



**NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES**  
CREATING SUCCESS

# Rural Healthcare Partnerships Toolkit

*How North Carolina's Rural-Serving Community Colleges Leverage Partnerships to Meet Healthcare Workforce Needs*

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2 million by 2030

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**  
College of Education  
Belk Center for Community College  
Leadership and Research

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## ABOUT US

The Rural Postsecondary Practices Partnership (RP3) brings together a small group of close partners, including the [North Carolina Community College System](#), [Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research](#), [EducationNC](#), and [myFutureNC](#).

The commitment of these partners is to understand, curate, and share practices and policies that strengthen rural-serving community colleges. Through a synthesis of conversations with college leaders, targeted research, and publicly available information, the RP3 team curates promising practices across the nearly 50 rural-serving institutions in North Carolina – the largest rural college network in the United States.

This collaborative research is ongoing, and we encourage you to reach out with additional examples, questions, updates, or feedback. Reach us at [RP3@nccommunitycolleges.edu](mailto:RP3@nccommunitycolleges.edu).

## OUR PARTNERS



[The North Carolina Community College System's](#) mission is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to postsecondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals.

### NC STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education  
Belk Center for Community College  
Leadership and Research

[The Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research](#), housed in the College of Education at North Carolina State University, serves North Carolina's community colleges by convening leaders, creating tools, and catalyzing social and economic mobility for learners – building stronger, more resilient communities.



[EducationNC \(EdNC\)](#) is a nonprofit news organization that provides essential news, important stories, and diverse perspectives about education in North Carolina, including coverage of the state's 58 community colleges and postsecondary issues and institutions. You can read EdNC's statement on its journalistic independence [here](#).



[myFutureNC](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that aligns and coordinates local, regional, and state actions to dramatically increase the attainment of industry-valued credentials and postsecondary degrees in pursuit of our state's goal of having 2 million North Carolinians ages 25-44 hold an industry-valued credential or postsecondary degree by 2030.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Rural North Carolina faces a healthcare workforce talent shortage, and community colleges play an essential role in addressing the need for highly qualified healthcare professionals. Unfortunately, community colleges across the state face several well-documented challenges in their efforts to launch and grow programs and courses to meet healthcare labor market needs and develop a pipeline of talent for the healthcare workforce.<sup>1</sup> While many of these are felt acutely by our rural-serving institutions, no two rural contexts or communities are exactly alike, and the challenges faced by individual colleges vary widely. A common thread that unites all of North Carolina’s 58 community colleges, both rural and urban alike, is a commitment to partnerships – partnerships that transform challenges into opportunities and promote the continued success of our colleges and the students and communities they serve.

Through a series of conversations with college leaders and a scan of publicly available information, RP3 has identified dozens of partnerships involving our state’s rural-serving institutions and mapped these back to a series of collaborative strategies being leveraged by colleges in response to healthcare workforce opportunities. These strategies include innovative, cross-sector partnerships involving employers, two- and four-year colleges and universities, K-12 schools and districts, and other community-based organizations. While not unique to rural contexts, partnerships like these are especially critical for our state’s rural-serving institutions, as collaboration maximizes the range of resources to which these colleges and their communities have access.

A framework for partnership strategies is summarized in Table 1 on the following page and explored in more detail throughout the toolkit. Whenever possible, we have provided links to additional information and/or related coverage about each of the partnerships featured in this toolkit. More than 35 of our rural-serving community colleges are represented in the pages that follow. At the end of the toolkit, we explore the successes realized by three specific rural-serving institutions that have centered partnership-based strategies in their work to meet local and regional healthcare workforce needs and highlight three emerging partnerships that show promise in their collaborative approach to recruiting, training, and matching local talent with the needs of the broader regional healthcare ecosystem.






## ■ Figure 1: Stages of Partnership



All are **evolving**, and some may have **ended or will be ending**. We believe there is something to be learned from all of them, which is why they are included here.

## ■ Figure 2: Healthcare Partnership Participants

North Carolina’s community colleges engage a **wide variety of cross-sector partners** including:

-  K-12 schools and districts
-  Other two- and four-year colleges and universities
-  Employers including regional healthcare systems and local healthcare facilities
-  Government agencies and workforce development boards
-  Non-profit organizations and philanthropic groups

## Table 1: Healthcare Workforce Opportunities and Related Partnership Strategies Explored in This Toolkit

### Opportunity: Reducing the high costs and logistical complexities of launching and expanding in-demand healthcare programs

#### Partnership Strategies:

- Healthcare providers (e.g., a local hospital or a regional healthcare system) partner with colleges to support the growth of in-demand programs by covering or subsidizing faculty salaries for a set period of time, often several years.
- Healthcare providers and colleges collaboratively fund – and/or pursue outside funding for – state-of-the-art simulation equipment, which is housed in shared spaces that can be used by staff and students.
- Colleges develop community-based clinical sites in response to local needs, often with support from the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NC AHEC) Program.
- Colleges partner with other colleges to jointly offer high-cost healthcare courses and programs to students. Under these agreements, students may take general education credits at their home college before completing their specialized coursework at a partnering college. This is often operationalized through Instructional Service Agreements (ISAs) between the colleges.

### Opportunity: Engaging the next generation of healthcare workers via early pathways and programs

#### Partnership Strategies:

- Colleges collaborate with K-12 schools and districts, healthcare providers, and other community-based organizations to offer special events, summer camps, and programs for youth focused on promoting awareness of careers in healthcare and bridging students into related dual enrollment opportunities.
- Colleges collaborate with K-12 schools and districts, healthcare providers, and other community-based organizations to coordinate and/or support work-based learning opportunities – including job shadowing, internships, and youth/pre-apprenticeships – for high school students.
- Colleges and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) establish Cooperative Innovative High Schools focused on preparing high school students for careers in the health sciences.

### Opportunity: Supporting students' success in healthcare programs and courses by eliminating barriers to entry and completion

#### Partnership Strategies:

- Colleges collaborate with healthcare providers to coordinate registered apprenticeship programs and other “learn and earn” opportunities for students.
- Healthcare providers partner with colleges to offer tuition- and fee-waived training programs, typically in return for post-completion employment commitments from students.
- Healthcare providers offer no-strings-attached scholarships and other emergency financial support to students enrolled in healthcare programs.
- Colleges develop expedited and/or flexibly designed healthcare training programs that create faster, more affordable pathways to employment for students.

### Opportunity: Creating seamless pathways for students to continue their health sciences education

#### Partnership Strategy:

- Colleges collaborate with university partners to bridge students into baccalaureate and graduate degree programs in the health sciences field.



# North Carolina's Healthcare Workforce: Critical Roles in Short Supply

North Carolina's healthcare workforce plays a critical role in improving the health outcomes of the nearly 11 million people who call our state home. As the backbone of our health system, healthcare workers offer preventive care, manage chronic and acute illnesses, assist in emergencies, and contribute to the physical and mental health and well-being of our communities.

