

## A new path for Southern & Rural Oregon... regional medical college is vital to our future

Oregon's state economy continues to improve post-recession. Yet, Southern Oregon's economy continues to struggle and lag behind as it has for decades. Our once robust timber industry has dwindled over the last 20 years, resulting in unemployment and poverty rates consistently higher than state and national averages. Federal timber payments that have provided relief are coming to an end soon. And, adding to economic hardships, communities are facing growing shortages of healthcare professionals that limit access to physical and mental health services.



Today, we stand at a crossroads. Innovative solutions are needed to put us on a path toward prosperity and growth. Building a regional medical college in Roseburg to train tomorrow's healthcare workforce will serve as a new economic engine for our region, while helping to ensure access to the critical care Southern Oregon's residents depend on.

### **Demand for healthcare is growing**

Healthcare delivery has increased as national reforms have connected more individuals with physical and mental health services. The number of uninsured Oregonians decreased by nearly 9 percent from 2013 to 2014. Southern Oregon counties had up to 13 percent declines in uninsured individuals. Large increases in enrollment under the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) from 2012 to 2014 have increased needs for physical and mental health care. OHP enrollment in Douglas County increased by 11 percent; Josephine County OHP enrollment was up by 14 percent.

Primary care, a focal point of healthcare reform, places greater demands on the healthcare labor force. Oregon's Coordinated Care Organizations reported that from 2011 to 2013 primary care visits among OHP members increased by 9 percent. A network of physician assistants, nurses and other support staff, in addition to primary care physicians, are needed to effectively deliver primary care to a growing number of individuals.



A large in-migration of older adults into Southern Oregon has also increased demand for healthcare services across the region. Plus, a looming "silver tsunami" of aging baby boomers with growing healthcare needs will soon put even greater strain on our healthcare system. While growing healthcare demand poses service delivery challenges, it also creates a new opportunity to capture that healthcare spending within the regional economy.

## Healthcare job vacancies are more difficult to fill, especially in rural areas

Oregon's healthcare industry consistently tops the list of total job vacancies, as well as difficult-to-fill jobs, in the state. Despite the recession, the industry has posted consistent job growth since the 1990s. Job vacancies for nursing assistants, registered nurses and other healthcare positions are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. The reason is largely due to the lack of applicants and qualified candidates. Rates of difficult-to-fill healthcare jobs are especially high in many areas across Rural Oregon and Southern Oregon and are expected to worsen as more workers soon retire from the labor force.



## Train tomorrow's workforce today

Building a skilled healthcare workforce will work to reverse growing access issues. Those who train in rural areas are more likely to stay and work in rural areas than those trained in urban areas. A new stream of graduates would fill growing job vacancies within Southern Oregon and rural communities throughout the state. The net result will be increased access to physical and mental healthcare services both locally and in other rural areas struggling to provide services.

## Ensure economic renewal now

Oregon's state economy continues to improve post-recession, but widespread disparities in unemployment rates and job growth exist between urban and rural areas. Employment in Southern Oregon's wood products industry has dramatically declined over the last 40 years. About one in ten jobs are in manufacturing today as compared to about one in three jobs during the 1970s. Unemployment rates are consistently higher than state and national averages. Renewal of federal timber payments that have provided relief to our region are likely to end soon.

Capitalizing on healthcare's recession-proof nature, the regional medical college will provide jobs, new economic activity and long-term economic stability. A total of over 500 direct and indirect jobs could be created at the college's largest potential capacity. It is estimated that the college, at its top projected enrollment, would generate almost \$52 million in economic benefits to the region. Plus, the college will have a positive impact on retaining and attracting residents and business by providing well-trained professionals to deliver healthcare services that are a cornerstone of our economic infrastructure.



## Create local job training opportunities

Southern Oregon is experiencing a large exodus of its youth and young families as they leave in search of jobs elsewhere. Yet, job vacancies exist in a range of healthcare fields and are projected to grow. Low education levels and the lack of local training opportunities are part of the problem. The region needs new job training opportunities that give our youth and young families a reason to stay and for others to relocate to the region.

## About Oregonians for Rural Health

Oregonians for Rural Health is a coalition founded in January 2016 of community leaders, healthcare providers, economic development groups, educators and others dedicated to promoting the health and vitality of our rural communities. Supporters include the following:

- County Commissioners
  - Douglas County: Commissioners Susan Morgan, Tim Freeman and Chris Boyce
  - Josephine County: Commissioner Simon Hare
  - Curry County: Commissioner David Brock
  - Coos County: Commissioner Bob Main
  - Lane County: Commissioner Faye Stewart
  
- Mayors & City Managers
  - Roseburg: Mayor Larry Rich and City Manager Lance Colley
  - Bandon: Mayor Mary Schamehorn
  - Brookings: Mayor Ron Hedenskog and City Manager Gary Milliman
  - Coquille: Mayor Benjamin Marchant
  - Myrtle Creek: Mayor Ken Brouillard and City Manager Sean Negherbon
  - Port Orford; Mayor James Auburn and City Manager Terry Richards
  
- Hospitals & Healthcare Providers
  - Architrave/Umpqua Health Alliance (Roseburg)
  - Bay Area Hospital (Coos Bay)
  - CHI Mercy Health Mercy Medical Center (Roseburg)
  - Coquille Valley Hospital (Coquille)
  - Curry General Hospital/Curry Health Network (Brookings & Gold Beach)
  - DCIPA (Roseburg)
  - Lower Umpqua Hospital (Reedsport)
  - Roseburg VA (Roseburg)
  - Southern Coos Hospital & Health Center (Bandon)
  
- Educators
  - Southwestern Oregon Community College
  - Umpqua Community College
  - Umpqua Training and Employment
  
- Businesses & Economic Development Groups
  - NeighborWorks Umpqua
  - Roseburg Area Chamber of Commerce
  - The Partnership for Economic Development in Douglas County