

REGIONAL WORKFORCE ROUNDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kansas is experiencing a critical shortage in the aging services workforce, threatening the stability and accessibility of long-term care for older adults. In response, LeadingAge Kansas convened regional roundtables in four diverse communities across the state: Dodge City, Hays, Hesston, and Lenexa. These sessions engaged providers, educators, workforce partners, and community stakeholders using a problem-based learning exercise (PBLE) format. Participants developed localized, actionable strategies that reflect both unique regional dynamics and common statewide challenges. This report summarizes the outcomes of each roundtable and proposes a unified path forward based on shared priorities and innovations.



Kylee Childs, Director of Government Affairs, LeadingAge Kansas, facilitates a Problem Based Learning Exercise.



Aging services providers, legislators, and community members engage in discussion surrounding the workforce crisis in Kansas.

BACKGROUND

The Aging Services Workforce Crisis in Kansas

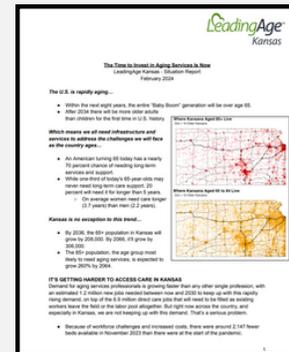
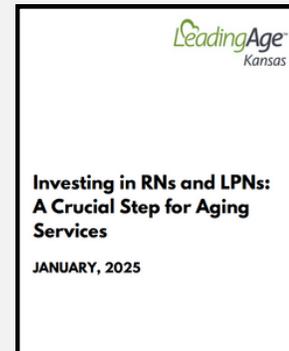
Kansas aging services providers are facing historic workforce shortages, particularly among CNAs, nurses, dietary staff, and support roles. Turnover and vacancy data from the 2025 LeadingAge Kansas Workforce Report highlights that CNAs experience turnover rates exceeding 50%, with similar alarming rates for RNs and LPNs. Many rural providers face vacancy rates above 13% for licensed staff. The demand for aging services is growing, but workforce numbers are not keeping pace.

Rural areas are disproportionately affected due to geographic isolation, lack of access to training programs, and smaller labor markets. Providers report a growing dependence on expensive temporary staffing agencies to fill gaps, creating strain on budgets and impacting care continuity. Staffing shortages have led to reduced admissions, delays in care, and diminished quality.

Barriers to recruitment and retention include:

- Low compensation relative to hospitals and other healthcare settings.
- Inadequate access to child care and transportation, especially in rural areas.
- Limited professional development pathways or apprenticeships.
- Lack of public awareness about rewarding careers in aging services.
- Regulatory burdens that deter innovation and add administrative strain.

To guide roundtable participants in exploring solutions to these challenges, two key resources were provided: the 2025 LeadingAge Kansas Workforce Report and the LeadingAge Kansas Workforce Toolkit. These tools offered comprehensive workforce data, strategy case studies, and practical planning templates. Participants used these reports during the PBLE brainstorming to identify barriers and co-create solutions tailored to their local workforce realities.



ROUNDTABLE DESIGN

Problem-Based Learning in Action

The roundtables were designed to foster community-driven innovation through PBLEs. Each regional event brought together a cross-section of local aging services stakeholders who worked collaboratively to define a workforce problem, brainstorm causes, identify knowledge gaps, and propose targeted solutions. The PBLE format encouraged realistic, evidence-informed, and locally tailored strategies.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a collaborative, hands-on approach to problem-solving that emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and applied knowledge. Rather than starting with a lecture or presentation, participants are given a real-world challenge to explore and solve through guided steps. In the context of the roundtables, PBL was adapted as a Problem-Based Learning Experience (PBLE) tailored to the unique workforce barriers facing the aging services sector.

Steps in the PBLE Process



Each group created a high-level action plan that included:

- The barrier and chosen solution
- Short-term and long-term steps
- Key partners and stakeholders
- Resources needed (e.g., funding, training)
- Metrics for success

At the end of the session, each group presented their findings and plan to all roundtable participants. This not only sparked cross-group dialogue but also helped surface shared regional priorities and promising local innovations. The PBLE format was well-received for its interactive and productive structure and we plan to utilize it more in future convenings.

REGIONAL THEMES @ HIGHLIGHTS

Southwestern Region - Dodge City

- Key Challenges: Lack of targeted recruitment, over-reliance on staffing agencies, lack of pooled workforce strategies.
- Action Plans: Form a regional staffing cooperative; target high school and nontraditional students through testimonials and HR outreach; explore apprenticeship and child care solutions.

Northwestern Region - Hays

- Key Challenges: Rural recruitment barriers, outdated tech infrastructure, burnout, stigma of long-term care careers.
- Action Plans: Improve scheduling flexibility, integrate new technologies with staff education, launch intergenerational outreach campaigns, and partner with colleges to revise nursing curriculum.