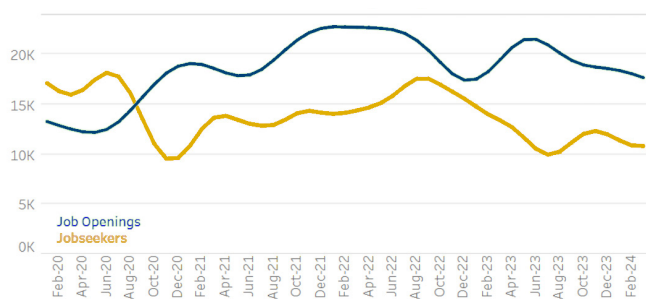
A growing healthcare worker shortage – driven by an increasing demand for healthcare services as North Carolina's population grows and ages, coupled with a limited supply of healthcare professionals due to factors including high rates of turnover and workforce pipeline issues – necessitates that we pursue innovative solutions to meeting the evolving needs of the healthcare industry.

While felt most acutely in nursing – North Carolina is projected to need 17,500 more nurses over the next 10 years – the healthcare worker shortage extends to many roles, including allied health professionals like medical assistants, respiratory therapists, and laboratory technicians.<sup>2</sup> Our state's rural communities are disproportionately impacted by the shortage, as hospitals and clinics in rural regions often struggle to attract and retain healthcare professionals, further limiting rural residents' access to vital healthcare providers and services in their communities.<sup>3</sup>



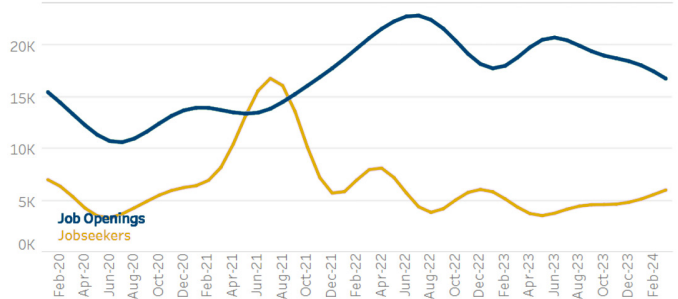
**Figure 3: Jobseekers and Job Openings**

### Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations



Job Openings (as of March 2024): 17,563  
 Job Seekers Per Opening: 0.6

### Healthcare Support Occupations



Job Openings (as of March 2024): 16,670  
 Job Seekers Per Opening: 0.4

*Source: NC Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis*

## North Carolina’s Community Colleges: Collaboratively Strengthening the Healthcare Workforce Pipeline

North Carolina’s 58 community colleges have long contributed to the education of the state’s healthcare workforce by offering a wide variety of educational opportunities that meet the needs of the healthcare industry and equip students with the skills and certifications required to enter the workforce quickly. Collaborating with healthcare providers, community-based organizations, and partners across the education continuum – including other two- and four-year institutions and K-12 schools and districts – community colleges respond nimbly to evolving healthcare workforce demands by adding or expanding in-demand programs and courses and developing a pipeline of talent for our state’s many healthcare employers.

In Fall 2023, 19,274 students enrolled in curriculum healthcare programs across the North Carolina Community College System, representing the first increase in healthcare enrollment since the pandemic. That same semester, more than 16,500 students enrolled in short-term healthcare training programs across the system, which have experienced rapid growth following the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

These curriculum and short-term programs prepare students for a variety of critical roles in the state’s healthcare system, including:

- › Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs)
- › Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)
- › Certified Medical Assistants (CMAs)
- › Nurse Aides
- › Community Health Workers
- › Mental Health Workers
- › Dental Hygienists and Assistants
- › Surgical Technologists and Technicians
- › Medical and Cardiovascular Sonographers
- › Radiographers
- › Respiratory Therapists
- › Pharmacy Technicians
- › Phlebotomists
- › Sterile Processing Technicians



Image Source: Blue Ridge Community College

### Reducing the high costs and logistical complexities of launching and expanding in-demand healthcare programs

Community colleges find themselves navigating several financial and logistical hurdles when launching and growing in-demand healthcare programs. Regulatory agencies require certain programs (including those in specialized fields like nursing) to maintain specific student-to-instructor ratios for clinical experiences, which means that colleges must **add faculty** to grow the number of seats available to students in these programs. Many colleges face a shortage of qualified instructors in these same fields, and budget constraints often prevent them from offering salaries competitive with those offered by the healthcare sector.

Colleges may also need to **build or renovate facilities** to create suitable learning environments for students, including classroom, lab, and simulation space. What's inside of these spaces is also vitally important, as students benefit from learning with the same **state-of-the-art equipment and technology** they will encounter when working in a healthcare setting. These specialized resources can be expensive to purchase and maintain and need to be updated frequently to remain industry-relevant. Colleges also need to **arrange clinical experiences** for students, affording them the opportunity to practice and apply skills and knowledge in real-world healthcare settings under the supervision of an experienced practitioner. In some communities and regions, colleges find themselves competing with several healthcare programs for a limited pool of clinical sites and preceptors.

#### Legislative Support Boosts In-Demand Healthcare Programs

The North Carolina General Assembly recently provided much-needed funding to community colleges to develop and expand healthcare programs. High-cost program startup and expansion funds are enabling colleges to invest in state-of-the-art equipment, create hands-on simulation labs, and offer specialized training programs that were previously out of reach due to budget constraints. As a result, colleges can better prepare students for in-demand healthcare careers, address workforce shortages in their communities, and enhance access to quality healthcare education in rural areas. Additional support in the form of faculty recruitment and retention assistance, including targeted nursing salary adjustments, is also helping to address the pay disparities that discourage practicing healthcare workers, particularly nurses, from pursuing faculty positions.



Image Source: Davidson-Davie Community College





Image Source: Wayne Community College

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Healthcare providers (e.g., a local hospital or a regional healthcare system) partner with colleges to support the growth of in-demand programs by covering or subsidizing faculty salaries for a set period of time, often several years.

- ▶ **UNC Health Wayne** committed to covering the salary and benefits of a clinical nursing instructor at **Wayne Community College** for a five-year period.
- ▶ **UNC Health Johnston** engaged in a multi-year partnership with **Johnston Community College** to support nursing faculty positions.
- ▶ **Mission Health** funded a full-time nursing faculty member and multiple adjunct/clinical faculty members at **Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College**.
- ▶ **Cape Fear Valley Health** funded a nursing simulation faculty position at **Bladen Community College**.



