

Eastern Connecticut Healthcare Partnership (ECHP)

October 25, 2024 Meeting Summary

United Services, Mansfield

MEETING SUMMARY

- **Congressman Joe Courtney** shared insights on the federal landscape. The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a key resource for employers in training prospective employees. In addition, Eastern Connecticut is a leader in developing worker pipeline programs – starting in manufacturing and now with the youth and adult Healthcare Pipeline Initiatives. Employers noted funding challenges – both in Medicaid reimbursement and funding for nonprofits. The Congressman will continue to advocate for the region – including around reimbursement rates and Medicare coverage for home health services.
- The **Childcare Team** shared [resources and opportunities](#) for employers to expand access to childcare for their employees. The Child Care Team will reconfigure around a different quality of life topic – possibly focusing on employee health & safety. The next meeting is scheduled for [Tuesday, November 12 at 1:00 pm](#).
- The next **Healthcare Expo is on November 8, 2024** at CT State - Quinebaug Valley, 742 Upper Maple Street in Danielson.
- The **Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI)** has expanded to 10 schools and is engaging over 100 students. Employers can “adopt a school” in their local community, expand work-based learning opportunities, and/or participate in career fairs and other career awareness events.
- Participants identified the following **future priorities** for the Partnership:
 - Convening a meeting on **Policy** in advance of the next legislative session.
 - Developing a **Congressionally Directed Spending Application** focused on employer-defined incumbent worker training (see below for details).
 - Exploring opportunities for the **Healthcare Partnership to connect with the Manufacturing Partnership** to explore areas of common interest.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

ECHP Co-Chair Diane Manning welcomed participants to United Services and to the meeting, and participants introduced themselves. Diane described the purpose of the ECHP and shared information about notable ECHP accomplishments including the upcoming [Healthcare Expo on November 8, 2024](#). Employer participants completed an instant poll question about the main factor hampering business growth. The top responses were: lack of skilled job applicants, cost of living, and uncertainty in legislative decision-making. Employers also identified other barriers such as limitations in new employees for demonstrating professionalism and appropriate workplace behavior, strategies to fill open positions (e.g., over-hiring because new hires exit), and the challenges of hiring for specific occupations when capacity and supply of education programs does not meet employer demand (e.g., respiratory therapists).

FEDERAL LANDSCAPE FOR HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Congressman Joe Courtney shared insights from his perspective representing the Second Congressional District of Connecticut in the U.S. House of Representatives and serving on the House Armed Services Committee and the House Committee on Education and the Workforce – including participation on the Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee and the Higher Education and Workforce Training Subcommittee. Key themes from his remarks included:

- Connecticut has lower unemployment and higher workforce participation rates than the United States. The labor market remains tight for most employers.
- Disruptions continue to occur in how workers perceive career pathways and the role of higher education and student debt in advancing within career pathways.
- Awareness about federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation and infrastructure remains low across the country. Yet, these public workforce development resources play a critical role in economic mobility and economic growth.
- The Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board's (EWIB's) pipeline model has received national recognition as a model for talent development. The youth pipelines expand career pathways for young people for whom college may not be a good fit.
- Mobilizing the ECHP to grow the Healthcare Pipeline Initiative makes perfect sense. Good things happen when employers and communities support partners work together across a region.

Employers shared information about emerging developments in areas such as gaining union support for accelerated career pathways into medical assisting from CNA. Discussion occurred about the mechanisms in place to fund salaries, particularly for non-profits that may provide healthcare services and are not billing third-party payers. Congressman Courtney spoke about adjustments that occurred in response to COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to extend Medicare for home health services. Congressman Courtney reinforced that healthcare workforce issues are important to him, encouraged the ECHP to continue its important work, and stated that he will continue to advocate for the region.

PARTNERSHIP UPDATES

Quality of Life / Child Care Team. Dave Bechtel reviewed a resource guide developed by the Action Team and indicated that employers could [contact him](#) or complete a [Childcare Team Survey](#) to learn more or be connected to other resource partners.

- The Child Care Team will reconfigure around a different quality of life topic – possibly focusing on **employee health & safety**. The next meeting is scheduled for [Tuesday, November 12 at 1:00 pm](#).

Policy Action Team. Dave Bechtel reported that employer interest and participation in the Policy Action Team was low. ECHP co-chairs and staff have been working with other healthcare partnerships across the state to develop a statewide voice on various issues (e.g., Medicaid reimbursement rate, awareness of impact of healthcare sector) and make an ask to the Office of Workforce Strategies to advocate on various issues.

- Melissa Meyers (Generations) and Jennifer Granger (UCFS) volunteered to participate on the **Policy Team** and develop specific position statements in advance of the next legislative session.

