

Stivers, Council on Postsecondary Education Announce Launch of Collaborative to Address Nursing Shortage

Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Collaborative
established via the 2022 state budget



FRANKFORT (JULY 15, 2022) - Senate President Robert Stivers, R-Manchester, joined several fellow Clay Countians from the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and other leaders Friday morning for a press conference outlining the official launch of the Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Collaborative (KYHWC).

The mission of KYHWC is to bring together state leaders, campus leaders, health care professionals and policy experts to solve the state's health care crisis.

Supported by Stivers, the Kentucky General Assembly allocated \$10 million in funding from the State Fiscal Recovery Fund of the American Rescue Plan of 2021 to establish the initiative, which is administered by CPE.

"As each state faces a health care worker shortage, the legislature has chosen to lead and be a model other states will seek to emulate," Stivers said after the announcement. "The problem isn't relative to Kentucky, nor is it something we can solve overnight, but with the funding authorized by the General Assembly and through the dedicated work we will see from my fellow Clay Countians, Aaron Thompson and Leslie Sizemore with CPE, we can have faith we have put our best foot forward."

Dr. Aaron Thompson is president of CPE and participated in today's launch of KYHWC.

"The collaborative is about looking at what we need to do holistically; it is about policymakers, practitioners and those who are educators," Thompson said. "We can't get to the point of understanding how to streamline all of this unless we are all at the same table. That's what the collaborative is all about, but the collaborative cannot do it without resources, so I want to thank President Stivers and the legislature for the \$10 million to get this started."

Dr. Leslie Sizemore, a senior fellow for workforce development at CPE, outlined the next steps of KYHWC, particularly the expectations of higher education institutions that will be critical in the mission.

"We have been entrusted with \$10 million to support our institutions of higher learning as they use innovative methods to move frontline health care students into the talent pipeline," she said. "A swift and intentional response is necessary for this process and in order to succeed we need to hold these institutions to some non-negotiables."

"Funds are available following an approved plan for use. The plans will need to show partnership with local and regional health care sectors who will demonstrate their skin in the game; dedicating staff, resources, clinical education experiences for students. Institutions will show how they will provide wrap-around services for students, removing barriers, effectively weeding in students who were once weeded out."

According to CPE, Kentucky is 12 to 20 percent short on nursing staff, and it is expected the state will need over 16,000 additional nurses by 2025. KYHWC will play a prominent role in pulling together stakeholders to solve the problem. The initiative will serve many purposes, including:

- Strengthening recruitment and retention within the nursing industry by raising student awareness of and interest in the health care industry and assisting health care organizations in supporting career growth and development for employees.
- Improving pathways between high school career and technical programs to college-level healthcare programs.
- Providing direct grants to Kentucky's public institutions, such as the Kentucky Community and Technical College Systems.

In addition to the \$10 million in funding to support KYHWC, President Stivers and bill sponsor Sen. Robby Mills, R-Henderson, were instrumental in enacting Senate Bill 10 (SB 10).

The bill was announced during a press conference on February 15, where Stivers, Mills and practicing health care professionals, Sen. Ralph Alvarado, R-Winchester, and Sen. Donald Douglas, R-Nicholasville, gathered to outline the provisions in SB 10 and the impact on the state's nursing shortage.

SB 10 was priority legislation to address issues placing strains on Kentucky's health care system. Provisions of the bill removed arbitrary enrollment caps on nursing programs and restructured the Kentucky Board of Nursing to be more reflective of Kentucky's geographical diversity and, most importantly, bolster the voices of nurses by requiring ten board members to be practicing nurses.

"These policy initiatives are thoughtful and measured approaches designed to meet the needs of the people of our state," Stivers added. "I want to thank everyone involved, from my colleagues like Sen. Mills who carried SB 10, our health care professionals providing care for Kentuckians, and Dr. Thompson and Leslie Sizemore and all the folks at CPE who will see the vision of the Healthcare Workforce Collaborative through to its end goal."

Additional efforts by the state legislature to address the health care crisis from the 2022 Legislative Session include \$38 million to establish the Commonwealth West Healthcare Workforce Innovation Center with KCTCS in Owensboro and \$2 million for the Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program to be administered by the University of Kentucky.

Visit Legislature.ky.gov for more information on Senate President Robert Stivers and to follow legislative activity during the ongoing 2022 Interim. Live legislative coverage is available at ket.org/legislature and via the LRC YouTube Channel. Archived footage of meetings is available at ket.org/legislature/archives.

Gov. Beshear Signs Bills Promoting Better Health Care in Kentucky



FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 15, 2022) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear joined state lawmakers and health care advocates in the Capitol Rotunda to ceremonially sign six bills that provide Kentucky families with better access to health care.

The bills the Governor signed support lung cancer screenings and community health workers, and they improve access to dental care, mental health benefits, stroke care and medication.

