

# Connecting Pathways to Health Care Careers



Dean of Business and Health Services at Clark College, Scot Headley introduces a panel.

More than 75 healthcare professionals, educators and workforce development experts gathered for an inaugural **Healthcare Pathways Education and Industry Summit** at Clark College Columbia Tech Center on March 7. With a shared goal of expanding healthcare career pathways and partnerships in Southwest Washington, the event buzzed with new connections, strategic discussions, and plans for future collaborations.

Host agencies included Clark College Health Sciences unit, Washington State Allied Health Center of Excellence, Workforce Southwest Washington and Career Connect Southwest, a program of Educational Service District 112.



A panel speaks about workforce and educator partnerships.

## Building pathways with partners

Scot Headley, dean of Business and Health Services at Clark College, said, “We view this event as the next step in bringing more collaboration and alignment in raising awareness and building pathways into healthcare careers amongst the various educational agencies, colleges, community organizations, and employers. I am grateful for our partnership with ESD 112 and Career Connect Southwest and for the faculty and staff at Clark who are willing to invest their time, energy, and creativity into building these pathways.”

This cross-sector gathering addressed the following objectives:

1. Share successes and challenges of existing programs
2. Develop a regional roadmap for healthcare career awareness

3. Plan community engagement strategies
4. Identify quick-turn and long-term solutions to workforce challenges

The event included two panel discussions. Additionally, during a collaborative small-group work session, group members considered these questions:

- Given the current healthcare workforce shortages, what innovative strategies or partnerships have you seen succeed in attracting and retaining talent, including in rural areas?
- How can the healthcare industry collaborate more effectively with educational institutions to ensure students are graduating with the skills and certifications needed to meet immediate labor demands?
- What emerging trends in healthcare (e.g., technology, aging population) do you foresee having the most significant impact on the types of roles and skills needed in the next 5-10 years, and how should education systems adapt to these changes?
- What resources and opportunities could be made available to educators and students to acquaint them with opportunities and needs within healthcare?





A panelist answers a question.

## Summit discoveries

Groups collaborated and wrote their answers and ideas on whiteboards, including these:

- Build strategic partnerships for developing allied health programs
- Create incumbent worker pathways
- Provide resources to K-12 faculty to understand and present health care pathways to students
- Lack of capacity from employers and education to build and deliver systems for career exploration and preparation
- Clinical experience is valuable

After robust discussions, it was clear what is needed in moving forward:

- More partnerships between education and industry
- Improved communication between education and industry partners
- More clearly defined career pathways for students, including those who do not plan to earn a four-year degree
- More hands-on opportunities for students, via career days, externships, paid internships, and more



*Left to right: Event organizers Chad Mullen, Scot Headley, and Vickei Hrdina.*

## Partner feedback

Vickei Hrdina, Director of K12 Workforce and Higher Ed Partnerships, Educational Service District 112 and executive director of Career Connect Southwest: "This Summit has been instrumental in strengthening collaboration between K-12,

higher education, and industry leaders. By developing a clear roadmap for aligning high school Career and Technical Education with post-secondary training and real workforce needs, we've taken a significant step toward building a more seamless talent pipeline. This model will not only guide regional efforts but also serve as a framework for other high-demand sectors."

**Chad Mullen**, *Career Connect Southwest network manager*: "The need for strong and reciprocal relationships between industry and education was clear at this summit. When we work together to increase our efforts to help our students explore, prepare for, and launch into many career pathways in healthcare, we can help those students envision and pursue their future in the field."

**Sean Moore**, *senior project manager, healthcare, Workforce Southwest Washington, also is a member of several health care advisory boards at Clark College*: "By bringing together employers, union representatives, community partners, high school and college educators ensures we are all focused on developing in-demand, career pathway/living wage opportunities for emerging talent to meet the needs of our Southwest Washington healthcare workforce."

**Paul Huddleston**, *dean of students at Cascadia Tech Academy*: "Getting industry and education in the same room is fantastic. I'm looking to improve our program, to provide our students opportunities to explore careers, and to equip our students with the skillset industry is looking for."

**John Armerding**, *health sciences teacher, Columbia River High School, Vancouver School District*: "My primary goal here is to figure out next steps for my students. It's important to recognize that four years of college is not for everyone."

**Andrew Goss**, *health sciences teacher, Heritage High School, Evergreen School District*: "I want to find more opportunities

for my students. I want to learn what gaps do I need to focus on to prepare my students?"

**Kelly Stellrecht**, *Washington State Opportunity Scholarships*: "We are trying to make more connections with employers and students."

**Jess Friason**, *Legacy Health*: "How can we provide more opportunities to middle school and high school students? How can what we offer complement a high school's needs?"

## Participate in a future summit

Contact Scot Headley, dean of Business and Health Services at Clark College

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## Learn more

- Clark College Health Sciences unit
- Washington State Allied Health Center of Excellence
- Workforce Southwest Washington
- Career Connect Southwest

*Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish*