

Southern Georgia



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# SOUTHERN GEORGIA HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Needs Assessment and Strategy



# 2018



Carl Vinson Institute of Government  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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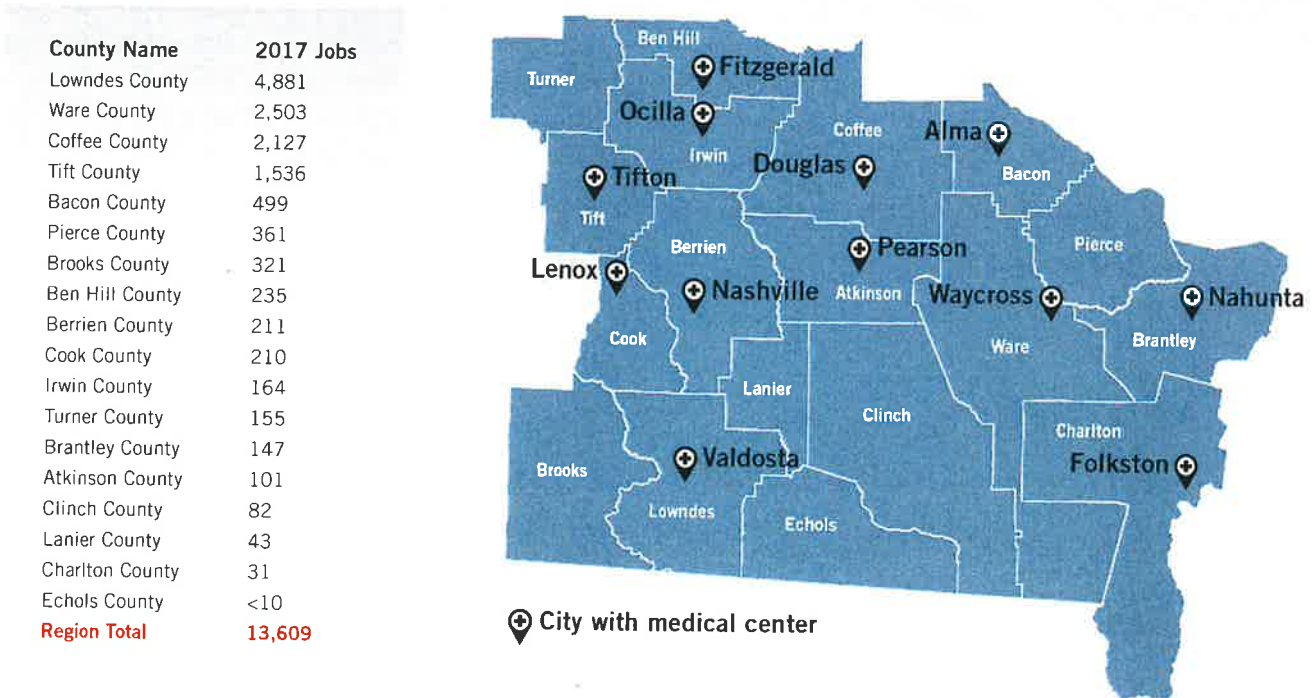
# Introduction

Health care is a key industry in South Georgia. High-quality hospitals and health care providers are linked to quality of life and economic development success. In addition, the industry is a key part of the region's economy, accounting for nearly 10% of all workers in Southern Georgia. Thus, more than 13,000 individuals work in health care-related jobs across the region.

The Southern Georgia Health Care Workforce Development Needs Assessment and Strategy project was designed to help community leaders understand and articulate the workforce development needs of health care employers in Southern Georgia and then build a sector partnership to create and implement strategies to close identified gaps. The needs assessment and strategy development process began in summer 2018. WorkSource Southern Georgia, the workforce development board for the 18-county region<sup>1</sup> of Southern Georgia, led the needs assessment process in coordination with a steering committee composed of leaders from health care organizations, secondary education, postsecondary education, community partners, and other government organizations. The group determined that the overall goal of this work is to build and strengthen the health care workforce pipeline in Southern Georgia.

