

## 2017 Issue Brief Workforce

Workforce challenges threaten access to health care services and the quality of care. With approximately 1,000 unfilled nursing positions, North Dakota health care providers are forced to hire expensive, temporary staff or limit access to critically-needed services. Hospitals unable to recruit and retain core staff increasingly are forced to divert patients out of town or even out of state.

### Fair reimbursement rates

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of healthcare occupations is projected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024 - much faster than the average for all occupations. During this time, health care occupations will add more jobs than any other group of occupations. This growth is expected due to an aging population, growing rates of chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity, a retiring labor force, and because federal health insurance reform increased the number of individuals who have access to health insurance. A shortage of 800,000 nurses nationwide is projected by 2020.

Reimbursement rates must be fair in order for hospitals to compete in the workforce market today. Healthcare operates on a fixed reimbursement system, meaning providers cannot increase charges to offset increasing labor costs. Reimbursement rates must be equitable to the cost of care in order for healthcare providers to pay the salaries necessary to recruit and retain staff.

### Enrollment slots in nursing and other healthcare education programs need to be increased.

Despite strong interest in healthcare careers, thousands of qualified applicants cannot gain entry into a training program. From 2002 to 2009, the number of qualified applicants turned away from



*North Dakota currently has approximately 1,000 unfilled nursing positions.*

entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs nationwide rose from 3,600 to 39,423. Training health care professionals in North Dakota will require ongoing, targeted investment in programs to increase faculty, allow seamless transitions between undergraduate degree programs, and provide incentives for providers to participate in clinical training of students. Reducing barriers to licensure such as adopting interstate licensure compacts for physicians, registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses and physical therapy will also be key. Retention of workers in the health care field can be increased by supporting enhanced protection for health care workers assaulted on the job.

### NDHA Position

NDHA supports legislation to implement fair reimbursement rates and interstate licensure compacts for health care professionals.

NDHA also supports increased slots in nursing and other healthcare education programs and enhanced criminal penalties for assault on health care workers.