

PA House Policy Committee Hearing Testimony on Addressing Pennsylvania’s Rural Healthcare Workforce Shortage Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Chair Rowe, Representative Struzzi, and members of the Policy Committee, welcome to IUP and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Lara Luetkehans, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at **Indiana University of Pennsylvania**, a public institution with a long-standing mission to serve the people and communities of rural Pennsylvania. I am joined by my colleague, Dr. Miko Rose, founding Dean of the proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine at IUP.

Pennsylvania is facing a **critical healthcare workforce shortage**, particularly in rural and underserved regions. This challenge extends well beyond physicians and nurses. It includes shortages in **speech-language pathologists, radiologic technologists, laboratory professionals, nutrition and food science experts, and mental and behavioral health providers**—the very professionals who make comprehensive, team-based care possible.

At IUP, we are responding with a **coordinated, scalable workforce strategy** grounded in partnerships, infrastructure investment, and outcomes.

Current Strengths and Workforce Demand

IUP already plays a vital role in Pennsylvania’s healthcare pipeline. Our nursing program alone produces approximately **120 graduates annually**, with a **97% first-time NCLEX pass rate** and strong retention and graduation outcomes. Similar strengths exist across our allied health and behavioral health programs, many of which are already operating at or near capacity due to workforce demand.

Our graduates serve communities across western and central Pennsylvania, with most remaining in the same regions where they train—an outcome strongly supported by research and reinforced by our own experience. Today we will share with you three of our strategic solutions to address Pennsylvania’s Rural Health Workforce Needs.

Strategic Solution #1: The Proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine

A Workforce Multiplier for Rural Pennsylvania

A central pillar of our strategy is the **proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine**, intentionally designed to serve **rural Pennsylvania first**.

This initiative is not simply about producing more physicians. It is about **strengthening entire healthcare teams and systems**.

Osteopathic medicine is uniquely aligned with rural needs. Osteopathic physicians are more likely to enter **primary care**, practice in **rural and underserved communities**, and embrace a **whole-person approach** that integrates physical, behavioral, and preventive health. That

philosophy complements IUP's existing strengths in nursing, allied health, psychology, and community health.

The proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine builds on IUP's established experience in **doctoral education, applied research, and community-engaged scholarship**.

Approximately 1/3 of our undergraduate students are pursuing degrees in STEM-H fields. Our medical students will train early and consistently in rural clinical environments, participate in applied research focused on rural health disparities, and learn alongside students from other health disciplines in team-based care models.

The College currently holds **Candidate Status** with the **Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation**. Importantly, IUP has already secured **affiliate clinical agreements exceeding 240% of national accreditation requirements**, with a strong emphasis on rural and high-need regions.

These same clinical partners support training in nursing, laboratory sciences, radiologic sciences, behavioral health, and other allied health fields—creating **shared clinical ecosystems rather than isolated pipelines**. Graduates trained together are far more likely to practice together and remain in the communities they serve.

In this way, the proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine functions as a **workforce multiplier**, stabilizing rural hospitals and clinics while reinforcing the full spectrum of healthcare professions.

Strategic Solution #2: Expanding Nursing and Allied Health Capacity

In parallel, IUP has developed a **two-phase Nursing Program Expansion Initiative** to increase the number of nurses trained—from an average of 175 students per cohort to as many as 350 depending on available funding through grants and private funding—while maintaining accreditation standards and educational quality.

This expansion will be possible by:

- Creating a **consolidated simulation training facility**, shared across nursing, allied health programs, and the proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine
- Strategic faculty preparation and hiring
- Leveraging affiliation agreements with clinical partners across programs, and
- Dedicated student success and NCLEX preparation support

This same infrastructure directly benefits **speech-language pathology, radiologic sciences, laboratory sciences, nutrition, and mental and behavioral health programs**, all of which rely on simulation, clinical placement capacity, and strong hospital/health system partnerships.

Strategic Solution #3: Partnerships with Hospitals and Health Systems

None of this work happens in isolation.

IUP maintains deep, long-standing partnerships with **hospitals, clinics, and health systems**, including **Indiana Regional Medical Center**, which serves as a cornerstone clinical partner for education, training, and workforce development.

These partners:

- Help shape curricula to reflect real-world workforce needs
- Provide clinical and experiential training across disciplines
- Serve as the **primary employers** of our graduates

As we expand capacity across nursing, allied health, behavioral health, and medicine, these education–practice partnerships ensure that students move efficiently from **training to employment**, strengthening local healthcare systems and improving access to care.

Return on Investment and Closing

These solutions are **measurable, sustainable investments**. By expanding coordinated training across healthcare professions, Pennsylvania will see:

- Increased workforce supply in high-need regions
- Improved retention of professionals in rural communities
- Stronger hospitals, clinics, and community health systems

In closing, Pennsylvania’s rural healthcare challenges cannot be solved by focusing on a single profession. **Care is delivered by teams**, and workforce solutions must reflect that reality.

