



primary care coalition

# 2024 Report **Workforce Capacity Program**

A Primary Care Coalition and Nexus Montgomery  
collaboration with community partners

# About PCC

The Primary Care Coalition (PCC) is a nonprofit organization in Montgomery County, Maryland, dedicated to improving health in our community. PCC has a 30-year track record organizing and administering health care programs for uninsured people. We support primary care, behavioral health, and specialty care services for adults and children by partnering with 11 community-based clinics and an array of community and county governmental organizations. PCC also serves as the management entity for the Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership (Nexus Montgomery).

Nexus Montgomery is a collaboration among Montgomery County's six hospitals, working with community partners to promote health, reduce hospital utilization, and manage the total cost of care for our shared community in ways that no single hospital could achieve on its own.

## With appreciation to our 2024 Workforce funding partners

A grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)'s Employment and Training Administration funds 92.8% (\$1.3 million) of the cost to train 200 healthcare workers and increase Montgomery College training capacity between December 2023 and November 2025. Non-governmental funds, including support from Maryland Physicians Care, support 7.2% (\$101,615) of these costs. Additional workforce capacity efforts have been supported by Maryland Physicians Care, WorkSource Montgomery, and the Maryland Department of Labor.



Maryland Department of Labor



Maryland Physicians Care



Federal Department of Labor  
Employment and Training Administration



WorkSource Montgomery



# Building Workforce Capacity

In 2022, Nexus Montgomery and PCC created the Workforce Capacity initiative to help local healthcare organizations enhance the pipeline of entry-level healthcare workers. The program is designed to meet local needs for caregivers, increase availability of qualified workers, and improve career opportunities for community members.

Maryland and Montgomery County are facing a significant healthcare staffing shortage. Hospitals, nursing facilities, and home care organizations have significant needs for Registered Nurses (RNs) along with nursing support staff. Since 2019, there have been over 7,000 more certified nursing assistant (CNA) licenses expiring than issued, and currently, more than 10% of CNA positions remain unfilled. The need for caregivers will continue to increase: an aging population and federal staffing rules for nursing homes add to the demand for certified nursing assistants.

In Montgomery County, where 59% of the population are people of color and one-third are immigrants, many people continue to face employment barriers such as lack of training, limited English proficiency and unfamiliarity with U.S. academic and employment systems. County residents need employment and access to jobs that can support families, for example:

## Partner Organizations

**Primary Care Coalition**

**Nexus Montgomery**

**American Muslim Senior Society**

**Ethiopian Community Center**

**Classroom 2 Community (C2C)**

**Montgomery College**

**Muslim Community Center**

**Triumph Training / Cambridge Nursing Assistant Academy**

45% of PCC’s program applicants were unemployed, and only 20% of employed applicants reported having any employee benefits. PCC’s Workforce Capacity (WFC) program addresses these challenges by recruiting and training community members for entry-level healthcare roles while emphasizing career advancement.

The Workforce Capacity initiative is a Nexus Montgomery partnership with community-based organizations, training programs, and Montgomery County hospitals. Together, we have increased the number of linguistically and culturally diverse entry-level healthcare workers available in Montgomery County by providing training, support services, and employment assistance. The program improves the health and economic stability of the community by providing skills leading to sustainable jobs and career advancement opportunities for individual community members. Certified trainees are part of the direct care service sector, an area of critical workforce need in Maryland.

Workforce activities are guided by a Workforce Capacity Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of Montgomery County hospitals, Montgomery College, and a community-based organization. The Committee advises on workforce needs, training recommendations, and career pathway development for entry-level healthcare workers.

## Collaborative Model

PCC coordinates a comprehensive strategy to identify motivated community members, provide certification training delivered by qualified institutions, provide wraparound services to help participants succeed, and, importantly, provide job readiness services to ensure that candidates are ready to work and know how to find jobs in Montgomery County healthcare organizations. Our community partners lead outreach to diverse communities, ensuring we reach and support a wide range of individuals.

*“The success of the program is the result of the fabulous partnership between the Primary Care Coalition, community organizations including Nexus hospitals, funders and motivated community members. I have to say, the leadership and support provided by the Primary Care Coalition has been pivotal. They have been the critical link.”*

*Mr. Abdulaziz Kamus  
Senior Clinical Manager at MCC Medical Clinic*

# Language Skills

Recognizing the critical importance of English skills for job success and career advancement, English language services are a key component of the Workforce Program. PCC partners with Classroom2Community to provide immediately available English classes to candidates before and during training. We emphasize the importance of English skills for career advancement and offer resume assistance and interview skills practice as a critical element of job readiness.

## About the Trainees

In 2024, over 2,000 community members expressed interest in the PCC Workforce Capacity program, 500 people completed applications, and 148 met eligibility requirements and were enrolled in training programs.

Trainees truly represent a cross-section of community members. While the majority immigrated to the US from other nations, participants represent every age and race. Over half of those seeking CNA or Geriatric Nursing Assistant (GNA) training expressed interest in continuing their education to become registered nurses.

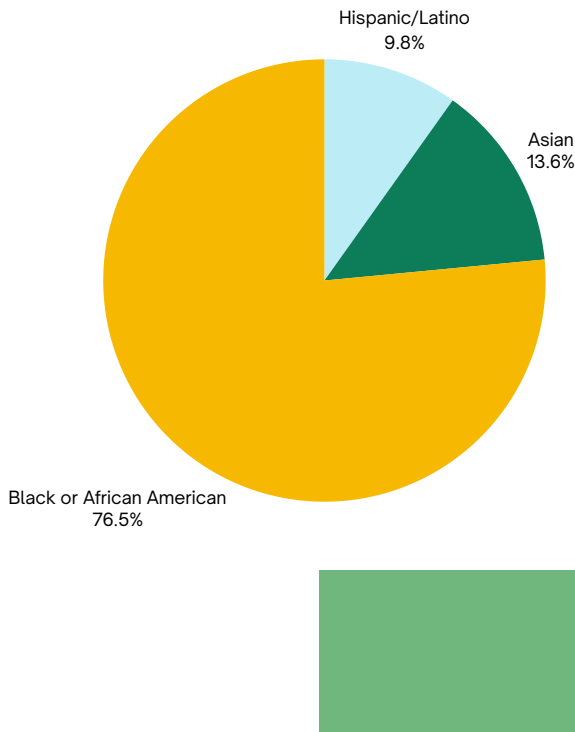


*Celebration of graduates supported by PCC and WorkSource Montgomery hosted by AMSS, December 2024*

Workforce trainees speak more than  
**200 languages**

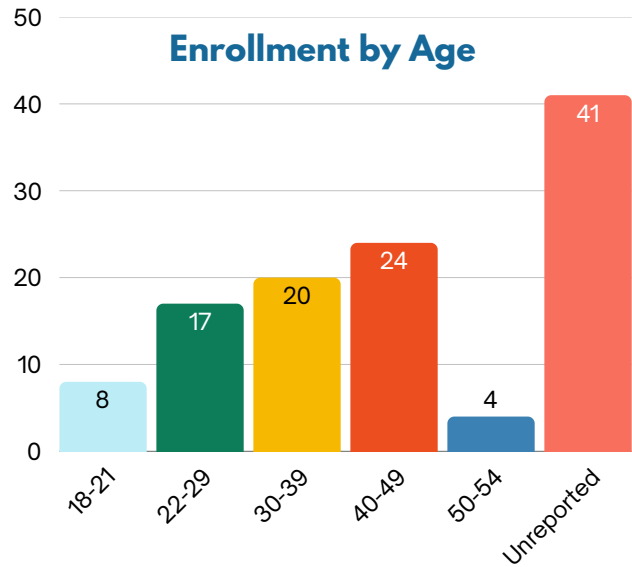
>80% are immigrants trying to build opportunities in Montgomery County.

### Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



In 2024, **148 people** enrolled in healthcare certification training through PCC programs

### Enrollment by Age



# 2024 Training

PCC’s workforce program is a path to employment and economic improvement for Maryland families. PCC encourages trainees to seek employment in Montgomery County hospitals and other healthcare organizations that offer employee benefits and opportunities for career advancement.

