

SLO Healthcare Workforce Partnership
September 28, 2023
Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES:

- **Partnership Members:** Dr. Penny Borenstein (Public Health), Michelle Shoresman (Public Health), Sarah Montes Reinhart (Public Health), Barbara Morrow (Oral Health – Health Agency), Frank Warren (Behavioral Health), Bridgette Bateman (Tenet Health), Jordan Turetsky (CenCal), Patrick Woolpert, (Compass Health), Maria Garcia (Community Health Centers, CHC), Madisyn Masatani (Community Health Centers, CHC), Suzanne Russell (Tolosa Dental), Patty Herrera (Dignity Health – CHW Program), Lisa Fraser (CFS), Angel Lopez (Promotores Collaborative), Fernanda Lucas (Promotores Collaborative), Terrance Harris (Cal Poly & Chair of Community Board at French Hospital), Aydin Nazmi (Cal Poly), Beth Johnson (Cuesta College), Heather Tucker (Cuesta College), Marcia Scott (CSU, Monterey Bay), Jennifer Clayton (SLO Partners/SLOCOE), Lady Freire (REACH/Uplift Central Coast), Tony Girolo (WDB), Jessica Peckham (NP)
- **Partnership Coordinator:** Susan McGraw, Consultant

Welcome & Introductions

Dr. Penny Borenstein, Public Health Director

Review Partnership Purpose, Goals, and Planning Process (See meeting slides)

Susan McGraw

Review Local Healthcare Information to Assess Impact on the Work of the Partnership (See meeting slides):

Susan McGraw

- SLO County Access to Care
- SLO County Cost of Living
- Summary of Key Community Partner Interviews

Discussion Results:

- **Medi-Cal Reimbursement Rates:** Jordan Turetsky confirmed that the Medi-Cal reimbursement rate has remained unchanged since 2001. There it is challenging to recruit and retain providers. However, the reimbursement rates may be changing soon and will keep the Partnership informed of any changes,
- **Break out Session 1 Discussion:** What insights did you have from this **Access to Care** and **Cost of Living** data that should be taken into consideration when planning the work of this Partnership?
 - **Cost of Living Data:**
 - It is shocking to see the disconnect between the cost of living and the average household income. It seems that the healthcare providers who are most successful here in SLO County are those that have been local, who may be started as unskilled, unlicensed workers and then upskilled to Nurse Practitioner (NP), Physician Assistant (PA), or nursing roles. They understand the cost of living challenges and have local, strong family support systems so we are able to retain them as a community.
 - We need to look more closely at the data to assess the impact of multiple families who are co-locating in one location in lower-income areas.
 - Do we know what the "living wage" is in our county? One organization is offering top pay, a rate very competitive in the state, and still not having success recruiting dentists.

Support positions are also challenging, but they have had success with on the job training for these positions.

- Are we able to provide housing incentives when recruiting professionals from outside the County?
- **Medicare/Medi-Cal Reimbursement Rates:**
 - These are a factor in local retention. In the Bay Area where the reimbursement rates are higher, the cost of living and working is also higher, but it seems easier for people to stay in urban areas.
 - State reimbursement rates must increase for any chance of sustaining even minimal services in our county.
- **Retirements:** There is a big wave of retirements coming, which is a concern.
- **Support Staff:**
 - It requires a lot of office staff to support primary care offices, also need front office staff, medical assistants in addition to higher level professional roles.
 - We have a huge problem providing access in all three areas (physical, behavioral, and oral health). The biggest insights from the data is the challenge to recruit and retain not just providers but support staff, who find the cost of living overwhelming.
- **Healthcare Education:**
 - Cuesta College is the main provider of healthcare education, so we have limitations on how much training we can provide. When healthcare organizations try to recruit MDs, dentists, and even med assistants, prospective employees decline the position when they find out the housing/benefits costs. They have to support their families and they need to assess whether their family members can also find jobs in the area.
 - The cost to become licensed is a barrier for some individuals.

Break Out Session #2 Discussion: Based on this feedback from Community Partners, what insights did you have that the Partnership should take into consideration during the planning process?

- **Successful Recruiting Practices:** It might be interesting to identify any professions in SLO County that are NOT struggling with hiring and retention of employees and see if there is anything that they are doing that we could replicate?
- **Recruiting Incentives:**
 - The cost of housing seems to have the biggest impact on an individual's ability to move and stay here. Can we consider housing incentives of various types?
 - How do we expand beyond just find recruiting incentives for physicians, when we need to do it across the board for all positions...housing for all positions?
- **Funding Sources:** We need to explore potential funding sources? How do we capture these collaboratively? How do we align the available resources? Might be a housing portion and LVN portion....how to align together? How to leverage existing community relationships?
- **Healthcare Education:**
 - A key theme in this field is to "Grow your own." Are there opportunities to support individuals from our County in getting their education outside the county and then getting them back after they finish their education?
 - How do we pull people in from the rural areas and align to a "grow your own" approach? Telehealth and residency programs?
- **Community Health Workers (CHW):** We need to advocate for increasing the focus on the use of Community Health Workers (CHW), which is a quick way to build capacity to support licensed medical providers.