



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Leveraging Modifiable and Non-Modifiable Factors

A Colorado Provider Recruitment & Retention Framework

**COLORADO
RURAL HEALTH
CENTER**

The State Office of Rural Health

ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

From 2023-2025, The Colorado Rural Health Center, has collected workforce data from:

- Health professional student environmental scans
- Current rural health professional workforce environmental scans
- Rural site visits
- CRHC's Colorado Provider Recruitment and Retention Program
- Other workforce-based grant initiatives

When matched to our largest workforce research project, the Community Apgar Questionnaire (CAQ), this information helped us develop a framework for addressing specific aspects of rural provider recruitment and retention.

The CAQ is a validated research tool developed and implemented by Dr. David Schmitz, M.D., University of North Dakota and Dr. Ed Baker, PhD, Boise State University. This tool utilizes 5 classes of 10 factors each to:

- Assess the recruitment and retention readiness of rural clinics and hospitals.
- Identify the importance of each factor relative to the characteristics of clinics, hospitals, communities, and patient populations.
- Identify how clinics and hospitals may have advantages and challenges related to each factor.
- Create space for clinics and hospitals to discuss possible solutions for recruiting challenges and language for marketing advantages.

Each CAQ uses a cohort of participating organizations to better understand state-level challenges and advantages as well as the unique top and bottom factors of each organization. There is a suite of CAQ options, but this framework narrows in on factors from the Rural Health Clinic and Critical Access Hospital CAQs.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK:

- Data and resources are linked to factors for guidance. Consider local insights, staff feedback, and other experiences when assessing your organization.
- This tool is not the CAQ itself but a starting point to:
 - Introduce recruitment and retention factors
 - Organize perceived advantages and challenges related to each factor
- Focus on the top 5-10 advantage and challenge factors, rather than all factors, recognizing that priorities may shift over time.

USE THIS FRAMEWORK TO:

- Develop a provider recruitment and retention plan.
- Identify the types of candidates most likely to be attracted and retained based on strengths, resources and opportunities your organization can offer.
- Address modifiable challenges thoughtfully.
- Craft clear, targeted language for recruitment materials.
- Shape interview talking points that reflect your organization's reality.

COMMUNITY APGAR QUESTIONNAIRE

CLASSES AND FACTORS

GEOGRAPHIC

Access to larger community
Perception of community
Climate
Housing (availability and/or affordability)
Schools
Shopping & other services
Recreational opportunities
Social bonding/networking
Spousal/ partner satisfaction
Demographics/ payor mix
Religious/ cultural opportunities*

ECONOMIC

Perceived fiscal stability
Employment status
Loan repayment
Signing bonus/ moving allowance
Income guarantee
Take home pay (revenue flow*)
Retention payments
Retirement package
Part-time opportunities
Competition
Start-up/ marketing costs*

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Inpatient care
Obstetrical care
C-section*
Emergency room coverage*
Nursing home
Emergency/ stabilization care
Endoscopy/ surgery*
Minor trauma
Mental Health
Patient Centered Medical Home Skills
PA and NP supervision*
PA and NP collaboration
Administration
Teaching

MEDICAL SUPPORT

Perception of quality
Stability of provider workforce
Call/practice coverage
PA and NP workforce
Nursing workforce
Lab/X-ray services
Provider sub-specialist availability
Transfer arrangements*
Allied mental health workforce*
Ancillary staff workforce*
Emergency medical services*
Mental health integrated care resources
Dental integrated care resources
Pharmacy integrated care resources

HOSPITAL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Physical plant and equipment
Plans for capital investment
Electronic medical records
Internet access
Telemedicine/ Televideo support*
RHC/Hospital leadership
Physician recruitment efficacy
Household member recruiting and onboarding
Hospital sponsored CME*
New provider mentorship
Community need/support of providers
Community volunteer opportunities*

*Indicates hospital specific factor



MODIFIABLE FACTORS

Factors in this section have a degree of modifiability, meaning the factor can be positively influenced or improved through intentional development.

Each factor page includes:



Definition.



Relevant data points collected from other CRHC workforce-based projects.



Local (or rurally focused) resources, all hyperlinked, to support your recruitment efforts (where available).



Best practices from around rural Colorado clinics and hospitals to highlight how other clinics and hospitals have successfully addressed that factor.



Sample language for job postings or during interviews to illustrate how the factor can be framed whether you deem it an advantage or a challenge. These examples are starting points only and you should ensure that any language you use accurately reflects your organization's reality before incorporating them into recruitment materials.



We encourage you to work through the factors in manageable segments focusing on one or two during an all staff meeting to foster open dialogue and shared ownership of recruitment strategies. Over time, your discussions and reflections can help identify if factors lean towards advantageous or challenging for your clinic.

Use this tool as both a discussion guide and an action framework to connect daily practices with long-term workforce sustainability and recruitment success.

PERCEIVED FISCAL STABILITY & PLANS FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENT



These factors reflect candidate and employee perceptions of an organization's financial health and long-term viability and the openness of dialogue around plans for capital investment. Strong perceived fiscal stability signals reliable operations, consistent compensation, and the likelihood of continued support for staff, programs and infrastructure.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 17.2% of respondents indicated a lack of resources as the most challenging part of working in rural healthcare.
- Community support of the facility services, needs and sustainability was ranked #1 for importance in retention. The facility responding to community needs was ranked #2.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



Grant Funding Sources:

- The Colorado Health Foundation
- The Denver Foundation
- The Colorado Trust
- Rocky Mountain Health Foundation
- The Telligen Community Initiative
- Kaiser Permanente
- El Pomar Foundation
- USDA
- HRSA
- CRHC PR Toolkit (Resource found on CRHC's Members Only page)

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Providers have dedicated time and space to showcases where they believe funds should be allocated.
- Leverage community level data and needs assessments to understand what services patients want to better generate funding.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- While we are in the early stages of pursuing funding for facility upgrades, our leadership is actively exploring grant opportunities and partnerships to sustain long-term growth. We are building a team that can help shape these plans and bring innovative ideas.
- We're positioned to continue expanding services to meet community needs. For example, we have invested in a new outpatient cancer center to ensure patients can access advanced care closer to home.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Connect Program- offers opportunities to participate in conservation and park maintenance.
- Rural Action Project (RAP)- supports rural communities across Colorado by bringing residents together to shape the future of their communities.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- CEO hosts a dinner for the provider and their partner/family.
- Use narratives from current providers that highlight how they've built social lives.
- Establish and highlight low-cost connection points (book clubs, game nights, group exercise classes).
- Invite a local real estate agent to tour the provider and their family around town during site visit.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- There are several active professional and social networks to get involved in, including regional clinician peer group and monthly community health roundtables. Outside of work, staff often connect through the local running club, volunteer opportunities, and family-friendly community events like the summer concert series, farmers markets and local parades.
- As a smaller, rural clinic, our team has fewer formal networking organizations nearby but build connections through local community events such as volunteering at the local school, church groups or the regional medical society. We partner with the local hospital to create opportunities for shared learning and professional support.

SOCIAL BONDING & NETWORKING



This factor reflects the organization's ability to help providers and their families build personal and professional connections within the community. While you may not be able to build physical infrastructure typically associated with socializing, you can create spaces and opportunities for providers and staff to connect organically, fostering a sense of belonging.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 33% of participants indicated that when considering a geographic location for their employment, they are committed to regions that align with their values and career goals (mentorship, networking).
- The term "work-life balance" was the most meaningful phrase in a job description.
- 46% of participants indicated that an emphasis on work-life balance and well-being were the most important aspects that influence their decision to apply for and accept a job offer.
- 20.45% of respondents said social isolation was a concern. 25% said distance from extended family/support network was a concern. 27.27% said lack of recreational and cultural activities was a concern.

