

Health Sciences Pathway Landscape Assessment

Strengthening a health sciences workforce that builds health and wealth for all

Nursing

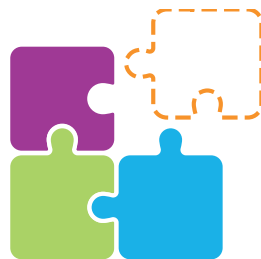
A health sciences workforce that reflects the communities it serves is essential to creating better health outcomes and drives inclusive economic opportunities. The greater Kansas City region is quite diverse with large populations of people of color and includes several rural communities. Health Forward commissioned a regional landscape assessment to study the health sciences workforce and its educational and career pathways.

In 2024, NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a mixed-methods assessment of the Greater Kansas City region's community health ecosystem. The goal was to deepen understanding of how to better support individuals who are under-represented in health professions, **including those living in rural areas**. The data shared in this infographic are critical findings from this larger assessment. You can access the [full report here](#), including its methodologies and catchment areas.

The Kansas City region has increasing demand but a projected undersupply of nurses along the nursing career ladder.

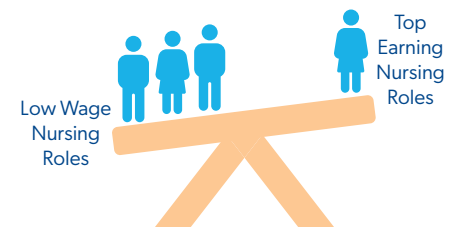
Shortages

Considerable nursing shortages are projected to continue across nursing roles over the next 10 years.



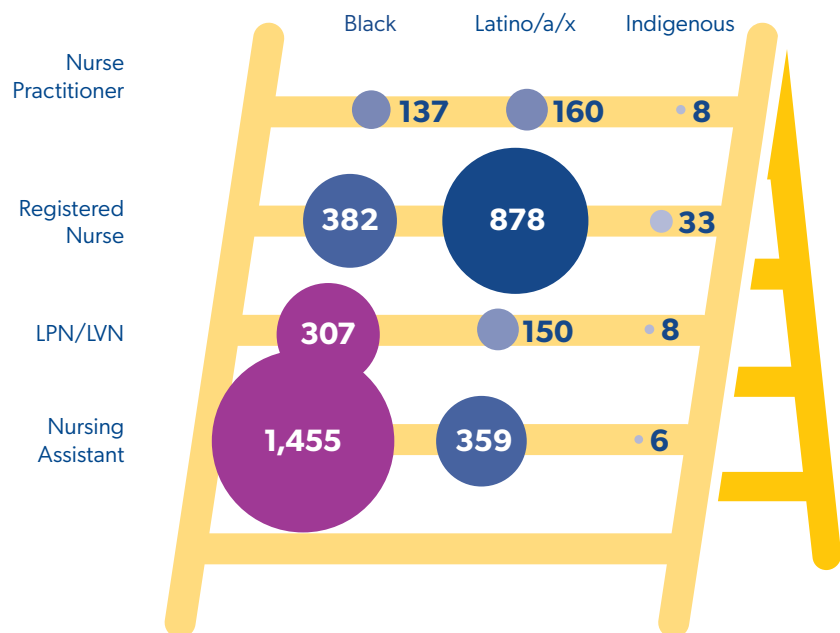
Representation

Black nursing team members are over-represented in lower wage roles, such as Nursing Assistants and LPN/LVNs.



Needs by 2034

The blue dots reflect the number of providers needed for each role to close the gap in representation of race/ethnicity across the Kansas City region. As noted by the purple dots, Black LPNs, LVNs and nursing assistants are over-represented in these roles.



- Over-represented
- Under-represented

Qualitative Findings from Community Listening Sessions

In November 2024, Health Forward's community partners facilitated a listening session with 14 nurses of color from the Kansas City region.

Resilience and Leadership in Challenging Work Environments

Nurses of color bring exceptional professionalism, emotional intelligence, and leadership to their roles, often navigating complex workplace dynamics with grace

and strength. Their ability to remain committed and passionate, even when misunderstood or isolated, reflects a deep dedication to their patients and profession.

Untapped Talent and Pathway Potential

Many nurses of color are highly motivated and capable, yet face financial and informational barriers that limit access to nursing education and career advancement. There is a powerful opportunity to invest in early exposure, scholarships, and flexible pathways—especially for single parents and first-generation students—unlocking a broader, more diverse talent pool.

Mentorship as a Catalyst for Success

Mentorship is a proven asset in supporting nurses of color, especially those without family experience in college. Representation in faculty and leadership is essential to foster belonging and retention. Expanding mentorship programs and diversifying nursing education environments will strengthen the entire workforce. Younger generations are redefining mentorship and asking for their time, experience, and knowledge-sharing to be valued and compensated. Models with compensation reflects a broader commitment to equity, sustainability, and intentional engagement—offering an opportunity to co-create mentorship models that honor contributions across generations. Affinity-based nursing associations have expanded representation and are supporting mentors with burnout.

Cultural Competence and Inclusive Practice

Nurses of color are uniquely positioned to lead efforts in culturally responsive care and inclusive practice. Their lived experiences offer valuable insights into patient needs and workforce dynamics. Supporting education and strategic initiatives focused on equity and inclusion—especially in politically complex environments—can enhance care quality and workplace culture.

Empowerment Through Pay Equity and Negotiation

Nurses of color are advocating for fair compensation and transparency. Equipping them with tools and data to negotiate salaries confidently is a key step toward equity and retention. Their awareness and advocacy signal readiness for systemic change.

Commitment to Kansas City's Growth

Despite challenging environments in Missouri and Kansas, nurses of color express a strong sense of purpose and pride in serving Kansas City. Local institutions with multi-layer approaches to workforce diversity and equity are seen as strong models of inclusive practice. There is momentum to build on this commitment and position Kansas City as a leader in equitable health workforce development.

NORC's Recommendations

Strengthen the nursing workforce by reducing barriers to entry and advancement, helping address both staffing shortages and uneven representation.

Suggestions include:

- Establishing defined pathways and dedicated programs for individuals to move from one nursing role to the next
- Ensure relevant clinical experiences are available at each level of nursing education
- Scholarships, tuition reimbursement, or other financial support
- Robust mentorship and pathway programs where experienced nurses guide and support aspiring nurses navigating career progression
- Recruiting and supporting individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Partnering with hospitals and clinics to create dedicated pathways for advancement
- Health care organizations to offer internal opportunities for nursing staff advancement through training and support

These recommendations are based on the comments and perspectives of participants in the landscape assessment and the reflections and observations of members of the NORC assessment team.