

WORKFORCE

Nevada's health care workforce has significantly lagged behind a decade of explosive population growth and the fastest aging senior segment in the US. Nevada lacks sufficient numbers of trained health care professions in geriatrics, and will experience dramatic shortages in the next decade. Many states have programs that help students repay their student loans if they agree to enter public sector employment for a certain amount of time. From an economic standpoint, a well-developed workforce in geriatrics is a key to attracting businesses to Nevada. It will also help to alleviate unemployment to train people in a field where jobs are available.

Need – There is a shortage of geriatric health care workers in Nevada, and it is one that could be disastrous for an already under-staffed health care system. Nevada lacks: nurses (Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses & Licensed Practical Nurses); primary care providers; geriatricians; geriatric pharmacists, therapists (physical, occupational, speech); social workers and other key roles. These professions require long and costly training. Certified nursing assistants (CNAs) can be trained in a reasonable amount of time and meet a vital need. Nursing homes and in-home care providers rely heavily on CNAs in providing care.

Potential Model – Provide incentives to Nevada's educational system to respond to work force shortages. Many states have programs that help health care providers pay off their student loans if they enter the public service sector through federal programs. These careers are usually limited to government positions. Currently home care and community-based care services are not generally covered. A state funded program to help health care professionals at all levels to pay off their student loans while working in the private sector in geriatrics would help alleviate the shortage of qualified persons available as the aging population grows

Benefits – Building a competent workforce with high job satisfaction is important to keeping seniors in their homes instead of being institutionalized. It is also key to providing quality health care services to people who need consistent care for their chronic diseases. Helping to defray the cost of developing a good health care workforce and creating work sites that provide job satisfaction with less stress and more benefits would make Nevada a good place for older people to live and retire.

Implementation – Access existing federal funds. Provide private business incentives and consistent regulations to encourage workforce development and career paths. Restore funding to the Geriatric Centers in the Nevada System of Higher Education and provide for graduate degrees in geriatrics in both health and social work. Provide student loan relief to health care professionals and social workers who work in geriatrics in both the public and private sectors. Provide incentives and/or funding to community based organizations to provide clinical training opportunities for CNAs, community health workers and student rotations for professionals.