

**Healthy Coastal Community Initiative (HCCI):**

*Training Healthcare Workers for a Strong Future in Grays and Pacific Counties*

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**1. Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?**

The Healthy Coastal Community Initiative (HCCI) will address the pressing need for an adequate and well-trained healthcare workforce in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties by collaborating with stakeholders to identify workforce needs, developing targeted training programs, prioritizing career connected learning, implementing recruitment strategies for underserved populations, and establishing employer partnerships. The initiative aims to equip individuals with the necessary skills, provide practical experience, promote inclusivity, and secure commitments for hiring, ultimately improving healthcare services, and meeting the demands of the aging population in the region.

This sectoral partnership will comprise key employers, including Grays Harbor College, K-12 institutions, local hospitals, Tribal Nations, medical clinics, and short- and long-term care facilities, operating within the healthcare industry sector. Our focus occupations are medical assistants (MAs), registered nurses (RNs), and licensed practical nurses (LPNs). The partnership aims to address workforce needs by re-engaging adults, expanding Medical Assistant program staff, establishing an LPN apprenticeship program, and meeting the healthcare demands of the aging population and underserved communities, with a particular emphasis on Pacific County.

Grays Harbor College offers a degree in Medical Assisting at its Aberdeen Campus. In addition to direct student admissions into the program, the Medical Assistant degree program has a long-standing partnership with the Aberdeen School District's Twin Harbor Skills Center. This partnership allows rising high school seniors in the Aberdeen School District to enroll in Grays Harbor College's Medical Assisting degree program. As the seniors graduate from high school, they have the first year (out of two years) completed of the college program. Students on this path have nearly a 100% matriculation rate to the college the year after they graduate from high school. Knowing the success of this model, coupled with the demand for qualified medical assistants, the HCCI proposes the expansion/replication of the model to Pacific County. Grays Harbor College includes two educational learning centers in Pacific County—Raymond and Ilwaco. The Raymond location is the proposed site for this program expansion—not only is there available physical space, but there is a nexus of three feeder high schools (Raymond, South Bend, and Willapa Valley) to collaborate with this program near this facility. In establishing a second program in Raymond, Grays Harbor College will also be able to encourage adult re-engagement in college, upskilling current certified nursing assistants, and to grow future interest in allied healthcare pathways.

HCCI grew out of the workforce demand for qualified healthcare workers in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties. With lead healthcare providers, like Summit Pacific Medical, unable to staff the gamut of positions needed to run their facilities, many partners are turning to contract nursing options, which are costly and are transitory. Through this initiative, HCCI is interested in addressing needed changes and updates in training allied healthcare workers for an ever-evolving world—including creating and promoting a healthy lifestyle (see Blue Zones below); incorporating indigenous knowledge and wisdom; growing and retaining talent in the two-county district; and preparing to serve a growing Latinx population.

The Healthy Coastal Community Initiative partners include:

- **Grays Harbor College:** Lead partner organization, program development, training delivery, student support.

- **K-12 (Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Raymond, South Bend, Willapa Valley):** program development, training delivery, student support
- **Tribal Nations including Chehalis, Chinook, Quinault, and Shoalwater Bay:** collaboration on tribal relations, program design, provide clinical experiences (including Quinault Wellness Center), commitment to hire graduates.
- **Local hospitals, medical clinics, and long-term care facilities, including Summit Pacific, Harbor Regional Health, and Willapa Harbor Hospital:** collaboration on program design, provide clinical experiences, commitment to hire graduates.
- **Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council:** coordinate workforce development efforts, aligning education, employment programs to meet regional needs.
- **Greater Grays Harbor Inc:** support healthcare workforce development through employer engagement, resource provision, business connections.
- **Grays Harbor College Foundation:** utilize resources to support HHCI related efforts at GHC through funding of scholarships and deploying resources to elevate related academic programs.
- **Blue Zones Grays Harbor:** collaborate on health-related initiatives, advocate for policies that enhance overall health outcomes.
- **RISE (Red De Inclusion Solidaridad y Empoderamiento):** facilitate connections to underserved populations to create access to healthcare workforce training programs.
- **Grays Harbor Youth Works:** offer career development and employment opportunities for youth, assisting with career exploration, internships, transitions into the healthcare workforce.
- **Twin Harbors Skills Center:** provide vocational training and career preparation programs for high school students, including healthcare career pathways and transition support.
- **Department of Health**

## 2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

The Healthy Coastal Community Initiative will be organized through a project advisory board comprised of the representatives from the stakeholder list noted above. HCCI will have a project manager that will be responsible for meeting the grant outcomes, keeping the project on target, and providing budget management. The project manager will be an employee of the college for the duration of the funding period.

