

**Talking Points and Frequently Asked Questions**  
**Sussex County Osteopathic Medical School Feasibility Study**

as of August 15, 2023

**1. Do we need a medical school?**

As most Delawareans know, Sussex County and Delaware have a serious physician shortage. The federal government has designated Sussex County as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA) with a shortage of health professionals.

Delaware ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in the nation for Primary Care Physicians, with 32% of those doctors over age 60. With physician retirement on the horizon, Delaware will need an additional 177 Primary Care Physicians by 2030 to maintain the current level of care. Given that current access to care is inadequate and with projections of continued population growth in Sussex County, we must take steps now to lay the groundwork to attract more physicians to improve healthcare delivery in the state and the county.

**2. Why is the study focused on Osteopathic (D.O.) rather than Allopathic (M.D.) programs?**

Allopathic and osteopathic medicine both offer rigorous medical training and can lead to successful physician careers. Importantly for Sussex County, graduates of osteopathic medical schools are more likely to go into family practice, internal medicine, or pediatrics and more often to practice in underserved areas. Sussex County is in dire need of primary care physicians who will be more likely to address these deficits.

**3. What is Family Practice? Primary Care?**

Primary care focuses on everyday health, encompassing wellness services like physicals, vaccinations, and check-ups, as well as the treatment and management of common health concerns that are not emergencies. Family medicine is a medical specialty devoted to the complete and continuing healthcare of every member of the family, both children and adults. Essentially, family medicine physicians provide primary care. (Source: TuftsMedicine.)

**4. How would an osteopathic medical school benefit Sussex County?**

A medical school in Sussex County offers multiple benefits including:

- Increase the number of physicians to serve the projected health care needs of Sussex County residents: Sixty-eight percent of doctors who complete all their training in one state end up practicing there, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.
- Direct economic impact for Sussex County: According to the American Medical Association, a physician who practices in Sussex County, on average, generates \$2.1 million in total economic impact annually and supports 11 direct jobs.
- Savings on social costs: In addition to economic impact, each primary care physician is responsible for \$3.6 million in healthcare cost savings by avoiding overuse of emergency room services and improving the population's health status.

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- **Additional benefits:** These include increasing healthcare access for underserved populations, addressing the region’s healthcare workforce needs, strengthening the overall healthcare delivery system in Sussex County, and expanding health sciences technology innovation that fuel job creation.

Also, a medical school’s presence in Sussex County will serve as a powerful and authoritative voice advocating for healthy communities and focusing attention on improving such social determinants of health status as: accessibility, proximity and transportation to clinics and doctors’ offices; and nutrition, environmental, and other impactful factors.

Further, the possibility of a medical school in Sussex County, let alone the reality of such a school, will stimulate more Sussex County high school and college students to consider healthcare career / college paths.

**5. Is this study necessary? Why don’t you just get started?**

We believe the study is beneficial because it will provide factual data to support what we believe is a great idea. However, the fact remains that we need to attract or create medical school leadership. The study will provide assurance and confidence to potential funders, board-level and executive leadership, and accreditation agencies.

**6. Why is SEDAC leading the effort, instead of a university or health system?**

SEDAC has been investigating and supporting short-term approaches for addressing barriers to attracting, recruiting and retaining physicians. SEDAC is leading this longer term medical school effort to keep the initiative focused on healthcare improvement for Sussex County as a whole, and not on behalf of any single healthcare system or university. The project builds on SEDAC’s experience and is one of broad-based community support and economic development.

**7. Is Sussex County the best location for a Delaware medical school?**

Sussex County is an excellent location for a medical school. It offers diversity in rural and urbanizing communities, nationality, race, ethnicity, income, and health status, making it an ideal medical education environment for primary care and family practice students. The medical school will also be a feeder of graduates for the residency programs already established at Bayhealth in Milford DE; Beebe Healthcare in Lewes; TidalHealth in Salisbury, MD, partner of TidalHealth Nanticoke in Seaford, Delaware.

**8. Where will the medical school be located in Sussex?**

We don’t know. The feasibility study will seek to determine the ideal site conditions for success, and that information will be used in a future development phase to determine the best available location.

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**9. Where will students in a Delaware medical school based in Sussex County do their clinical rotations? And their residencies?**

Students attending the medical school may do their clinical rotations at the three hospitals in Sussex County, at the hospital systems' clinics throughout the County, and at independent clinics in the County. Each of the hospital systems serving Sussex County have residency programs. Graduates of the medical school may do their residencies in the hospitals and their networks of clinics.

**10. Are the three hospitals systems serving Sussex County supportive?**

Yes. Bayhealth, Beebe Healthcare and TidalHealth Nanticoke – the three healthcare systems with hospitals in the county -- are fully engaged and have expressed written and financial support for the feasibility study.

**11. Are Delaware's two public universities and its public community college supporting the study?**

Leadership from each of Delaware's three state-supported educational institutions are engaged in the conversation. Discussions with the University of Delaware, Delaware State University, and Delaware Technical Community College are continuing.