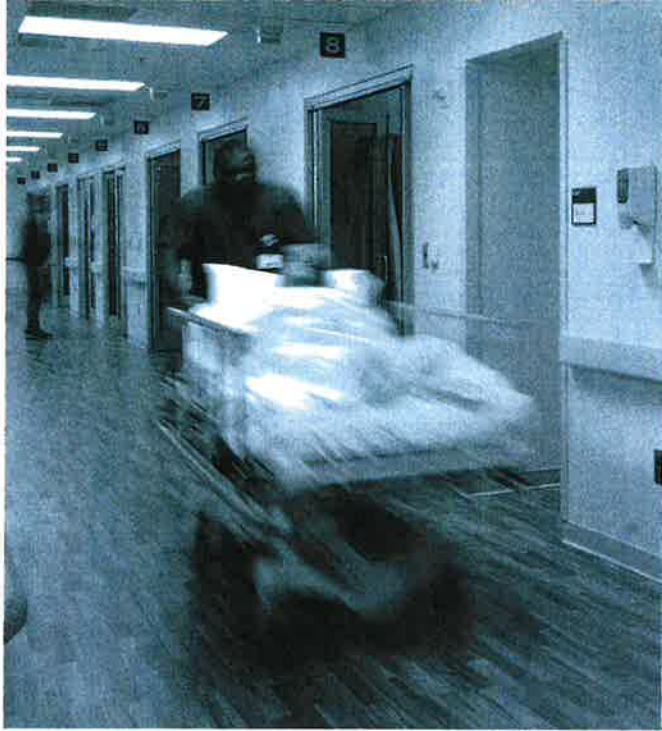
The health care sector in Southern Georgia is expected to grow substantially in the coming years. Figure 1 shows the estimated current number of health care jobs in each county in Southern Georgia. Eleven of the top 15 fastest growing occupations in Southern Georgia over the next decade will be in the health care sector.

**Figure 1 Health Care Employment (2017) and Medical Center Locations by County**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, EMSI, Inc.

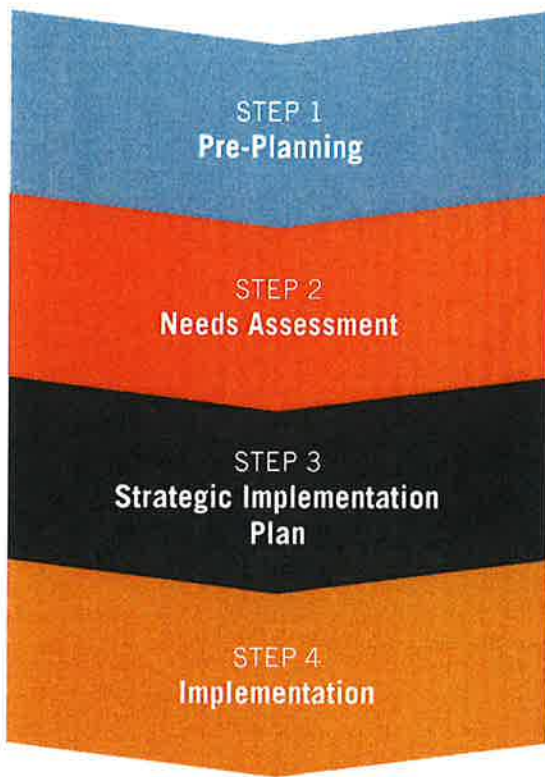
1. The 18-county workforce development region is made up of the following counties: Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware.



## High Demand Career Initiative and Sector Partnership Overview

Governor Nathan Deal launched the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI) in 2014 to better understand the talent needs of Georgia businesses and align educational efforts to close any gaps in the workforce. The HDCI is an important economic development resource that has helped Georgia’s K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions remain competitive by collaborating directly with Georgia employers to identify acute labor needs and address those needs to develop a competitive workforce. In 2016, the HDCI expanded its approach by focusing on regional workforce strategies implemented through HDCI sector partnership grants. WorkSource Southern Georgia received an HDCI sector partnership grant to support health care workforce development efforts.

Figure 2 Sector Partnership Development Process



Source: High Demand Career Initiative Sector Partnership Guide

## Project Approach

Participants in the needs assessment and strategy development process aimed to understand the top workforce development needs of the health care industry in Southern Georgia. A steering committee composed of leaders from health care organizations, secondary and postsecondary education, workforce development partners, and the Southwest Georgia Area Health Education Center (SOWEGA-AHEC) was recruited to oversee this project. The first step was to set goals for the process and organize a partnership to accomplish the work. The steering committee then conducted a needs assessment that involved collecting occupational, skill, and training requirements from regional health care employers. Finally, the steering committee developed priorities to close workforce gaps and identified short- and long-term action items to accomplish each priority. Figure 2 details the sector partnership development process. This report presents results from the first three steps of this process.