"Rural communities need to plan for what growth and support of healthcare workers looks like from a community growth aspect." - Anonymous Respondent

REFLECTION

LOAN REPAYMENT



This factor reflects the organization's financial programs or incentives that help employees repay educational or professional loans in addition to the assistance they provide with navigating the application process to help reduce providers' financial burden and support long-term retention.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 66% of participants noted the cost of education as the biggest barrier in accessing a healthcare career.
- 40% stated that salary range and benefit details (including loan repayment) are a top influential factor in their decision to apply for or accept a position.

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 50% of respondents indicated loan repayment was a top three desired benefit.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- National Health Service Corps
 - NHSC SUD Workforce
 - NHSC Rural Community (SUD/Opioid treatment)
 - Nurse Corps
- Colorado Health Service Corps
 - Rural Essential Access Provider (private practice)
- Indian Health Service (IHS) Loan Repayment Program

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- In-house loan repayment for organizations that do not qualify for national or state-level programs.
- Provide the option to reallocate funds traditionally used for moving expenses or sign-on bonuses for loan repayment (and vice versa).
- Reimburse for the cost of additional certification(s).

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic participates in both state and federal level loan repayment programs. Eligible providers may qualify for significant student loan forgiveness based on service commitment.
- Our clinic does not currently qualify for federal or state level loan repayment programs, we recognize the importance of financial stability for our providers. We strive to offer a competitive compensation and benefits package, flexible scheduling and supportive environment. Our leadership will continue to explore options for program eligibility as we grow and expand services.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Connect for Health Colorado- offers cost effective health insurance premiums including some without income caps
- CO-CARES- provides mental health support to Colorado's healthcare workers
- Doximity- mobile and web app for healthcare professionals that provides HIPPA-compliant communication services:
 - mobile faxing
 - hide personal phone number for patient calls
 - secure messaging to other health professionals

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Let candidates propose their ideal schedule during an interview and negotiate from there.
- Allow phased employment transitions. For example, a provider returning from parental leave starts back at 2 days a week and scales up over a predetermined period.
- Explore alternative scheduling models such as 7 days on, 7 days off.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic offers predictable call coverage designed to support work-life balance. Providers share call equitably across the group, and hospitalists manage most inpatient responsibilities, allowing our clinicians to focus on outpatient care. Support from our advanced practice providers help ensure coverage remains manageable.
- As a smaller practice, our on-call schedule can be more hands-on, but our leadership is committed to maintaining reasonable expectations and continues to explore ways to strengthen coverage.

CALL/PRACTICE COVERAGE & PART-TIME OPPORTUNITIES



These factors reflect an organization's approach to managing on-call rotation to balance operational needs and provider fairness. It includes frequency and intensity of call duties, and availability of back-up support to prevent provider burnout. Additionally, these factors consider flexibility in meeting workforce and community needs by offering roles that can support work-life balance or phased career engagement.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

CURRENT RURAL WORKFORCE:

- "I wouldn't apply it looks like long hours and that means the pay is not competitive."
- "Hesitant about the flexible work hours and on call."
- "It seems there is an expectation to be available for the job far more than regular hours, which means pay may not be competitive enough to make up for lack of availability to travel for the enrichments unavailable in the job area."
- "(Hesitant) extended hours as a must and not a maybe."
- "Hesitant: variation in shift hours on-call; and extended hours."

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- "Hesitant: flexible with work hours, on-call shifts, extended hours."
- "Hesitant about needing to be "flexible" for on-call and extended hours - sounds like there are not set hours, and that can sometimes be taken advantage of."
- "Hesitant - the requirement to be flexible and work more hours than expected."
- "Must be flexible with work hours" is also code for "we own you and can change your schedule willy-nilly;" I am also concerned about scheduled PTO getting cancelled due to patient and organizational needs."

REFLECTION

INCOME GUARANTEE & TAKE HOME PAY



These factors reflect an organization’s approach to ensuring financial stability and transparency for providers through guaranteed income and clear compensation structures. It also considers how compensation aligns with market rates and can support provider satisfaction and retention.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

Participants were asked to review a sample job post which included the line-

THE SALARY IS COMPETITIVE, AND BENEFITS INCLUDE STANDARD HEALTH INSURANCE, RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTIONS, AND PAID TIME OFF. PLEASE NOTE THAT COMPENSATION LEVELS ARE BASED ON EXPERIENCE AND ALIGNMENT WITH THE ROLE’S REQUIREMENTS.

Below reflects common responses when asked what made them interested in applying:

- “Competitive salary”
 - When benefits are listed in the job posting
 - Health insurance as a benefit
- 51.61% of participants indicated that the phrase “productivity-based pay” would make them hesitant to apply.
 - 54.29% indicated that they expect to see the exact salary and full benefits package in a job posting.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- NRHA Rural Provider Compensation Report- data on salary, productivity and incentives specific to rural locations.
- Sources for salary surveys: MGMA NACHC, national and state associations, SHRM, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Payscale.com, Salary.com, Glassdoor.
- Create total compensation statement to show value- samples on 3RNET.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Conduct annual salary surveys.
- Utilize cost of living calculators.
- Offer retention bonuses as “supplemental” income.
- Develop career ladders to show salary progression.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- We provide guaranteed base salary to ensure financial stability, independent of patient volume or productivity targets. Take-home pay is complemented with a full benefits package, including health, dental and vision insurance, retirement contributions, PTO and professional development allowances.
- We offer a reliable base salary with predictable take-home pay, supported by a comprehensive benefits package. Our providers can focus on patient care and work-life balance rather than productivity metrics while still enjoying retirement contributions, PTO and health coverage.
- We provide stable base salary and a benefits package designed to support provider well-being. Benefits include health insurance, retirement contributions and PTO.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



Options for supplemental income benefits:

- CMS Physician Bonuses in Health Professional Shortage Areas
- Colorado Preceptor Tax Credit

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Build short-term retention by splitting payments at the start of employment and then at 6 or 12 months into contract.
- Reimbursement-based moving to cover house search trips, temporary lodging, moving company costs.
- Tiered relocation assistance based on distance moved.
- Negotiate flexible start dates based upon relocation needs.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- While our signing bonus and relocation support are modest, we work closely with each candidate to identify flexible options that make relocation feasible.
 - Meet with local realtor and community tour during site visit
 - Cover travel expenses for candidates invited to an on-site visit during the late stages of the interview process.
- At this time, we do not offer a signing bonus or relocation allowance. However, we work to offer a smooth onboarding process with local resources and community connections to help new providers settle in comfortably.

SIGNING BONUS & MOVING ALLOWANCE



These factors reflect an organization's ability to provide financial and logistical support to attract new providers through hiring incentives and relocation assistance. It includes the availability, size and structure of signing bonuses; the retention and repayment terms; and the extent of moving allowances or reimbursement for relocation expenses that can help ease the transition for providers and their families.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 63% of respondents felt their benefits package met the needs of employees (a decrease from 2023).
- "Affordable housing is not available in this area, especially for the pay that is offered anywhere."
- 53% of respondents indicated a housing stipend was a top three desired benefit.

Findings from the 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 51.5% of respondents indicated that a housing stipend is a benefit that is not currently offered but would help retain staff.

