

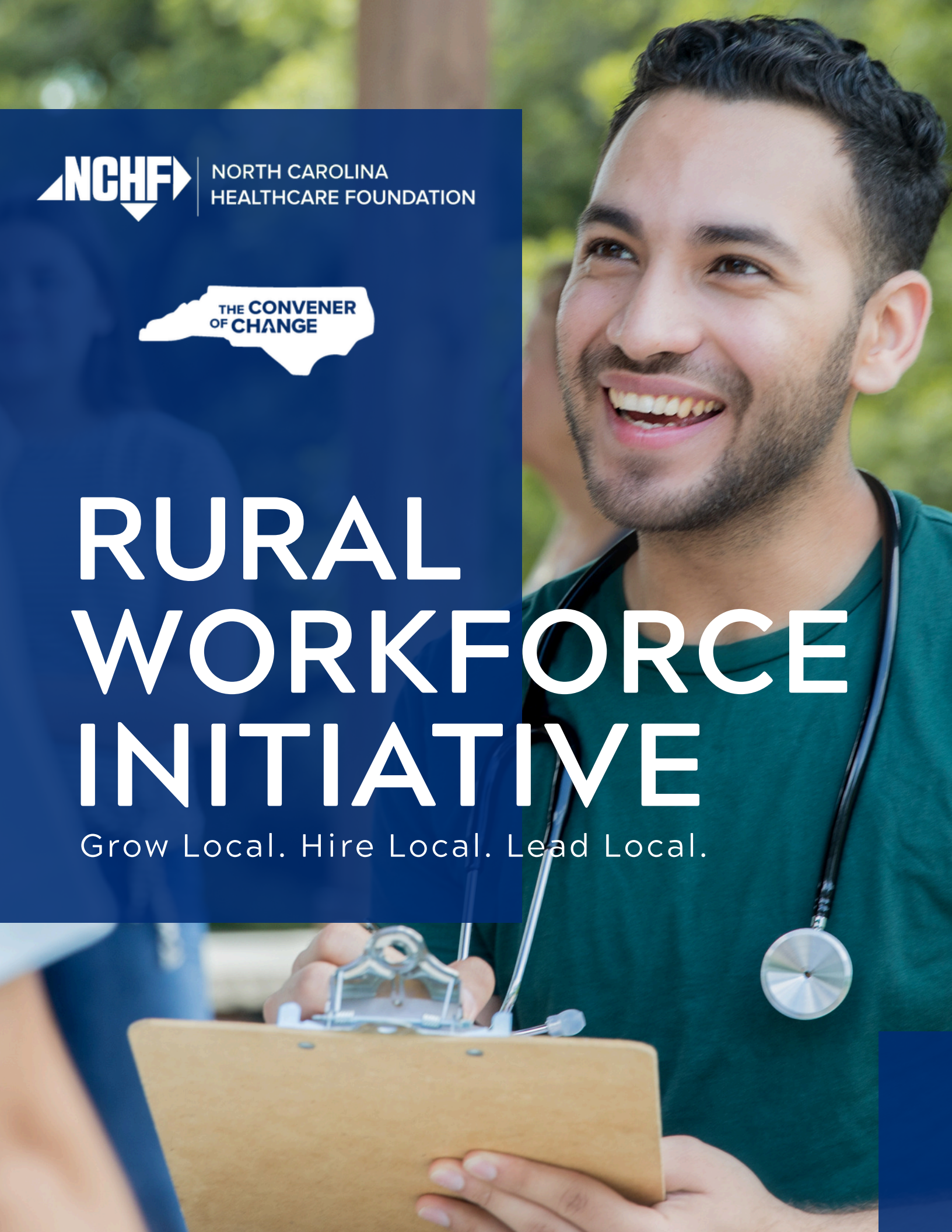


NORTH CAROLINA
HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION



RURAL WORKFORCE INITIATIVE

Grow Local. Hire Local. Lead Local.



A strong rural healthcare workforce is essential for maintaining local access to care and fostering healthy communities. The North Carolina Healthcare Foundation (NCHF) has partnered with Bank of America to support a statewide initiative aimed at strengthening the rural healthcare workforce pipeline for North Carolina's Critical Access Hospitals and communities in Tier 1 (most economically distressed) counties.

NCHF is thrilled to share this exclusive preview of the Rural Workforce Initiative Toolkit. The toolkit design offers a practical roadmap specifically tailored to the unique strengths and challenges of North Carolina's rural healthcare ecosystems. The toolkit aims to support the infrastructure needs to build a sustainable workforce by investing in locally grown talent, addressing social drivers, and creating long-term career pathways through mentorship, and experiential learning. The toolkit is organized to ensure every member of your organization can take meaningful action.



