



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF
RURAL HEALTH

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POLICY BRIEF | APRIL 2024

Georgetown County's Role in Recruiting Workforce



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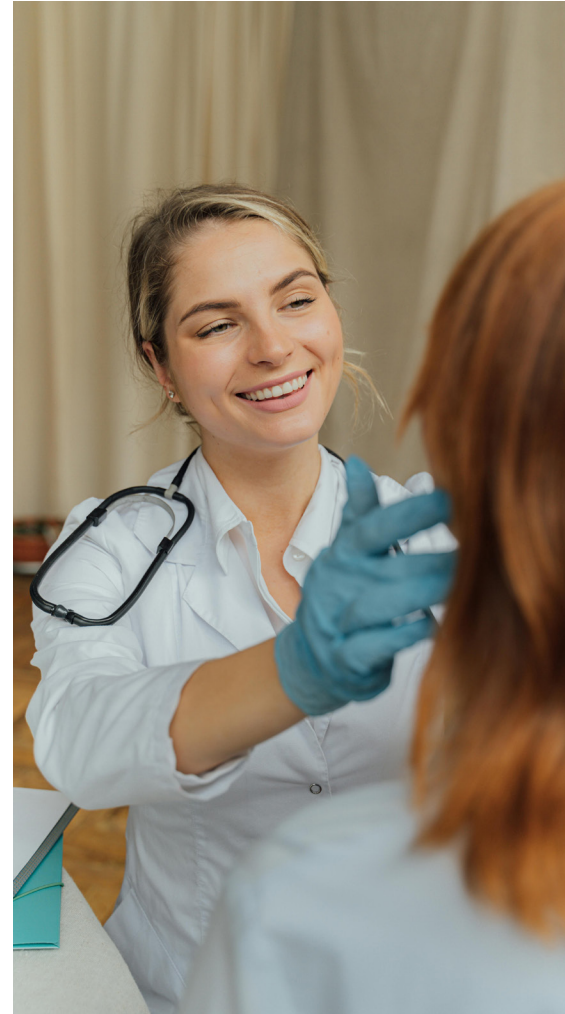
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Introduction

Georgetown County is unique in nature. One portion of the county is considered a tourist destination; however, thirty miles inland, another part of Georgetown County is rural. The residents of the coastal town Pawley's Island and the residents of Andrews have different levels of access to care. Parts of the county have an adequate supply of health care providers and other parts do not.

In South Carolina's rural communities, the number of health professionals is decreasing more rapidly than the rural population.¹ Rural South Carolina has experienced a decline of physicians, registered nurses, dental hygienists, pharmacists and respiratory care practitioners.² Health care professionals can be reluctant to seek or stay in roles housed in rural health care facilities because of the travel time, lack of available schools and childcare programs for their children, limited housing, heavy workload and professional isolation.³

Local government can play a critical role in attracting and retaining the workforce to support health care needs. This can be done by enhancing the quality of life for residents in all corners of the county. Counties can invest in beautification projects, childcare accessibility, affordable housing solutions and the public school system. All these components will support the growth of the professional workforce and make local communities more attractive for future residents. Rural communities face unique challenges in workforce recruitment, but utilizing community relationships and planning can help reduce barriers and promote growth.



Community Beautification and Infrastructure

Community beautification fosters community pride, identity and satisfaction. Physical appearance plays a critical role in a county's success.⁴ Beauty attracts tourists, economic development investments and ultimately an influx of residents to fulfill workforce demands. Examples of beautification projects include planting trees and flowers and installing public art displays and holiday decorations.⁵ Local governments can encourage civic groups to plant gardens throughout the county to improve beautification. County officials can uplift the arts community by inviting local artists to paint murals in key parts of the county. Murals provide the government with the opportunity to pay homage to the community's history and traditions while creating vibrant destinations within their community.