REFLECTION

COMPETITION



This factor reflects the quality of professional relationships and teamwork within the organization and community. It includes the degree of mutual respect, collaboration, communication, and shared decision-making among providers and staff. Strong collegiality can support professional satisfaction and reduce burnout.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

Participants had the following to say related to company culture:

- "Prefer - collaborative team and avoid cut-throat culture."
- "Would prefer to be able to collaborate meaningfully on how things are run."
- "Prefer to have team lead, individual or team projects."
- "I would like to have some decision-making input because it shows trust and that I'm valued and I want leadership opportunities."
- "'Cultural fit' is usually code for cliquishness and that there is no room for competent, dedicated people who are different than the other employees."
- "Any job posting that centers around 'working and collaborating a lot' sounds like some people will always pull more weight than others."
- "Hesitant about what would be a 'cultural fit.'"

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Chamber of Commerce- Employer Training Workshops (current Colorado laws and regulations, Colorado sick leave, workplace discrimination law, Colorado non-compete law, etc.)
- Denver Training Group- V.I.B.E Culture Transformation Program.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- During recruitment and onboarding, pair a new provider with an existing clinician for a 'day in the life' or 'week in the life'.
- Build clinician collegiality through team lunches, social hours, training events, etc.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic emphasizes shared decision-making in patient care and operational planning. Providers are encouraged to contribute ideas, participate in committees and collaborate with colleagues across specialties to ensure high-quality care and a supportive environment.
- Team members support one another through peer consultation, case discussions, and informal check-ins. New providers are paired with experienced colleagues for mentorship and guidance, fostering an environment of learning and growing.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- The Colorado Health Foundation- offers various grant funding that can support recruitment and retention like retirement package enhancements (cannot be used for salary support or bonuses).

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Utilization of visual charts that show how and when retention bonuses and retirement benefits increase in value over time answering the question “Why should I stay here more than a couple years?”
- Offer a standard merit increase between 2% and 4%.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic values long-term commitment and offers retention incentives to eligible providers. After [X] years of service, providers may receive retention bonuses or additional financial awards as a thank-you for their continued contribution to the clinic and community.
- While formal retention payments are limited, our leadership team recognizes tenure and periodically evaluates opportunities for retention incentives based on service and impact.
- Our clinic is committed to building a long-term team and hopes to introduce retention incentives as we grow.

RETENTION PAYMENTS & RETIREMENT PACKAGE



These factors reflect an organization’s commitment to long-term provider satisfaction and stability through financial incentives tied to longevity and future planning. It includes retention or loyalty bonuses, vesting schedules, and other incentives that reward continued service, as well as the availability and quality of retirement plans or employer contributions that can support providers’ long-term financial security.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 63% felt their benefits package met the needs of employees which is a decrease from 73% in 2022.

Findings from the 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 43.9% of respondents indicated that a retention bonus was a benefit not currently offered by their facility but that would help retain staff

REFLECTION

PA & NP COLLABORATION



This factor considers the collaboration or working relationship between physician assistants and nurse practitioners with the physician. It includes team dynamics around shared decision making, clarity of roles, supervision arrangements and opportunities for professional growth. Effective collaboration can support clinical efficiency, enhance patient care and contribute to provider satisfaction.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 28% of respondents reported that creating an onboarding process that creates a sense of belonging is most important to them.
 - 5% of facilities reported creating a sense of belonging was prioritized in onboarding.

Findings from the 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- When asked what onboarding process/experience for new employees are prioritized in your facility? Respondents reported:
 - Welcoming environment during orientation (45.5%)
 - Understanding mission, culture and goals of facility (19.7%)
 - Feeling of belonging (15.2%)

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Academy of Physician Associates
 - Legislative priorities
 - Colorado PA regulations
 - Resources
- American Association of Nurse Practitioners-CO
 - Regulatory structure
 - Advocacy
 - AANP's Positions and Papers

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- New PAs and NPs are paired with experienced providers for mentorship during onboarding, with opportunities to co-manage patients in complex cases. Ongoing collaboration includes peer-to-peer learning, procedural training and weekly team huddles.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA): the Division of Professions and Occupations- provides information on scope-of-practice regulations for all licensed health professions
 - Regulatory updates
 - Licensing information
- Rural Physicians Group- developed a hands-on procedure course to help physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other medical professionals
- Colorado Medical Center- CME Activities
 - Updates
 - Webinars
 - Education
 - Connections

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Offer cross-training opportunities that allow providers to safely expand their skill sets (e.g. mental health integration).
- Develop team-based care models that encourage providers to practice at the top of their license.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our providers enjoy a broad and flexible scope of practice, allowing them to tailor their work to their interests and expertise. Opportunities may include outpatient primary care, nursing home visits and obstetrics. Certain responsibilities such as inpatient care are required to meet patient and community needs. Leadership provides training, mentorship and support to ensure providers are confident in this area.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE



This factor reflects the extent to which providers are able to practice to the full level of their training, licensure and comfort within the organization. Flexibility in scope is a major driver in both recruitment and retention of rural providers. Providers will choose roles based on how well their clinical interests and professional identity align with practice expectations.

Individual scopes include but not limited to inpatient, OB, intentional C-section, nursing home, emergency/stabilization care, minor trauma, mental health, patient centered medical home skills, scope procedures



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- Participants were asked to select up to three areas they were most focused on regarding professional development. Below are the top answers:
 - Technical expertise (51.61%)
 - Advancing education and/or certification (48.39%)
 - Gaining industry-specific knowledge (45.16)
- Additionally, 71.43% of respondents indicated that having clear and transparent job responsibilities was the most important aspect of the hiring process.
- 34% reported advancing education or certification as an area of professional development they are most focused on.
- 29.5% reported expanding technical expertise as an area of professional development they are most focused on.

Findings from the 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- Barriers to practicing at top of ability was reported as a top 5 factor that impacts burnout.

REFLECTION

PERCEPTION OF QUALITY CARE



This factor reflects the organization's perceived reputation, values and care standards. Providers will want to work for organizations where their clinical judgement is respected, patient driven outcomes are prioritized and where they can practice at the top of their scope. When a clinic or hospital has a perception of high-quality care, they will attract high-caliber providers that can deliver on goals. This factor considers the organization's online presence as well.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 CRHC survey, when health professional students and residents were asked which 3 factors most influenced their perception of quality healthcare:

- 71.4% said availability of healthcare providers.
- 65% said access to medical facilities, equipment and technology.
- 50% said geographical isolation and transportation barriers.
- 28% government policies or funding.
- 28% workforce shortages.
- 28% health insurance coverage and affordability.
- 14% community engagement and outreach.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- The Colorado Rural Health Center Snapshot of Rural Health - This resource visualizes systemic issues that may influence access to patient care
- Colorado Health Institute: Better by Design: Building Colorado Communities with Health in Mind
- Online tools showing community amenities, demographics, economies, etc.
 - [livability.com](https://www.livability.com)
 - [niche.com](https://www.niche.com)
 - [areavibes.com](https://www.areavibes.com)

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Community welcome packets- including school district information, community events, and health system branded items and local treats.
- Walking tour- staff members provide walking tour of local amenities for provider/family during interviews.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic is known for delivering high-quality, patient-centered care. Patients consistently report satisfaction with their experience, including timely access, thorough communication, and compassionate treatment. Providers benefit from well-respected reputation in the community, which helps attract loyal patients and build long-term relationships.
- We are actively working to enhance patient satisfaction and care delivery. We have implemented improvements such as updates scheduling processes, patient communication initiatives and QI programs. Providers joining the team can contribute to these initiatives and help shape patient experience moving forward.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence- Emerging Talent- Leadership Development Training.
- Colorado Nonprofit Association- offers training around board involvement and committee compliance.
- Colorado School of Public Health- Total Worker Health Training - "training programs are designed for professionals who are working to design, implement, and lead in workplace health, safety, and well-being."

