

## One Coast, One Future Health Care Industry Cluster Study

Prepared by Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP  
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**Purpose** –The One Coast, One Future effort aims to create stronger economic linkages among Southwest Connecticut’s business centers of Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford. The One Coast, One Future Health Industry Cluster Study assists municipal governments, regional organizations, and economic development leaders in their efforts to include health care services, facilities, providers and related businesses in their respective planning processes.

**Methodology** – The Business Council of Fairfield County retained Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP to work with a Steering Committee composed of regional leaders in health care, higher education, business, and economic development. The Steering Committee developed recommendations based on a review of extensive demographic and health services data, a literature search of national and regional trends in health care, and opinions of leaders in health care and related industries and economic development fields.

### **Key Findings and Recommendations**

#### **1. The Health Care Workforce – The most important issue affecting the prospects for the region’s health care industry is the growing workforce shortages.**

To address the region’s workforce shortages, the Steering Committee recommends the **creation of the Southwest Connecticut Health Workforce Initiative, a public/private partnership to implement specific strategies with measurable goals to address current and projected health care occupational shortages.** The partnership must include representation from the region’s six hospitals, the region’s colleges and universities, The Workplace, Inc. (Southwest Connecticut’s workforce investment board), K-12 school systems, the technical high school system, the adult education system, and statewide groups already involved in healthcare workforce initiatives. Strategies should address four priorities:

- **Increase the annual, regional production of registered nursing program graduates from 350 to 700 by 2012. Similar goals should be set for other health care occupations.** This will require building the capacity of the regional higher education system to graduate more qualified nursing and allied health professionals. The Steering Committee recommends strategies, aligned with statewide efforts, to address teaching faculty shortages, increase the use of clinical simulations, improve coordination of clinical placements, and coordinate the expansion of teaching facilities.
- **Increase worker access to health occupations and increase mobility within the health care field.** Strategies to support this priority include defining health care career ladders, increasing financial aid for shortage occupations, strengthening state science and

math high school graduation standards and instruction, and improving health care career guidance throughout the K-12 system.

- **Improve services to bring more English-proficient, immigrant workers into the health care field.** This can be accomplished by customizing services for immigrants with foreign health care credentials and supporting English as a Second Language (ESL) providers and employers in efforts to expand ESL capacity and accessibility.
- **Address "Brain Drain" with steps to make the region more attractive as a location for nurses and other health workers.** The Steering Committee recommends financial and non-financial incentives to retain graduates of in-demand occupational programs, as well as incumbent workers, marketing the region as an attractive place to live and work, and supporting efforts to make housing more accessible for health care workers of all wage levels.

2. **Creating a Healthier Coast** – A growing national movement promoting prevention, wellness, and chronic disease management seeks to improve health and lower health care costs, often by working through employers to provide incentives and programs to influence employee behavior.

The Steering Committee recommends the mobilization of a *Southwest Regional Wellness Task Force* to be charged with creating a pilot, collaborative program to restructure the compensation system, adjust practices, and engage employers to encourage wellness, prevention, and chronic disease management for one or a limited number of selected health conditions, such as asthma, obesity or diabetes, for a targeted population. Developing incentives for individuals, employers, providers, and payors to encourage wellness and prevention has the potential to not only advance the health of our regional population, but also bolster the competitiveness of the region's businesses and the vitality of the regional economy.

3. **Health-Related Economic Development Opportunities** – The Steering Committee concluded that successful economic development strategies should target firms that provide products and services for a national and global health care marketplace. These include:
  - **Medical Devices and Instruments** – Fairfield County has a high concentration of medical device industry employment to build upon. The One Coast region should be attractive to medical device companies because it offers easy access to a customer base, a technically-skilled workforce, access to firms with precision manufacturing capabilities, proximity to New York City, and a high level of venture capital and private funding. Due to cost and transportation factors, greater Bridgeport and the lower Naugatuck Valley are the logical areas to target for medical device manufacturing.
  - **Health-Related Insurance and Finance** – The One Coast region contains a high concentration of venture capital and hedge funds. It also has the workforce and infrastructure to support further development in specialized markets such as health care finance. The finance industry's ability to support the region's high cost of business operations and housing make it a strong candidate for increased investment. The region has an opportunity to "brand" itself as a center of health related finance and attract additional firms active in this niche market.
  - **Bioscience/Biotechnology** – Regions to the North (New Haven) and South (New York City) of the One Coast region feature prospering bioscience clusters, but Southwest Connecticut has yet to establish a strong bioscience presence, in large part due to the lack of a major research university in the region. However, the region should attempt to

highlight cheap lab space, easy access to capital, and a highly skilled labor force. If research activity can be brought into the region, bioscience would immediately become an area on which to concentrate economic development efforts.

- 4. Health Care Policy** – Advocacy activities fall beyond the charge of the Steering Committee. However, the Steering Committee did explore a number of key policy issues in the course of the study, including universal coverage, Medicaid reimbursements, malpractice and tort reform, community college faculty pay, and the adult education funding system. These issues will be forwarded to other relevant entities for further consideration.

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