All professional/technical programs offered by Grays Harbor College maintain advisory committees made up of business and industry leads who are in the field from a particular program of study. These committees meet on a quarterly basis, offer their expertise over the program curriculum, relay the needs of the industry, and inform the program leads on the success of the program's graduates in the community. The HCCI advisory board would operate in a very similar format to that of a program advisory board for the College.

An evaluation component to HCCI will be established by the project manager and facilitated by an external entity on an annual basis.

## 3. How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

Collaboration and pooling resources are commonly done across the two-county region of Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Knowing the remote, rural nature of the majority of this coastal region, the leaders in

these communities come together on a regular basis to address needs—such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, transportation needs, etc. This history of cooperation for a common good serves the HCCI well—many of the stakeholders noted in the first response of this document have a long history together.

A common concern among many stakeholders in this region is the “brain drain” of talent from the region. The need to train residents of the two counties in the region to stay in the region is paramount in stabilizing the future of healthcare for the coast. A “grow our own” model is supported by HCCI stakeholders and is why the program is building from two key onramps—one through the K-12 CTE Dual Credit model, and one through adult-reengagement.

In order for HCCI to be effective and meet its goals, the project has to have a diversity of perspectives and approaches to healthcare integrated into the work.

First, given that Grays Harbor College offers curriculum on the ancestral land of the Chehalis, Chinook, Shoalwater Bay, and Quinault, the healthcare programming should reflect indigenous learning and wisdom. Within the last year, the Quinault Nation opened the Quinault Wellness Center in downtown Aberdeen, offering much needed healthcare services to the region. The incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the medical assisting program at the college would help serve our Tribal communities better and to generate an informed and trained workforce. Grays Harbor College has begun this work in other areas of its professional/technical offerings through its inaugural work with the Tribal Stewards pilot program at the state level for natural resources. The college is well positioned to expand this work to the allied healthcare pathway.

Second, over the past ten years there has been significant growth in the Latinx population in both Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties. Grays Harbor College has seen this with the increased demand for English Language Learner classes and in its overall enrollment growth of Latinx students in college-level curriculum offerings. This growth has been significant enough that the college was recently invited to begin its application process for being federally recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution. This means that at least 25% of the college’s enrollment is comprised of Latinx students. The college is actively preparing for this designation. The inclusion of the Latinx community as the HCCI builds out its programming is paramount in making these healthcare pathways accessible to all populations in the region. As one would surmise, there is a growing need for Spanish-speaking healthcare workers. Ideally, the HCCI would be the perfect vehicle for the college and the community to create a pathway to offer bilingual medical assisting.

Lastly, Blue Zones Grays Harbor County is providing much needed focus on creating healthy communities. Led by the Chief Executive Officer of Summit Pacific Medical, Josh Martin was instrumental in bringing Blue Zones to the region. The life expectancy of the region, the common diseases plaguing many in the region, and the socio-economic realities of the region are all factors that have led to Grays Harbor County being one of the unhealthiest regions in the state. Teaming up with Blue Zones, HCCI will continue to lift the work of creating healthy, inclusive environments as it trains the allied healthcare workforce of the future.

As previously noted, HCCI will be organized through an advisory board that will meet on a quarterly basis to garner feedback and address any corrections mid-project. The leaders/stakeholders associated with HCCI are often on similar boards or at the same community meetings—so there is a working relationship already established as this work begins in earnest.

**4. Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership’s work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?**

The focal populations in HCCI include:

**\*K-12 Seniors**—in Aberdeen/ Hoquiam /Raymond / South Bend / Willapa Valley [Lived experience; local knowledge; first in family to attend college/first generation; multi-lingual households; bi-cultural households and communities].

**\*Returning Adults**—outreach to adults who have some credits but no credentials; to retrain and upskill current job situation [Lived experience; work experience; positive role modeling for younger generation; level of maturity and commitment; work-life balance; multi-lingual households; bi-cultural households; inter-generational experiences].

**\*Tribal Communities**—meeting regional Allied Healthcare needs; expertise with Quinault Wellness Center; incorporation of indigenous knowledge and wisdom into healthcare pathways.

