



Lucas County Healthcare Workforce Development Care Plan

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Abstract

This report focuses on the strengths of the community of Lucas County, Iowa. Like many rural areas, it faces challenges related to limited access to essential resources such as workforce shortages, limited access to healthcare and school resources. However, this report delves deeper into the various resources available for the residents living here, including medical, educational, and workforce development efforts, as well as partnership opportunities that contribute to the community's well-being and potential economic growth. Insights gathered from Ryan Murphy of Labor Workforce Development, Nicki Schultz from the Chariton Community District, and Mary Grismore from Lucas County Public Health, have empowered us to explore the community's health resources, educational programs, and workforce initiatives. We aim to highlight how these opportunities not only provide essential support and skills training but also empower residents to improve their overall health and quality of life in Lucas County.

1. Introduction

Based on our findings in Part A, it was evident that the community of Lucas County faces challenges that are common in rural communities due to the limited access to resources available for the residents living within this area. With the information given to us by Ryan Murphy, the Director of Labor Market Information at Labor Workforce Development, as well as Nicki Schultz, the school nurse for the Chariton Community School District, and Mary Grismore, the nurse administrator for Lucas County Public Health we decided to further investigate and highlight the strengths of Lucas County and what local, federal and state resources are offered for this community.

2. Healthcare Workforce Opportunities

When considering overall health, it is often linked to economic stability. A lack of job opportunities, low wages, and high unemployment rates significantly impact individuals' ability to meet basic needs, such as access to healthy sources of food, healthcare, and stable housing. In Lucas County, addressing healthcare workforce conditions can significantly improve economic stability, job satisfaction and improved health outcomes. Since most of the population is at high retirement risk, the need to retain and attract young workers is essential to maintaining a stable healthcare workforce (Lightcast Data Set, 2024).

According to data from Ryan Murphy, Director of Labor Market Information at Labor Workforce Development, there were 1,792 total job postings in Chariton, IA from August 2023 to July 2024, with 858 requiring specific skills. From these postings, 308 postings were for registered nurses with 135 of those requiring specialized skills, making it the most in-demand position, followed closely by postings for home health and personal care aides, dietitians and nutritionists, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, and nursing assistants (Lightcast Data Set, 2024). The high demand for registered nurses and other healthcare-related occupations highlights the need for improving working conditions that can attract and retain qualified workers (Lucas County Health Center, 2024).

When comparing wages with other counties, the average hourly pay for nurses at Lucas County Health Center in Chariton is approximately \$31.58 per hour, which is 12% below the national average. In comparison, nurses in Cedar Rapids, IA earn an average base salary of \$42.13 per hour (Indeed, 2024).

The significant wage gap between Lucas County and other counties contributes to job dissatisfaction, making it difficult to maintain a stable healthcare workforce in this area. To improve workforce conditions and opportunities, information gathered from the Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Initiatives aims to support the healthcare workforce by developing competitive salary and incentive programs to motivate healthcare workers to stay in these positions (Iowa Workforce Development, 2022).

Also, expanding scholarship programs aimed at attracting new healthcare professionals to rural areas. These efforts not only encourage people to come work in Lucas but also support those who choose to remain within the community (Iowa Workforce Development, 2022). During a recent community

presentation on rural health, Brian Sims, CEO of the Lucas County Health Center, outlined its strategies for fundraising to reinvest back into facility equipment and programs, ultimately aiming to improve the experience for patients, families, and healthcare workers at the hospital. One key opportunity to enhance recruitment and retention efforts includes “Shirley’s

Promise,” a scholarship established by Brian Sims to award scholarships to Lucas Health employees seeking to further their healthcare education. To date, this program has awarded

\$7,500 in scholarships, with plans for additional awards in the upcoming year (Lucas County Health Center, 2024). This is a great initiative and opportunity to attract new and retain current healthcare, making it appealing for anyone who wants to continue their education.

Beyond increasing financial incentives, addressing healthcare workforce challenges in Lucas County involves understanding the needs of the community. During a recent community presentation on rural health, Mary Grismore, nurse administrator from Lucas County Public Health, provided great information about the ongoing community health needs assessment conducted in partnership with the Lucas County Health Center (LCHC) (Lucas County Health Center, 2023). The assessment aims to identify and address the top health concerns the community is facing, such as mental health, insurance gaps, transportation needs, skin cancer, and blood pressure management. Mental health being the number one concern, their goal is to host three community education events each year over the next five years.

These events will include mental health first aid training with programs like “Handle with Care” an Narcan training, along with outreach efforts to healthcare professionals and law enforcement (Lucas County Health Center, 2023). This proactive approach to understanding and addressing local healthcare needs fosters a collaborative environment which can help attract healthcare professionals who want to work in a community-based environment while also addressing the community health needs.