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Assess candidates and newly hired providers for interest in mentorship and committee involvement during their onboarding.
- Track outcomes to identify patterns and better guide strategies.
- Emphasize autonomy where the option to be involved is available but not mandatory so providers can grow into these roles as they see appropriate.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Providers can choose to engage in administrative activities like committee work, teaching or mentorship based on their interests. These opportunities allow clinicians to shape clinic operations, contribute to education, and have an impact beyond direct patient care.
- In our smaller practice, all providers contribute to administrative and educational tasks, including committees, teaching or mentorship. While these responsibilities are required, they offer opportunities to influence clinic operations, support colleagues, and have a broader impact on the community.

ADMINISTRATION, TEACHING & MENTORSHIP



This factor reflects the providers' opportunities for administrative involvement (committees, quality initiatives, Chief of Staff, involvement in plans for capital investment) and considers the spaces for providers to have a voice in shaping their workplace. Teaching opportunities provide a sense of purpose, legacy and engagement, especially for mid- and late-career providers.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

Findings from the 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 22% of respondents indicated they were influenced by mentorship or shadowing opportunities to pursue a career in healthcare.
- 31.4% reported a lack of mentorship as a barrier during their healthcare education and training.
- When asked what strategies the healthcare industry could adopt to make it more accessible:
 - "Better mentorship and shadowing opportunities for underserved communities."
 - "Connections to mentors early with continued support through education journey."
- When asked what responsibilities they would prefer to have in their role"
 - "I prefer to have a working leadership role at this stage of my career."
 - "Would like to have leadership role along with accountability."
 - "Have: oversight, responsibility, strategy, decision making."

Findings from the 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center workforce environmental scan:

- 30.3% of respondents indicated opportunities for raises and upward movement as a benefit not currently offered in their facility that would help retain staff.
- 21.1% of respondents indicated professional development opportunities as a benefit that would help retain staff.

REFLECTION

LAB & X-RAY SERVICES



This factor reflects the organization's ability to provide timely, accessible, and high-quality diagnostic services, including imaging (x-ray, CT, MRI, etc.) and laboratory testing. It considers both the availability, turnaround time and accuracy of results, which directly impact patient care and provider workflow.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when incoming workforce was asked what factors influence their perception of healthcare:

- 65.7% reported access to medical facilities and technology.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- The Colorado Rural Health Center- Group Purchasing Program:

LabCorps:
 - The LabCorp GPO Agreement Offers:
 - Extensive price discounts for the top 2000 lab tests
 - 65% discount off regular catalogue prices
 - Dedicated LabCorp representative for each facility
 - Clearly defined lab test turnaround time
- Project C.U.R.E Denver- Project C.U.R.E delivers life-saving medical equipment, supplies and services to meet the needs of people in poverty, disasters and violence.
- Assistance League of Denver's Hospital Equipment Lending Program (HELP) - Provides free and instant access to needed equipment.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Establish partnerships with regional hospitals or health systems to provide access to advanced imaging and lab testing.
- Expand point-of-care testing (POCT) for common diagnostics such as strep, flu, and A1C to improve same-day care decisions.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic is equipped with on-site X-ray and laboratory services to support efficient, high-quality patient care. Providers have timely access to diagnostic results, which streamlines decision-making and enhances patient experience. For specialized testing or advanced imaging, we maintain strong partnerships with nearby facilities, ensuring comprehensive diagnostic support for our team.
- While our clinic does not have on-site x-ray or laboratory services, we maintain strong partnerships with nearby imaging centers and laboratories. Providers have reliable access to diagnostic results, with streamlined processes for ordering and receiving tests.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Academy of Physician Associates
 - Legislative priorities
 - Colorado PA regulations
 - Resources
- American Association of Nurse Practitioners-CO
 - Regulatory structure
 - Advocacy
 - AANP's Positions and Papers
- Physician Associate Foundation
 - Resources
 - Funding Opportunities
 - Podcast
 - Events

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Partner with Colorado-based universities and PA/NP programs to offer rural clinical rotations, preceptorships, and residencies that expose students to the realities and rewards of rural practice.
- Identify and support local community members or clinic staff interested in pursuing PA or NP education through mentorship and financial support.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic relies on a small but highly skilled team of PAs and NPs who provide essential support across patient care areas. While the team is limited in size, new providers can expect close collaboration, mentorship, and hands-on learning opportunities. This structure allows for meaningful impact, professional growth, and the chance to shape patient care alongside a dedicated workforce.

PA & NP WORKFORCE



This factor reflects the organization's ability to attract and maintain a sufficient number of physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) with the skills, experience, and professional attributes necessary to meet patient care needs. It considers both the quantity of available providers and quality of the workforce in terms of clinical expertise, experience and fit for the organization's practice model.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when participants were asked: "what, if any, barriers related to identity that they experienced while pursuing a career in healthcare?" NP and PA respondents from both the incoming workforce and current workforce consistently reported:

- Assumptions based on age.
- Assumptions based on gender.
- "Assumptions about my ability because I am an APP and not an MD."

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Denver Health Integrated Behavioral Health Academy at Denver Health-
- CDPHE Office of Suicide Prevention
- Refer to your local Regional Accountable Entity (RAE)

MENTAL HEALTH



This factor reflects the organization's expectations for primary care providers to directly address mental health needs within their clinical practice, as opposed to referring patients to social workers, therapists or other specialists. It considers the degree of involvement in screening, counseling, medication and ongoing support, as well as the resources, training, and leadership guidance provided to support providers in delivering mental health care.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, mental health was the main service providers felt was missing and impacting retention in rural areas.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Address social determinants of health that can impact mental health via established clinic food pantry, SUD safe spaces and creation of support groups.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Providers are expected to address mental health needs directly within their practice for common behavioral health conditions. Leadership supports clinicians with training, resources, and access to collaborative care teams to ensure patients receive comprehensive, high-quality care.
- Providers manage basic mental health care, such as screening and initial counseling, while collaborating with specialists for more complex cases. This ensures patients receive timely support and providers have resources for managing these needs.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Health Institute- "Colorado's Unmet Demand for Specialty Care and the System We Need to Meet It."
 - Use for advocacy efforts
- Center for Improving Value in Health Care
 - Evaluation Services: "tailored to meet your specific needs, and we will work with you to determine what output will best serve you and your constituents or community."
 - Use to determine the ROI of telehealth services, specialty care
- The Colorado Health Foundation- Telehealth grant funding
- Connect To Health Colorado
 - 26 rural libraries equipped with telehealth access for their communities'

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



Real life examples from rural health clinics and hospitals around the state:

- Establish collaborative partnerships with large metropolitan health systems to meet occasional or specialized care needs. For example, leveraging pediatric behavioral health services through a Children's Hospital via telehealth and student rotations.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- While some specialty services are located off-site, our providers have reliable access through telehealth consultations and strong regional partnerships.
- We maintain strong referral networks with regional specialists and telehealth resources, ensuring patients can access necessary specialty care.

PROVIDER SPECIALIST AVAILABILITY & TELEHEALTH



This factor reflects the organization's ability to provide timely access to specialty care for patients, either through in-person specialists or via virtual/telehealth consultations. It considers both the range and availability of specialty services, the ease of scheduling, and the responsiveness of specialists, which directly support primary care providers in delivering comprehensive care.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when incoming workforce was asked what factors influence their perception of quality healthcare:

- 69% reported availability of provider including specialists

REFLECTION

HOUSEHOLD ONBOARDING



This factor reflects the organization's ability to support new hires and their families in transitioning to the community. It includes assistance with locating housing, navigating local schools and childcare, understanding community resources, and addressing other logistical and practical needs that contribute to a smooth relocation and successful integration for the provider and household members.

OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when asked about general barriers when considering careers in rural healthcare:

- "Recall limited opportunities being offered when pregnant or as a young mother."
- "Assistance with transport and childcare."
- "Make sure spouses also have work opportunities."
- "Lack of reliable childcare options available during healthcare provider working hours/after school options (very common issue for recruiting new providers)."
- "Students, especially parents can't get as much out of their programs/have reduced potential for success when trying to juggle family, school and work (esp. single parents)."

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Parent to Parent of Colorado
 - Connecting families of individuals with disabilities or special healthcare needs to emotional and informational support, many are offered online/virtually.
- Family Connects Colorado
 - A home-visit program for families with newborns offering support on childcare, community connection, and early literacy information.
- Colorado Shines
 - The State of Colorado offers a free search tool to help you find and research licensed childcare programs in your community.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Engage spouses, partners and other family members of established providers to connect with new provider families, offering advice, answering questions, and helping to integrate into the community.
- Encourage providers, spouses, and other family members to join community organizations such as school boards or Chamber of Commerce.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our organization provides comprehensive household onboarding to help new providers and household members transition smoothly. Support includes assistance with finding housing, connecting with local schools and childcare, navigating community resources, and other practical guidance to ensure a seamless relocation experience.
- We offer guidance to help providers and their families settle into the community, including basic resources for housing, schools, and local services. Our team is available to provide information and advice to facilitate a smooth transition.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- 3RNET Annual Recruiting for Retention Academy
- National Rural Health Association- Rural Hospital HR Certification Program

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Contact former applicants and previous employees to inform them of new management structure and explore whether they would be interested in joining or returning.
- Structured a full-day onboarding program that combines clinical shadowing, leadership engagement, community exploration, and a social welcome dinner with the CEO ensuring providers feel professionally and personally integrated into clinic and community.
- Robust residency programs that offer comprehensive training often see high rates of graduates staying on for employment.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- While we are a smaller clinic working to grow our team, we are dedicated to recruiting skilled providers and providing support throughout the hiring and onboarding process. New clinicians can help shape our practice and contribute to our mission of delivering high-quality patient care.

PROVIDER RECRUITMENT EFFICACY & STABILITY OF PROVIDER WORKFORCE



These factors reflect the organization's effectiveness in attracting, hiring, and retaining qualified providers. It considers the timeliness and success of recruitment efforts, strategies used to reach and engage candidates, and the organization's ability to fill open positions with clinicians whose skills, experience, and values align with patient care needs and organizational goals.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan when asked about general best practices around recruitment and retention:

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- 92% reported an unorganized recruitment process reflects negatively on the company as whole.
- 75% of respondents reported that the length of job interviews depends on the role and company where some positions require more in-depth conversations, while others can be efficiently assessed in shorter interviews.
- 56% reported they expect to hear back within 1 week of submitting an application.
- 56% reported there should be two stages of the interview process (initial screening and an interview).
- 83% reported a personalized email is their preferred method for initial contact following an application submission.

CURRENT WORKFORCE:

- 40% reported overly specific qualifications in job posting are restrictive and discourage applicants.
- 25% reported they are standard for them to include but they aren't evaluated or heavily considered.
- 54% reported their organization does not have an organized recruitment process.

REFLECTION

SPOUSAL SATISFACTION



This factor reflects the organization's ability to support the satisfaction and well-being of providers' spouses or partners during relocation. It considers access to social networks and friendships, community involvement, educational opportunities, and local employment, which can influence overall retention and provider integration into the community.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when asked about spouse/partner/family concerns with their rural employment:

- 39% limited employment opportunities.
- 27% reported lack of recreational or cultural opportunities.
- 25% reported healthcare access beyond general care.
- 25% reported distance from extended family or support network.
- 20% reported social isolation.
- 9% reported limited educational opportunities.
- 31% none of the above.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- National Rural Health Resource Center Healthcare Workforce Toolkit - Employee Satisfaction Survey

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Include questions regarding spousal satisfaction on employee engagement surveys, STAY surveys and exit interviews.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our team can provide guidance on local employment resources, schools, and social opportunities. Many families find the community welcoming and enjoy the range of activities and networks available nearby.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Regional Institute for Health & Environmental Leadership
 - Health-sector leadership training via workshops, trainings, academies, and programs
- El Pomar Foundation Leadership Development Programs
- Collective Leadership Initiative
 - Nuanced leadership training courses

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Clinical staff who take on supervisory responsibilities should be intentionally prepared and supported to lead effectively. For example, physicians who supervise medical assistants should receive training on their scope of practice, how to provide feedback and how to empower the MA.
- Administrative leaders, like CEOs, should have structured opportunities for ongoing professional development, strategic engagement and meaningful projects that go beyond routine administrative tasks. Providing opportunities that allow for innovation ensures that leaders remain energized, motivated and effective in leading their teams.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our organization prides itself on supportive, accessible leadership. Providers benefit from clear guidance, open communication, and mentorship opportunities, with leaders actively engaged in addressing operational needs, fostering collaboration, and supporting professional growth.
- Our leadership is approachable and actively involved in supporting providers. Clinicians have direct opportunities to collaborate with leaders on operational and clinical decisions, influence practice development, and help shape the organization's growth and vision.

RHC/HOSPITAL LEADERSHIP



This factor reflects the organization's leadership quality and its influence on provider satisfaction, retention, and professional growth. It considers the accessibility, responsiveness and supportiveness of leadership including their ability to provide clear direction, foster collaboration, encourage professional development, and address operational challenges effectively.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, participants were asked about strategies the healthcare industry could adopt to make healthcare careers more accessible. Below are considerations for how staff might look to leadership.

- "Train current administration on leadership qualities to pass along."
- "Rural hospitals lack individuals who have worked outside the area and who have had little to no training on leadership skills in order to keep staff"
- "More leadership growth opportunities to develop healthcare executives, administrative roles, and leadership"
- "Did not meet a Hispanic woman in medicine until I was in medical school. We need more visibility of minorities like me at the highest levels PhDs, MDs, in engineering, etc., not just in nursing, as MAs, etc."
- "Prioritizing diversity in leadership"

REFLECTION



NON-MODIFIABLE FACTORS



Each factor in this section is not modifiable, meaning they are not easily changed, so careful and accurate language is key when addressing them in recruitment and retention efforts.

Factor pages each provide:



Definition



Relevant state data collected from other CRHC workforce-based projects



Where available, local resources to support your recruitment efforts



Best practices from around rural Colorado are highlighted as examples of how other clinics and hospitals have successfully addressed that factor



Sample language for job postings or during interviews is included to illustrate how the factor can be framed whether it is an advantage or a challenge for your clinic or hospital. These examples are starting points only and you should ensure that any language you use accurately reflects your organization's reality before incorporating them into recruitment materials.

We encourage you to work through the factors in manageable segments focusing on one or two during an all staff meeting to foster open dialogue and shared ownership of recruitment strategies. Over time, your discussions and reflections can help identify trends, priorities and opportunities for continued improvement.

Use this tool as both a discussion guide and an action framework to connect daily practices with long-term workforce sustainability and recruitment success.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Department of Transportation-Colorado Community Engagement Toolkit
 - Community Asset Mapping

Additional tools for creating a local resource guide:

- Canva “Community” or “Profile” templates to customize clinic community amenities sheet
- Creately: “Community Asset Mapping” template
- Notion: “Communities” templates

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Offer flexible work weeks (4-day schedules) that make it easier for providers to travel into nearby towns for shopping, entertainment and/or services.
- Promote or advocate for strong broadband in and around provider neighborhoods so they can access online services and shopping.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- While our rural community is smaller, it offers reasonable access to regional amenities like higher education, entertainment, and specialized healthcare. Weekend trips to nearby cities provide opportunities for cultural events, shopping and professional development.
- Our rural community is within [X] miles of [city] giving providers access to specialty medical services, shopping and cultural events when desired. While life is centered in a small-town environment, the larger community remains easily accessible for leisure.