**\*Latinx**—growing population in two county district; Spanish speaking friendly healthcare community needs; emerging federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution (GHC).

### **5. What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?**

HCCI is focusing its efforts on the two counties of Grays Harbor and Pacific, which is on the ancestral lands of the Chehalis, Chinook, Shoalwater Bay, and Quinault. Grays Harbor College’s service district includes these two counties from Lake Quinault in the north end of the district to Cape Disappointment on the Oregon border. The counties are predominately rural with the western border of the district being the Pacific Ocean. The region is comprised of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Legislative Districts.

### **6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?**

The communities of Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties have a long, rich history based on the successful timber industry. For over a century, timber, and its related industries, have been the economic engine that led to thriving communities for multiple generations. These industries produced living-wage jobs—where families could make it on one income. In the 1980s, the strength of the timber industry started to wither, throwing communities into great economic distress. Since that time, the once thriving communities of Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties have seen the onset of generational poverty, the diaspora of younger generations, and the steady decline of educational attainment at both the K-12 and college levels (it is one of the lowest in the state).

The reality of many communities in the region include challenges with affordable housing, food security, childcare, and a lack of living-wage jobs.

There are many leaders working to reverse these trends—but the region needs investment. The HCCI is one part of the greater lift for our communities that is needed to make a healthy, bright, vibrant future for our region.

In late 2023, the Biden-Harris Administration announced that Greater Grays Harbor, Inc. and Grays Harbor College was selected to receive \$500,000 to help create jobs thanks to the Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program. The Recompete Program is designed to target the hardest-hit and most economically distressed areas in the country where prime-age (25-54 years) employment is significantly lower than the national average, with the goal to close this gap through flexible, locally-driven investments. Upon looking into the EDA’s Prime Age Employment Gap (PAEG) mapping tool, Grays Harbor County has the highest PAEG of all counties in Washington State at 14.99%, while Pacific County’s PAEG was also high at 5.44%.

Economic distress, low educational attainment levels, housing challenges, food insecurity, and the “brain drain” of talent from the region are all challenges facing the region to be served by the HCCI. Another

aspect to consider is the only growing population in Grays Harbor County is the age demographic of 65+. This population will need stronger healthcare in the region—HCCI will help train the workforce to meet this growing demand.

## **7. What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?**

HCCI intends to grow allied healthcare workforce pipeline by:

\*Medical Assisting:

- A. Curriculum review of existing program for Medical Assisting at GHC
  - a. bilingual and indigenous knowledge considerations
- B. Create CTE Dual Credit articulation with Raymond, South Bend, and Willapa Bay High Schools based on the Aberdeen School District’s Twin Harbors Skills Center program.
- C. Create marketing/recruitment strategy.
- D. Establish and staff an allied healthcare simulation lab in Raymond.
- E. Build out program offerings to meet the needs of working adults—adding evening or weekend options.

\*Laying the groundwork for future educational opportunities:

- A. Explore the creation and implementation of a “bridge” from MA to RN pathway for existing Medical Assistants.
- B. Create proposal for a comprehensive LPN apprenticeship program.

## **8. How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?**

HCCI is built on the concept/framework of a progressive ladder curriculum—which is being built for initial training and credentialing, then retraining with multiple on and off ramps. This model better reflects student behavior post-pandemic—allowing for direct matriculation from high school, and for adults to reengage (or engage for the first time) throughout different points in their career.

Residents of the two-county area will be served by the following pathway options.

Pathway #1: CTE Dual Credit option for K-12 students: earning a Medical Assistant Degree (high school completion and a 2-year degree a year after high school) not just in Grays Harbor County, but expanding to a new cohort in Pacific County at the GHC Raymond Educational Center.

Pathway #2: Degree pathway for returning adults. Through assessment of prior learning and work-based engagement, working adults will be offered the opportunity to retrain as a medical assistant. Thousands of residents in the region that have earned credits but have not earned a credential. Re-engaging adults is a primary strategy for Grays Harbor College as it looks to better serve its district with its educational attainment needs.

Pathway #3: Upskilling certified nursing assistants and other entry-level medical professionals. Pathways #2 and #3 can be offered in Spanish depending on demand. These pathways will be offered with consideration for working adults or adults with children at home—hence evening and weekend program delivery.

Future plans include creating a bridge program for Medical Assistants into an RN pathway; and an LPN Apprenticeship program.