**12. Who will ultimately own and operate the med school?**

That remains to be determined through the feasibility study. There are various examples of ownership/operation, including universities, healthcare systems, the state, private businesses such as a health insurance company, or some coalition of many stakeholders.

**13. How will capital funding be addressed?**

That is to be determined following the feasibility study. Assuming a favorable outcome, information from the feasibility study will be used to solicit funding mechanisms. Ideally, it would be a coalition of stakeholders that would benefit most from the project.

**14. What will be the impact on the DIMER program?**

The osteopathic medical school is intended to complement and support Delaware's existing medical education programs and represents a key part of a holistic approach to medical education within the state. DIMER (Delaware Institute of Medical Information and Research) is one of the State's medical education programs. DIMER provides an opportunity for Delaware residents to obtain a medical education at the Sidney Kimmel Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University of Philadelphia, PA, and at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). Each year, 20 admission slots at Kimmel and 10 at PCOM are reserved for applicants from Delaware. Both schools are matriculating more students than they have committed to. In 2022, the schools matriculated three students from Sussex Count.

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**15. Who is conducting the study?**

Tripp Umbach, a national leader in medical education consulting, is conducting the study. Tripp Umbach has completed feasibility studies for more than thirty new medical schools and consulting for more than 75 medical schools in the United States as well as medical schools in Canada, Europe, South America, Australia, and Abu Dhabi.

**16. What is the scope of the study?**

SEDAC engaged Tripp Umbach in June 2023. The study involves extensive data gathering; structured interviews with leaders of key Sussex County and state-wide organizations; thorough analyses, including financial analyses; formulating findings, assessments of feasibility, organizational and operational options, timelines, and recommendations; outlining key next steps; and developing a final report and presentation. SEDAC expects Tripp Umbach to complete the study by no-later than December 2023.

**17. Where is the support coming from for the study?**

Bayhealth, Beebe Healthcare, and TidalHealth Nanticoke, the three healthcare systems with major facilities in Sussex County, are key stakeholders. The Sussex County Council, with its county-wide vision and responsibilities, joins them in fully supporting the study initiative. SEDAC's additional funding partners for the study are Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware, the Carl M. Freeman Foundation, The Christian and Julie Hudson Family Foundation, Chesapeake Utilities, Delaware Electric Cooperative, and Fulton Bank.

**18. Are there quicker ways to increase the number of doctors in Sussex County?**

Yes, there are. Over the past few years, SEDAC and other organizations have successfully supported solutions to state-wide issues, generally of a specific regulatory nature, that make it difficult to attract physicians to Delaware and to retain physicians already here. SEDAC will continue to address these targeted situations and others that may be identified in the study.

A medical school focused on Sussex County is a longer-term strategic solution for increasing the numbers of doctors who choose to practice here. By educating and graduating medical students here, the likelihood of their living and working here increases.

**19. What would a medical school's role be in addressing documented healthcare inequities throughout the County?**

The feasibility study will cover this compelling issue. As expressed in the answer to Question 4, above, the benefits of a medical school in Sussex County ... "will serve as a powerful and authoritative voice advocating for healthy communities and focusing attention on improving such social determinants of health status as: accessibility, proximity and transportation to clinics and doctors' offices; and nutrition, environmental, and other impactful factors."

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The study will also take account of the views of the County's hospital systems and Blueprints, a supporter of the study. They speak to the fundamental importance of addressing healthcare inequities and of their roles, responsibilities and commitments.

TidalHealth's mission is to improve the health of the communities we serve - and that means all communities here on Delmarva. We reject all manifestations of discrimination or harassment, including those based on race, ethnicity, age, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, religious beliefs or any of the other differences among people that have been excuses for hatred. A thriving health system needs diversity within the workforce that reflects the diversity of the people it serves. We will work together with accountability to ensure we are an anti-racist organization where every person matters.

Beebe Healthcare's CEO, Dr. David Tam, says he was attracted to join Beebe as he saw "a purpose for this work" with opportunities in Sussex County for the future, including a focus on healthcare as an economic engine, increased educational and research initiatives, recruitment of more workers, addressing the social determinants of health, and growing and developing educational partnerships.

Bayhealth's Graduate Medical Education subcommittee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion seeks to create a culture which helps Bayhealth recruit and maintain a workforce of physicians that is reflective of the community we serve. We believe that we can best achieve this goal by addressing systems of privilege including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability within the locus of our control. To aid in our mission we promote education, awareness, and action to create positive outcomes for the individuals, families, and the communities we serve.

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware's BluePrints for the Community, one of our funding partners, focuses its grants on five health care challenges we face in Sussex County:

- Recruiting and training health care professionals;
- Increasing access to health care for uninsured/underserved in communities;
- Reducing health disparities in minority communities;
- Supporting early childhood and youth development with initiatives focused on health;
- Addressing social determinants of health.

**20. When will the study's results be announced?**

We expect results to be available toward the end of 2023.

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**21. What's next?**

The answer to this question depends on the findings and the near-term and long-term recommendations of the feasibility study. Assuming positive recommendations, SEDAC's immediate next step will be to provide support for the recommended path forward.

Questions or comments: contact George Beckerman, co-chair, SEDAC  
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