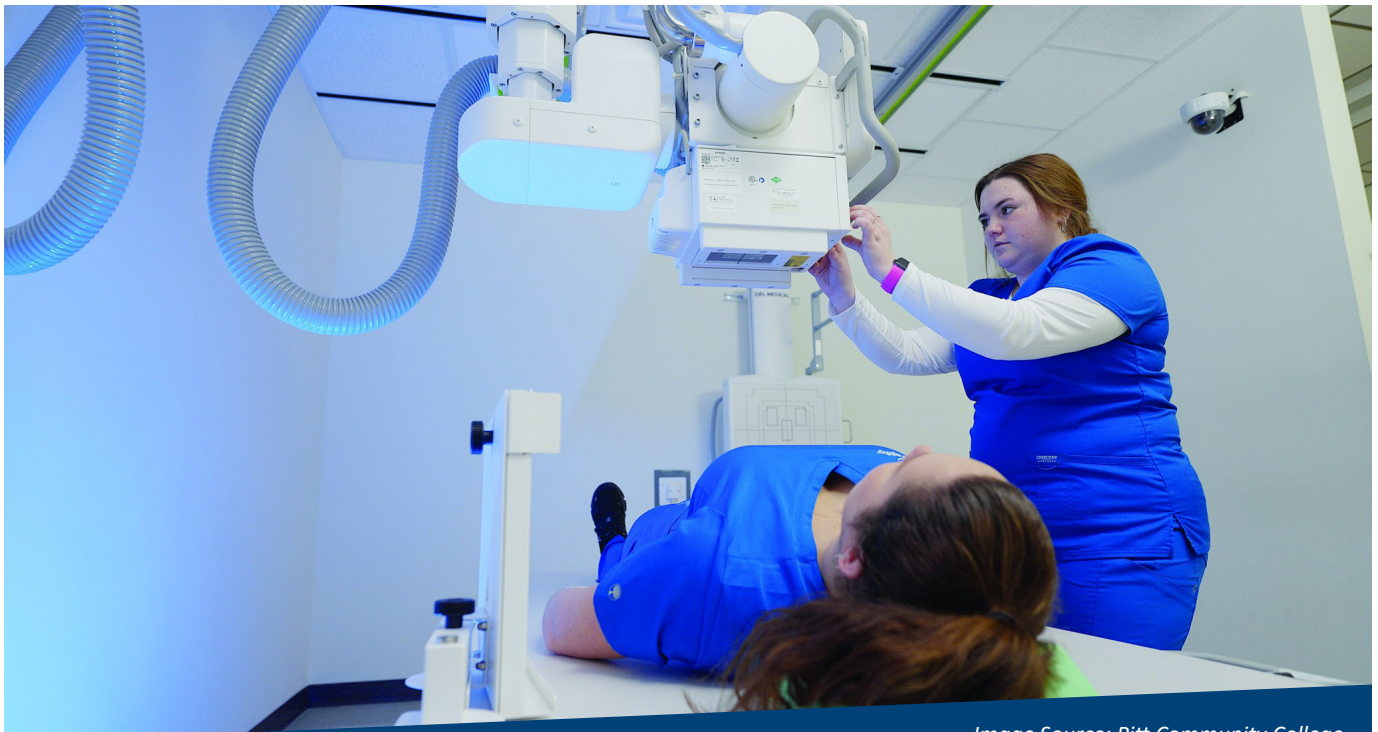


Image Source: Pitt Community College

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Healthcare providers and colleges collaboratively fund – and/or pursue outside funding for – state-of-the-art simulation equipment, which is housed in shared spaces that can be used by staff and students.

- ▶ **Sampson Regional Medical Center** upgraded its second floor to house **Sampson Community College's** Simulation Center, which serves as a location for healthcare training for both organizations. **The Cannon Foundation** provided a grant to defray some of the costs of purchasing simulation equipment.
- ▶ **Wilson Medical Center** collaborated with **Wilson Community College** and the **Golden LEAF Foundation** to create a Virtual Medical Center in the hospital to train nursing staff and clinical students. **Wilson County Emergency Medical Services** also uses the space for training.
- ▶ **Richmond Community College** converted space in the former **FirstHealth of the Carolinas** hospital adjacent to its Hamlet campus into a Simulation Learning Center to provide simulated healthcare experiences for healthcare students and practicing professionals. The hospital leased the space to the college at no cost, and a grant from the **Golden LEAF Foundation** supported the purchase of simulation equipment.
- ▶ **Catawba Valley Community College** partners with **Catawba Valley Medical Center (CMVC)** to collaboratively manage ValleySim Hospital, a state-of-the-art simulation hospital housed on the college's campus and used to train future and current physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals in the community. CMVC employs the two-person department that manages ValleySim's day-to-day operations, and hospital leadership have also donated equipment (including a da Vinci® Surgical System and related training) for the space.



Image Source: Wayne Community College

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges develop community-based clinical sites in response to local needs, often with support from the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NC AHEC) Program.

- ▶ **Sampson Community College** collaborated with NC AHEC and the **NC Farmworker Health Program** to develop a clinical site for nursing students, who visited farms in the region to provide health and wellness checks to farmworkers.
- ▶ **Halifax Community College** worked with NC AHEC and the **Roanoke Rapids Graded School District** to develop a clinical site for nursing students to work alongside school nurses at Roanoke Rapids High School.
- ▶ **Wilson Community College** partnered with NC AHEC and the **Transitional Care Team at Wilson Medical Center** to develop a clinical site for nursing students to support recently discharged patients at high risk for readmission to the hospital.
- ▶ Several rural-serving colleges – including **Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College**, **Catawba Valley Community College**, **Central Carolina Community College**, **Coastal Carolina Community College**, and **Wayne Community College** – operate dental clinics, enabling students to gain clinical experience while providing affordable, accessible dental care to members of the community.



*Image Source: Beaufort County Community College*

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges partner with each other to jointly offer high-cost healthcare courses and programs to students. Under these agreements, students may take general education credits at their home college before completing their specialized coursework at a partnering college. This is often operationalized through Instructional Service Agreements (ISAs) between the colleges.

- ▶ **Martin Community College** and **Beaufort County Community College** entered into an ISA to help students access healthcare programs not available at their home college. Martin reserves two seats in its physical therapy assistant program for qualified Beaufort students, and Beaufort holds five seats in its associate degree nursing program and three seats in its medical laboratory technology program for qualified Martin students. Martin is also partnering with **Roanoke-Chowan Community College** to educate registered nurses through Roanoke-Chowan's associate degree nursing program. Under that agreement, Roanoke-Chowan reserves 10 spaces annually for students from Martin.
- ▶ **Pitt Community College** is partnering with **Beaufort County Community College** and **College of The Albemarle** (COA) to connect students to their medical laboratory technology programs. Beaufort guarantees at least five seats for Pitt students annually, and COA reserves a minimum of three seats for Pitt students annually.
- ▶ **Robeson Community College** is partnering with **Fayetteville Technical Community College** (Fayetteville Tech) to offer dental assisting and hygiene programs to students. Fayetteville Tech reserves six seats in each cohort of its dental assisting program and four seats in each cohort of its dental hygiene program for Robeson students.
- ▶ **The Region A Nursing Consortium** is a partnership between **Haywood Community College** and **Tri-County Community College** to bring associate degree nursing education to communities west of Asheville. Under the arrangement, students at Tri-County take their second year of nursing courses at Haywood.
- ▶ **Wayne Community College** is partnering with **Lenoir Community College** to accept their top three applicants for dental assisting and dental hygiene into the Wayne Community College applicant pool.
- ▶ **Halifax Community College** is partnering with **Nash Community College** and **Edgecombe Community College** to make seats available in its dental hygiene program to students in the region.
- ▶ **Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute** (CCC&TI) is partnering with **Cleveland Community**



**College** to extend the reach of its medical sonography program to members of the Cleveland County community. Under the arrangement, CCC&TI sends an instructor to Cleveland’s campus to offer specialized medical sonography courses.

- **Edgecombe Community College** partners with **Johnston Community College** and **Vance-Granville Community College** to collaboratively offer the **Eastern North Carolina Consortium of Computed Tomography and Magnetic Resonance Imaging** program. Each semester the curriculum is offered through Edgecombe and taught at one or more of the colleges within the Consortium.

