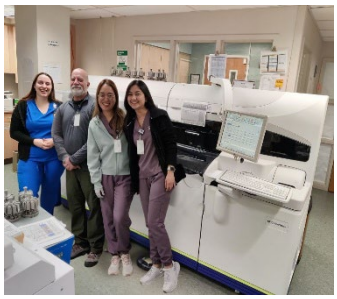

NORTON COUNTY HOSPITAL

Strategic Progress Summary

2025

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Introduction

In 2025, Norton County Hospital (NCH), their partners, and community stakeholders worked to develop a strategic plan to guide future priorities and decision-making processes that would allow them to expand the scope of the hospital and better meet the needs of the surrounding community.

NCH navigated the unchartered territory of recovering from a worldwide pandemic and found new ways to meet the healthcare needs of our community. This Strategic Plan captures many of those hard-won victories. We will continue to grow and adapt to what our community needs from our facility. In 2024, Norton County Hospital conducted a community health needs assessment to drive the process of reviewing and updating the existing strategic plan and continue to make progress toward meeting its established goals in the four areas of Facility Status and Condition, Funding, and Public Financial Support, Recruitment and Retention, and Regional Engagement and Needs. Hospital leadership met alongside community partners in March of 2024 to discuss the status of each of these areas and to utilize the results of the needs assessment to identify opportunities for continued improvement.

Community Health Needs Assessment 2024 (Executive Summary)

VVV Consultants, LLC was contracted by Norton County Hospital (NCH) to conduct a community assessment of Norton County on health and related issues. One hundred thirty-three (133) electronic and paper surveys were collected and analyzed for the assessment report. Additionally, a community forum was held following the compilation of a preliminary report of findings from the survey to allow an opportunity for community members to provide input regarding their reactions to the results. At the forum, VVV researchers presented the results of the assessment, comparing our statistics to those of other counties in the state; and gathered community feedback on the accuracy of the findings, any inconsistencies with participants' experiences, and additional insights that could help Norton County Hospital in its planning process.

Top Six Primary Health Concerns and Needs:

1. **Healthcare Staffing/Volunteerism (Providers & Supporting Staff).** Access to qualified healthcare staff and active community volunteers is the number one issue for respondents (20.3%).

2. **Cost of Healthcare/Affordable Medications.** Costs for everyday living have generally increased since COVID, while wages have not kept pace. People are especially concerned about the rising costs of healthcare and affordable medicine (16.4%).

3. **Mental Health (Diagnosis, Placement, Aftercare, Access to Providers).** Respondents noted the need for more focused attention on all aspects of mental health in Norton County (13%).

4. **Affordable Healthy Foods.** Access to affordable healthy foods is very important to our community (10.7%).

5. **Failing Infrastructures (Grid, Water, Streets & Sidewalks).** Residents want Norton County's infrastructure to function well and provide necessary services to ensure its effectiveness (9.6%).

6. **Childcare (Accessible & Affordable).** Safe, available, and affordable childcare is very important for Norton County residents. Its absence limits education, employment, and progress (9.0%).

Strategic Focus Area 1

Facility Status and Condition

GOAL

Norton County Hospital's facility meets the emerging healthcare needs of the region (form follows function).

OBJECTIVES

- Increase community and partner support for assessing and addressing hospital facility needs.
- Improve access to high-quality medical services.
- Assess hospital capacity for state-of-the-art equipment and procedures.
- Increase the number of people utilizing services (market share).
- Be Survey ready.

DASHBOARD MEASURES

- Number of region-wide community meetings and unduplicated community member attendance at public engagement activities to identify healthcare needs.
- Number of people utilizing services at the hospital (market share)
- Public financial support for the hospital
- Internal quality meetings will track and measure our progress

HEALTH NEEDS

- Cost of Healthcare

STATUS UPDATES

Strategy 1.1: Share messages/facts about the current status of the hospital.

In 2024, NCH launched a "Communications Campaign" to better communicate with our community. The Communications Campaign is a holistic plan that encompasses the services we offer at our facility. We have an aggressive presence on social media highlighting the work we are doing at NCH. We have a consistent presence on our local radio station to emphasize new initiatives we are showcasing. We have a routine message or article in our weekly newspaper and have expanded NCH advertisements on streaming radio and TV services.

NCH leadership participates in quarterly Legislative Town Hall meetings, hosted by the Norton City Council. During those town hall meetings, we share updates on the hospital since our last town hall. Many members of the community regularly attend the meetings.

Our concerted outreach efforts, including on-site education events, will promote a positive effect on Norton County.

Strategy 1.2: Study feasibility of updating infrastructure, expansion, repurposing, and other opportunities.