In addition to beautification projects, adults want their local government entities to invest in community centers, parks and recreation facilities.⁶ Community infrastructure is not only desirable to adults; nearby green spaces and sports facilities encourage active lifestyles for community residents of all ages.⁷ Investing in these public spaces improves the physical environment and culture.⁸ Studies have found that talented professionals, remote workers and retirees are more likely to reside in areas with a variety of amenity options.⁹ These facilities can serve as hubs for children, families and the aging population.¹⁰ Additionally, they provide space for educational and social activities for both children and adults.¹¹ This infrastructure is especially desirable for new and existing families searching for community in a post-pandemic world.



Accessible Childcare

Accessible childcare is critical to building family-friendly communities.¹² A barrier for parents wanting to enter or return to the workforce is access to high-quality and affordable childcare. Many families decide on their place of residence based on childcare and educational opportunities for their children.¹³ High-quality early childhood education supports healthy development and academic achievement.¹⁴ Children who participate in high-quality preschool programs are best prepared for school and future earning potential.¹⁵ Lack of available daycare and other preschool opportunities might prevent families with young children from being able to move to a particular area, despite what opportunity exists for parents.

The contribution local government can make in the early childcare space is often overlooked.¹⁶ Local government can use existing revenue to fill funding gaps so that more families can access childcare programs.¹⁷ Counties can waive permit fees, provide tax credits and modify zoning requirements for potential childcare providers.¹⁸ Additionally, local government can incentivize employers who provide childcare for their employees and encourage school districts to create preschools since they have existing physical infrastructure.¹⁹ Since much of the childrearing burden often falls on women, investing in innovative ways to make childcare more affordable supports gender equity and promotes economic growth.²⁰

Affordable Housing

As the cost of housing continues to rise, workforce housing becomes increasingly more valuable to residents. In 2023, the South Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to allow revenue generated by the accommodations tax to be used to develop workforce housing.²¹ According to the state legislation, workforce housing is defined as residential housing for sale or rent provided for a person or family within 30 percent and 120 percent of the median income for the local area.²² In 2023, Georgia announced a Rural Workforce Housing Initiative that would develop multi and single-family units in rural Georgia.²³ This effort was established to assist the growing workforce in attaining high-quality and affordable housing. Construction costs continue to rise for housing developers, and the price of new homes is beyond the reach of many working families.²⁴ That said, for health care facilities to keep the needed professionals, they must ensure employees have a feasible place to live for their wage level. To ensure that health care positions remain filled, county leadership should work in partnership with health care providers to develop feasible housing solutions for the workforce.



Investing in Public Schools

School quality and a family's home location are closely related.²⁵ The proximity to desirable schools is a driving factor for working professionals; therefore, attracting families should include investing in public schools to ensure that they are able to provide the best education possible. The quality of nearby schools can influence the perception of a neighborhood or community. To improve the quality of schools in rural communities, local policymakers should prioritize fully funding schools. In South Carolina, the state funds up to 70 percent of the budgets of school districts.²⁶ Local school districts are responsible for filling in the funding gaps.²⁷ County leadership should work with local school boards to determine funding priorities to ensure the needs of students are being met. When county and school officials build strong working relationships, they can work collaboratively to maximize the impact of county and other external investments. Families flock to zip codes with high-quality schools.²⁸ Therefore, failing to maintain the quality of schools can lead to disinvestment, resulting in families leaving the area.

It has been demonstrated that families in a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to move to a higher-quality school zone as compared to families of a middle or lower socioeconomic status.²⁹ Families with children were also willing to increase their monthly housing costs, demonstrating that they are willing to undertake financial burdens for access to better schools for their children.³⁰

Conclusion

Appealing to multiple generations of potential residents can be a challenge to local leaders. A recent high school graduate entering the workforce values different aspects of their community compared to an experienced health care worker with a family. To ensure that community planning efforts are informed by the desires of community members, county leadership should intentionally include voices from residents of all ages and socioeconomic statuses. To ensure resident input is included in the policy making process, county officials can utilize existing advisory boards to provide recommendations to county officials.

To retain health care workers in rural areas, the county must work diligently with their local health facilities. Maintaining the appropriate staff ensures that county residents receive quality of care.³¹ When employees leave health care facilities, a strain is placed on staff and may impact the quality and coordination of care.³² By addressing concerns such as childcare affordability and access to housing and high-quality schools, health care professionals will be more likely to move their families to rural communities.



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