With continued Commonwealth partnership, **Indiana University of Pennsylvania** stands ready to expand these pipelines, deepen hospital collaborations, and deliver a healthcare workforce prepared to serve Pennsylvanians—now and for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and your leadership.

Supporting Data for IUP Testimony – PA House Policy Committee

Figure 1. PA/Regional Resident to Healthcare Provider Ratio

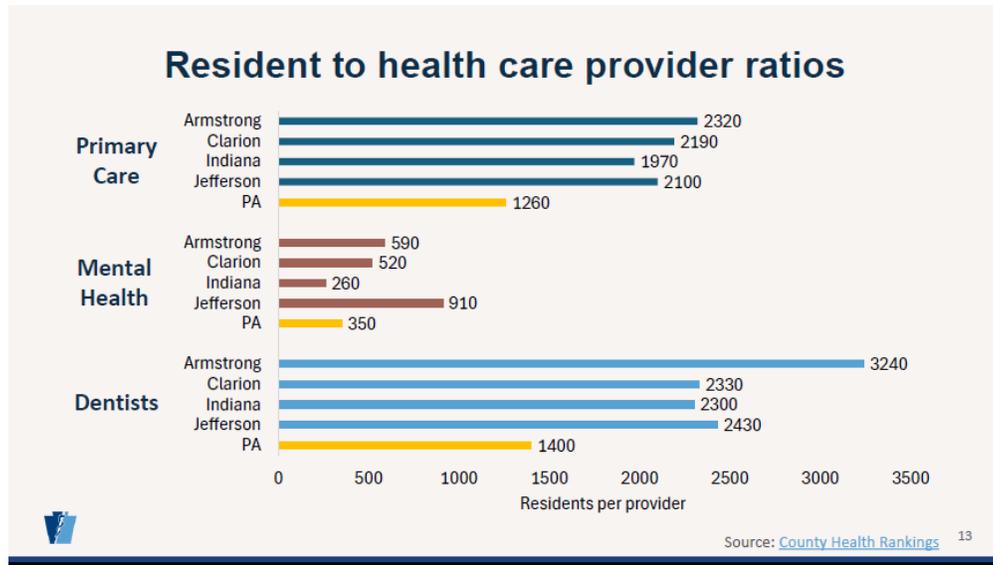


Figure 2. 2025-26 IUP Health Sciences Program Enrollments

Program	Current Enrollments
Nursing BSN	634
Nurse Educator/Admin MSN	15
Nursing DNP to PhD/PhD	50
EMT	47
Paramedic	49
Medical Laboratory Sciences BS	3
Medical Imaging BS (Sonog, Echo, Nuclear)	238
Medical Technology BS	10
Athletic Training and Exercise Science (all BS degrees)	156
Athletic Training and Exercise Science (all MS degrees)	17
Food and Nutrition (MS)	19
Respiratory Care (BS)	31
Speech Language Pathology (MS)	45
Clinical Psychology (PsyD)	56
Clinical Mental Health Counselors/Educators (MA and PhD)	120
Psychology BS	339

PASSHE Workforce Outcomes. Updated July 2024. Found at <https://viz.passhe.edu/t/Public/views/PASSHEWorkforceOutcomes/WorkforceOutcomes?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y>

Current PASSHE data reporting, three years after graduation, 71 percent of students are working in Pennsylvania. Five years after graduation, 67 percent of graduates remain working in Pennsylvania. Further, of those students who pursue a health-related major, 80 percent work in Pennsylvania 3 years after graduation, and 77 percent are still employed in Pennsylvania five years after graduation. This provides strong evidence that PASSHE-educated students prefer to stay in Pennsylvania after graduation.

Osteopathic Medicine Training Outcomes - OMP Report. 2023-2024. Found at <https://osteopathic.org/index.php?aam-media=/wp-content/uploads/2023-OMP-Report.pdf>

In 2023, the number of osteopathic physicians in the U.S. had a 30% increase over the past five years, and more than 25% of all U.S. medical students are pursuing osteopathic medicine. 39-57% of DO graduates practice in primary care, noted by the [American Medical Association that “Most DO’s Choose Primary Care.”](#) By comparison, approximately 19 -25% of allopathic medical graduates practice primary care. Without the front-facing primary care health care providers available to serve the Commonwealth, the result will be an overutilization of emergency department (ED) services, a significant national problem characterized primarily by patients with non-emergent conditions seeking care in a setting designed specifically for acute care. Additionally, nonurgent medical conditions, when not treated adequately (or at all), run great risk to evolve into medical urgencies and emergencies—risking worsening health of our communities and creating great financial burdens for delivery of care. Primary care access has been demonstrated to [make healthcare, overall, more affordable.](#)