ACCESS TO LARGER COMMUNITY



This factor reflects the organization’s proximity and ease of access to larger metro communities. It considers availability of specialized services, cultural and recreational amenities, higher education, transportation hubs, shopping, airports, dining and other resources that complement life in a smaller community.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when provided a general job posting with the line “a rural area that offers a peaceful setting but limited amenities” the following was received commentary:

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- Roughly 34% of respondents expressed they would be hesitant based on the exact phrase “limited amenities” or “rural area”
- “If rural location has some access to a larger city (within an hour and a half) would likely be fine, but if it is difficult to get anywhere, would be a hard sell.”
- “More details on what “limited amenities” means -- do they mean the nearest grocery store is 30 minutes away, or do they mean that there is no running water?”

CURRENT WORKFORCE:

- 31% of respondents expressed they would be hesitant based on the exact phrase “limited amenities” or “rural area”
- “Limited amenities, yet immediate responsibility and occasional on-call shifts”

REFLECTION

PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY



This factor reflects how potential providers perceive the community in which they may work and live. It includes views on quality of life, social opportunities, local amenities, schools, safety, cultural and recreational resources, and overall livability.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, respondents were asked to consider factors around job location (geographic region and community type) most important to them:

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- Community type – I am committed to working in a specific setting (e.g., rural, frontier) that aligns with my values and career goals.
 - 30% incoming workforce
 - 25% current workforce
- Regional preference – I prefer a certain geographic area but am open to different community types.
 - 22% incoming workforce
 - 18% current workforce
- Flexibility – I am open to any location as long as the role aligns with my skills and interests.
 - 20% incoming workforce
 - 40% current workforce
- Professional opportunities – I prioritize locations with strong career growth, networking, or mentorship opportunities.
 - 17% incoming workforce
 - 6.8% current workforce
- Access and amenities – Proximity to housing, schools, healthcare, or other resources is a key factor in my decision.
 - 11% incoming workforce
 - 9% current workforce

When asked about perceived career development opportunities in urban areas 65% reported it was better in urban areas.

REFLECTION



- The Colorado Rural Health Center Snapshot of Rural Health - This resource visualizes systemic issues that may influence access to patient care
- Colorado Health Institute- Better by Design: Building Colorado Communities with Health in Mind
- Online tools showing community amenities, demographics, economies, etc.
 - livability.com
 - niche.com
 - areavibes.com

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Define your organization's niche:
 - Our data reflects that candidates are most drawn to locations aligned with their skills, career goals and values. Leveraging community needs assessments and the CRHC Snapshot of Rural Health data can help illustrate your unique demographic mix and what daily practice may look like for a provider in your setting.
- Encourage organizational participation in local community events such as fundraisers, festivals, and wellness events.
 - Include and update an events page or calendar on the hospital or clinic website.
- Look at other rural hospital event pages for ideas or potential collaborations.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our community offers a high quality of life with excellent public and private schools, local library, and other enrichment programs for children. Families enjoy access to community sports leagues, trails, summer festivals and cultural events. Safe neighborhoods, low traffic and a welcoming atmosphere make it easy for new residents to feel at home.
- Our rural community provides easy access to outdoor recreation like fishing, kayaking, hiking and horseback riding. Families can enjoy community events like farmers markets, volunteer opportunities, schools clubs, and local scouts. Residents appreciate the sense of safety, friendliness and ability to make a visible impact in the community.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Annum Housing
 - Works with employers to find cost effective housing solutions or directly with employees as an employer benefit
- DOLA Housing Strategies Peer Exchange

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Leverage cross-industry partnerships to expand housing options. For example, partnering with local organizations that maintain temporary housing, such as religious entities and utilize those accommodations when not in use.
- Maintain a centralized, regularly updated internal database of available housing options including rental units, temporary accommodation, and shared living arrangements to provide accurate, real-time information to candidates during site visits, interviews or relocation discussions.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our community offers a variety of housing options, from single-family homes to townhouses and apartments, at competitive prices. Providers can find affordable, high-quality homes near work, schools and community amenities. Temporary housing is also available to support new hires during the relocation process.
- While housing options are somewhat limited, our recruitment team provides guidance and resources to help new providers find suitable accommodation. Many providers chose to live within a reasonable commute, enjoying the opportunity to reside in a community with unique local charm.

HOUSING



This factor reflects the availability, affordability and suitability of housing for providers relocating to the community. It considers the range of housing options, costs relative to local income levels, proximity to work, and the ability to meet the needs of different household types, which can influence recruitment success and long-term retention.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan:

- 17.2% reported housing as a challenge of working in rural healthcare.
 - “(Housing)- focus is not typically on helping providers (MD, NP,PA) but instead on low income-based community residents or (from clinic) support staff. There is resistance from admin staff and community towards supporting providers with housing.”

In a 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, respondents reported a housing stipend as a desired benefit (by region):

- 23% Eastern Plains
- 33% Resort West
- 23% Mountain West
- 43% Northwest
- 14% Southwest

REFLECTION

K-12 SCHOOLS



This factor reflects the quality, accessibility and variety of K-12 school options available to providers' children. It considers public and private options, extracurricular programs, academic performance, and proximity to housing and work.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan when asked to rank factors based in retention by importance:

- K-12 school system and childcare choices ranked in the top 5.
- 40.9% reported K-12 school systems (and childcare) were in the top three factors that are important in the retention of staff and providers.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Sponsor or host wellness-based programming
 - Colorado School of Public Health-RMPRC School Wellness Programs
- Start "Mileage Club"
 - North Colorado Health Alliance "Mileage Club"
- The Colorado Health Foundation: Out-of-School-Time Physical Activity
 - Funding to enhance or pilot a before or after school program.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Identify staff with school-age children or those serving on local school boards who can share insights about the school district, events and academic performance. Engage them to meet with prospective families or collaborate with them to create information materials that can be shared during recruitment and relocation discussions.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- The area provides solid public and private school options for families, with a range of academic and extracurricular activities. While some families may consider commuting to access specific programs, most schools are within a reasonable distance of residential neighborhoods and offer supportive learning environments.
- K-12 options are more limited in our rural community, with fewer specialized programs. Some families choose to commute to nearby towns for additional academic or extracurricular opportunities. Despite this, local schools are known for small class sizes, strong community involvement, and a safe, supportive environment for students.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Develop a “Rural Living Resource Guide” that first outlines considerations for living in a rural community including aspects of life, lifestyle, transportation and local services. The guide should also provide a curated list of physical resources such as grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, recreational facilities, and other essentials to help a provider and their family settle in smoothly.
 - Colorado State University Extension-Routt County
 - Colorado State University Extension-Boulder County

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- In relocation situations, provide families with immediate necessities such as toiletries so they can arrive in town and settle in without the immediate need to locate these resources.
- Host or provide resources for identifying Amazon Hub Lockers Map to increase access to online shopping and timely deliveries.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our community maintains a small-town feel with essential stores nearby and larger shopping options 30-45 minutes away in our neighboring towns.
- Here in [town] enjoy convenient access to daily essentials and a mix of locally owned and larger retail centers.

SHOPPING & OTHER SERVICES



This factor reflects the ease with which providers and their families can access everyday goods, groceries, and retail services. This factor can influence convenience, quality of life, and a sense of connection to surrounding communities.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when asked about community preference:

- 9% of the current workforce reported access and amenities as a key factor in their employment decision.
- 11% of the incoming workforce reported access and amenities as a key factor in their employment decision.

