

Project: Health Care Pathways

Brief Description: Montana State University Billings requests continued funding of \$350,000 to continue to provide degree and professional development education programs for the health care industry, focusing on the most crucial needs as determined through ongoing conversations with area health care providers (St. Vincent Healthcare, The Billings Clinic, Earnest Health, St. John's Lutheran Home and the Yellowstone City/County Health Department.)

Executive Summary: Providing new and replacement workers is vital to the economy of Billings, the region and the State of Montana, especially for the health care industry, which is the largest private industry sector in Yellowstone County with 10,000 workers. In addition, the state's 47 Critical Access Hospitals, rural health clinics, Indian Health Service facilities, long term care homes, and Community Health Centers are facing ever-growing problems in recruiting and retaining mental health professionals, medical assistants, nurses and other allied health professionals critical to maintaining health services in these communities. MSU Billings seeks to address continuing worker shortages in health care to meet regional needs. The shortage of health care workers is a national trend, driven by a growing demand for health services, an increasingly aging population and a shrinking supply of workers. The industry is unable to meet all these demand for health care in a time when medical technologies are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Even during economic declines, the health care segment of Montana's economy is experiencing workforce shortages. Reports note that the situation is "especially acute" in a "frontier state like Montana with a growing population of elderly citizens." Reports also conclude:

- Health care represents Montana's largest overall service sector economy in terms of jobs
- Even though Montana's health care wages lag behind those in other states, health care wages in Montana average 21 percent higher than the overall Montana average wage
- Montana is experiencing an unacceptable shortage of qualified health care workers
- Significant barriers exist to alleviate this shortage
- This shortage will increase without policy leadership and action.

Substantial increases in labor force needs will continue to affect regional health care and it goes beyond primary care physicians and nurses. New health-related programs will be developed utilizing national accrediting agencies and advisory committees composed of professionals from these fields, guaranteeing both relevancy and applicability to workforce demands. Programs under consideration include those to train respiratory therapists, pharmacy technicians, substance abuse counselors, nurse aids, and others that bridge skills needed for health care industry with students interested in health care education — from two-year programs to baccalaureate to master's degree programs. Such cooperative and cost-effective solutions to educating additional health care workers will help broaden the workforce base, improve workplace and educational partnerships and develop good-paying careers in Montana.

Funding will support curriculum/program development, purchase of necessary software/hardware and medical equipment; program staffing and employment; program startup and development costs; and facilities modification/renovation to accommodate applied experiential work at cooperative training facilities at the College of Technology/local hospitals including audio-visual, on-line conferencing capacity.

Congressional Action Needed: An ongoing appropriation of \$350,000 is requested.

Importance/Outcomes for Montana: The health care sector is a vital economic and resource component of our regional economy, with more than 10,000 Yellowstone County residents currently at work in that industry. Continued growth in the health care field and a continually aging population means that there is a continued need for more workers in health care-related fields. Health care jobs offer good living wages and benefits to Montanans, the opportunity for advancement in the healthcare field, and the ability to live in most communities in Montana. Employers are also faced with increasing certification and recertification needs and the need for continued workforce training. Positive results of the College of Technology's Practical Nursing program have led to increased requests to provide training using the expertise of local health providers. Making sure adequately trained Montana employees are available to meet regional employer needs is vital to curtailing the workforce shortages in the future.

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MSU Billings Health Care Pathways

Talking points

Degree and certificate workforce education programs will be established in the health care industry focusing on the most crucial needs as determined through ongoing conversations with area health care providers (St. Vincent Healthcare, The Billings Clinic, Earnest Health, St. John's Lutheran Home and the Yellowstone City/County Health Department.)

- The health care industry represents Montana's largest overall service sector economy Gross State Product.
- The project involves maintaining the economic viability of a key regional economic sector—health.
- Addresses acute shortages which now exist in health care workforce employees
- Develops new, relevant certificate and degree programs to meet these critical employer and employee needs
- Provides for certificate development by professionals currently working in the medical field
- Allows for training and internship experiences with health care providers in the Billings area
- Offers increased opportunities for Montana residents to obtain better paying jobs in the health/medical sector
- Utilizes experiential training methodology as a basis for its curriculum
- Provides tangible, long term benefits as project outcomes:
 - Certificated training provided by practitioners
 - Meets national certificate requirements
 - Provides local and area residents with opportunities to earn higher paying wages
- Matching and in-kind funds are available through partnership collaboration