## Needs Assessment

A needs assessment was conducted as part of the strategy development process to better understand the health care workforce needs in the community. The assessment involved presentations by representatives from regional health care organizations, followed by group discussion and a review of relevant data. The following employers participated in the needs assessment process:

 Memorial Satilla Health

 Dorminy Medical Center

 Tift Regional Medical Center

 McKinney Medical Center

 South Central Primary Care

 Bacon County Hospital

Each of the employers was asked four questions about the workforce at their facility. The first three questions were designed to better understand current and future workforce needs as well as any issues or skills gaps the organizations face when hiring. Finally, each business representative was asked, “What can education and workforce development do to help your organization meet its talent needs in the future?” While each of the health care organizations had unique needs, there was a great deal of consensus around several key themes. Below is a brief description of each.

### KEY THEME 1 RURAL GEORGIA

Employers highlighted the challenges of recruiting and retaining a workforce outside of a major metropolitan area. They reported that it can be difficult to recruit doctors, physical therapists, or nurses from the Atlanta or Jacksonville area to take a jobs in South Georgia. While overall the pay in the region is sufficient for the affordable cost of living, some entry-level positions start at a lower salary level.

In addition to the challenges of recruiting talent from outside the region, health care employers in the region are drawing from and competing for the same pool of local talent. Because of the high demand for health care workers, employees can move throughout the region to make additional money. This turnover and movement is difficult on employers, causing them to constantly compete to make the best deal or to offer just a little more than the other organizations. Employers highlighted that in-migration to the region is limited, so having strong local programs to train and retain the local workforce is crucial. Additionally, the needs assessment revealed that addressing this limited workforce challenge and creating a more sustainable approach as a region will help all employers in the area.

### KEY THEME 2 PROFESSIONAL AND SOFT SKILLS

Many positions in health care require highly skilled employees who are not only proficient in technical skills but also have the strong soft skills necessary to work with patients. Nearly every representative that presented during the needs assessment mentioned a need for additional soft skills in the younger applicant pool. In particular, representatives suggested teaching students and new employees how to interview more successfully through mock interviews and other tools. Soft skills development is an area in which collaboration between education, both secondary and postsecondary, and industry is vital.