## OPPORTUNITY

### Engaging the next generation of healthcare workers via early pathways and programs

Community colleges have a long history of collaborating with K-12 schools and school districts to enhance students’ preparation for higher education, promote career readiness, and create seamless pathways to postsecondary education and the workforce. When it comes to preparing the next generation of healthcare workers, colleges recognize the importance of **reaching students and their families early in their academic journeys** – as early as elementary and middle school – to increase their awareness of and readiness for in-demand careers in the health sciences and share information about related pathways and programs available to students.

Colleges also see opportunities to bolster student interest and enrollment in North Carolina’s nationally recognized **Career and College Promise program**, a dual enrollment program that makes it possible for students to take college classes and earn college credit while in high school. Additionally, colleges recognize the value of connecting students with work-based learning opportunities, including internships and youth/pre-apprenticeships with healthcare providers, to provide the hands-on work experience students need to jump-start their careers in the health sciences.

#### Dual Enrollment Connects High School Students to College Courses

**Career and College Promise (CCP)**, North Carolina’s **tuition-free dual enrollment program** for high school students, offers students the opportunity to earn credits toward a college degree or a credential for employment while still in high school. Eligible students can explore more than 40 academic programs, including several in the health sciences, while taking classes at community colleges and universities through their high school. In many cases, students can also earn dual credit, meeting high school graduation requirements with college courses. Participating students choose from three pathways:

- A **College Transfer** pathway for students planning to continue their educational career beyond high school to eventually achieve a bachelor’s degree at a university;
- A **Career and Technical Education** pathway for students looking to begin a certification, diploma, or state/industry-recognized workforce credential program in a particular technical field or career area; and
- A **Cooperative Innovative High School** pathway for students interested in enrolling in early colleges or other innovative schools, usually located on the campus of a community college or university, where students simultaneously work toward completion of their high school diploma and an associate degree, transferable credit, or a certificate.





Image Source: Surry-Yadkin Works

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges collaborate with K-12 schools and districts, healthcare providers, and other community-based organizations to offer special events, summer camps, and programs for youth focused on promoting awareness of careers in healthcare and bridging students into related dual enrollment opportunities.

- ▶ **The Strategic Twin-Counties Education Partnership** hosts an annual Healthcare Connections event for high school students from Edgecombe and Nash counties to raise awareness about local career opportunities in healthcare and related programs offered by **Edgecombe Community College** and **Nash Community College**. Local healthcare partners like **ECU Health Edgecombe Hospital**, **UNC Health Nash Hospital**, and **Area L AHEC** also support the event.
- ▶ **Project SHIFT**, coordinated by **Southwestern Community College** in partnership with **local high schools** and funded by a grant from the **Dogwood Health Trust**, aims to recruit enough prospective students to maximize the capacity of the college's healthcare career programs. SHIFT helps students select the best-fitting health sciences careers for their interests and skills, provides free exam preparation workshops, covers exam fees, and supports students throughout the selective admissions process for the college's health sciences programs.
- ▶ **Pitt County Schools' Health Sciences Academy** is a high school curriculum program open to any student enrolled in one of the district's traditional or early college high schools that is designed to support students in pursuing healthcare-related careers after graduation. Over four years, students complete several courses exposing them to potential healthcare careers and preparing them for postsecondary health science programs at **Pitt Community College** and/or **East Carolina University**.
- ▶ **Pitt Community College** also offers a **Health Sciences Scholars program** directed at prospective dual enrollment students interested in health sciences and health careers. Participating juniors and seniors

take a predetermined list of courses at the college in the mornings, and transportation to and from area high schools, tuition, and books are all supplied free of charge. Courses completed by Scholars satisfy the requirements to enroll in any entry-level health sciences program that the college offers.

- ▶ **Union County Public Schools' Health Sciences Academy** promotes awareness of health sciences careers and pathways, beginning in kindergarten and continuing through high school. **Atrium Health** provides healthcare specialists who support each level of the academy (elementary, middle, and high school), ensuring that participating schools provide an aligned curriculum that engages students at each grade level. When participating students reach high school, they are encouraged to pursue healthcare-focused dual enrollment opportunities available through **South Piedmont Community College** and other postsecondary opportunities with partners like **Wingate University**.



Image Source: Surry-Yadkin Works

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges collaborate with K-12 schools and districts, healthcare providers, and other community-based organizations to coordinate and/or support work-based learning opportunities – including job shadowing, internships, and youth/pre-apprenticeships – for high school students.

- ▶ **The HEALTH branch of Surry-Yadkin Works**, a work-based learning program coordinated by **Surry Community College** in partnership with **Elkin City Schools**, **Mount Airy City Schools**, **Surry County Schools**, and **Yadkin County Schools**, offers a semester-long CNA pre-apprenticeship program (three cohorts per year) with area healthcare providers like **Hugh Chatham Health**, **Northern Regional Hospital**, **Mountain Valley Hospice**, **Ridgecrest**, and **Chatham Nursing and Rehab**.



- ▶ **Southeastern Community College** is partnering with **Columbus Regional Healthcare System, Whiteville City Schools, and Columbus County Schools** to offer a medical laboratory technology pre-apprenticeship program to area high school students.
- ▶ **Wilson Education Partnership's Career Health Connections Program** connects juniors and seniors from **Wilson County Schools** to hands-on experiences in community healthcare facilities. The eight-week program, coordinated in partnership with **Wilson Community College's Virtual Medical Center, Area L AHEC, Wilson County Substance Abuse Coalition, Carolina Family Health Centers, Wilson Medical Center and Wilson County Emergency Medical Services**, enables students to shadow healthcare professionals and participate in healthcare-focused training sessions.



Image Source: Surry-Yadkin Works





Image Source: The Gaston Gazette

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) establish Cooperative Innovative High Schools focused on preparing high school students for careers in the health sciences.

- ▶ **Caldwell Applied Sciences Academy**, located on the campus of **Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute** and operated in partnership with **Caldwell County Schools**, offers an Academy of Health and Life Sciences focused on preparing students for careers in nursing, medicine, physical therapy, forensic science, and other healthcare fields.
- ▶ **EDGE Academy of Health Sciences**, located on **Edgecombe Community College's Rocky Mount Campus** and operated in partnership with **Edgecombe County Schools**, provides students with multiple pathways towards certifications and degrees in the health sciences field.
- ▶ **Gaston Early College of Medical Sciences**, located on the campus of **Gaston College** and operated in partnership with **Gaston County Schools**, **Belmont Abbey College**, and **CaroMont Health**, is focused on addressing the critical shortage of trained healthcare workers in the area by connecting students to career pathways in nursing, human services, and pre-medicine/biotechnology sciences.



### Supporting students' success in healthcare programs and courses by eliminating barriers to entry and completion

While North Carolina's community colleges are known for their affordability, **the cost of tuition, fees, books, and supplies** can still present a significant barrier for many prospective and existing students. Many healthcare programs require students to wear specific uniforms in clinical settings, which must be purchased by students before they begin their clinical rotations. Students may also need to purchase specialized tools and equipment for practical training in labs and clinical settings. Additionally, students may be responsible for covering registration fees associated with required courses and certifications (e.g., CPR and other professional certification exams like the NCLEX for nursing students) and fees associated with required background checks and drug screening.

