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**MCHC**  
**Metropolitan Chicago**  
**Healthcare Council**

222 South Riverside Plaza  
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6010  
Telephone 312-906-6000  
Facsimile 312-993-0779  
<http://www.mchc.org>

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**Contact:** Heidi Diedrich, MCHC  
312-906-6142  
[hdiedric@mchc.com](mailto:hdiedric@mchc.com)

Sharmila Rao Thakkar, MCHC  
312-906-6008  
[sthakkar@mchc.com](mailto:sthakkar@mchc.com)

## **Chicago-area health care workforce shortage Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How acute is the Chicago-area shortage of nurses and allied health professionals?**

The metropolitan Chicago area has a current shortfall of 2,500 nurses, according to Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council vacancy survey data for metropolitan Chicago-area hospitals. In Illinois, the nursing shortage is expected to rise to 21,000 or 19 percent of the projected demand, by year 2020 if no intervention is taken, according to a 2002 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration. In 2003, Illinois granted 4,148 nursing degrees, up from 4,002 in 2002.

Chicago-area hospitals also report vacancy rates of more than 10 percent for physical therapists, occupational therapists and magnetic resonance imaging technicians in recent surveys conducted by MCHC. Other allied health care professionals in short supply include respiratory therapists, speech therapists and pharmacists. The number of graduating therapists of all types fell to 784 in 2003 from 861 in 2002.

### **Why is there a Chicago-area health care workforce shortage?**

The shortage can be attributed to increased demand and shrinking supply. The U.S. population is aging, which creates increased demand for health care services from the population and decreases the supply of health care workers due to retirements. All industries are expected to experience a shrinking labor pool as aging baby boomers reach age 65 and begin to retire. Health care organizations will have to compete for those workers to meet the need for nurses and allied health professionals. By 2011, this is expected to increase hospital discharges by 26.5 percent and inpatient days by 24.4 percent.

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**How many health care workers are needed to prevent future workforce shortages?**

About 6,000 new nurses and 1,200 new allied health care professionals will be needed each year to meet these demands. This requires maintaining current graduation rates and training an additional 2,000 nurses and 400 allied health care professionals statewide. An estimated 2,000 new health care workers will be needed in the eight-county metropolitan Chicago region each year.

**How will the health care workforce shortage impact patients?**

Health care workforce shortages limit the number of patients that hospital critical care and medical surgical units can accommodate, sometimes requiring hospitals to transfer patients to adequately-staffed hospitals. Chronic shortages prevent hospitals from expanding services to meet community demands. Workforce shortages in radiology and nuclear medicine make high-tech diagnostic services and minimally invasive procedures, such as radiosurgery and catheter-based blood vessel repair, unavailable to patients.

Patient safety is another critical concern. Inadequate nurse staffing played a part in 24 percent of the 1,609 hospital patient deaths that occurred nationwide between 1995 and 2002, according to a study by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). A 2003 study by the Institute of Medicine indicates that low nurse staff levels and long work hours contributed to patient care errors. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association indicates that shortages of nurses with baccalaureate and master's degrees decrease quality of care and increase hospital deaths.

**How will the health care worker shortage affect the Chicago-area economy?**

An inadequate health care workforce puts at risk the metropolitan Chicago region's economic development. Health care is one of the fastest growing regional economic sectors, generating \$23.7 billion or 9.5 percent in personal income for regional residents and contributing 400,000 workers to the area in 2003.

Health care worker salary and benefits packages averaged \$63,088 compared to \$43,021 in other regional sectors. Every dollar in hospital wages creates \$1.42 in wages in other sectors of the economy, according to JCAHO. Health care expansion will create 22,500 hospital and 50,000 regional jobs by 2020. One hospital job creates 1.54 jobs in the community. Chicago-area hospitals contributed \$1.8 billion in capital improvements to the economy. The availability of hospital and health care services makes the Chicago area attractive to potential employers looking for a business site.