2024 PCC Healthcare Certification Training Enrollments, by Funder	
WorkSource Montgomery	25 certified nursing assistants (CNAs)
U.S. Department of Labor	115 CNAs, geriatric nursing assistants (GNAs), pharmacy techs, phlebotomy techs
Maryland Department of Health	8 CNAs

Funded by the **U.S. Department of Labor** and in partnership with Montgomery College, 67 people completed Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training, 2 completed Geriatric Nursing Assistant Training, 31 finished pharmacy tech coursework, and 14 completed phlebotomy tech coursework.



*WorkSource Montgomery Scholars at Cambridge CNA graduation*



*Montgomery College CNA celebrating graduation with her family*

**17 (of 25) participants**  
funded by WorkSource Montgomery in  
2024 were hired for new CNA positions

25 people completed CNA training at Cambridge Nursing Assistant Academy/Triumph Training and Services in 2024 with **WorkSource Montgomery** funding and in partnership with the American Muslim Senior Society (AMSS). In the three years of WorkSource Montgomery funding, PCC and AMSS supported training for 70 CNAs, 29 certified medication technicians (CMTs), and 13 GNAs.

New hire positions included: 13 full-time, 2 part-time, and 2 as-needed (PRN). These jobs are in Montgomery County hospital systems, urgent care clinics, and long-term care facilities, many which offer benefits and career advancement opportunities.

The **Maryland Department of Labor** Direct Care Workforce Innovation Program, launched in late 2024, identifies candidates with college-level training in other countries, provides entry-level training in the US, and promotes career acceleration in partnership with hospitals.

28 people funded by the U.S. DOL secured new jobs in Montgomery County hospitals, and 18 found new jobs in the community with home care agencies, Montgomery County Schools, laboratories, and pharmacies.

# Employment Navigation and Partnerships

As immigrants, many participants experienced challenges navigating the complex U.S. employment market. Newcomers to Montgomery County needed assistance with resume development, practicing interview skills in English, and even understanding how to search for jobs on employment portals. PCC and its partner organizations provided job readiness services and educated participants on how to assess the value of job opportunities.

Our message is that ‘High value’ jobs offer:

- Competitive wages
- Health care benefits
- Paid time off
- Tuition assistance
- Career opportunities

PCC cultivated hiring partnerships with Holy Cross Health, Adventist HealthCare, Suburban Hospital, MedStar Montgomery, along with other healthcare employers. We advocated to our participants that they should seek employment where they could access tuition assistance and other support to advance in their career growth.

## Recent Employers



*PCC scholars visit Adventist HealthCare Rehab*

- Adventist HealthCare
- Capital City Nurses
- Corewood Care
- CVS
- Dominion Labs
- Holy Cross Health
- MedStar Montgomery
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- LabCorp
- Suburban Hospital
- Sunrise Assisted Living
- Visiting Angels



# 2024 Newsletter Features

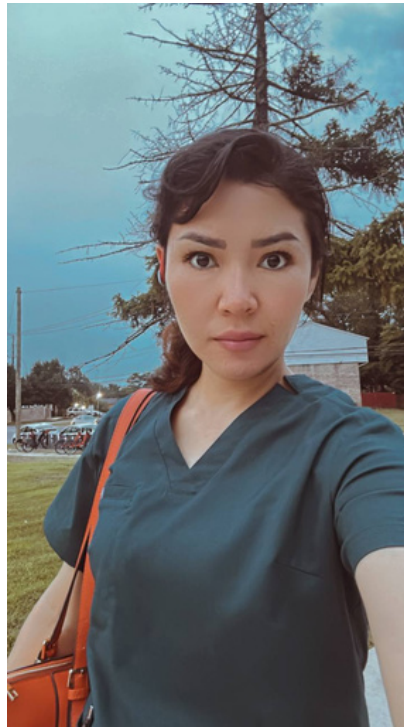
In PCC's newsletter, The Pulse, we share stories of Workforce Capacity Program participants and partners.

## Workforce Program Graduate Profile – Fatima Afshar's Step Forward!

Fatima Afshar's remarkable journey—from arriving in this country seven months ago to becoming a dedicated Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at Holy Cross Hospital's Intermediate Care Unit—exemplifies her unwavering determination and perseverance. And the impact of receiving a CNA degree through the Primary Care Coalition's Department of Labor (DOL)-funded Workforce Capacity program.