Beyond these direct costs, the **lost earnings potential** of not working or working fewer hours while enrolled in school can also be a major deterrent for students thinking about continuing their education. Students seek programs that allow them to gain knowledge and practical work experience while earning a paycheck, including registered apprenticeship programs offered through **ApprenticeshipNC**. They also value programs and courses that align with their schedules and are offered at times of day that are most convenient to them and look for expedited onramps to jobs in healthcare that offer family-sustaining wages.

#### Learn and Earn via Registered Apprenticeship

**ApprenticeshipNC** helps employers – including several healthcare providers – leverage **registered apprenticeships** to build and retain an adaptable, skilled, and effective workforce that meets their current and future needs. Registered apprenticeship

is an **employer-led approach** that integrates training programs into businesses, connecting participants with structured on-the-job learning, supplemental education, and a progressive wage scale. In North Carolina, nine industries are represented in the apprenticeship program model: healthcare, advanced manufacturing, construction, energy, finance, hospitality, information technology, logistics, and public safety.

As the State Apprenticeship Agency recognized by the Office of Apprenticeship to act on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor, ApprenticeshipNC registers apprenticeship programs and connects employers to registered apprenticeship occupations and federal and state funding. ApprenticeshipNC also coordinates **youth apprenticeships**, which begin when an apprentice is in high school or within 120 days (about 4 months) of graduation, and **registered pre-apprenticeships**, which are designed to prepare individuals to ultimately enter and succeed in a registered apprenticeship program.

The logo for ApprenticeshipNC features the word "APPRENTICESHIP" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. To its right, the letters "NC" are displayed in a larger, bold, yellow, sans-serif font, partially overlapping the end of the word "APPRENTICESHIP".



Image Source: Cleveland Community College

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges collaborate with healthcare providers to coordinate registered apprenticeship programs and other “learn and earn” opportunities for students.

- ▶ **Apprenticeship Wayne at Wayne Community College** collaborated with **UNC Health Wayne** to establish two registered apprenticeships in healthcare: one for medical lab technicians (MLT) and another for LPNs transitioning to RN licenses.
- ▶ **Coastal Carolina Community College** partnered with **Onslow Memorial Hospital** to create a CNA residency program that offers students the opportunity to work at the hospital while taking the required courses and testing at the college to become a CNA.
- ▶ **Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute** partnered with **Appalachian Regional Healthcare System** (ARHS) to establish a program in which ARHS compensates students pursuing their CNA certification for attending class and covers the full cost of tuition and fees in return for students picking up one eight-hour shift per week at an ARHS facility and agreeing to work for one year as a full-time CNA after graduation.
- ▶ **Carteret Community College** partnered with **Carteret Health Care** to develop a registered apprenticeship program for CNA students, enabling them to receive paid on-the-job training in a hospital setting while enrolled in the college’s CNA program.
- ▶ **Roanoke-Chowan Community College** partnered with **Roanoke-Chowan Community Health Center** to develop a registered apprenticeship program for medical assistants.
- ▶ **College of The Albemarle** partnered with **Sentara Health** to develop a registered apprenticeship program for nursing students.



Image Source: The Caswell Messenger

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Healthcare providers partner with colleges to offer tuition- and fee-waived training programs, typically in return for post-completion employment commitments from students.

- ▶ **Southwestern Community College** partnered with **Harris Regional and Swain Community Hospitals** to develop the Harris & Swain Healthcare Scholars Program, which awards a scholarship covering full tuition, books and supplies, background check, and drug screen costs to selected students enrolled in the college's health sciences programs. Upon completion, students become employed on an at-will basis by either Harris Regional Hospital, Swain Community Hospital, or a hospital-owned physician practice or outpatient location for an employment term that is based upon their scholarship amount and program length. **Haywood Community College** and **Southwestern Community College** also partnered with **Haywood Regional Medical Center** to develop a similar program for health sciences students.
- ▶ **Lenoir Community College** partnered with **UNC Health Lenoir** to offer nursing scholarships to students from Lenoir, Greene, and Jones counties. These scholarships covered full tuition and provided a monthly stipend to help with additional expenses incurred by full-time nursing students in return for these students committing to work within the hospital system for two years after graduation.
- ▶ **Nash Community College** and **Edgecombe Community College** partner with **UNC Health Nash** to offer a scholarship to rising nursing and allied health students, which covers the total cost of their program tuition, books, and related fees, plus a \$100/month stipend until students graduate in return for students committing to work full-time at UNC Health Nash for two years.
- ▶ **Piedmont Community College** partnered with **Person Memorial Hospital** to fund the program expenses for four nursing students in return for the students agreeing to work for the hospital for two years after they graduate.





Image Source: The HealthCare Foundation of Cleveland County

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Healthcare providers partner with community colleges to offer no-strings-attached scholarships and other emergency financial support to students enrolled in healthcare programs.

- ▶ The **Cleveland Community College Foundation** received a gift from the **HealthCare Foundation of Cleveland County** to name and endow an **Allied Health Emerging Needs Fund**, which provides need-based assistance to students in the college's allied health programs. Funds may be used to pay tuition, buy books and supplies, or cover other expenses that could prevent a student from completing a program.
- ▶ The **Sentara Scholars Program**, offered by **Sentara Health** in partnership with several two- and four-year colleges and universities throughout North Carolina and Virginia, including **College of The Albemarle**, provides direct tuition assistance and emergency funding to students in healthcare and healthcare-related programs.





Image Source: Scotland Health

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges develop expedited and/or flexibly designed healthcare training programs that create faster, more affordable pathways to employment for students.

- ▶ **Richmond Community College** shortened the length of delivery for its new surgical technology program from two years to one year, an idea that surfaced during an advisory council meeting with **members from area hospitals, such as Scotland Health and FirstHealth of the Carolinas**. The college also set up a continuing medical education version of the program.
- ▶ **Isothermal Community College** will begin offering a flexibly designed dental hygiene program in the fall of 2025 geared toward dental assistants who want to take the next step in their careers while continuing to work. Participating students may work as dental assistants during the day and attend dental hygiene classes in the evenings and on weekends.
- ▶ **Halifax Community College** partnered with **Roanoke-Chowan Community Hospital** to launch an evening/weekend Practical Nursing (PN) program that supports hospital staff pursuing nursing education by offering flexible schedules and scholarships to reduce financial barriers.

## OPPORTUNITY

### Creating seamless pathways for students to continue their health sciences education

North Carolina’s community colleges are a first stop for thousands of students interested in continuing their education in the health sciences. Many students will carry the knowledge, skills, and credentials they acquire from their community college experiences immediately into the workforce, stepping into high-demand roles in the healthcare industry that pay a family-sustaining wage. Others may elect to continue their education at the baccalaureate and/or graduate levels in pursuit of advanced practice opportunities, specialized skills, and **continued career advancement**.

Beyond enhancing students' long-term career prospects and earning potential, pathways to higher learning also contribute to the development of a **pipeline of prospective healthcare instructors** and grow the pool of qualified clinical preceptors, who are often required to hold a bachelor's degree.

## Affordable, Accessible Baccalaureate Degrees in Nursing

North Carolina's **Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nurses (RIBN)** programs work to meet the growing demand for highly skilled nurses by providing a streamlined, seamless dual enrollment pathway for students to earn a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN). RIBN students begin their nursing education at a participating community college, earn an associate degree in nursing (ADN), and then complete a BSN at a partnering university, all within four years.