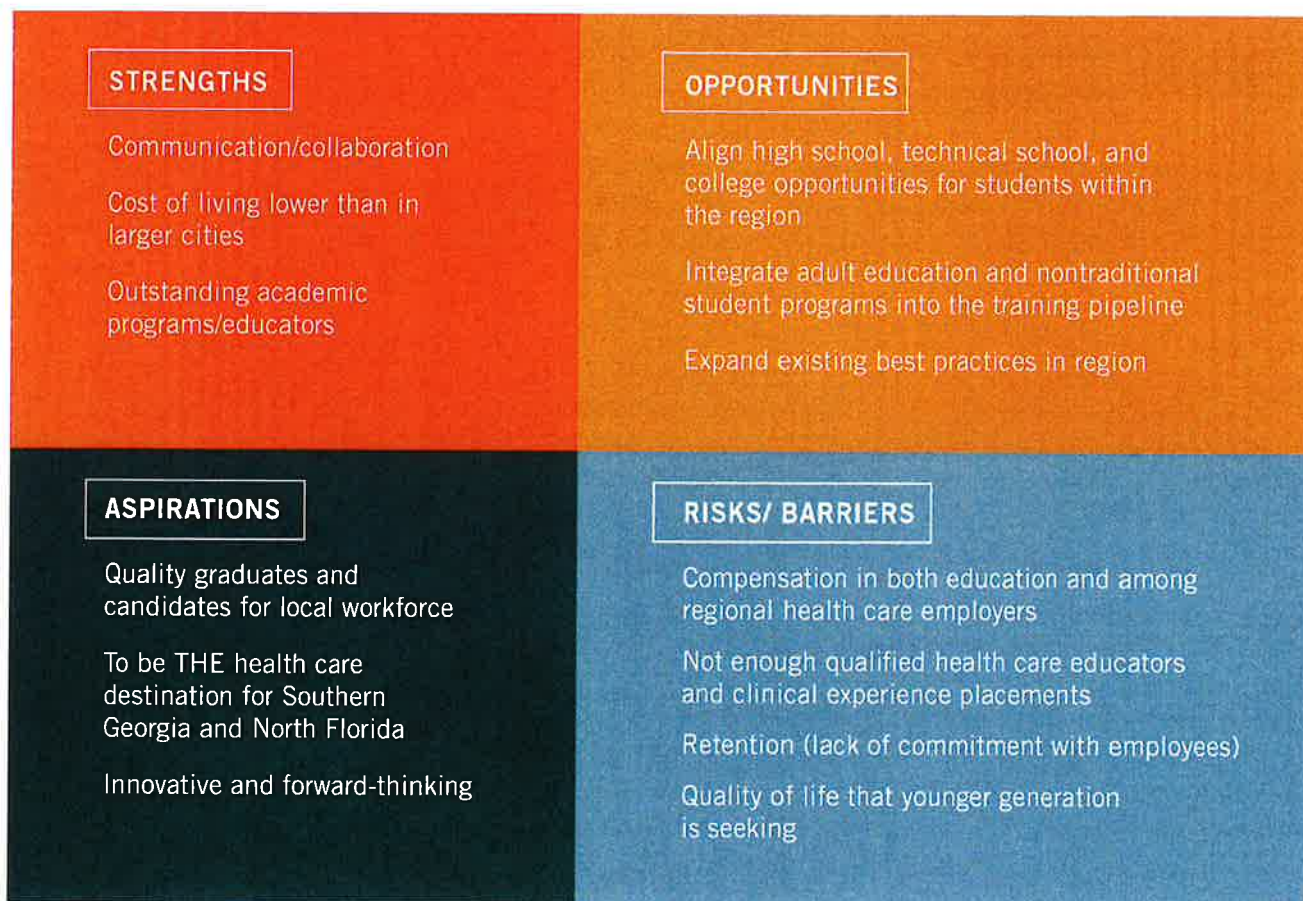
Every employer highlighted challenges in recruiting health care workers to fill vacancies in their organizations. While some of the needs were unique to the provider, the following common positions arose during the needs assessment process:

-  Registered nurses
-  Medical technicians
-  Therapists (occupational and physical)
-  Mental health care practitioners
-  Doctors

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN (SOAR)

The steering committee used the strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and risks (SOAR) framework to process the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed during the needs assessment process. The figure below details the most salient items identified in each piece of the SOAR framework.

Figure 3 SOAR Analysis Summary



## Policy and Regulatory Issues Impacting Health Care Workforce

In addition to employer needs, two other relevant topics arose during the needs assessment and strategy development process. The steering committee felt it was important to better understand the policy and regulatory issues the health care field. The two major policy issues that participants identified were state regulations on scope of work and licensing, and clinical training time for medical students. Participants noted that the scope of practice regulations may limit the care that health care practitioners are able to provide, particularly nurse practitioners. The steering committee also identified difficulties with transferring licenses and certifications from other states.

Another problem that the state and various regions are facing is a shortage of clinical experience placements (medical preceptorships). Students in health care programs are required to complete these on-the-job training hours as part of their education program. The lack of clinical experience placements has become a limiting factor in training health care providers. Recently, the Georgia General Assembly has proposed legislation that would increase tax incentives for professionals who help train students, which in turn would support graduate medical education residency slots and the training needs of other health care professionals. Graduates of residency programs tend to stay within a relatively small radius, which could increase the size of the local workforce. The desire to encourage local youth to stay and work in the region after graduation and attain professional credentials is one reason why the steering committee believes this policy to be particularly salient.

## Implementation Plan

Based on the needs assessment, the steering committee identified several priority areas for meeting Southern Georgia's health care workforce development needs. Additionally, for each priority area, the group developed short-term action items that can be accomplished in three to six months and long-term action items that can be accomplished in one to two years to make progress toward the priorities.