Central Region - Hesston

- Key Challenges: Absence of clear career pathways, retention struggles, lack of entry-level candidates.
- Action Plans: Develop credentialing partnerships, in-house training and mentorship certifications, housing support for staff, and regional marketing campaigns.

Eastern Region - Lenexa

- Key Challenges: CNA turnover, limited workforce preparedness, lack of affordable housing and child care.
- Action Plans: Launch mentorship and apprenticeship models; promote intergenerational programs; update workforce readiness curricula in high schools; offer flexible wage/benefit packages.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES ACROSS REGIONS

RECRUITMENT

- Early Career Exposure
- Intergenerational Programming
- Stigma Reduction

RETENTION

- Mentorship
- Flexible Scheduling
- Workplace Culture Improvement

TRAINING ACCESS

- Limited CNA/LPN Clinical Access
- Rural & Hybrid Models Needed

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Child Care & Housing were Identified as Universal Barriers

TECHNOLOGY

- Limited CNA/LPN Clinical Access
- Rural & Hybrid Models Needed

REGULATION

- Frustration with Redundant Regulations that Limit Innovation and Care

SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

Local and Regional Partnerships

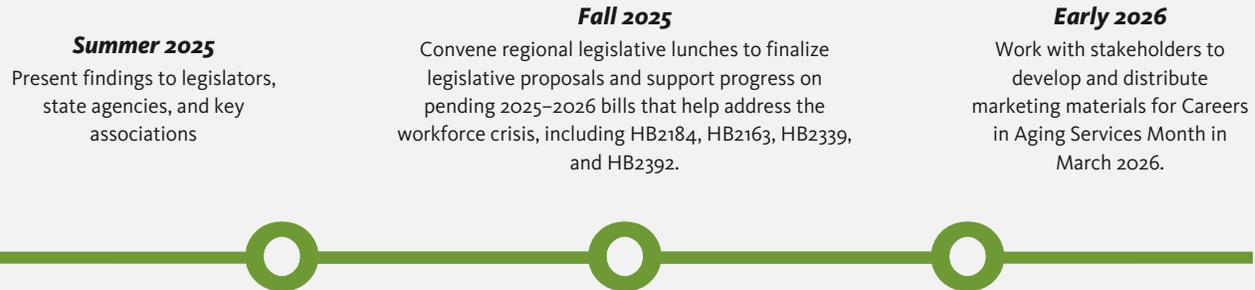
- Education & Training:
 - K-12 pipeline partnerships for more frequent and earlier exposure to LTC
 - Clinical partnerships and apprenticeships
 - Badge and credentialing programs
- Support Services:
 - Employer-led child care solutions
 - Local housing partnerships and subsidies
 - Peer support and wellness programming
- Community Awareness:
 - Intergenerational volunteer programs
 - Community-driven social media and testimonial campaigns



Legislative and State Policy Recommendations

- Workforce Investment:
 - Create a Medicaid incentive to support increasing wages based on upskilling
 - Continue and expand scholarships, stipends, and loan forgiveness for LTC workers
 - Individual incentives, such as a tax incentive, for staff accepting clinical placements of students
- Regulatory Modernization:
 - Simplify and harmonize regulations that are administratively burdensome and pull away from direct patient care
 - Review K-12 education requirements and see where opportunities for career exploration and engagement are available
- Public-Private Coordination:
 - Fund statewide career awareness campaign
 - Create a standing long term care workforce innovation council

NEXT STEPS @ CONCLUSION



Ongoing

The LeadingAge Kansas Workforce Committee will collaborate with education entities, including community colleges and universities, to develop scalable apprenticeship and microcredential programs that respond to the regionally identified needs.

A dedicated workforce intern has joined the LeadingAge Kansas team and will assist in tracking local partnership progress, supporting apprenticeship pathway development, coordinating follow-up on roundtable-identified strategies, and track statewide metrics on turnover, vacancies, training access, and enrollment.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Workforce Roundtables confirmed that while each region faces unique challenges, there are shared themes that call for both localized experimentation and coordinated statewide action. This report outlines concrete ideas generated by the field itself, and LeadingAge Kansas is committed to building on this momentum. As we move into 2026, the Workforce Committee will lead collaborative planning with educational institutions and workforce boards to operationalize solutions like apprenticeships and credential ladders. Legislative advocacy will continue, with attention on pending bills designed to address staffing shortages and workforce quality. Our new workforce intern will support continued outreach, research, and technical assistance for pilot projects. By connecting roundtable insights with policy, education, and practice, we are laying the groundwork for a more resilient and rewarding aging services workforce in Kansas. Together, we will continue to elevate the profession, support our direct care heroes, and ensure high-quality care for Kansas elders for generations to come.

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