"One of the reasons I became Governor is because I believe health care is a basic human right. I believe that government should do everything possible to make sure people have access to health care no matter where they live, no matter how old or young they are, no matter how much money they have," Gov. Beshear said. "Every Kentuckian should be able to get health care for themselves and for their families."

First, the Governor signed House Bill 219, sponsored by Rep. Kim Moser of Taylor Mill, which establishes a lung cancer screening program in the Kentucky Department for Public Health. The bill also sets up a lung cancer screening fund and a Lung Cancer Screening Advisory Committee, in order to catch the disease earlier.

"We worked really hard to get this bill through and it passed unanimously," Dr. Mike Gieske, a primary care doctor with St. Elizabeth Healthcare, said. "We are going after cancer with lung cancer screening, even what we find in the late stages. There is a tremendous amount of hope. We can make a big difference."

"Kentucky Medical Association is thrilled to see House Bill 219 officially signed into law," KMA Executive Vice President Patrick Padgett said. "Kentucky currently has the highest incidence rate of lung cancer in the U.S. and consistently ranks at the top of the list in lung cancer deaths. This legislation will increase lung cancer screening, reduce the state's morbidity and mortality from lung cancer, reduce the cost associated with treatment and raise public awareness regarding the benefits of screening. Lung health is a top priority for KMA members, and we thank the physicians who advocated tirelessly for this bill, as well as its sponsor, Rep. Moser, for helping see this important legislation cross the finish line."

Second, the Governor signed House Bill 525, which provides funding and other support for community health workers who work primarily in underserved communities. Community health workers help Kentuckians make the best possible health care decisions. They advise people on matters such as how to deal with chronic illness and assist them in learning about preventive care services.

"It is a step toward making a statewide system of navigation to improve access to health care," Rep. Moser said. "We have expanded Medicaid, yet there are still people who are not accessing care for a variety of reasons. We know that our community health workers are those individuals who can really connect the dots for individuals who are struggling."

Next, the Governor signed House Bill 237, co-sponsored by Rep. Moser and Rep. Lisa Willner of Louisville, which increases the number of mental health professionals able to treat patients, particularly in underserved areas. The bill also adds cultural and social training requirements for psychologists so they can better understand all the factors that influence their patients' decision-making, particularly when it comes to issues related to health and quality of life.

House Bill 237 follows two other mental health bills signed by the Governor last month: House Bill 127, which expands access to assisted outpatient treatment, and House Bill 562, which promotes mental health care for first responders.

"Thank you to Gov. Beshear, thank you to everybody that's here today, thank you to Rep. Moser for this really important bill to expand health care access to make it easier to attract and retain psychologists across Kentucky," Rep. Lisa Willner said. "As we have opened up access to mental health care through telehealth, it is so important that psychologists across the state have strong training and cultural determinants of health and social determinants of health, and that's what this bill does."

Today, Gov. Beshear also signed House Bill 370, sponsored by Rep. Derek Lewis of London. This bill addresses the need for greater transparency when it comes to dental health benefits by helping Kentuckians better manage their coverage and costs and preventing insurance companies from misleading patients.

"We've been seeing some insurance companies misleading patients about what's covered, and about how their coverage works when it comes to dental health," Gov. Beshear said. "This bill addresses those bad practices and it expands access to dental health for Kentuckians."

Following House Bill 370, Gov. Beshear signed another bill improving health care in Kentucky, Senate Bill 55, sponsored by Senator Donald Douglas of Nicholasville, helps more Kentucky hospitals earn the formal designation of "certified stroke center," which will allow for patients with stroke emergencies to be directed to the most qualified hospital faster. This will enhance stroke care and prevention throughout Kentucky.

"Heart disease and stroke affects everyone. It touches all of our lives" Dr. D.P. Suresh, executive medical director of the St. Elizabeth Healthcare Heart & Vascular Institute, said. "For the people of the commonwealth, these measures today are really going to benefit their lives."

The final bill Gov. Beshear signed today, Senate Bill 140, sponsored by Senator Max Wise of Campbellsville, pertains to the health insurance practice of step therapy. Step therapy is the insurance company practice that requires doctors to prescribe the lowest-cost medicine from the insurance company's approved list, rather than the medication the doctor thinks is best. If that medication is ineffective, the clinician is then required to prescribe the medicine with the next step up in price, and so on. The process of step therapy can lead to a lot of needless suffering for Kentuckians.

Senate Bill 140 requires insurers to allow patients and doctors to choose which medications are best for treatment, rather than automatically having to start with the least expensive medication.

"Kentucky now joins more than two dozen states that have enacted legislation to put common sense patient protections into the step therapy practice," Senator Wise said. "This new law will help ensure that patients and their health care providers will have a clear, transparent and timely process particularly when it comes to medically recommended for a patient to receive a step-therapy exception request."