**How should the Chicago-area health care workforce shortage be addressed?**

Expanding the health care workforce in Illinois requires fundamental changes in hospital policies, the education system and government regulations. The first steps should include:

- A comprehensive study to provide a detailed roadmap for Illinois that directly addresses the most urgent health care workforce needs.

## MCHC Workforce Shortage Report – Add 2

- A task force to coordinate the region's hospital workforce activities and provide a forum for collaborating and sharing practices.
- A health care workforce development plan that addresses regional needs for the next five to 15 years.

### **How much funding will be required to stem Chicago-area workforce shortages?**

Illinois will require an investment of \$40 to \$50 million over five years to increase by 50 percent the number of nurses and allied health care professionals trained each year by 2010. This figure is based on commitments made by other states with similar workforce shortages to Illinois'. This money must help fund faculty and education programs.

### **How have other states responded to health care workforce shortages?**

Hospital officials in Arizona, which experiences a health care workforce shortage similar in size to that of Illinois, expect to invest \$40 million over five years to double nursing graduates. Tennessee officials estimate that \$38.8 million and 383 full-time faculty members will be needed to train 4,969 nurses over five years in Tennessee. California will spend \$90 million to increase annual nursing graduates from 6,000 to 9,500 over five years.

### **What are some of the obstacles to employment that foreign-born nurses face?**

Language barriers, nursing credential validation and licensure standards often prevent foreign-born nurses from practicing in Chicago-area hospitals. Illinois recently passed a law that eliminated redundant licensure examinations, enabling foreign nurses to enter the workplace faster. Hospitals, government officials and health care educators should support the efforts of the Bilingual Nurses Consortium, a group that helps foreign-born nurses earn licenses.

### **How do Chicago-area hospitals foster health career development for incumbent workers?**

Nurse and medical assistants and licensed practical nurses represent potential candidates for nursing or allied health care programs. Many hospitals sponsor programs that allow workers to take time off to earn nursing or allied health care degrees without losing seniority, pay or benefits. Innovative workplace programs, such as those that reduce transportation and childcare costs for those seeking a health care degree, need to be expanded.

### **Why should health care programs standardize basic course curricula?**

Health care workers, including those with advanced training and experience, often must retake basic courses to earn degrees in other disciplines, such as nursing. Standardizing basic course curricula would streamline health care education; reduce financial and time commitments; and allow students to move between programs. This year, Illinois passed a law allowing advance practice nurses to expand their practices without earning another degree by demonstrating commensurate skills and passing a national certification exam.

**How can Chicago-area schools reduce the health care workforce shortage?**

Fundamental changes to the way the educational system prepares students for health care careers must begin in elementary and middle school. Gov. Blagojevich's Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI), launched in 2004, provides tools to incorporate health care career awareness in K-12 school curricula. In addition, programs such as "The Other Side of the Stethoscope," which introduced 43,000 Chicago Public School seventh graders to careers in health care, emphasize good math and science skills.

**How can Chicago-area health care faculty shortages be averted?**

State law requires that faculty members in schools of nursing hold master's or doctorate degrees in nursing to teach. Lifting regulatory barriers allows professionals with advanced training in fields such as geriatrics or pharmacy to teach related health care courses.

Educators and providers must make academia attractive to those in health services management by challenging and rewarding workers who choose teaching as a career. Legislators must fund public education and scholarships to attract candidates to advanced study programs.

**How much funding is available to Chicago-area health care programs?**

The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago, a consortium serving the northeast Illinois economic region, secured \$3.6 million in state grants to upgrade the skills of existing health care workers and support teaching programs through CSSI, from which \$2.6 million will fund the skills training programs of 16 health care, government and education organizations

These programs should add 444 registered nurses; 119 licensed practical nurses; 116 medical records workers; 84 technician/technologists; and 10 therapists to the Northeast Illinois workforce over the next two years. The remaining \$945,000 will fund non-traditional nurse training programs in northeast regional community colleges.

In 2003, \$100,000 in grants provided to MCHC by the "Promise of Nursing Illinois Program" of Johnson and Johnson, New Brunswick, N.J., enabled seven area undergraduate nursing programs to establish 100 nursing student slots by 2006.

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