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, 2.8% of respondents reported access to amenities as a challenge in working in rural healthcare

REFLECTION

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL SPACES



These factors reflect the availability of spaces and opportunities for recreation, cultural engagement, and religious or spiritual connection. These amenities contribute to a sense of belonging, community engagement and overall well-being.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan when asked about aspects of recreational opportunities as they relate to recruitment and retention:

CURRENT WORKFORCE:

- 27% of respondents were concerned about access to recreational and cultural opportunities for their spouses and family
- 29.9% reported work-life balance as the most meaningful phrase in a job post
- 43% reported the ability to balance work and personal commitments as one of the most important aspects of applying, accepting and retaining a job offer
 - 27% reported an emphasis on work-life balance and well-being

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- 42.8% reported work-life balance as the most meaningful phrase in a job post
- 48% reported an emphasis on work-life balance and well-being as a factor in their decision to apply for or accept a job
 - 31% reported the ability to balance work and personal commitments

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan:

- 60% reported recreational opportunities as a top factor in deciding where to practice

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Parks and Wildlife Map Library
 - Find every map on the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website using the Map Library. Search by county to discover state parks and state wildlife areas, trails, wildlife habitats, and other resources.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Partner with local businesses and community organizations to provide staff with access to discounted services or recreational opportunities such as ski passes, gym memberships, or cultural events.
 - Ensure these benefits are offered equitably to all eligible employees and comply with applicable tax and labor regulations.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- The community offers recreational opportunities like parks, trails, fishing and other outdoor sports. Local theaters, museums and parades provide spaces for community connection. Families can also choose from multiple places of worship that support a range of beliefs and traditions.
- Our community offers a selection of cultural and faith-based spaces locally with additional spaces in nearby towns. The surrounding natural environment offers endless opportunities for outdoor activities and family time.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- The Colorado Rural Health Center Snapshot of Rural Health.
- Colorado Health Institute- Colorado Health Access Survey
 - Use this data on health insurance coverage, access, utilization and social determinants of health to help inform what the providers' payor mix might look like.
- Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing- Rural Sustainability Heatmap
 - This heatmap shows provider-to-member ratios which gives insight into "care deserts."

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- During tax season, offer a 50% discount on outstanding invoices so tax returns could be utilized. Clinics lose 35% if they alternatively turn the debt over to collection agencies.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Providers report being able to practice meaningful medicine with sufficient coverage across private, public and self-pay patients.
- This community serves a high proportion of publicly insured or underinsured patients, offering meaningful opportunities to address healthcare access and equity.

DEMOGRAPHICS/ PAYOR MIX



This factor reflects the community's population characteristics and the distribution of payor sources among patients. This factor influences the providers' ability to deliver care they deem appropriate, maintain practice sustainability and align clinical practice with their values and skill set.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan the following reports were collected regarding demographic and payor mix:

CURRENT WORKFORCE:

- Healthcare costs and insurance barriers were ranked in the top 3 of 7 healthcare challenges they were interested in addressing.
- Patient-centered care ranked 2 in the most meaningful phrases in a job post.
- Opportunity to make a difference in their community was ranked in the top 4 of most meaningful phrases in a job post.

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- Healthcare costs ranked 2 in the top of healthcare challenges they were interested in addressing.
- Patient centered care ranked 2 in the most meaningful phrases in a job post.
 - Work with underserved populations and opportunity to make a difference in the community ranked in the top 5.

REFLECTION

PHYSICAL PLANT, EQUIPMENT & EMR/INTERNET



These factors reflect the condition, functionality, and modernization of the clinical environment including facilities, equipment, internet and electronic medical record (EMR) systems. These elements influence providers' efficiency, satisfaction, and ability to deliver high-quality care.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, incoming workforce reported:

- 36.3% reported the opportunity to practice at the top of their license ability as a top factor when selecting a practice

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan:

- EMR ranked 2nd in factors that impact provider burnout

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- The Colorado Rural Health Center Rural Connectivity Program
 - Increase access to health information technology (HIT) resources and analytics for Colorado's Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs).
- The Advisory Group of McCormick Chase & May
 - "We save and strengthen rural healthcare systems by providing management and advisory services. Specifically, we manage projects, departments and full organizations."

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Display and offer local artwork for sale within the clinic to enhance physical environment among patients and staff. This approach can provide supplemental revenue, strengthen community ties, and create a more welcoming environment.
- When planning for a clinic expansion or capital improvements, consider leveraging a mill levy or other local funding mechanisms to support facility growth.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our clinic is designed to support workflow, patient privacy and collaboration between all staff members.
- Our clinic is functional with plans underway for renovation and equipment upgrades.



HOSPITAL SPECIFIC FACTORS



Each factor in this section is most relevant to hospitals due to their organizational structure, but clinics can also consider how to leverage hospital partnerships and resources in their recruitment efforts.

Factor pages each provide:



Definition



Relevant state data collected from other CRHC workforce-based projects



Where available, local resources to support your recruitment efforts



Best practices from around rural Colorado are highlighted as examples of how other clinics and hospitals have successfully addressed that factor



Sample language for job postings or during interviews is included to illustrate how the factor can be framed whether it is an advantage or a challenge for your clinic or hospital. These examples are starting points only and you should ensure that any language you use accurately reflects your organization's reality before incorporating them into recruitment materials.

We encourage you to work through the factors in manageable segments focusing on one or two during an all staff meeting to foster open dialogue and shared ownership of recruitment strategies. Over time, your discussions and reflections can help identify trends, priorities and opportunities for continued improvement.

Use this tool as both a discussion guide and an action framework to connect daily practices with long-term workforce sustainability and recruitment success.

START-UP/ MARKETING COSTS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT



These factors reflect the level of organizational and financial assistance provided to help new providers establish a sustainable practice. This may include onboarding support, administrative resources, or initial patient panel development.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan when asked about priority onboarding processes:

- Community support the facilities' sustainability was the top ranked importance factor when looking at retention.

In a 2023 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan when asked about priority onboarding processes:

- 45.5% reported a welcoming environment.
- 15.2% reported a feeling of belonging.
- 6.1% reported that community is the most important consideration in retention of rural workforce.

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Leverage internships and partnerships with local universities and colleges by engaging students in public health, healthcare administration, human resources and graphic design to support recruitment and community engagement efforts. Interns can assist in creating recruitment materials, designing social media templates, developing community resource guides, website design, and other communications that enhance provider onboarding and integration.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- When introducing a new provider, the CEO or Clinic Director post on the clinic's official social media channels to ensure maximum reach and credibility. Posts are professional but personable and include a photo, highlights their role and expertise.
 - Encourage staff and partners, including local community business organizations, to share the post across social media platforms.
 - Add staff photos and biographies to website.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Early scheduling support and strong patient demand allow new providers to build their patient panel quickly.
- This role offers a chance to practice at your own pace, with flexibility and growing community needs.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Connect to Health Colorado - Library Telehealth Program
 - Supplement access to mental health support services via telehealth.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Engagement with community via food pantry, creation of SUD safe spaces and creation of support groups.
- Initiate a 'Grow Your Own' workforce pipeline program to allow professional development opportunities and upskilling for allied health staff.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- The hospital is expanding its allied and mental health workforce, offering opportunities for providers to help share integrated care models.
- Our providers work alongside embedded mental health clinicians, social workers and care coordinators who help manage complex patient needs.

ALLIED HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH WORKFORCE



This factor reflects the availability, stability and integration of allied and allied mental health professionals such as therapists, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, etc. who support comprehensive, team-based care. This factor affects provide workload, referral efficiency, and the ability to address patients' behavioral, social and physical health needs.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan:

- "More outreach to public schools and other venues with children to expose them to the different opportunities available in Healthcare other than just nurse and doctor."
- "Programs within Rural High Schools that attribute to both high school and college credit. Many schools offer programs that afford their high schoolers the opportunity to graduate with their diploma and an associate's degree."
- "Encourage kids to be interested in their hometown healthcare."