The NCH campus is older but in fairly good condition due to the hard work of NCH employees. At this point, we are not focused on building a new hospital; however, we recognize that several important modernization projects are needed. Our most pressing projects include updating the fire alarm system, sprinkler system, and elevator upgrade. In order for us to bring in new service lines, we must make these necessary building modifications.

In 2024, the hospital undertook several department moves to accommodate the needs of our community. NCH will continue to look for ways to modernize our facility to meet the needs of our patients.

Strategy 1.3: Explore existing and potential opportunities to negotiate partnerships that influence facility design, meet increased demands, and promote the sustainability of the hospital.

Norton County Hospital participates regularly in Sunflower Health Network meetings, which allows us to leverage resources that improve services. In addition to this membership, the hospital has a variety of agreements with healthcare systems in the region including CHI Health Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney, NE; Citizen Medical Center in Colby, KS; Gove County Medical Center; Smith County Memorial Hospital; and Hays Medical Center to leverage both human and equipment resources. NCH also joined Cardinal Health, a new supply contractor, to take advantage of better pricing for our hospital and patients.

1.1 Share messages/facts about the current status of the hospital.

[Timeline: Continuous with our Communications Campaign]

- **1.1.1** Prepare messages/facts that tell the story of the hospital's past, present, and future status.
- **1.1.2** Equip staff with talking points and message materials to informally share with the community.
- **1.1.3** Conduct staff and community communication and education activities (i.e., in-person meetings, social media, local billboards, internal and external newsletters).
- **1.1.4** Gather and utilize positive patient experience stories and health outcome data to communicate with internal and external stakeholders.

Champions: NCH CEO, CNO, CFO, Marketing Coordinator

1.2 Study feasibility of updating infrastructure, expansion, repurposing, and other opportunities.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

- **1.2.1** Assessment of regional healthcare needs and desires.
- **1.2.2** Analyze community utilization trends, including classification comparisons.
- **1.2.3** Study what is working in peer communities.
- **1.2.4** Conduct feasibility assessment of current operations and options to meet regional needs expressed by the community.
- **1.2.5** Review current space utilization across the facility and identify opportunities to make improvements.

Champions: CEO, CNO, CFO, Engineering Manager, NCH Board of Trustees

1.3 Explore existing and potential opportunities to negotiate partnerships that inform facility design, meet increased demands, and promote the sustainability of the hospital.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

- **1.3.1** Identify and establish formal and informal partnerships to ensure NCH is offering access to a continuum of services that meet community health needs.

Champions: CEO, NCH Board of Trustees, Medical Staff Representative

Strategic Focus Area 2

Funding and Public Financial Support

GOAL

Norton County Hospital has strong public financial support and other diversified resources to meet the needs of patients, the region, and hospital/clinic staff.

OBJECTIVES

- Use hospital resources effectively and efficiently.
- Increase funding for personnel, services, and technology.
- Increase perception of hospital stability to promote financial support.
- Increase diversity of hospital funding sources.

DASHBOARD MEASURES

- Percent of income by source (including non-service generated income)
- Profit-loss margins
- Days of billing in accounts receivable status (billing and payment efficiency)
- Increase in inpatient service utilization
- Days of cash on hand

HEALTH NEEDS

- Cost of Healthcare/ Affordable medications.
- Affordable Health Foods

STATUS UPDATES

Strategy 2.1: Increase regional funding support.

NCH develops a variety of opportunities to increase financial support for hospital initiatives and services. These efforts include securing funding from the Norton Regional Health Foundation to purchase updated radiology equipment and passing a 1% sales tax across Norton County to benefit healthcare. Of this tax, NCH receives 0.75%, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) receives 0.25%. NCH earmarks this additional tax revenue for capital expenditure projects, such as facility upgrades and equipment modernization. NCH actively seeks to leverage all available grant and donation opportunities in the region to continually enhance the facility and provide the best possible medical services. In 2024, the Norton Regional Health Foundation successfully acquired grant funding from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Pathways program to support community health and well-being initiatives. Through these combined efforts, NCH strives to

improve healthcare access and outcomes for the community.

Strategy 2.2: Promote a sustainable hospital environment.

In the previous Community Health Needs Assessment, the community noted several problems with our billing process. Leaders acted and implemented a much more streamlined and efficient billing system. The reaction from the community has been very positive. NCH will continue to employ recommended business principles to ensure the long-term viability of our facility.

Strategy 2.3: Create a stable provider network, including specialty clinics.