In response to COVID-19, Lucas County Health Center (LCHC) Medical Clinic introduced telehealth services, providing patients with a safe and convenient way to schedule and attend appointments through phone or video calls with the help of LCHC representatives helping patients in setting up telehealth appointments. This service not only improves access to healthcare but also creates more job opportunities, strengthening and growing the healthcare workforce in Lucas County, IA (Lucas County Health Center, 2020).

Collectively, these efforts from the Iowa Rural Healthcare Workforce Initiatives, the scholarship program led by Brian Sims, CEO of the Lucas County Health Center, and Lucas County Public Health’s focus on mental health reflects Lucas County’s mission to address healthcare needs. By investing in the healthcare workforce and addressing community health challenges, these efforts support both improved health outcomes and healthcare workforce stability.

3. Healthcare Workforce Development for Highschool Students

Lucas County, Iowa, is a rural community that faces unique challenges in preparing its high school

students for future careers. With a population that relies heavily on healthcare, social services, and local industries, the county's workforce development programs must address immediate employment needs and long-term community health goals. Aligning these efforts with the Healthy People 2030 objectives helps Lucas County set benchmarks for success in both workforce readiness and public health outcomes.

One objective, AHS-R01: Increases the ability of primary care and behavioral health professionals to provide high-quality care and highlights the necessity of a well-prepared workforce in healthcare sectors, particularly in underserved areas (Healthy People 2030, 2024). Workforce initiatives in Lucas County focus on increasing the availability of qualified healthcare providers and ensuring that high school students gain exposure to and training in fields where demand is high, such as primary and behavioral healthcare. Additionally, with a recognized State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) designation, the Iowa Office of Apprenticeship (IOA) supports high school students in accessing registered apprenticeship programs that can lead to certified qualifications upon graduation, providing a robust entry point into critical sectors like healthcare (Iowa Workforce Development, 2024).

Lucas County offers several programs designed to support high school students in career development and encourage a pipeline of skilled professionals to meet the county's specific workforce needs. The Lucas County Health Center (LCHC), for example, provides various resources aimed at career development and healthcare skill acquisition for young people (Lucas County Health Center, 2024). Through work-based learning opportunities, students gain hands-on experience in healthcare settings and can benefit from mentorship by practicing professionals, a practice that not only enhances job readiness but also fosters an interest in healthcare fields among local youth.

As Iowa increasingly invests in apprenticeships, Lucas County can leverage programs through the IOA that introduce high school students to career pathways in high-demand industries, such as healthcare, which includes primary and behavioral health roles. With the IOA's state recognition, registered who aren't in school or working (Healthy People 2030, 2024). This is particularly important in Lucas County, where attracting and retaining healthcare workers is an ongoing challenge due to rural location and wage disparities. Programs that offer students competitive salaries, scholarships, or loan repayment incentives for postsecondary education can serve as effective tools to not only attract youth to healthcare careers but also retain them in the community long-term.

Apprenticeship programs are overseen and regulated to meet industry standards, providing quality learning opportunities that prepare students to meet the high demand for healthcare professionals locally. This correlates with objective AH-09: Reduce the proportion of adolescents and young adults. In Lucas County, workforce development programs for high school students are increasingly aligned with Healthy People 2030 goals, particularly around providing access to mental health services.

The SU-18 objective, which focuses on reducing opioid use disorder, drives local initiatives that integrate mental health education and substance use prevention into student programs (Healthy People 2030, 2024). The county provides resources in surrounding areas to ensure its residents can receive the help they need. Collaborating with Iowa Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS), local schools introduce Narcan training and opioid awareness programs for students. This initiative educates youth on recognizing signs of overdose, using Narcan effectively, and understanding the broader impacts of

opioid misuse (Iowa HHS, 2024). Such programs prepare students not only to assist in emergencies but also to consider careers in behavioral health, fostering a potential future workforce to meet local mental health demands. By engaging students in mental health awareness and substance use prevention, Lucas County aligns with Healthy People 2030 objectives and builds a more informed, resilient community prepared to address critical health challenges.

Workforce development programs for high school students in rural areas like Lucas County are essential to achieving broader public health and community goals. Through strategic partnerships, such as those fostered by the IOA, and support for healthcare-focused training initiatives, the county can address critical objectives within Healthy People 2030. By expanding access to high-quality healthcare training and mental health awareness programs, Lucas County is investing not only in the future of its youth but also in the overall health and resilience of its community. These efforts underscore the importance of a targeted approach to workforce development, particularly in underserved, rural communities where the health and well-being of residents depend on a robust, well-trained, and locally rooted workforce.

