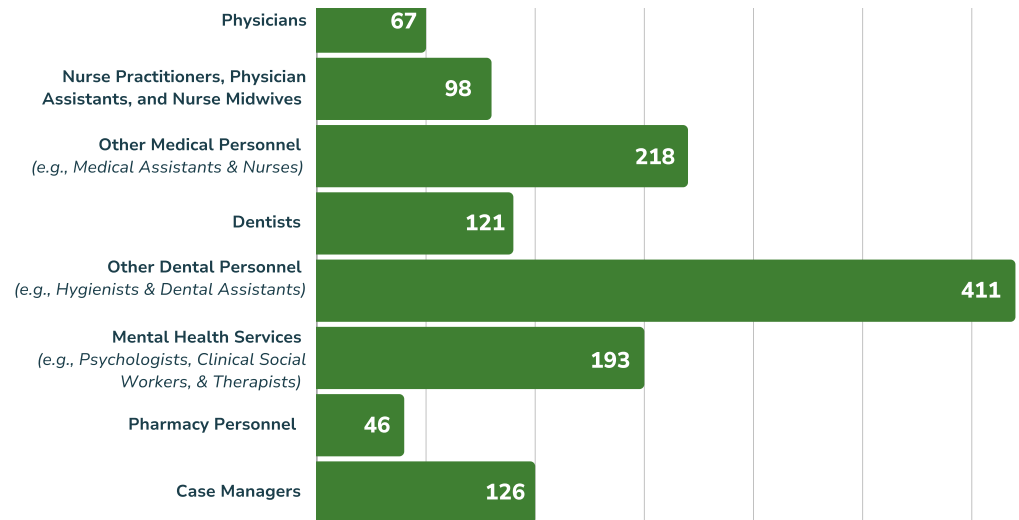


# ESSENTIAL INVESTMENTS IN EXPANDING THE HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE

JANUARY 2025

Wisconsin is at a critical inflection point, facing competing pressures on the health care workforce due to demographic changes and the rising cost of education. New, creative solutions are needed to invest in training and retaining primary care providers and other professionals that keep patients healthy and out of expensive emergency care.

Community Health Center Clinical Employees (FTE)s



Community Health Centers consistently report significant vacancies for all members of the dental team, behavioral health providers, and wait lists for patient care based on a limited health care workforce, especially in rural areas. Together, policymakers, employers, and academic institutions should work upstream to introduce more youth to health professions, increase training and availability of clinical rotations, and create new partnerships to expand pipeline development for high-need professions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Funding for Area Health Education Centers (AHECs):

AHECs are regional non-profits that provide mentorship and career exposure programs for early learners interested in health careers. AHECs are limited to using only 10% of their federal budget for early learner programs, which often means that exposure starts too late. Middle and high school experience programming is important so that students can identify opportunities earlier, explore different areas of interest, and overcome barriers to accessing training. State funding would result in stronger relationships between primary care settings and early education, building and expanding programs for shadowing, educational camps, career days, internships, and clinical training partnerships, especially in health care deserts. **WPHCA recommends creating a new appropriation for the seven regional non-profit AHECs at \$100,000 each, totaling \$700,000 annually for this initiative.**

Learn more about AHECs at <https://ahec.wisc.edu/>.

## Develop Behavioral Health Training Consortia

WPHCA recommends adding a new grant program to focus on behavioral health provider training consortia, building from the success of the Advanced Practice Clinician Training Grants (\$146.615) and Allied Health Professional Education and Training Grants (\$146.616), which would lead to development of consortia to create and expand behavioral health training. Eligible entities would include consortia of health care organizations (including but not limited to Community Health Centers, private non-profit clinics, free and charitable clinics, outpatient mental health clinics, and county-based human services departments) and educational partners. Developing this grant opportunity would encourage local partners to add and expand their capacity to train behavioral health team members in under-resourced areas. Improving access to appropriate mental health care relies on increasing the overall behavioral health workforce. **WPHCA recommends an annual appropriation of \$1,000,000 to kick-start this program.**

Learn more about existing programs at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/primarycare/ahp-grant.htm> and <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/primarycare/apc-grant.htm>.

## Include Behavioral Health in the State Loan Assistance Program and Add Funding

Wisconsin created the Health Professions Loan Assistance Program, administered by the Office of Rural Health, in 1989 to make awards to providers for education loan repayment in return for practicing three years in an underserved area. Awardees receive up to either \$25,000 or \$50,000 in loan assistance depending on their profession. According to a recent study, 81% of current program recipients remained at their practice site more than one year after their loan obligation ended, demonstrating its value. Additional professions are also permitted under federal law and eligible for matching funding but are currently not included in Wisconsin's program. **WPHCA recommends adding behavioral health and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment professionals permitted by federal law as eligible for matching funds and adding Dental Therapists as eligible recipients. WPHCA recommends doubling the state commitment (currently from Indian Gaming Funds) of \$445,000 to \$900,000 annually for awards and increasing the administrative allocation to \$90,000.**

Learn more about the State Loan Assistance Program: <https://worh.org/resources/for-the-workforce/loan-repayment/>; see §36.61.

## Provide ongoing General Purpose Revenue (GPR) for Oral Health Training Programs at Wisconsin Technical Colleges

2023 Wisconsin Act 89 allowed the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board, in coordination with technical college district boards, to submit a request to the Joint Committee on Finance for up to \$20 million for technical college programs to expand the state's oral health care workforce. 14 of the state's colleges submitted requests for funding, and funds are estimated to generate approximately 250 new program slots annually once programs are fully implemented, an increase of more than 26%. Based on the number of projected new annual graduates resulting from expanded or new oral health programming, WTCS estimated that 263,000 Wisconsin residents could gain access to dental health services. **WPHCA requests permanent support for Technical Colleges to sustain oral health programs, in support of the System Board General Aid Workforce request.**

Learn more about the WTCS Board's 2025 Budget Request: <https://www.wtcsystem.edu/impact/priorities/2025-27-wtcs-biennial-budget-request/>; see "General Aid."