NCH emphasizes the expansion of specialty clinics to better serve our community. Based on feedback from the 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment, we have partnered with High Plains Mental Health (HPMH) to bring their services into the hospital, helping to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance. We have also added Rheumatology and Endocrinology clinics to our service offerings. In late 2024, we partnered with the Kansas Clinical Improvement Collaborative to launch a Tele-Behavioral Health Program. In early 2025, we welcomed a new general surgeon who performs colonoscopies each month, offering these procedures on Mondays to help the community take less time away from work.

NCH remains committed to exploring opportunities to expand services and programs that align with the evolving needs of our community, ensuring these efforts are financially sustainable and provide long-term benefits.

2.1 Increase regional funding support.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

- **2.1.1** Update fundraising information packets to reflect current funding opportunities.
- **2.1.2** Identify strategies for and implement an employee giving program.
- **2.1.3** Align grant writing efforts with strategic planning priorities.
- **2.1.4** Explore opportunities for increased support through local taxation funds.

Champions: CEO, CFO, Foundation Director

2.2 Promote a sustainable hospital environment.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

- **2.2.1** Implement systems to assess, develop, and effectively utilize staff skills and capacities.
- **2.2.2** Maximize cost-sharing service opportunities.
- **2.2.3** Continue to improve and expand telehealth services and capabilities.
- **2.2.4** Continue to assess systems that assure accurate, timely, and efficient billing processes.

Champions: CEO, CFO, CNO, Human Resources Director, CIO

2.3 Create a stable provider network including specialty clinics.

[Timeline: Continuous Effort]

- **2.3.1** Identify existing and potential opportunities to engage in collaborative partnerships.
- **2.3.2** Recruit and retain providers.

Champions: CEO, CNO, Human Resources Director, Specialty Clinic Manager

Strategic Focus Area 3

Recruitment and Retention

GOAL

Norton County Hospital attracts and develops qualified providers and staff that demonstrate long-term commitment to the hospital/clinic.

OBJECTIVES

- Improve sense of support and connectivity among providers and staff.
- Generate new opportunities for provider/staff recruitment and retention.
- Enhance menu of recruitment and retention incentives.

DASHBOARD MEASURES

- Turnover and retention rates
- Provider contracts
- Healthcare Provider Shortage Area Score
- Costs associated with contracted service fees

HEALTH NEEDS

- Healthcare Staffing/Community Volunteerism
- Mental Health

STATUS UPDATES

Strategy 3.1: Develop regional efforts that promote recruitment.
NCH uses a variety of services to promote recruitment, including increased online and social media presence, to attract a quality workforce. We use well-regarded employment placement firms, and we offer referral bonuses to current employees who recruit new employees to join our team.

Strategy 3.2: Explore the best way to foster long-term commitment.
NCH understands a healthy and positive organizational culture is one of the best retention tools we can employ. As a result, all leaders at NCH continue to make a concerted effort to position the hospital as the preferred healthcare employer of choice in the area. In 2024, we reduced our employee turnover rate by 28%. We will continue to create an environment where employees want to come to work every day to serve members of our community.

Strategy 3.3: Develop current employees and form partnerships with educational institutions to fill needed positions.

The hospital currently offers tuition assistance and student loan repayment funds to assist staff and providers interested in advancing their education. The hospital partners with Colby Community College to offer preceptorship for nursing program clinical rotations. Norton Regional Health Foundation offers scholarships for individuals interested in obtaining licenses or certifications in healthcare-related fields. NCH is looking for ways to partner with area schools to promote careers in healthcare. NCH also hosts medical students participating in rural clinical rotations.

FOCUS AREA 3 STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS

3.1 Develop regional efforts that promote recruitment.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

3.1.1 Identify opportunities to collaborate with local business organizations, schools, and institutions of higher learning on recruitment activities.

3.1.2 Develop outreach efforts and a range of opportunities for staff spouses/families.

Champions: CEO, CNO, Human Resources Director, Marketing Coordinator

3.2 Explore the best way to foster long-term commitment.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

3.2.1 Reach out to peer organizations to research best practices for incentivizing long-term commitments.

3.2.2 Work with Norton Regional Health Foundation and others to explore opportunities to fund incentives.

3.2.3 Identify and implement strategies that foster a positive workplace culture.

3.2.4 Create community integration opportunities for providers and staff.

Champions: CEO, CFO, CNO, Human Resources Director, Foundation Director

3.3 Develop current employees and form partnerships with educational institutions to fill needed positions.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

3.3.1 Utilize Talent Management System to develop staff professional development plans.

3.3.2 Explore opportunities to partner with regional education institutions to "grow our own" staff.

Champions: CEO, CNO, Human Resources Director

Strategic Focus Area 4

Regional Engagement and Needs

GOAL

Norton County region looks to Norton County Hospital for all health-related needs.