Participating students complete their first three years of RIBN coursework at a community college, with at least one class taken each year online through the partnering university. Once students earn their ADN and pass the NCLEX-RN (National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses), they move directly into the final year of their BSN at the partnering university, completing much of their coursework online.

By starting their nursing education at a community college, RIBN program participants save on tuition costs for the first three years of their education, making it a more affordable option for earning a BSN. Additionally, participating students have the option to work part-time as a registered nurse during the fourth year of the program.



*Image Source: Western Carolina University*





Image Source: Blue Ridge Community College

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Colleges collaborate with university partners to bridge students into baccalaureate and graduate degree programs in the health sciences field.

- ▶ Colleges partner with four-year universities to offer **Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nursing (RIBN) programs**, which enable students to concurrently enroll in community college and a partnering four-year institution to complete an associate degree and a bachelor's degree in nursing. These include:
  - ▶ The Eastern North Carolina RIBN program, a partnership between 17 community colleges and **East Carolina University's College of Nursing**
  - ▶ The North Carolina Piedmont RIBN program, a partnership between three community colleges and **North Carolina A&T State University**
  - ▶ The Western North Carolina RIBN program, a partnership between five community colleges and **Western Carolina University**
  - ▶ The SouthCentral RIBN program, offered in partnership with **UNC Pembroke**
- ▶ **Southeastern Community College** partnered with **UNC Chapel Hill's Eshelman School of Pharmacy** to develop a program aimed at recruiting more students from eastern North Carolina into UNC's Pharmacy School.

### Blue Ridge Community College

In 2016, Blue Ridge Community College opened the doors of its new [Health Sciences Center](#), a state-of-the-art facility that is home to the college's nursing and allied health programs, UNC Health Pardee's Cancer and Surgery Center, and two of Wingate University's healthcare-focused graduate programs. The co-location of these three partners – a community college, a four-year university, and a healthcare provider, which each occupy a floor of the Center – affords many benefits to students, including direct access to patients and other [collaborative learning experiences](#). It also creates a true secondary to postsecondary to healthcare workforce pipeline for students in the area, who can begin their healthcare education in high school via tuition-free dual-enrollment opportunities in Blue Ridge's allied health programs made possible through Career and College Promise, transition into a two-year healthcare program offered by the college, and ultimately continue their education all the way through a doctoral degree at Wingate, all without leaving their hometown.

Plans for the Center came together as a result of connections and timing. Blue Ridge was seeking a new space to accommodate the growing demand for its nursing and allied health programs while UNC Health Pardee was considering the possibility of opening a Cancer and Surgery Center locally. At the same time, Wingate was exploring opportunities to grow its footprint in western North Carolina by establishing a campus in the area. Recognizing the opportunities presented by a shared space, leaders collaborated with the **City of Hendersonville**, which deeded property for the facility to **Henderson County**. The county borrowed against the property to build the building, and the rent generated by the Center's occupants offsets the county's debt. Blue Ridge occupies a floor at no cost to the college, and the county pays the college to maintain the building. A grant from the **Golden LEAF Foundation** offset the costs of simulation lab equipment for the Center.

**UNC Health Pardee Hospital** is located across the street from the Center, facilitating additional connections between the healthcare system and the college. One example is the new [Pardee Pathways Program](#), an eight-week customized training program that supports community members, including existing UNC Health Pardee team members, in becoming certified medical assistants (CMAs). After completing the program, trainees are eligible to earn a certified CMA credential, which immediately leads to a role with UNC Health Pardee. Program costs are covered for trainees, who commit to a two-year service term. [Blue Ridge also partners with Mountain Area Health Education Center \(MAHEC\)](#) to offer a similar pathways program that helps local CNAs receive their certified medical assistant (CMA) certification.

As demand for the college's healthcare-focused programs – particularly nursing – continues to increase, Blue Ridge has partnered with UNC Health Pardee and another area healthcare provider, **Mission Health**, to add more adjunct and full-time nursing faculty members. Mission Health is [funding full-time instructor positions](#) at three Western North Carolina nursing programs – Blue Ridge, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech), and Western Carolina University (WCU) – and also provides adjunct faculty members to support students' clinical experiences. Additionally, Blue Ridge's strong relationship with **AdventHealth Hendersonville** results in education for many of the hospital's certified medical assistants.

Blue Ridge is also partnering with other two- and four-year institutions in western North Carolina to collaboratively grow the number of healthcare-focused programs available to students in the region. Through the [Western North Carolina Respiratory Care Consortium](#), a partnership between Blue Ridge and **Southwestern Community College** that launched in 2023, Blue Ridge's Transylvania County Campus in Brevard serves as a satellite location for Southwestern's respiratory therapy program. Blue Ridge is also exploring opportunities with A-B Tech to grow that college's existing dental hygiene program, with the goal of coordinating an instructional service agreement to reserve spots in the expanded program for Blue Ridge's students. As a participant in the [Western North Carolina RIBN program](#), coordinated with WCU's School of Nursing, Blue Ridge also offers prospective nursing students the option of a four-year, seamless associate-to-baccalaureate nursing education. In the first three years of the program, students take classes at Blue Ridge and complete online coursework through WCU. Students finish their fourth year online and at WCU's Biltmore Park instructional site. Unlike a traditional BSN program, students may begin working as an RN at the start of their fourth year in the RIBN program.



# BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

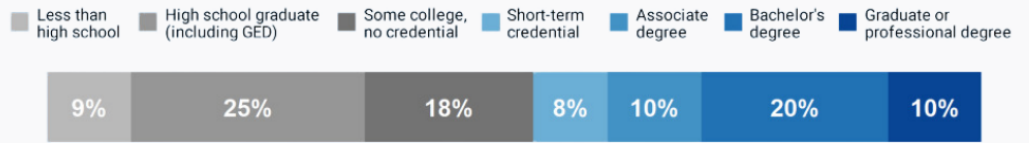


**SERVICE AREA:** Henderson and Transylvania Counties



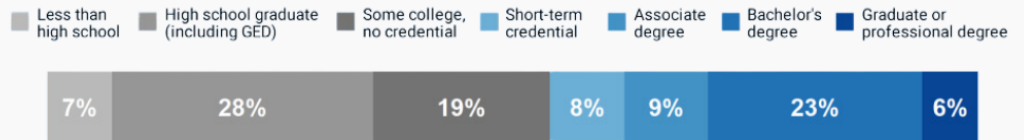
## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**HENDERSON COUNTY**  
residents ages 25-44 (2022)



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TRANSLYVANIA COUNTY**  
residents ages 25-44 (2022)



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

Henderson and Transylvania Counties are part of the **Asheville Prosperity Zone Sub-Region**. In addition to Blue Ridge Community College, other community colleges serving the region include Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and Isothermal Community College.



IN THE ASHEVILLE REGION...

**5,027**

positions in the **Health Care and Social Assistance** sector are projected to be added between 2021 and 2030, making it the **fastest-growing** sector in the region during this same time period.

**8 of the top 25**

community college credential required or preferred\* occupations predicted to have the most openings between 2021 and 2030 are in the healthcare sector.