## PRIORITY 1

# Public Relations and Regional Campaign to Promote Health Care Careers

The group as a whole had a strong desire to improve the reputation of the region through increased public relations and the creation of a regional campaign to bolster interest in health care careers. Such efforts can be beneficial for both keeping locally grown talent and recruiting top-notch external candidates. Additionally, improving public relations helps all stakeholders, from the health care providers recruiting nurses and doctors to the higher education institutions recruiting instructors.

### Short-Term Strategies (Three to six months)

1. Hire a communications intern (potentially from a local college or university) to develop a series of feature stories for print media and begin using social media to tell the health care workforce story.
2. Build awareness of existing health care training programs in Southern Georgia.
3. Develop a regional "story" campaign.

### Long-Term Strategies (One to two years)

1. Train all steering committee members on available programs and resources so that they may serve as health care ambassadors (train-the-trainer program through Southwest Georgia AHEC).
2. Launch a marketing campaign for a regional health care workforce initiative.



## PRIORITY 2

# Southern Georgia Health Care Workforce Pipeline Development

Being intentional about all aspects of the pipeline from early secondary education through nontraditional adult learners or professional development is key to creating a strong regional workforce that will endure over time. The steering committee would like to see increased communication between all stakeholders to ensure that interested students are supported through the pipeline and make it into health care careers.

### Short-Term Strategies (Three to six months)

1. Inventory what health care programs currently exist at the middle school, high school, and postsecondary dual-enrollment levels.
2. Develop materials and tools to help educate parents about health care careers for their children.
3. Initiate/reactivate health care program advisory committees.

### Long-Term Strategies (One to two years)

1. Share organizational successes and best practices related to health care workforce development (e.g., career academy grants, YouScience).
2. Determine the primary areas in the health care field in which students are interested and help expose them to those careers through experiential learning opportunities (job shadowing, internships).
3. Develop tools and protocols to evaluate the effectiveness of workforce development programs.

## PRIORITY 3

# Postsecondary Health Care Programs

While the region already has some strong higher education health care programs, the steering committee identified a need for additional programs. New academic programs could help meet identified gaps, address class size constraints, and help build the health care pipeline. A research project using data from the American Medical Association found that over half of all physicians find employment within 100 miles of where they graduate from their medical residency.<sup>2</sup> Increasing the number of health care programs could greatly increase the number of health care workers that desire to stay in the region. All decisions in this area must be made with the input of local employers and secondary partners and must be based on regional workforce data.

### Short-Term Strategies (Three to six months)

1. Determine employer needs, including programs and faculty.
2. Promote and encourage job shadowing, internships, and college tours.
3. Strengthen already-established relationships between schools and employers to develop health care workforce solutions

### Long-Term Strategies (One to two years)

1. Determine what additional programs and certificates are needed.
2. Start new programs based on employer needs and evaluate those programs.

2. Fagan, E. B., Finnegan, S. C., Bazemore, A. W., Gibbons, C. B., & Petterson, S. M. (2013). Migration after family medicine residency: 56% of graduates practice within 100 miles of training. *American family physician*, 88(10), 704.

## PRIORITY 4

# Identify Additional Funding Sources

To accomplish all of the other goals, the steering committee felt that it was necessary to include funding as a priority. In recent years, the state has put an increased focus on rural Georgia and regional work. Continuing the conversations that have begun through the HDCI sector partnership grant could help Southern Georgia acquire resources to support future efforts. The group must work together and be creative about where it looks for funding that can support each of the other three priorities.

### Short-Term Strategies (Three to six months)

1. Meet with elected officials, state program managers, and other funders to start a dialogue about financial needs in the region and state.
2. Take advantage of programs and funding offered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Southwest Georgia Area Health Education Center.

### Long-Term Strategies (One to two years)

1. Identify funding for a sustainable network of health care workforce development training resources (including WIOA, AHEC, rural prosperity, legislature, private stakeholders).

## Conclusion

Health care is an important industry in Southern Georgia. It accounts for nearly 10% of the region's employment base, contributes to the health of the local citizenry, and is critical to attracting and retaining key industries. The Southern Georgia Health Care Workforce Development Needs Assessment and Strategy process helped to bring together a group of stakeholders to address key issues, identify the current needs of health care employers, and determine strategies to close any identified gaps. It is critical now for the steering committee to begin implementing the four priorities that the group identified. This work will help position the health care industry in Southern Georgia for continued success in the years to come.

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