"I left my home country with few opportunities to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse," Afshar says. "When I moved here, PCC helped me to enroll at Montgomery College. I was unsure of my ability to pursue the certification, but I was determined to try. Through a friend, I found out about the scholarship. It made all the difference in the world. I had found a way."

In addition to Nexus Montgomery hospital partners and training institutions like Montgomery College, PCC's Workforce Capacity program partners with community organizations that provide outreach, wraparound services, and student support. Candidate referrals come from these partners and a wide variety of county organizations. Current enrollees include immigrants from Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Ghana,



and El Salvador, as well as U.S. students. The goal is for program participants like Fatima to find employment with a Nexus Montgomery hospital, giving them additional career advancement opportunities and financial stability. Fatima's experience demonstrates

scholarship's effectiveness in delivering personalized solutions and equipping individuals for successful careers in healthcare. Fatima is grateful for the scholarship and the crucial support system it provided. She credits much of her success to the demanding schoolwork, peer encouragement, and supervision from her Montgomery College professor, Metassebia Kefelegn. "Professor Metassebia was a great source of inspiration and support for me, especially when I was unsure whether I could continue with the program," Afshar says. "But she encouraged me: 'You are strong; you can do this.'" Afshar's clinical training experience at Holy Cross Hospital gave her a solid foundation for her current job in the Intermediate Care Unit. She feels confident in her skills and well-prepared. In

addition to getting her started in the training program, PCC assisted in the job search by helping her write a resume and connect with Holy Cross's recruitment staff.

The happiness and pride in her mother's eyes when she saw Afshar in her nurse's uniform highlight the transformative power of educational possibilities, as well

as the importance of perseverance and dedication in attaining one's goals. Afshar's husband, Amanullah Rahimi, has supported her throughout her journey, and Fatima believes it has impacted her daughters, too: "They can see that dreams are worthwhile since they can come true."

## Triumph at Last: Celebrating Faith Ibura Ideki's Inspiring Journey to Become a CNA



Faith Ibura Ideki's journey has taken her tens of thousands of miles, two continents, and almost five years. "Growing up in Nigeria, I dreamed of being a nurse. I majored in Biochemistry in one of the Federal Universities of Technology in Nigeria with plans to join in the nursing program upon graduation. However, my husband's career took us to Columbia, Missouri, where he accepted a position. That changed everything."

Faith had the good fortune to land a job at the University of Missouri hospital with duties supporting the nursing care team. "I assisted with everything, including helping doctors, storing supplies, and providing patients with basic medical care." I felt like I was helping people even though I wasn't a nurse.

When her husband was offered a new position in Washington, DC, Faith and her family gathered their possessions, packed up, and relocated to Silver Spring, Maryland. "Because of my experience in Missouri, I had a better understanding of how to secure another

position in health care," she explained. Unfortunately, despite her significant experience and excellent recommendations from past colleagues, she learned she would need certification if she wanted to be a part of clinical care teams in Maryland. And, as fate would have it, an informal conversation with a neighbor pointed her to an opportunity, putting everything back on track.

"It was just a casual talk, and I mentioned to my friend that I was looking into getting the necessary certification. Here I was unemployed and looking for a way to become a nurse. My friend told me that Montgomery College had a curriculum that was ideal for me, and that the Primary Care Coalition had a tuition assistance program. Well, I applied to the program through PCC and was fortunate enough to be accepted as part of the second set of certified nursing assistant (CNA) students in the program. It was a blessing."

PCC's Workforce Capacity program, a project of Nexus Montgomery, was created to meet hospital needs for entry-level healthcare workers and to provide career-path employment opportunities for diverse community members. The program is partnering with community

organizations for outreach and student support, and scholarships provide community members with certification training at Montgomery College, designed as a first step into a healthcare career. After graduating from the CNA training program at Montgomery College in early October, Faith accepted an offer from Kensington Senior Living Center. By accepting the scholarship, she is committed to providing care in Montgomery County for a year. As Faith reflects on how far she has come, she says, "I understand that so much of what we achieve is because of the help of others. I wouldn't be where I am now if it hadn't been for the support from my husband and friends, as well as the significant boost provided by PCC. I wish more people knew about it, since I know others are on the same path as me."

