

Workforce Needs for the Central Nebraska Veterans Home

Report to the
Economic Development Council of Buffalo County

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Executive Summary of Workforce Factors

The cities of Kearney, Grand Island, and Hasting in central Nebraska form a single large labor market with similar wages and movement of labor between cities. Our analysis shows that Kearney has a large healthcare workforce and is able to offer a mix of specialized labor to meet the workforce needs of a 225-bed Veterans Home. Current educational programs serve the entire market, and planned expansions will also help address workforce needs. The proximity of the University of Nebraska – Kearney (UNK) and the new and expanded University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) programs in Kearney provide unique advantages and opportunities for the Veterans Home to build relationships that could ultimately benefit recruiting and professional development and offer medical expertise to Veterans Home residents.

Workforce Availability

The following summarizes the workforce within a 50-mile radius of the Kearney site.

- There are 90,000 primary jobs within a 50-mile radius of Kearney. There are only slightly more (91,400) within a 50-mile radius of Grand Island.
- The number of licensed Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in the 50-mile area is sufficient to meet the needs of a new Kearney facility. The workforce also includes specialists who can provide services for medically complex needs, dementia, and hospice.
- In 2011, 14,380 workers commuted 50 miles or less to a primary job in Kearney. Most commuters come from Grand Island, Hastings, Lexington, or smaller communities and rural areas located to the east, west, and north of Kearney.
- Sixteen percent of RNs living or working in Buffalo County commute 21 to 50 miles to their jobs, compared to 27 percent of RNs living or working in Hall County. This suggests that RN jobs at a new Veterans Home in Kearney that offer competitive pay and benefits will attract qualified job seekers from Kearney and the surrounding area.
- Filling the 184 FTE Staff Care Technician positions at a Central Nebraska Veterans Home will be challenging in any geographic market. **Turnover for Staff Care Technicians was 62 percent at the Grand Island Veterans Home in 2012.** Current Nurse and Medication Aide training programs offered at Central Community College (CCC) in Kearney are not able to serve more students without additional space and staff. There are opportunities, however, for the Veterans Home to provide training programs on site to attract and retain qualified Staff Care Technicians.

Other Long-Term Care Facilities

Other long-term care (LTC) facilities serve the surrounding area.

- Thirty-two LTC facilities with 1948 beds are located within a 50-mile radius of the proposed site.
- Currently, five percent of RNs in Buffalo County work in LTC, compared to 13 percent of RNs in Hall County. More RNs in Buffalo County work in hospitals (62 percent) than in Hall County (47 percent). We would expect a more competitive market for RNs, LPNs, and Nurse and Medication Aides in LTC if Kearney is selected as the new Veterans Home location.

Education and Training Programs

There are several colleges and universities in the surrounding area that provide education and training programs in healthcare-related areas.

- Five colleges and universities and Mary Lanning offer educational programs in nursing, physical therapy, physician assistant, radiology, laboratory science, and other healthcare and health science areas.
- CCC educated more healthcare professionals (286) in 2011 than other program, with degrees or certificates in nursing, practical nursing, social work, occupational therapy, laboratory technician, and medical records.
- Demand for nursing and practical nursing programs remains strong.
- The addition of seats in the CCC Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program at the Kearney Center and expansion of the BSN degree program at UNMC's College of Nursing Kearney Division will produce up to 13 more nurses each year after those programs reach capacity.
- A new UNMC School of Allied Health will open in 2015 and supply physician assistants, physical therapists, and individuals trained in clinical laboratory science and radiation sciences. One objective of expanding the UNMC Allied Health programs in Kearney is to grow the healthcare workforce in central Nebraska.

Student Workforce

Educational programs at UNK, UNMC Kearney Division, and CCC in Kearney will provide a student workforce for a Kearney Veterans Home facility.

- The UNMC College of Nursing estimates that up to 25 nursing students each year complete the curriculum necessary to become registered as a Nurse or Medication Aide. Many students seek registration and work during their degree programs.
- A Veterans Home facility also offers opportunities for clinical training. Distances and transportation costs are an issue for students, and this is one reason the UNMC College of Nursing at Kearney no longer offers clinical training at the Grand Island Veterans Home.

Professional Development and Recruiting Advantages

A Veterans Home facility in Kearney will offer substantial opportunities for professional development, recruitment, and retention of healthcare professionals in the 50-mile surrounding area.

- Clinical training and other types of collaboration between colleges and universities and the Veterans Home can offer benefits that support workforce recruiting and professional development.
- Students bring new ideas and enthusiasm, which can educate and stimulate the existing workforce.
- Students who have a positive experience are more likely to seek employment with the agency.

Recommendations

To meet the need for Staff Care Technicians, we recommend that the new facility provide on-site training for Nurse and Medication Aides that meets the requirements of the Nebraska State Registry. Unlike the current programs at CCC, an on-site program could require background checks and drug testing to eliminate applicants who would be disqualified from registration for those reasons.

We also recommend that Kearney focus on building relationships with and seeking ways to bring the benefits of the new UNMC Kearney Division facility to the broader community, including residents of the Veterans Home. Those benefits might include state-of-the-art imaging facilities, faculty expertise, and workforce solutions.

Supporting data provided in sections 7.a – 7.e