



Eastern Connecticut Healthcare Partnership

April 2024 Partnership Meeting

Friday, April 19, 2024 – 8:30am – 11:30am
Backus Hospital, 326 Washington Street, Norwich

Industry Partners Present: Lisa Coe (Bayview Healthcare); Curtis Rodowicz (Colonial Health); John O'Keefe, R. Kyle Kramer, Robert Viens (Day Kimball); Melissa Meyers (Generations Family Health Center); Gregory Allar, Mike Davis, Liz Li, Carley Warzecha, Joe Zuzel (Hartford Healthcare); Lisa Ryan (Matulaitis Nursing Home); Mike Van Vlaenderen (Reliance Health); Pamela Kinder (United Community & Family Services); Diane Manning (United Services); David Panteleakos; Katy Holzer; Christine Zadora (Westview)

Support Partners Present: Tiffany Morrissey (CT Health Council); Jodi Clark, Erin Sullivan (CT State); Joelle Garrett (Eastern CT Chamber of Commerce); Christina Nadeau (ECSU); Carol Labelle, Michael Nogelo, David Allard, Linda Riquier, Amanda Murphy (EWIB); Jeff Martel (Northeast Chamber of Commerce); Jessica Vocatura (Norwich Free Academy); Malia Sieve (ReadyCT); Paul Whitescarver (seCTer); David Bechtel, Mark Nickel, Ken Plourd (Cross Sector)

Welcome and Introductions

Partnership co-chair Mike Davis welcomed everyone to the meeting and participants introduced themselves.

Partnership co-chair Diane Manning shared background information on the Eastern Connecticut Health Partnership (ECHP) – including early accomplishments since launching in January 2023:

- Hosting a Legislative Breakfast in May 2023
- Organizing Healthcare Career Expos
- Supporting the [Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative](#) (YHPI).
- University of St. Joseph MSW Partnership
- Childcare Presentations and Opportunities

See presentation slides for details.

Employer Poll: How is your organization responding to current hiring challenges?

Employers completed the poll and David Allard facilitated a discussion of the results with the group. Employers reported the following responses:

How is your organization responding to current hiring challenges? (check all that apply)	# Responses
Partnering with high schools and/or colleges to increase awareness and hire students	16
Increasing employee pay / salaries	13
Offering sign on / referral / attendance bonuses	11
Advocating for increased reimbursement rates	11
Expanding advertising / recruiting activities	11
Enhancing employee benefits	10
Offering more flexible scheduling / work hours	9
Investing more in professional development / training	8
Using staffing agencies	7
Other responses (started on-site childcare center)	2

Themes from the discussion included:

- Many nurses and healthcare staff left their jobs after the pandemic, and this is having a long-term impact on the healthcare industry. There is an increased need for pipeline programs and early planning of programs to get more individuals into healthcare-related jobs. Organizations have reported partnering with high schools to educate students early on about the different career opportunities available in healthcare. Organizations also report increasing the salary for nurses in hopes to recruit more folks into the field.
- Employers noted the importance of increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates in order to increase salaries. CT is 46th in Medicaid reimbursement rates.
- Telehealth has become increasingly popular, especially in areas where transportation is difficult and areas that are considered a “healthcare desert.” Many behavioral health therapists want to work from home now; however, this is becoming problematic because many patients prefer to be seen in-person. Telehealth can be convenient, but when a patient is experiencing extreme difficulties, they are told to go to the Emergency Department – this ends up putting a strain on the emergency care system.
- Personal safety is another issue contributing to the lack of healthcare staffing. Staff report feeling less safe in their workplace. There have been incidents of staff being harassed and abused by patients. There is an increased need to strengthen relationships with the local police departments and explore alternatives for towns without a police department.
- Healthcare organizations are also dealing with more substance use issues among employees, as employees cope with the stresses from the pandemic (“we were in survival mode”). Participants reported that employees are generally healthier than they were before the pandemic. Many healthcare job applicants are now asking the question, “do you drug test?” The [Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation](#) initiative is one response.

Building the Healthcare Careers Pipeline

The meeting featured several presentations on efforts to strengthen career pipelines.

Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI). Malia Sieve (ReadyCT) and Jessica Vocatura (NFA) shared efforts to prepare high schools students for healthcare careers. YHPI is delivered in collaboration with EWIB, ReadyCT, Eastern CT Healthcare Partnership, CT State Community College, and (currently) 6 region’s comprehensive high schools. Norwich Free Academy (NFA) has been involved in YHPI for the longest, and currently offers CNA, EMT, and its newest CNA/Medical Interpreter certifications. The program includes career exploration opportunities, coursework, clinical experiences, certification exams, and job opportunities / college planning with local partners. NFA is considering adding additional pipeline tracks (such as Phlebotomy) as the current student demand exceeds available training capacity.

