

Health Sciences Pathway Landscape Assessment

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

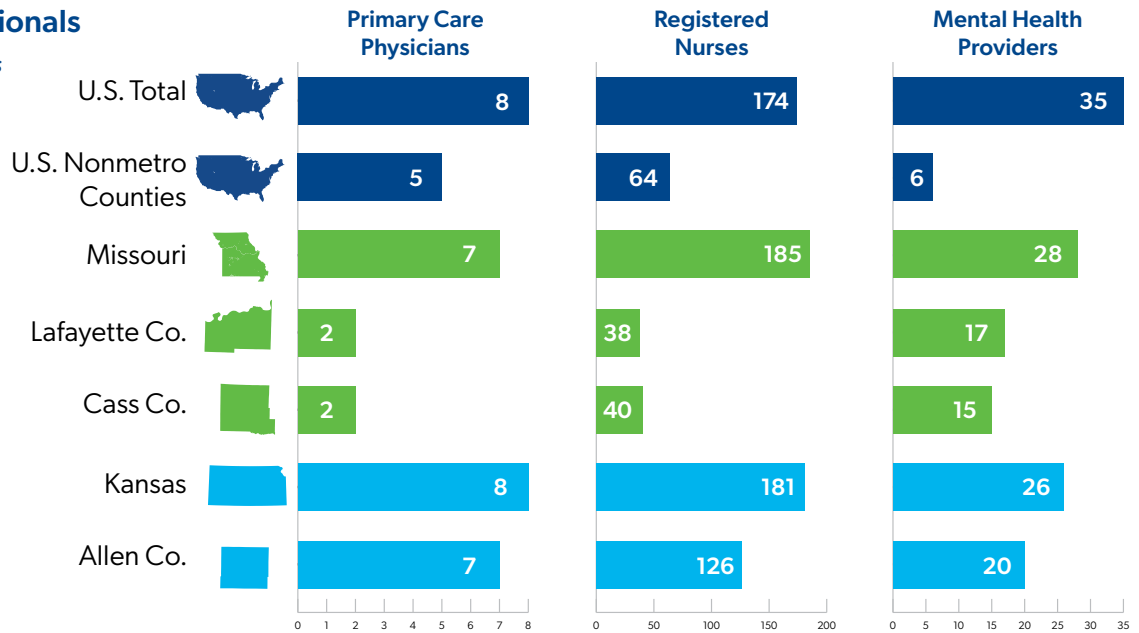
Rural

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.

Health Professionals

Number of providers per 10,000 people



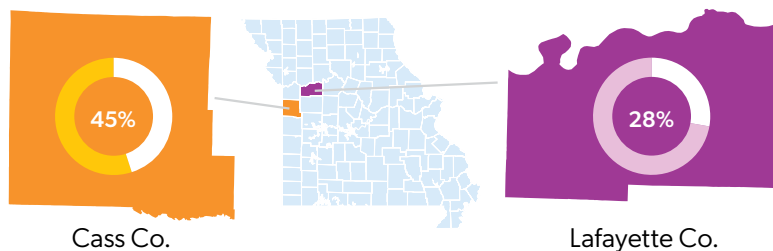
Sources: Kansas Nursing Workforce Center. The State of Nursing in Kansas. 2024, Kansas City, Kansas. Missouri State Board of Nursing. 2022 Missouri Nursing Workforce Report. 2022. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2025](#). National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). [National Nursing Database](#). Rural Health Information Hub. [Rural Healthcare Workforce](#).

Our rural service areas are generally understaffed across many health care roles.

Health Professionals

Two rural-serving counties have a significant percentage of the health care workforce who are residents of the county but work outside the county.

Health care workers leaving their county of residence for work



Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings from the NORC assessment indicate that our rural communities face multiple challenges in their health sciences workforce and pathways such as:

- **Bias and stereotypes**
- **Limited access** to education, professional development, and mentorship
- **Community development needs** (e.g., economic and social opportunities, transportation, broadband access, educational programs and resources)

NORC's Recommendations

Rural communities in our region demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in advancing health education and employment. By building on their strong sense of local identity and commitment to community well-being, we can further expand opportunities for health professionals. Recommendations from the assessment include:

Dedicated funding for transportation for professionals and patients — provides rural residents access to educational and career pathways and health services, strengthening connections across counties. Support collaborations with local and state officials to ensure dedicated funding is available for rural communities to address common transportation barriers.

Hands-on clinical experiences provide valuable learning and mentorship opportunities for future practitioners. Examples include conducting home visits for direct connection with patients experiencing higher needs and lower access to social services. Participate in mobile clinics to provide services or technology in geographically isolated areas or lack access to specialized care or equipment.

Expanding online education, training, mentorship and career exposure to unlock new possibilities for rural learners, supporting their growth and professional development.

Cross-sector collaboration and holistic development such as through land use, housing, education, and economic development in rural areas provide resources to local schools and communities and facilitate social and economic opportunities for students, rural health professionals, and their families.

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.

By prioritizing the needs of the health care ecosystem and critical roles across medical, behavioral, and specialty care, we aim to build a stronger and more effective health ecosystem for all.

To effectively advance the health of our communities, we must address critical workforce shortages while ensuring care is delivered by practitioners who understand and reflect the diverse experiences of their patients and clients. In addition to addressing health inequities, increasing racial, ethnic, and geographic workforce diversity creates economic opportunities for people of color and rural people within our region. Investing in their education and career development not only advances individual and community well-being but also strengthens the region's health systems.