"It took me a while," she says, "but now finally I'm doing what I've always wanted to do: take care of people."

Nexus Montgomery is a partnership of Montgomery County's six hospitals and was created to improve health care quality and access in the county.

## Mr. Abdulaziz Kamus Shares Insights as Workforce Capacity Program Partner

*In the November 2024 issue of PCC's The Pulse newsletter, a workforce program partner, Mr. Abdulaziz Kamus, Senior Clinical Manager at MCC Medical Clinic was interviewed and asked to share his thoughts of the program.*

*The Pulse: What is your impression of the Workforce Capacity Program?*

Mr. Kamus: The Workforce Capacity Program has been transformative for both participants and the community. It bridges

the gap between untapped talent and workforce needs, providing participants with essential skills for entry-level healthcare positions. The program empowers individuals by offering training and opportunities for personal and professional growth, enabling them to take significant steps toward career stability.

*The Pulse: Is there any particular reason why the program has been so effective?*

Mr. Kamus: The success of the program is the result of the fabulous partnership between the Primary Care Coalition, community organizations including Nexus hospitals, funders and motivated community members. I have to say, the leadership and support provided by the Primary Care Coalition has been pivotal. They have been the critical link between the Department of Labor, partner organizations, Montgomery College, and the Nexus hospitals for the past year. Liza Greenberg's tireless commitment to helping students navigate challenges—such as language barriers and passing certification exams like the pharmacy technician program—has been essential to the program's success.

*The Pulse: Who do you think might benefit from the program?*

Mr. Kamus: This program is particularly beneficial for immigrants and newcomers, such as Afghan and Ethiopian community members, seeking meaningful employment in healthcare. It is also valuable for individuals looking to enter the workforce for the first time or those pursuing a new career.

The program also holds immense potential for former medical doctors who are unable to practice medicine in the U.S. By creating education programs that allow them to re-

enter the healthcare field at an entry-level we can help them avoid underemployment and working dead-end jobs, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their profession and community.

*The Pulse: What have you seen to be the challenges of students joining the clinic?*

Mr. Kamus: The clinic has seen a mix of successes and challenges as participants transition into our facility's roles. We hired three Afghan newcomers as medical and dental assistants. Their training at Montgomery College enabled them to step into these roles confidently, and they contributed meaningfully to our operations. In addition, we hired a certified medication technician who was trained through PCC's WSM (WorkSource Montgomery grant). He is a former Afghan medical doctor who currently works in the pharmacy at the clinic and has already made significant contributions.

To further support participants, the clinic conducted mock interviews with Afghan and Ethiopian students to help them prepare for job interviews. These sessions boosted their confidence and equipped them with practical skills to succeed in the competitive job market.

However, challenges also arose. Two of the participants left the Clinic due to pregnancy and the demands of caring for their newborns, highlighting the need for more robust support systems for working parents. Another participant recently left for a better opportunity with a higher salary, reflecting both the competitive nature of the job market and the program's success in preparing individuals for upward mobility.



*Workforce program community partners, including Mr. Kamus (far right)*

*The Pulse: What has been the impact on the community and partner organizations?*

Mr. Kamus: The program's impact on the community has been profound. It introduces a culturally diverse workforce into healthcare, fostering trust and improving care delivery, especially for underserved populations. Partner organizations like ours benefit by gaining skilled team members with unique insights and a deep commitment to patient care.

Our involvement in the Nexus Workforce Steering Committee, which includes four area hospitals, further enhances collaboration and strategic planning for workforce development. While the hospitals have been hiring entry-level healthcare students, many of them face challenges such as a lack of work experience and English language communication skills, which limit their job opportunities. Addressing these gaps is crucial for the program's long-term success.

*The Pulse: What does the future hold for the program?*

Mr. Kamus: Looking ahead, I envision an even greater impact for the Workforce Capacity Program. Given the high demand for this profession, we are exploring the inclusion of dental hygienist training in the curriculum. Expanding advanced certifications and leadership pathways could also retain talent and support participants' long-term career growth. Strengthening partnerships with community organizations to provide childcare solutions or mentorship programs could address some challenges participants face.