In a 2024 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when asked about challenges of working in rural healthcare that impacts retention:

- 34% reported staff shortages.
- A lack of support staff was identified as the top factor that impacts burnout.

REFLECTION

NURSING WORKFORCE



This factor reflects the skill level, experience and availability of nursing staff who support providers in delivering patient care. This factor influences workflow efficiency, provider satisfaction, patient outcomes and overall team collegiality.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan of the current rural healthcare workforce, themes identified by respondents with a LPN, RN, BSN, MSN, DNP, PhD in Nursing, or a CNA credential, indicated:

Barriers to education/training:

- Cost
- Work-life balance
- Lack of support/mentorship
- Lack of training sites

Stereotypes encountered during healthcare careers:

- Assumptions based on my age or stage in life.
- Assumptions about my ability based on my gender.
- Assumptions related to my level of degree

Professional development priorities:

- Developing work-life balance strategies
- Expanding technical expertise
- Improving communication or interpersonal skills
- Advancing education and/or certifications

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- National Health Service Corps- Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program
- National Health Service Corps- Nurse Corps Scholarship
- Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence
 - Training
 - Advocacy
 - Funding
 - Data

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Partner with local high schools, community colleges and nursing homes to create educational pathways like CNA to LPN to RN).
- Offer in-house tuition reimbursement, or work-study options tied to service commitments.
- Integrate mentorship opportunities by pairing students with more experienced nurses to support skill development.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our nursing staff work at the top of their license, anticipate needs, and contribute meaningfully to care coordination and patient education.
- The organization invests in mentorship, continuing education and cross-training to strengthen nursing capacity over time.
- Our hospital is actively recruiting and developing its nursing workforce, with opportunities to help develop training and collegiality.

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Rural and Frontier Health Care Preceptor Tax Credit
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment- Volunteer in Colorado Program
- Colorado Safety Net Collaborative

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Both clinical and non-clinical volunteer experiences can embellish loan repayment applications. Encourage providers who are interested in applying to volunteer in either capacity.
 - School-based health outreach
 - Mobile health clinic
 - Health fairs
- Add community volunteer opportunities to hospital/clinic events calendar.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- Our staff enjoy meaningful community engagement that welcomes family participation, from local projects to larger initiatives.
- We are exploring ways to expand volunteer and community engagement opportunities and welcome staff input on initiatives they are passionate about.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



This factor reflects the organization's and community's ability to offer meaningful volunteer and community engagement opportunities for employees and their families. Access to these programs can enhance job satisfaction, foster a sense of purpose, support work-life integration, and contribute to community ties.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan:

- 14.2% of the incoming workforce reported community engagement and outreach influenced their perception of healthcare quality in rural areas.
- Opportunity to make a difference in the community ranked 3rd for the current workforce in terms of most meaningful phrases in a job post.
 - Ranked 4th by the incoming workforce.
- "More services have been provided at the community level, including health fairs, vaccine clinics, etc. for underserved people."
- "Just mentoring us after high school because it can be challenging in choosing and knowing the healthcare careers."
- "More representation from individuals from rural communities highlighting the fact that you CAN be from a rural place and can still achieve things like becoming a physician. Emphasize that it is possible and not just for city kids."

REFLECTION

HOSPITAL SPONSORED CME



This factor reflects an organization's ability to provide financial support, time off and access to educational resources for employees' ongoing professional development. Strong continued medical education (CME) support can enhance provider satisfaction, professional growth, and recruitment appeal.



OUR FINDINGS: WHY THIS MATTERS

In a 2025 Colorado Rural Health Center environmental scan, when respondents were asked to identify their top three professional development focuses:

CURRENT WORKFORCE:

- 59% Developing work-life balance strategies
- 50% building leadership skills
- 40% Improving communication or interpersonal skills
- 34% advancing education and/or certification
- 29.5% expanding technical expertise
- 18% Enhancing project Management or organizational skills
- 18% gaining industry-specific knowledge
- 13% growing professional network

INCOMING WORKFORCE:

- 48.5% expanding technical expertise
- 48% advancing education and/or certifications
- 45% gaining industry-specific knowledge
- 42% developing work-life balance
- 40% building leadership skills
- 28.5% growing professional network
- 28.5% improving communication or interpersonal skills
- 8% enhancing project management or organizational skills

REFLECTION

OPPORTUNITIES IN COLORADO



- Colorado Alliance for Continuing Medical Education
- Colorado Medical Society
- Colorado Academy of Family Physicians (CAFP)
- The Colorado Rural Healthcare Conference
- COPIC

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- Utilize the hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment to inform CME content, ensuring education is relevant and impactful to the population served.
- Leverage existing partnerships with pharmaceutical/medical device companies to utilize 'Lunch n Learns' or CME grant programs.

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE



- We are committed to your ongoing professional development and provide [\$\$\$] annually in CME funding, plus paid time off to attend conferences and other educational opportunities to help you stay at the forefront of your field.
- Providers have the freedom to pursue continuing education that suits their practices needs, with flexible scheduling to accommodate learning and professional development.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Although these factors play a meaningful role in recruitment and retention, the absence of directly collected data led us to address them at a high level rather than through separate, dedicated sections.

Climate

- The weather in your region of the state compared to others.

Employment Status

- This factor reflects the organization's flexibility to employ providers under different arrangements, offering options for structured agreements, defined responsibility or more flexible work arrangements or at-will arrangements.

PA and NP Supervision

- This factor reflects the organization's expectation for physicians supervising physician assistants and nurse practitioners as optional or mandatory.

Transfer Arrangements

- This factor reflects the organization's ability to coordinate and support patient transfers to higher levels of care, specialty clinics or skilled nursing facilities. It encompasses referral network, communication, continuity of care and follow-up protocols.

EMS

- This factor reflects the organization's ability to coordinate and support emergency medical services (EMS) for patient care.

Dental Integrated Care

- This factor reflects the organization's ability to integrate dental services to support comprehensive patient health.

Pharmacy Integrated Care

- This factor reflects the organization's ability to integrate pharmacy services to support comprehensive patient health.

LOCAL STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE



- **Climate:**
 - Ensure incoming providers are equipped to safely and comfortably navigate local weather conditions by arranging for the purchase or provision of necessary gear prior to their arrival.
 - Create a 4WD carpool map where staff can contact coworkers willing and able to carpool their vehicle during weather events.
- **Transfer Arrangements:**
 - Maintain active communication between hospitals, specialty providers, skilled nursing etc. to ensure patients who require out-of-town care remain connected to local care team and can return to local services as soon as appropriate.
- **EMS:**
 - Colorado Rural Health Center CREATE partnership program.
 - AirLife
 - 24/7 helicopter operated by HCA HealthONE but will deliver care to hospitals on Eastern Plains.

WHO WE ARE

The Colorado Rural Health Center (CRHC) is Colorado's nonprofit State Office of Rural Health. CRHC works with federal, state, and local partners to offer services and resources to rural healthcare providers, facilities, and communities. We have a diverse and inclusive statewide constituency serving organizations in every corner of the state.

Established in 1991 by members of the Colorado Rural Health Consortium, CRHC was created with start-up support from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy and several other public and private organizations around the state. CRHC was developed as a nonprofit organization and is one of only three nonprofit offices of rural health in the country.

VISION

Our vision is to improve healthcare services available in rural communities to ensure that all rural Coloradans have access to comprehensive, affordable, high-quality healthcare.

MISSION

Our mission is to enhance healthcare services in the state by providing information, education, linkages, tools, and energy toward addressing rural health issues

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