilities and stakeholders to move forward on action related to workforce pipeline, pathways, or protection. The moderator also asked to hear about anything on attendees' minds that was not discussed and, in closing, asked for thoughts on what follow up or support AHHA might provide to its members or partners going into the future.

Ideas shared during discussion

- Adult career fairs for education programs, not just job recruitment
- Reskill or upskill “older” people ages 30-50. Don’t just focus on high school or recent graduates
- Target 20 to 28-year-old people in addition to high school. How do we reach them?
- It is important to thank and recognize preceptors
- Ask providers why did you get into this work? Help them take their passion and their why to help recruit young people to healthcare careers.
- Job shadow liability. Share paperwork developed by facilities successful in doing job shadows ([click here for Providence Alaska’s job shadow packet and policy for student observational visits](#)).
- Push back on static culture. Ask “Why” and “Why Not”. Changes in leadership are both a threat and an opportunity.
- Questions to ask during an interview to help people learn about workforce wellbeing initiatives when considering employment. Share with students.
- Occupational well-being, healthy work environment. Importance of listening.
- Job shadowing could be just a few hours; small bites of job shadow can be useful.
- New friendships and connections
- Collaboration is a strong asset/strength in Alaska
- Kick start initiatives
- Keep AHHA’s Workforce Committee going. Possibly transition it to the AK Workforce Alliance?
- Create a directory of current initiatives and contact information for people to support communication and sharing
- Roll some of this work into the new healthcare coalition (Jacqueline)
- Retention. Importance of integrating people into communities so they feel connected (including spouse and kids) and will stay.
- Support for spouse and family of the person who accepts a job in Alaska
- Untapped talent of immigrants and refugees
- Family career fair, information for all ages on healthcare careers

- Celebrate successes and thank everyone involved in workforce initiatives