Ms. Liza Greenberg's role in uniting key stakeholders, identifying barriers, and guiding participants toward success will continue to be instrumental in achieving these goals. Her dedication inspires confidence that the program can overcome any obstacle and grow even stronger.

# Challenges

Despite ongoing demand for healthcare workers and highly motivated candidates, participants still face barriers to economically sustainable healthcare employment. Obstacles we encountered and helped to navigate are:

- **Limited English language skills of trainees** – Impact both access to training and success at job-seeking.
- **Low wages** – Most fully certified candidates got offers around \$18/hour – only marginally above Montgomery County minimum wage. Trainees were sometimes reluctant to leave ‘gig’ jobs that paid more, even though they wanted careers in healthcare.
- **Preference for experienced workers** – In spite of the documented need for entry-level healthcare workers, PCC’s trainees encountered employment barriers relating to requirements for experience. Some trainees accepted per-diem and hourly jobs with no benefits.
- **Administrative hurdles** – Trainees navigated a high volume of paperwork requirements (many with costs attached) to enter training, gain certification, and complete employment onboarding. They frequently experienced paperwork ‘getting lost’ and had to redo work.
- **Limited career pathways** – Although there is a national, urgent need for higher-level nursing professions, there is no articulation from certification training to professional education leading to a nursing degree.
- **Other socioeconomic factors** – Such as financial hardship resulting from employment deferred during training, transportation, and childcare contributed to challenges accessing both training and job seeking.

“I understand that so much of what we achieve is because of the help of others. I wouldn’t be where I am now if it hadn’t been for the support from my husband and friends, as well as the significant boost provided by PCC. I wish more people knew about it.”

*Program participant FI, now working at Kensington Senior Living*

# Recommendations

PCC sees tremendous potential for workforce investments that improve the health and economic stability of our community and create a pipeline of qualified individuals to meet hospital and community workforce needs. Nationally, the need for such investments to improve career opportunities and strengthen the entry-level caregiving workforce have been well described. Priorities for Montgomery County could include:

- Improve wages for certified entry-level workers to increase the attractiveness of jobs and reduce turnover
- Reduce administrative barriers to certification by streamlining management of health and background check documentation and improving capacity at the Maryland Board of Nursing
- Enhance career readiness by integrating English skills, technical skills, and customer service training with entry-level certification training
- Develop clear, articulated academic paths from entry-level certifications to college-level professional nursing
- Support training graduates and entry-level workers in career advancement with advising, mentoring, and tuition assistance
- Continue building healthcare education capacity by training faculty and improving access to training through flexible delivery approaches and sites



*WSM graduates at AMSS community celebration, December 2024*

With over 150 community members having completed training, PCC believes that we have an important opportunity to demonstrate the viability of building out pathways to career advancement in nursing. We are excited to collaborate with our Workforce Capacity partners and others in Montgomery College to continue this important work to invest in community members while tackling the healthcare workforce shortage.

PCC is proud of our successes helping Montgomery County community members with career development and thank our funders for their support. We are excited to take the next steps with our partners to build a stronger healthcare workforce while strengthening the economic stability of Marylanders.



“I love helping our workforce students. When they get a job, that’s a big achievement. It sets them and their families on paths to economic stability and helps our community by increasing the number of healthcare workers.”

*Haseeb Shinwary  
PCC Workforce Navigator Manager*

*Montgomery College CNA celebrating graduation with her family*



## Thank you to our Workforce Capacity Steering Committee Members:

Karen Baxter, Holy Cross Health  
Ann Coppersmith, MedStar  
Dr. Monique Davis, Montgomery College  
Davanna Frisbey, Holy Cross Health  
Abdulaziz Kamus, Muslim Community Center/MCC Medical Clinic  
Anita Waters Hammond, Suburban Hospital  
Corey Lewson, Suburban Hospital  
Will Raglin, Adventist HealthCare  
Jennifer Weigold, Adventist HealthCare  
Amanda Wright, MedStar

## Workforce Capacity Program Staff

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Mauricette Ayechemi, Workforce Capacity Program Coordinator  
Haseeb Shinwary, Workforce Navigator Manager