4. Healthy People 2030 Objectives

AHS-R01: Increase the ability of primary care and behavioral health professionals to provide more high-quality care to patients who need it (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). In Lucas County, IA, the high demand for healthcare professionals, wage disparities, and increased mental health needs within the community highlight the need to improve workforce conditions. Improvements through competitive salaries and scholarship programs for continued education for employees can increase job satisfaction and retention. By attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, these improvements support the ability of healthcare providers to deliver high-quality care to patients in need.

SU-18: Reduce the proportion of people who had opioid use disorder in the past year (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). Reducing the number of people with opioid use disorder is one of the objectives for the Public Health Department in Lucas County, IA. To achieve this goal, the Public Health Department aims to focus on increasing mental health screenings and services, which includes community education on Narcan use and collaborating with school systems to raise awareness about the dangers of opioids for the next five years. These efforts provide support for those at risk but also contribute to a more informed community that is better prepared to address opioid issues, ultimately reducing the prevalence of opioid use.

AH-09: Reduce the proportion of adolescents and young adults who aren't in school or working (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). This objective focuses on connecting young people to education and job opportunities, which are crucial for long-term well-being and economic stability. By addressing barriers like mental health challenges, lack of access to training, and economic hardships, AH-09 seeks to help more youth stay in school or secure meaningful employment. This not only supports individual growth but also contributes to healthier, more resilient communities and a stronger workforce.

5. Nursing Diagnosis Supported by the Healthy People 2030 Goal

Readiness for enhanced community coping related to efforts to improve healthcare workforce shortages and access to quality healthcare services as evidenced by increased community engagement in health initiatives, support for local healthcare education programs, and the implementation of workforce development programs for high school students that foster interest in healthcare careers.

6. Evidence-Based Recommendations

There are a few ways we can use the MDH intervention wheel to help build a pipeline for future nurses and address the need for high school nursing education pathways in small counties in Iowa like

Lucas County. The first recommendation is collaboration to establish dual enrollment healthcare courses so students can earn college credits while still in high school. Dual enrollment programs can effectively prepare students for higher education and provide an early introduction to healthcare careers, reducing time and costs for degree completion (Doyle, 2012).

Another intervention involves advocacy to secure funding for nursing scholarships specifically targeted at students in rural areas. Financial barriers are often significant obstacles to overcome when pursuing higher education. However, evidence shows that scholarships and financial aid significantly increase enrollment in nursing programs (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2014). By collaborating with local healthcare facilities and community organizations, advocates could establish scholarship funds that support students who commit to returning and working in the county after graduation.

Lastly, and the third recommendation is case management through dedicated career counseling and support services that help students navigate the complexities of nursing pathways, from application processes to understanding financial aid options. High school counselors trained in healthcare career pathways can provide individualized guidance, which research shows is effective in supporting students' educational goals and improving retention in nursing programs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2020). Counselors could meet regularly with interested students, helping them set realistic goals and stay informed about the prerequisites and requirements for nursing education.

7. Collaboration Opportunities

Collaborator: Lucas County Health Center

Potential Contribution: Work with LCHC to develop job shadowing, internship, and volunteer opportunities for high school students. This direct exposure to healthcare roles will provide students with hands-on experience, allow them to learn from healthcare professionals, and help them understand the career opportunities available in their community.

Collaborator: Lucas County Public Health Department

Potential Contribution: Collaborate with the Public Health Department to offer educational sessions on public health and job shadowing opportunities for students interested in community health. This partnership will help students gain a better understanding of public health's role and explore careers in fields like epidemiology, health education, and environmental health.

Collaborator: South Central Iowa Workforce Development Board

Potential Contribution: Collaborate with the local workforce board to secure grants and funding for healthcare training programs, which may include apprenticeships or paid internships. This support should be focused on students from Lucas County who are interested in pursuing careers in healthcare, making these pathways more accessible and financially feasible.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, while Lucas County faces significant challenges related to limited resources, workforce shortages, and access to healthcare and educational support, the community demonstrates resilience through various available programs and initiatives. By leveraging the insights provided by Ryan Murphy, Nicki Schultz, and Mary Grismore, this report highlights the strengths within Lucas County, including workforce development, health resources, and educational programs that aim to uplift the community. These resources not only meet immediate needs but also create a foundation for long-term improvement in health, education, and economic stability. Through continued collaboration and support from local, state, and federal resources, Lucas County is well-positioned to enhance the quality of life for its residents, encouraging a stronger, more connected community.

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