



United For Jobs Health Care Forum: Summary Report and Recommendations

June 9, 2010

SUMMARY

In 2009, the COG Board of Directors took an important first step in making workforce and economic development a regional priority by creating a Task Force on Workforce Competitiveness. The Task Force's final report *Closing the Gaps to Build the Future*, adopted in January, urged COG to use the report as a springboard for further dialogue and convene employer, education, workforce development and economic development stakeholders to develop a regional workforce strategy.

On June 3rd, COG hosted *United for Jobs: A Forum on Careers in Health* for a diverse group of over 100 area officials and stakeholders at the Washington Convention Center. COG focused on health care because it is one of the fastest growing job sectors in the economy. According to a panel at the forum, metropolitan Washington lags slightly behind the national average in developing new jobs in health care, even though the region has produced jobs in other sectors at twice the national rate.

The event built on existing health-related workforce initiatives across the region and provided participants with a chance to cultivate relationships, develop a more comprehensive understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges facing the health workforce, and make recommendations for enhanced collaboration, future action, and COG's role in helping meet those goals.

FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Partnerships. The region's ability to appropriately plan for and respond to the workforce needs of today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow largely depends upon the strength of our partnerships. Businesses, government agencies, educational institutions and adult training programs must regularly be brought together to cultivate relationships and ensure that we are appropriately preparing for the immediate and future employment needs of the region.

- COG should continue to assemble forums for the region's workforce and economic development community to foster and encourage collaborative partnerships that address sector specific needs along the skills continuum.

Advocacy for Funding, Workforce Reforms. Currently the supply and demand of the health workforce is imbalanced and requires systemic changes to policies that create bottlenecks in the career pipeline, including: faculty shortages, clinical placement shortages, student and employee attrition issues, and licensure reciprocity challenges.

- COG should advocate for greater funding for community colleges, which are experiencing historically high enrollment levels and low financial support.
- There are significant differences in allied health licensure requirements In the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland and the Commonwealth of Virginia, COG should advocate for standardized requirements region wide and cooperative reciprocity agreements.
- COG should advocate for policies that enable special populations' easier access into the workforce (ESL, ex-offender, mature workers etc.)
- COG should support the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act and urge reform of several of the Act's provisions.

Marketing Campaigns. The National Capital Region would benefit from marketing campaigns with two distinct focuses—an external campaign to showcase our region to the rest of the nation and an internal campaign to promote health careers to our region's youth. Our highly educated workforce, world-class hospitals and institutions of higher learning give this region a competitive advantage against others in the nation; yet we are not recognized as a national health care leader like Boston or New York.

In addition, the National Capital Region is a net importer of talent with fewer qualified graduates than necessary to meet our health care demand. The largest gap in future job growth and skilled employees is in fields requiring two year degrees, many of those in the health industry. We must make careers in health more attractive to youth by stressing the career advancement opportunities available as well as showcasing job possibilities such as health information technology careers.

- COG should partner with the Greater Washington Initiative and the Board of Trade to develop an effective marketing strategy that showcases our tremendous workforce and economic assets.
- COG should assist in the development of a public messaging campaign that would provide community colleges and universities access to materials that promote programs in high growth health sectors which lead to well paying jobs.

Best Practice Review. Currently many of the workforce efforts underway are localized either to one jurisdiction or one state. The region would benefit from a review of national best practices in health workforce development and identify opportunities for replication in the National Capital Region. This includes programs that link economic and workforce development, address the needs of special populations, capitalize on strategic partnerships and take a dual-customer approach to meet both the needs of employers and jobseekers.

- COG should partner with the Greater Washington Regional Alliance for Careers in Health, and others, to conduct an analysis of best practices and convene stakeholders in targeted workshops to discuss ways to replicate identified successes in the National Capital Region.

Labor Market Data Collection. As part of COG's 2010 Policy Focus and Priorities, the Board directed staff to engage a consultant to conduct labor market analysis related to our economic recovery efforts. Forum participants echoed the need for such a study arguing that in order to ensure that community colleges, universities and others are aligning their curriculum and training programs, they must be able to understand and predict the impact new and evolving technology will have on the workforce.

- COG will engage a consultant in July 2010 to conduct the labor market analysis.*

Regional Health Insurance Exchange. The recently adopted health reform legislation establishes health insurance exchanges that are intended to create a more organized and competitive market for health insurance by offering a choice of plans, establishing common rules regarding the insurance prices and options, and providing information to help consumers better understand the options available to them. The legislation leaves open the possibility for the creation of a multi-state or regional exchange in addition to the state-wide exchange.

- COG will host a meeting with health finance agencies in Maryland and Virginia to explore the complexities and potential benefit of a creating a tri-state or region exchange at the request of the District of Columbia Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking. This meeting is planned to take place in July. The Board will be briefed on the meeting, its outcome and next steps.*

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Workforce development must continue to be a priority for COG and the National Capital Region.

Building on COG's 2009 Workforce Task Force, COG should convene an ad hoc group of interested stakeholders to keep attention on this issue, assist COG in the oversight of these recommendations, and advise COG on priorities, implementation strategies and resources. Staff will provide periodic updates to the COG Board including specific federal and state advocacy recommendations.

** COG is currently working on these recommendations.*