### SPECIFIC HEALTHCARE-RELATED OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF AVERAGE ANNUAL OPENINGS IN THE ASHEVILLE REGION:

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	\$26,568	718
Nursing Assistants	\$32,470	648
Registered Nurses	\$76,151	384
Medical Assistants	\$36,625	236
Medical Secretaries and Admin. Assistants	\$36,682	119
Dental Assistants	\$47,065	113
Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses	\$56,139	106
Pharmacy Technicians	\$36,144	94

\* Included occupations require either a minimum of a high school credential or a community college credential, according to the NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). Those with a minimum requirement of a high school credential have been identified as community college credential preferred by the North Carolina Community College System's analysis of program alignment with occupations.

### Craven Community College

Craven Community College and **CarolinaEast Health System** (CarolinaEast) have collaborated closely for several years, forming a mutually beneficial partnership to develop a pipeline of skilled healthcare workers who offer superior patient care in the health system's facilities in and around New Bern, including **CarolinaEast Medical Center** (CEMC).

Leaders from Craven and CEMC began meeting in 2018 to discuss local healthcare workforce needs – particularly the need for more registered nurses – and identify opportunities to collaboratively support one another. In response to persistent nursing vacancies, the hospital hoped to increase the number of nursing graduates produced by the college each year. To expand its nursing program, the college would need to add faculty and arrange to meet the clinical needs of the growing number of students served by its program.

In 2019, [CEMC awarded a \\$150,000 grant to Craven](#) to cover the costs of securing a full-time nursing instructor to accommodate additional nursing students on the college's New Bern campus. This funding was intended to bridge the first two years of the college's larger nursing cohort, allowing time for the college to gain the full-time equivalent students needed to self-support the hiring of an additional nursing instructor. As part of this initial partnership arrangement, the hospital also agreed to provide clinical training and hands-on learning opportunities for Craven's students. In 2022, CEMC provided an additional grant to Craven to cover the cost of two nursing instructors, enabling the college to further increase the size of its nursing cohort and [offer two admissions entry points](#) over the course of the academic year – one in the fall and another in the spring. Ultimately, this new dual-entry model will make it possible for healthcare employers like CarolinaEast to hire Craven's nursing graduates two times per year, creating a more continuous pipeline of talent to fill nursing vacancies.

CEMC also expressed its interest in growing the number of baccalaureate nurses on its staff, a need Craven is helping to meet by facilitating students' enrollment in [Eastern North Carolina's Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nurses \(RIBN\)](#) and [Accelerated Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nurses \(aRIBN\)](#) programs. Participating students are dually admitted to Craven and to East Carolina University's College of Nursing and complete both an associate degree and a bachelor's degree in nursing over the course of the program. Both programs offer students the option of working as a registered nurse during their final year after passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN), creating an expedited path to employment in local healthcare facilities like CEMC.

The strong collaborative foundation laid by the success of the existing nursing partnership has led CarolinaEast to work with Craven to fill other essential positions within its healthcare facilities. In 2023, the two groups partnered to offer a fee-waived, multi-day [Environmental Services \(EVS\)/Housekeeping training](#) to members of the community. EVS professionals play a critical role in hospital and healthcare settings and are responsible for cleaning, disinfecting, and maintaining healthy environments for patients and employees. All participants who completed the training were guaranteed an interview with CarolinaEast. Additionally, the college and CarolinaEast have joined forces to offer other new programs including a half-speed (nights and weekends) licensed practical nursing program to upgrade the skills of CarolinaEast employees and an [expedited surgical technology program](#) offered through continuing education that consists of two 18-week courses that can be completed in approximately nine months. Graduates of the expedited program are qualified for entry-level positions in surgical settings and are eligible to take the national certification examination for surgical technologists. As part of the partnership, CarolinaEast provides a rotating suite of operating rooms for surgical technology students to gain practical, hands-on experience.

# CRAVEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



**SERVICE AREA:** Craven County



Image Source: Craven Community College

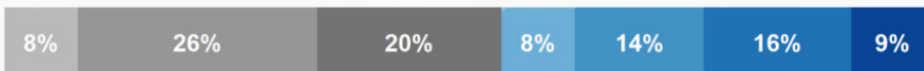
## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**CRAVEN COUNTY**  
residents ages 25-44 (2022)

■ Less than high school  
 ■ High school graduate (including GED)  
 ■ Some college, no credential  
 ■ Short-term credential  
 ■ Associate degree  
 ■ Bachelor's degree  
 ■ Graduate or professional degree

**No Degree**  
13,087  
54.1%

**Have Degree or Credential**  
11,117  
45.9%



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

Craven County is part of the **Jacksonville-New Bern Prosperity Zone Sub-Region**. In addition to Craven Community College, other community colleges serving the region include Carteret Community College, Coastal Carolina Community College, Lenoir Community College, and Pamlico Community College.



IN THE JACKSONVILLE-NEW BERN REGION...

**1,132**

positions in the **Health Care and Social Assistance sector** are projected to be added between 2021 and 2030, representing a **7.3% increase**. Health Care and Social Assistance is projected to be the **second-fastest growing sector** in the region during this same time period.

**4 of the top 25**

community college credential required or preferred\* occupations predicted to have the most openings between 2021 and 2030 are in the healthcare sector.

**SPECIFIC HEALTHCARE-RELATED OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF AVERAGE ANNUAL OPENINGS IN THE JACKSONVILLE-NEW BERN REGION:**

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	\$23,549	394
Nursing Assistants	\$28,017	290
Registered Nurses	\$64,616	160
Medical Assistants	\$32,789	74

\* Included occupations require either a minimum of a high school credential or a community college credential, according to the NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). Those with a minimum requirement of a high school credential have been identified as community college credential preferred by the North Carolina Community College System's analysis of program alignment with occupations.



### Davidson-Davie Community College

In response to a community-wide nursing shortage, Davidson-Davie Community College partnered with **Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist** and two of its local healthcare facilities – **Lexington Medical Center** in Davidson County and **Davie Medical Center** in Davie County – to launch North Carolina’s first registered nursing apprenticeship program in 2021. At the height of the pandemic, the healthcare system was heavily reliant upon travel nurses to fill critical vacancies, and leaders recognized the urgency of developing a more permanent pipeline of local nursing talent to stabilize the regional healthcare infrastructure.

Once admitted to Davidson-Davie’s nursing program, students can pursue two pathways toward registered apprenticeship. The first, a licensed practical nursing (LPN) to associate degree nursing (ADN) pathway, is available to students in their final semester of the college’s LPN program, shortly before they take the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN). Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist conducts interviews and hires LPNs as paid apprentices to work full-time on the medical-surgical floors at Davie and Lexington Medical Centers for approximately one year. Afterward, participating LPNs begin their LPN to ADN transition courses at Davidson-Davie and shift to working part-time on their respective floors and units, scheduling their work around their class and clinical hours. Ultimately, apprentices on the LPN to ADN pathway can complete their associate degree in 24 months, expediting the traditional 36-month timeline.

A second pathway toward registered apprenticeship, the nurse aide to ADN pathway, is available to students getting ready to complete Davidson-Davie’s entry-level nursing course. Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist conducts interviews and hires students as paid apprentices to work as nurse aides on the medical-surgical floors of Davie and Lexington Medical Centers. Students work full-time and once they begin taking courses at Davidson-Davie towards their ADN, they shift to working part-time.