Mentorship tools



Skill-building workshops



Job-shadowing opportunities



Shorter training career pathways



Exploration of workforce housing solutions

Executive Leaders

Scalable ROI model for local hiring, multi-sector collaboration frameworks, and strategic scalability steps for long-term workforce sustainability.

Human Resource Officers

Social drivers assessment surveys, community referral options, and national employer investment programs addressing housing, transportation, and food insecurity of your employees.

Managers and Staff

Coaching tools for student engagement and career development, NCHA I Do Care resources, and career pathways in health and health-related fields for rural communities.

HOW DATA DRIVES RURAL WORKFORCE AND HOUSING STRATEGY

Data-informed decision-making transforms workforce planning from reactive to strategic. North Carolina offers world-class research institutions providing rural housing projections, workforce trends, and demographic data to guide your organization's investment decisions.

Using Data for Strategic Planning

Combine housing affordability with workforce projections to identify:

- Counties where housing costs exceed healthcare worker wages
- Projected workforce gaps 5–10 years out by occupation
- Communities with high youth populations for pipeline investment
- Areas where employer-assisted housing will have the highest ROI



85

NC COUNTIES

Designated as rural or underserved by federal criteria

1 IN 5

1 IN 5 RURAL WORKERS

Experience housing cost burden in North Carolina rural counties

2030

CRITICAL HORIZON

Projected peak shortage of rural healthcare workers in North Carolina

TAKE ACTION: YOUR FIRST STEPS

The rural healthcare workforce challenge is solvable- but it requires commitment, collaboration, and action at every level of your organization. Use this toolkit as a starting point, not a finish line. Engage multi-sector leaders, connect with statewide partners, and begin building the locally grown workforce your community deserves.



Assess Your Current State

Establish a baseline before time and resource investment. Map your existing partnerships, identify current cost-per-hire, and deploy social needs survey.



Engage in NCHF Rural Workforce Learning Sessions

Explore best practices for pipeline planning support, shared resource opportunities, infrastructure development, and sustainability planning across sectors.



Launch One Pilot Program

Start with one initiative — a mentoring program, a school partnership, a housing referral network. Measure results, learn, and scale what works.



Measure, Share and Scale

Track ROI, retention rates, and employee satisfaction. Share your successes with NCHF. Your story can inspire other rural organizations.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE: AN ROI FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL HIRING

Rural healthcare organizations that invest in locally grown talent see measurable returns- reduced turnover, lower recruitment costs, and stronger community trust. This framework helps executives quantify and communicate that value to boards and stakeholders. Local hiring is not just a community investment, it is a financially sound strategy.

Track your organization's local hire retention rate as a board-level KPI.

ROI Framework Components

- Local recruitment cost savings vs. external hires
- Turnover reduction and replacement cost avoidance
- Productivity ramp-up time for local vs. external hires
- Community goodwill and patient satisfaction impact
- Long-term retention and career development ROI

Key Benchmarks

Research from the Healthcare Anchor Network and rural workforce studies consistently show that local hires:

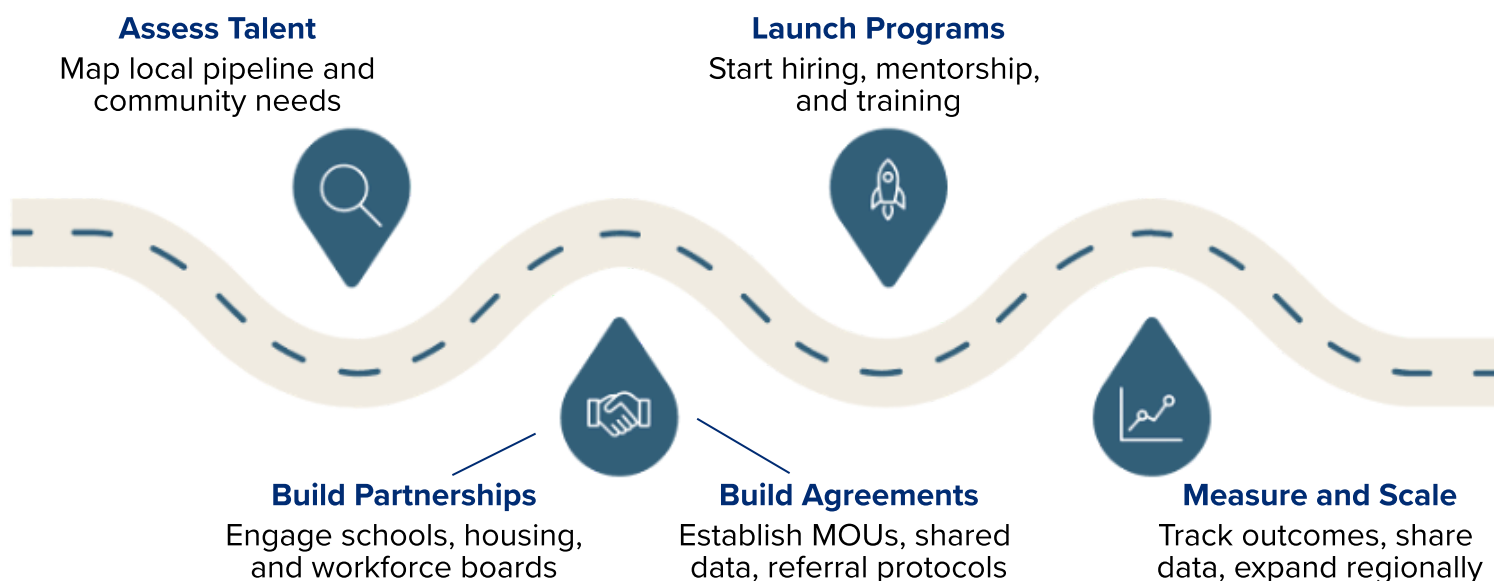
- Stay 2–3x longer than recruited external candidates
- Require 40–60% less onboarding investment
- Demonstrate stronger cultural competency with patient populations
- Contribute to measurable improvements in community health outcomes

MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION AND PIPELINE STRATEGY ADAPTATION

Sustainable rural workforce development requires partnerships that extend beyond your organization's walls. By engaging education, local government, housing, and social service sectors, rural healthcare leaders can create an ecosystem that supports talent from recruitment through career advancement.

As partnerships are established, be transparent and willing to think creatively about the need and the solution. Pipeline adaptation to include early and accelerated experiential opportunities, such as micro-internships, to expose students to the wide array of clinical and non-clinical opportunities in the healthcare sector is critical.

Furthermore, career-mapping from entry-level certification roles up to organizational leadership positions can then help students visualize advancement opportunities in healthcare careers. Tying these initiatives with local stories and collaborative partnerships support community trust and health system engagement.



This four-phase approach can move your hospital from assessment to regional impact. Each phase builds on the last, creating compounding returns on workforce investment.



PEER MENTORING, EMPLOYEE WELLNESS, AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Mid-level managers and front-line staff are both the backbone of rural healthcare and the most powerful recruiters and influencers on retention for the next generation. Peer mentoring programs, professional development pathways, micro-internships, and wellness support help staff thrive and inspire others to join the field.



Peer Mentoring Frameworks

Formal peer mentoring pairs mid-level managers and experienced staff with students and new employees. These programs include the benefits of monthly check-ins, shared goal setting, and access to a mentoring toolkit. Gain insights from NCHF's Diverse Leaders Mentorship Program with over 100 healthcare leaders across the state.



Professional Development Pathways

Increase capacity to promote student learners and staff awareness about organizational supports to pursue certifications, cross-training opportunities, and continuing education. Share NCHA's I Do Care resources with community partners to highlight different pathways to health care careers, both clinical and non-clinical roles.



Remember: Every staff member is a potential pipeline recruiter. Equip them with stories, resources, and recognition – and your workforce grows organically from within the community.



Micro-Internships

Internships can be difficult for rural students due to transportation, scheduling, and staffing limitations. Micro-internships offer: short-duration experiences, flexible scheduling; exposure to multiple departments; and lower administrative burden.



Wellness as a Recruitment Tool

Employee wellness programs that address social drivers — food, housing, transportation, financial literacy, and mental health — signal that your organization cares about the whole person. Promote these benefits in recruitment materials and community conversations. Staff who feel supported become your best ambassadors.



Example Micro-Internship Models: Summer Explorer Programs, School Earn & Learn Programs, Apprenticeships

SOCIAL DRIVERS ASSESSMENT: PIPELINE SURVEY TOOL

Understanding the social drivers affecting your prospective and current employees is essential for effective recruitment, retention, and wellness programming. Use this sample survey framework to assess barriers and connect student interns and staff to community resources.



Housing Stability

- Do you currently have stable, affordable housing near your workplace?
- Would housing assistance (rental subsidy, employer-assisted housing) influence your decision to stay or join our organization?
- How far is your commute, and does transportation cost create a financial burden?

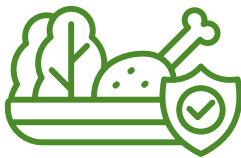
Suggested Resources: NC Housing Finance Agency, local Habitat for Humanity, employer-assisted housing programs



Transportation Access

- Do you have reliable transportation to and from work every shift?
- Would a transportation benefit (gas card, shuttle, ride-share subsidy) improve your ability to work consistently?
- Have you ever missed or been late to work due to transportation challenges?