Health Education and Training Team (HEAT). The HEAT Team has been focused on planning the November 8, 2024 Healthcare Expo. The MSW program partnership with St. Joseph's continues to operate, with 12 MSW candidates in the program and classes held at United Services. The group will continue to explore options to scale and to sustain the program, and as needed, replicate the program to address other in-demand occupations.

Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative. David Allard reported that the Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI) continues to expand and involves 10 schools with over 100 students. Program areas include CAN, EMT, and CNA / Medical Interpreter. David stated that YHPI could surpass the Youth MPI because of the diversity of career pathways and occupations (e.g., behavioral health, health technology, healthcare administration, nursing). Malia Sieve (ReadyCT) explained data collection activities to document the journey of YHPI participants, and how various activities influenced their pathway into healthcare.

- Employers were asked to consider “**adopting a school**” in their local communities, to expand work-based learning opportunities, and to participate in career fairs and other career awareness events.
- Employers were asked to share any insights with ReadyCT about success stories ranging from hiring a YHPI candidate or how a YHPI candidate can influence other high school students to take a job at the organization.

FUTURE PRIORITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP

Diane Manning shared the ECHP Co-Chairs’ reflections on the first 18 months of progress and how the Partnership structures its work. It appears that a higher level of employer engagement occurs when groups are organized to support tangible, short-term action items instead of longer-term and broader agendas.

Dave Bechtel, Diane Manning, and Dave Allard reviewed four options for time-limited Action Teams:

1. Setting up / expanding student internships and work-based learning opportunities.
2. Coordinating professional development and continuing education opportunities across the region, perhaps in areas such as professionalism or employee safety and wellness.
3. Developing a **Congressionally Directed Spending application** for about \$1 million to support incumbent worker training or other strategies in response to employer needs (see attached slides for details). Employers would receive reimbursement for a portion of training costs. Suggestions arose about designing the program to encourage workers to stay in the region, expanding the application to include prospective employees, and for ECHP industry partners to benefit as an incentive to grow ECHP. Several participants volunteered to develop the application.
4. Coordinating a Community of Practice for human resource / talent acquisition managers. For example, best practices to promote the region or to connect recruits to resource partners and assets / amenities in the region (e.g., real estate agents, childcare, schools, jobs for family members).

Two other topics were addressed during this segment.

- Michael Nogelo asked employers to comment on what changes or improvements could occur to increase **employer engagement** and participation. Employers responded that making the case that participation leads to **hiring** employees must remain the priority. Other feedback indicated that it would be helpful for the ECHP to show **how participation benefits the diverse types of organizations** (and their primary occupations). For example, an employer that needs case managers may not perceive the ECHP to be a good fit with its discussion on MSWs, nurses, or CNAs. The Congressionally Developed Spending application could help address this issue – as employers would define the occupations for incumbent worker training.
- The group discussed a suggestion about how to create more constructive interaction between the MPI applicants (youth and adult) and the HPI (youth and adult). Perhaps individuals

expressing initial interest in the MPI may prefer a career in healthcare. EWIB representatives agreed to explore this idea.

NEXT STEPS

Dave Bechtel and ECHP Co-Chair Mike Davis summarized next steps.

1. ECHP staff will produce a meeting summary and send it and meeting handouts to the ECHP list.
2. ECHP employer members will be canvassed to assess their interest in participating on time-limited action teams in: (a) Policy, (b) Congressionally Directed Spending Application, and (c) Quality of Life – next topic related to HR or coordinating training. Interested parties will be direct to the appropriate Action Teams.
3. ECHP members will promote and support the November 8, 2024 Healthcare Expo.
4. ECHP co-chairs will explore opportunities to collaborate / connect with the Manufacturing Partnership.
5. Staff will provide updates on the effort by other healthcare RSPs to work collectively to address statewide healthcare workforce policy issues.

ADJOURNMENT

Mike Davis thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 10:24 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Industry Partners: Ginger Frasca, Melissa Meyers (Generations Family Health Center); Mike Davis, Carley Warzecha (Hartford Healthcare); Mike Van Vlaenderen (Reliance Health); Jennifer Granger (United Community & Family Services); Regina Donovan, Diane Manning (United Services); Katy Holzer (Westview)

Support Partners: Erin Sullivan (CT State); Joelle Garrett (Eastern CT Chamber of Commerce); Michael Nogelo, David Allard, Linda Riquier (EWIB); Jeff Martel (Northeast Chamber of Commerce); Malia Sieve (ReadyCT); RT Brown (seCTer); Genevive Walker (Social Impact Partners); Tracy Tremblay (United Way of Southeastern CT); David Bechtel, Mark Nickel (Cross Sector)

Guest Speaker: Congressman Joe Courtney