In 2022, building on the success of the existing nursing apprenticeship model, Davidson-Davie launched a much larger, more comprehensive healthcare apprenticeship program – the largest of its kind in the state – that expanded apprenticeship opportunities to other critical healthcare fields, including medical assisting, medical laboratory technology, pharmacy technology, central sterile processing, and surgical technology. Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist signed on as the college’s first healthcare partner under the new agreement.

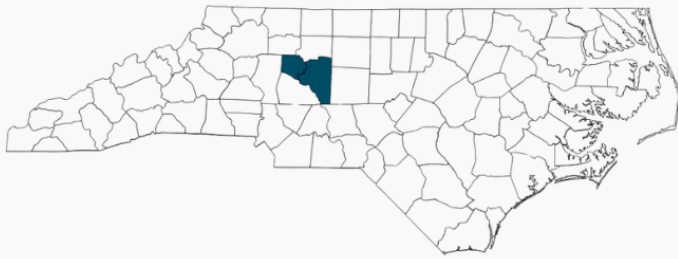
As the registered apprenticeship sponsor, Davidson-Davie manages administrative tasks and provides academic instruction, while Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist hires and pays the apprentices for the hours they work and also provides additional paid stipends to apprentices based on the skills and experience they gain throughout the apprenticeship period. The healthcare system also provides on-the-job training to apprentices and matches each apprentice to a workplace mentor, who receives a small bump in pay in return for their service.

To learn more about Davidson-Davie’s healthcare apprenticeship program, including lessons learned and recommendations for other colleges and healthcare providers to consider when scaling healthcare apprenticeship programs across the state, check out [this case study](#) from RP3’s partners at EdNC.



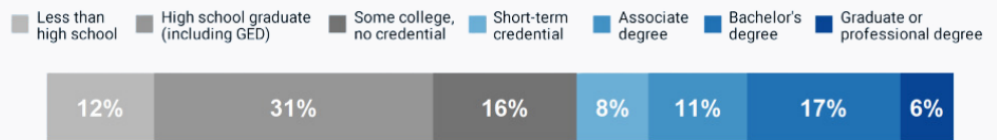
Image Source: Davidson-Davie Community College

**SERVICE AREA:** Davidson and Davie Counties



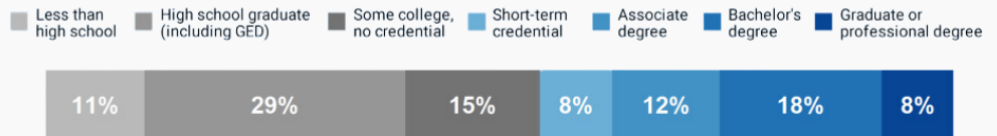
## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

**DAVIDSON COUNTY**  
residents ages 25-44 (2022)



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**DAVIE COUNTY**  
residents ages 25-44 (2022)



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT

Davidson and Davie Counties are part of the **Winston-Salem Prosperity Zone Sub-Region**. In addition to Davidson-Davie Community College, other community colleges serving the region include Forsyth Technical Community College and Surry Community College.



IN THE WINSTON-SALEM REGION...

**7,522**

positions in the **Health Care and Social Assistance** sector are projected to be added between 2021 and 2030, making it the **fastest-growing sector** in the region during this same time period.

**6 of the top 25**

community college credential required or preferred\* occupations predicted to have the most openings between 2021 and 2030 are in the healthcare sector.

### SPECIFIC HEALTHCARE-RELATED OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF AVERAGE ANNUAL OPENINGS IN THE WINSTON-SALEM REGION:

Occupation Title	Median Earnings	Annual Openings
Nursing Assistants	\$31,793	865
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	\$25,928	813
Registered Nurses	\$78,116	755
Medical Assistants	\$37,550	231
Medical Secretaries and Admin. Assistants	\$37,443	165
Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses	\$51,480	140

\* Included occupations require either a minimum of a high school credential or a community college credential, according to the NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). Those with a minimum requirement of a high school credential have been identified as community college credential preferred by the North Carolina Community College System's analysis of program alignment with occupations.

## LOOKING AHEAD: EMERGING PARTNERSHIPS

### North Carolina Health Education & Employers Aligned Local Strategies (NC HEALS) - Sandhills

In response to a growing shortage of healthcare professionals in the Sandhills region, a group of healthcare partners and community colleges – including **Bladen Community College, Fayetteville Technical Community College, Montgomery Community College, Richmond Community College, Robeson Community College, Sampson Community College, Sandhills Community College, and Southeastern Community College** – are collaborating to better recruit, train, and match local talent with regional and local healthcare system needs in allied health and nursing roles. The objective is to develop a sustainable workforce that continues to reside and work within the region. With support from the **John M. Belk Endowment**, this regional partnership is working to identify the gap between supply and demand and develop a prioritized list of initiatives for the group to pilot and pursue in the region. This approach will allow the region to make the most of their collective strengths by organizing and executing concurrent Sandhills pilot programs and policy efforts together.

### Advanced Training and Education for Direct Service Providers

The **North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS)** is partnering with the **North Carolina Community College System** to create an advanced training and education program that will provide more opportunities for direct support professionals (DSPs) to advance in their careers. DSPs provide vital services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and play a critical role in the state’s behavioral health workforce. The program will initially be offered for enrollment at **Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, Stanly Community College, and Forsyth Technical Community College** beginning in the fall of 2025, with expansion to community colleges statewide by 2026. The credits students receive can be applied toward an associate degree, and NCDHHS will also offer scholarship opportunities to support DSP enrollment and advancement. Additional information about eligibility and registration for the program will be shared at a later date.

### North Carolina Health Talent Alliance

The **North Carolina Community College System** is partnering with the **NC Chamber Foundation** and the **NC Center on the Workforce for Health** on the NC Health Talent Alliance, an initiative focusing on regional collaboration, using job demand data from health employers and talent supply data from NC’s education sectors. The data, set for public release in late 2024, is already guiding employer-led collaboratives in addressing critical workforce shortages. These collaboratives work with the region’s education network to prioritize resources around key job demands. For community college leaders, this data offers insights to enhance enrollment, retention, and completion efforts aligned with industry needs. The success of this program will depend on partnerships similar to those in this toolkit. For more information, visit [workforceforhealth.org](http://workforceforhealth.org).

## APPENDIX

<sup>1</sup> University of North Carolina System and North Carolina Community College System. “Recommendations on Increasing Nursing Graduates: In Response to SL 2022-74 (HB 103), Section 8.3.” January 2023. <https://websiteservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/73863>.

<sup>2</sup> The Program on Health Workforce Research and Policy at the Cecil G Sheps Center. “NC Nursecast: A Supply and Demand Model for Nurses in North Carolina.” November 2021. <https://ncnursecast.unc.edu/key-findings/>.

<sup>3</sup> North Carolina Institute of Medicine. “Issue Brief: Recruitment and Retention of the Rural Healthcare Workforce.” June 2018. [https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Issue-brief\\_FINALv2.pdf](https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Issue-brief_FINALv2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> North Carolina Community College System presentation to the NCGA Legislative Caucus on Economic Development and Foreign Trade in August 2024.



# NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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## CREATING SUCCESS