Suggested Resources: Rural transit authorities, ride-share partnerships, vanpool programs, gas card incentives



Food Security

- Do you or your household members ever worry about having enough food?
- Would on-site meal programs, food pantry referrals, or grocery subsidies be valuable benefits?
- Are you aware of SNAP or WIC resources available in your county?

Suggested Resources: Food banks, SNAP enrollment assistance, employer food stipends, on-site pantry programs



Career, Education, & Financial Wellness

- Are you interested in advancing your career within healthcare? Do you have access to a mentor or coach to guide your career development?
- Would tuition assistance, certification programs, or apprenticeship opportunities influence your long-term commitment? Do you feel financially secure enough to pursue additional training or education?
- Would you benefit from connection to a financial counselor or benefits navigator?

Suggested Resources: Benefits navigation, emergency assistance funds, financial coaching, EAP integration



Administration Tip: Deploy this anonymous survey during onboarding, annual reviews, and exit interviews. Aggregate data should inform your organization's social support investment priorities and be shared with your hospital boards and strategic planning oversight teams.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS IS A WORKFORCE RETENTION STRATEGY

By providing these tangible, actionable resources, NCHF and Bank of America (BoA) are supporting the holistic health of the individuals who keep North Carolina's healthcare system strong.

These resources are perfect for students planning for college and current employees (whether entry level or looking for advancement) who may benefit from additional education pertaining to financial literacy. These offerings will help prepare individuals for a career, foster economic mobility, build skills, and inspire career confidence.

EDUCATION OFFERINGS FOR STUDENTS

Five Ways to Pay Off Student Loan Faster

Practical tactics to tackle student debt, and save for other financial goals.

Need to Know Student Loan Terms

Getting a handle on the central concepts of student loans as early as possible can help with borrowing choices now and the repayment process down the road.

How to Spot Six Common Financial Scams

High school or college students have many responsibilities such as studying for exams, holding down a part-time job and handling at least some of their own finances. While doing all this, con artists may also be trying to separate them from their money.

Four Key Credit Moves for 20-Somethings

Tips for boosting credit scores and building a strong financial future.

A Gen-Z Guide to Money

Tips for living alone for the first time (and paying for it) and getting finances in order.



Leverage Key Relationships

Consider how your hospital might leverage these types of unique relationships with financial institutions in your region to have a conversation about community education needs and collaborative support opportunities.



Topic Areas to Consider:

Maximizing relationships with the bank, skill gaps, and wrap around service supports



Scan the QR code for additional resources from BofA about paying for college.



NORTH CAROLINA RESOURCES AT A GLANCE

North Carolina offers a robust ecosystem of career resources designed to help individuals at every stage explore, enter, and advance in healthcare. These tools are free, accessible, and specifically designed for North Carolina's workforce landscape — from high school students to experienced professionals seeking advancement. Use these resources to deepen your strategy, access data, and connect to funding and technical assistance.

NCHA I Do Care Campaign

The North Carolina Healthcare Association's I Do Care campaign is a premier career resource connecting individuals to healthcare job opportunities, career pathways, and employer information across the state. Visit idocarenc.org to learn more!

- Searchable job board for NC healthcare positions
- Career pathway explorer by role and education level
- Employer profiles and culture highlights
- Resources for career changers and first-time job seekers



NC Center on the Workforce for Health

The Center seeks to identify solutions, share best practices, and monitor progress in addressing the state's health workforce challenges.

What you will find: Resource Hub inclusive of workforce data, pipeline program design tools, employer resources, and policy advocacy for NC healthcare organizations.

NC Health Talent Alliance

A strategic partnership, leveraging the Talent Pipeline Management Framework, between the Center, NC Chamber Foundation, and AHEC regions aimed at addressing pervasive healthcare worker shortages in NC.

Cross-sector partnership connecting education, healthcare employers, and workforce development to align talent supply with industry demand.

Healthcare Anchor Network

National network supporting healthcare institutions as community economic anchors through local hiring, procurement, and investment strategies.

MyFutureNC

Statewide initiative aiming to prepare 2 million North Carolinians with postsecondary credentials by 2030, with direct alignment to healthcare workforce needs in addition to a broader array of sectors.

Promotes a shared vision for an education-to-workforce continuum across NC - from early childhood through adulthood - and aligns and supports local, regional, and state actions that will dramatically increase the attainment of industry-valued credentials and postsecondary degrees.

UNC Sheps Center | NC Rural Health Research Program Carolina Demography

Research and data resources on rural health workforce trends, county-level projections, housing demand, and population demographics for strategic planning.



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or stay connected!**