Employers completed the following poll:

What level of support would your organization like to provide to local high school healthcare pipeline training programs? (check all that apply)	# Responses
Attending career fairs & exploration events	15
Hosting work experiences to include job shadowing, internships, clinical arrangements	15
Participation in the classroom to include guest speaking and mock interviews	14
Recruitment of program completers	12
In-kind sponsorship of program needs such as donating equipment or staff time to deliver instruction	9
Direct financial sponsorship to support program expenses	6
Limited/no support	0

Malia facilitated a discussion of the responses. Themes included:

- We need to expand definition of healthcare careers. Many students only associate healthcare jobs with just doctors and nurses. These definitions need to be expanded to include the many clinical and nonclinical jobs including groundskeeping / custodial, security, HVAC, culinary, marketing / design, etc. These occupations can be considered healthcare jobs because they are in a hospital setting. Jessica noted opportunities for students to experience a “Day in the Life” and share video snippets of different careers at the school Community Meetings.
- Not all agencies are permitted to hire individuals who are under the age of 18. Often this is because of rules around malpractice insurance. As a result, this makes it challenging to implement a healthcare pipeline program for younger students. CT Technical High Schools are one solution; they provide instruction and job opportunities for minors for non-clinical jobs such as HVAC, electrical, etc.
- In addition to career-specific skills, employers requested education in general office skills (e.g., phone, EHR, software), work ethic, and soft skills including communication skills.

Malia thanked participants for their feedback and encouraged employers to contact her to explore additional partnerships with high schools.

Nursing at Eastern CT State University. Christine Nadeau presented on Eastern’s newly-accredited Nursing Program (see presentation for details). The program will recruit locally and can help address the nursing shortage in Eastern CT. As Dr. Nadeau noted, Eastern and Hartford HealthCare have a strong presence in the community. The development of a nursing program has the potential to make a huge positive impact on the nursing shortage and public health. It will include world-class simulation experiences at Eastern and Windham Hospital.

Action Team Highlights

Partnership co-chairs and staff shared highlights from the three Action Teams (see presentation for details):

- **Healthcare Education, Attraction & Training (HEAT), Co-chair Diane Manning.** HEAT has focused building the pipelines for CNAs, other entry-level positions, and mental/behavioral health clinicians, and creating a sustainable process to connect with middle and high schools. The new University of Saint Joseph’s Accredited MSW Program is starting this spring with supervision by University-employed Clinical Preceptors (LCSW Clinicians). Diane noted that it was not a challenge finding preceptors; her senior staff were very interested in serving as preceptors.
- **Childcare, Co-chair Pamela Kinder.** This team originally addressed Quality of Life issues, but decided at the October Partnership meeting to focus on childcare as a critical need for many current (and prospective employees). Recent meetings have featured a presentation on launch of on-site childcare program at [Westview Health Care Center](#), a presentation on lessons learned from challenges in offering on-site childcare at Backus Hospital, a survey of healthcare employers on childcare needs and best practices, and engagement of TVCCA and additional employers on the team. The team is also exploring emerging opportunities related to the Governor’s [Blue Ribbon Panel on Childcare](#) – which highlighted the need in Eastern CT and may result in new legislation that expands affordable, quality childcare.

Employers completed a poll asking which childcare or related topics they are most interested in (see below). The Childcare Team will discuss at its next meeting.

What childcare topic / presentation are you MOST interested in?	# Responses
Helping employees locate childcare, including affordable options (e.g., Care 4 Kids)	3
Offering on-site childcare for employees	2
Sharing the costs of childcare among employees, employers, and government (e.g., Tri-Share Pilot)	2
Increasing access to family childcare programs (e.g., family childcare incubator pilot)	2
I’m more interested in other “quality of life” topics that support employee retention (e.g., improving work climate / sense of belonging, supporting DEI)	3

- **Policy, ECHP Staff Mark Nickel.** The Policy Team did not reach a decision on its role within the complex policy environment with multiple industry groups and associations, lobbyists and macro/micro policy issues. In subsequent conversations with the North Central region’s Healthcare Policy Action Team, they discussed an opportunity to join forces across regions to address statewide policy issues including changes to Medicaid reimbursement rates and increasing awareness among elected officials and community leaders about the

role and impact of the healthcare industry. The CT Health Council is engaged with the North Central Policy Team, and has a statewide reach and focus.

Employers completed a poll asking for their feedback on participating in a joint (cross-region) approach to policy. 8 of 11 respondents responded “Yes” to a joint approach. Participants also shared the following comments as part of the discussion:

- Eastern CT is not in parity with the rest of the state, so should be wary about joining a statewide effort.
- Eastern CT needs to have a larger presence at the Capitol. Legislative breakfasts are not sufficient.
- The industry needs to address the perception among the administration that “hospitals make a lot of money.” The region’s local legislators are supportive, but the administration is not.

CT State Update and Request

Erin Sullivan, Director of Workforce Development & Continuing Education at CTState Three Rivers asked for feedback on a proposed customized Spanish in the Workforce training program. This is in response to a recent Industry Round Table.

You can complete the survey at: <https://s.surveyplanet.com/4wdgi7um>

Action Team Breakouts

Due to time constraints, the three Action Teams met briefly to review poll finding and plan next steps. Future Action Team meetings are as follows:

HEAT Team

Tuesday, May 21st at 9:00am

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81272112501?pwd=fqF0ALl360aNAXHUbWgBORqAGvF6CG.1>

Contact Ken Plourd at plourd@xsector.com for details

Childcare Team

Tuesday, May 14th at 1:00 pm

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83897022305>

Contact Dave Bechtel at bechtel@xsector.com for details

Policy Team

Meeting date TBD

Contact Mark Nickel at nickel@xsector.com