OBJECTIVES

- Communities in Norton County and the surrounding region look to the hospital as a trusted and credible organization.
- Norton County Hospital collaborates with other providers to offer integrated services.
- Hospital and Health Department staff are better able to communicate community needs and how the organization addresses these needs.

DASHBOARD MEASURES

- Percent of community seeking services at NCH
- Progress on Pathways grant indicators for measuring community health
- Number of patients who reside outside of Norton County
- Number of patients seeking specialty care at NCH
- Patient satisfaction data

HEALTH NEEDS

- Healthcare Staffing/ Volunteerism
- Cost of Healthcare/ Affordable Medications
- Mental Health
- Affordable Health Foods

STATUS UPDATES

Strategy 4.1: Integrate health services.

NCH continues to add specialty providers to address gaps in local services. NCH is committed to continuing to identify resources to meet the needs of patients in our region.

Strategy 4.2: Improve patient confidence and positive experiences of care.

NCH is currently implementing systems and reviewing processes to improve opportunities for patient feedback. The Patient and Family Advisory Council meets monthly with key members of the community to get community feedback. The hospital has also been exploring new technology to improve inpatient experiences, updating patient privacy processes, and providing staff education on managing patient privacy and customer service.

The NCH CEO and CNO also visit patients in the hospital regularly to check how our staff is meeting patient needs. This rounding has been very well received by members of the community

Strategy 4.3: Collaborate with the Norton Regional Health Foundation and County Health Department to spearhead the promotion of healthy living in the region.

In 2024, Norton Regional Health Foundation secured a Blue Cross Blue Shield Pathways to a Healthy Kansas grant focused on improving healthy living in the community. This grant continues through 2028. NCH will collaborate with the Foundation, County Health Department, and local school districts to address community issues related to vaping, childcare, and healthy food access. NCH participates in the Farm to Institution program, which will provide fresh produce to institution kitchens.

4.1 Integrate health services.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

4.1.1 Evaluate the gap between needs and resources for areas identified in the 2024 needs assessment and market analysis.
4.1.2 Develop cross-sector workgroups to address gaps in services, review best practices, and develop integrated programs to address identified needs.
4.1.3 Identify and pursue funding opportunities to develop programs.

Champions: CEO, CFO, CNO, Specialty Clinic Manager

4.2 Improve patient confidence and positive experiences of care.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

4.2.1 Identify areas of improvement within daily patient encounters.
4.2.2 Address areas of improvement by standardizing processes throughout the facility based on best practices.
4.2.3 Strategically communicate efforts to improve care and positive results to staff and the community.

Champions: CEO, CNO, CIO, Risk & Quality Manager, Marketing Coordinator, Patient and Family Advisory Council

4.3 Collaborate with the Norton Regional Health Foundation and County Health Department to spearhead the promotion of healthy living in the region.

[Timeline: Continuous effort]

4.3.1 Identify additional partners in this effort.
4.3.2 Reach out to peer hospitals to gain information on community activities.
4.3.3 Develop a plan to initiate higher levels of internal organizational and regional engagement.
4.3.4 Lay the groundwork for future healthy organizational and public policy development.

Champions: CEO, CNO, Foundation Director, Norton Co. Health Department Administrator

Moving Forward

This plan aligns with the Norton County Hospital's mission: Norton County Hospital meets the evolving healthcare needs of our region and provides an exceptional staff and patient experience to empower health and wellness at any stage of life. The strategic planning effort was informed by stakeholder input, as well as data related to trends, conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

A crucial step to ensuring a strategic plan's effectiveness is clearly communicating the roles of stakeholders. When they understand their roles, stakeholders actively work together to implement strategies, learn from their efforts, adapt, and continue to move forward until the desired outcomes are accomplished. During the planning process, champions were identified for each focus area strategy. These leaders will not necessarily be the ones doing the work associated with their named strategy; instead, they will facilitate the work. Performance measures will be used to track changes in productivity, effectiveness, and/or efficiency. Over time, Norton County Hospital will be able to see progress toward objectives in each focus area, which will lead the organization to achieve its overall desired end results.

This strategic plan is a living document. Updates will constantly inform, and perhaps change, the course of the plan. Adaptability ensures that the organization may stay attuned to the needs of its stakeholders—patients and their families, staff, volunteers, donors, and regional citizens at large.

These recommended steps will help to ensure Norton County Hospital makes progress toward stated goals and objectives:

- The Norton County Hospital Board of Trustees, serving in a governance capacity, should review, revise as needed, and approve the plans.
- Ongoing strategic "thinking and doing" is required if any progress is to be made toward goals and objectives.