

# *Oregonians for Rural Health*

## **Regional Allied Health Medical College Frequently Asked Questions**

Today, Southern and Rural Oregon stands at a crossroads. Innovative solutions are needed to put us on a path toward improved economic prosperity and growth. Building a regional medical college to train tomorrow's healthcare workforce will serve as a new economic engine for our region, while reversing healthcare provider shortages and ensuring access to critical care.

The following are frequently asked questions about the regional medical college.

**Q:** Is this regional medical education college really viable?

**A:** Southern Oregon, like so many communities across the U.S., faces increasing healthcare provider shortages. This significantly decreases access to physical and mental healthcare for families, seniors and other vulnerable community members. Building a skilled healthcare workforce today will work to reverse growing access issues. This is a matter of great concern to the medical care industry. In turn, the salaries received in the field can justify the cost of higher education in a way that many other professions do not. Oregonians for Rural Health has done extensive research on college finances and models; while many higher education institutions are facing financial difficulties this is not the case in allied health fields.

**Q:** Are healthcare shortages real?

**A:** As baby boomers age, their demand for healthcare services continues to increase. The net result of this "silver tsunami" is a greater strain on our healthcare system. Shortages are being felt in a number of medical fields from nursing and pharmacy to physical therapy and laboratory services. Because of new demand for services and expected retirements, about 350,000 new healthcare professionals in the college's target fields will be needed by the year 2023 in the western United States alone. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 526,800 more nurses will be needed across the nation by 2022 in order to keep up with patient growth and replace those who leave. It is projected that Oregon will need over 11,000 new nurses alone by 2022.

Smaller communities and rural areas are being hit especially hard. Most of Oregon's rural counties are in fragile healthcare situations, experiencing severe provider shortages in both physical and mental care. Douglas County, where Roseburg is located, is designated as a Governor's Certified Shortage Area. Roseburg itself is considered one of Oregon's medically-underserved areas. And, Oregon is not alone. Of the 2,050 rural U.S. counties, 77 percent are designated as health professional shortage areas.

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**Q:** Will building this college really help the local economy?

**A:** An economic impact study, conducted by independent experts (Johnson Economics), concluded the college will serve as a stable economic engine for the area. The college is expected to be largely “recession proof” as are most higher education providers and especially given the healthcare focus. The college will provide a much needed boost to employment in the area. A total of over 500 permanent jobs could be created at the college’s largest potential capacity, driven by both direct employment and demands for services by the students who would enter the area. It is estimated that the college, at its top projected enrollment, would generate almost \$40 million in payroll and locally-purchased services. Altogether, including student spending and other impacts, the college would add \$52 million in economic activity per year in Douglas County. In addition, the college will have a net positive impact on local and regional healthcare by providing trained professionals to fill open job vacancies. This will aid in retaining and attracting businesses to the area.

Health care training institutions provide a significant boost to the local economy. There are several examples of this throughout the nation; however one local example stands out. In 2011, the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific Northwest (COMP-Northwest) began training Osteopathic Physicians in small town Lebanon, Oregon. Now look at what Lebanon area leaders are saying about the College and its economic impacts:

- Lebanon Mayor Paul Aziz: *“When COMP-Northwest came to Lebanon, it was a game changer. The partnership with COMP-Northwest and the city of Lebanon shows what can be done to turn a community around. You cannot measure the value that having the medical school brings to Lebanon.”*
- Linn County Commissioner Roger Nyquist: *“Lebanon is the envy of many rural communities in Oregon. Without COMP-Northwest, there likely is no medical campus as we know it, no veterans home and it’s doubtful that the new conference center, lodging facility and restaurant would be realities.”*
- Lebanon City Manager Gary Marks: *“In many ways, the arrival of COMP-Northwest in Lebanon was a watershed event in the economic turnaround of the community.”*

**Q:** Will the college help to improve healthcare access?

**A:** Many students graduating from the college are expected to stay in the local and regional area and fill growing job vacancies. It has been found that rural healthcare can be best served by training students within a rural context. Evidence for this can be found in OHSU’s training in Klamath Falls where about 85% of graduates go on to jobs in rural areas. This will provide a more stable, reliable source of skilled healthcare professionals to serve in a variety of high-demand medical positions. The net result will be increased access to physical and mental healthcare services both locally and in many rural areas struggling to provide critical services.

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**Q:** Why Roseburg?

**A:** Roseburg is a well-suited location to build the college. It is well-situated on the I-5 corridor and accessible, but also a rural community positioning the college to address the most acute healthcare workforce problems: those faced in rural communities. An extensive feasibility study completed in 2014 confirmed that there are multiple sites that would accommodate a multi-building college campus. Strong local support from city and county government, the business community and healthcare organizations, including Mercy Medical Center and the Roseburg VA Medical Center, exists to support the college and make it a reality.

**Q:** Why now?

**A:** We need to start generating long-term solutions now to Southern Oregon's economic crisis. Renewal of the federal timber payments that have provided economic relief to the region for nearly a decade are expected to come to an end. Unemployment rates in Southern Oregon are consistently higher than the state average. For more than 20 years unemployment rates in Southern Oregon have been higher than the national and state average. New job training opportunities are needed. And, with healthcare provider shortages increasing in Southern Oregon and many other areas, this is an ideal opportunity to spearhead a new path toward improved economic prosperity. Furthermore, it is also critical that we get ahead of growing healthcare provider shortages to ensure Oregonians have access to physical and mental care.

**Q:** What programs are expected to be offered at the college?

**A:** The college would serve multiple high-demand medical fields, such as nursing, pharmacy, radiology and imaging, laboratory services, physical and occupational therapy, and mental health. The specific mix of programs offered by the college will depend, in part, on the academic partner. Priority will be given to higher-demand medical fields.

**Q:** Would the new college compete with Umpqua Community College?

**A:** No. The college is a partner in this effort. None of the proposed programs are offered or currently contemplated by UCC. In addition, the college has been modeled with no 100- or 200- level coursework, creating the possibility to drive additional course demand at UCC.

**Q:** Will there be enough students interested in attending the college?

**A:** Compared to the growing demand for healthcare professionals in physical and mental care, there are currently limited training opportunities, especially in Southern and rural Oregon. It is expected that students will come from the regional area and across Oregon, plus Southern Washington and Northern California. Regional physical therapy programs, as an example, regularly receive applications from several times the number of qualified applicants as they have slots for.

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**Q:** How many students is the college expected to serve?

**A:** The feasibility study modeled a college that would serve over 1,500 students annually once all programs were phased in.

**Q:** How much funding is needed to build the college?

**A:** It is estimated that about \$180 million is needed to build the college at its largest potential capacity. The total amount of initial funding needed will depend on how the college is configured once a new academic partner is secured. The college could be built in phases in order to reduce the initial funding requirements.

**Q:** How do you expect to raise the capital needed to support building the college?

**A:** We are building a broad-based coalition to attract a new academic partner and secure the funding needed to make this college a reality. A combination of public and private funding will be sought to build the college.