

# The Importance of the Health Care Sector to the Thomas County Economy

**Countywide Report, May 2025**

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Any conclusions or opinions expressed in this study remain those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Kansas Hospital Association.

Please feel free to contact the authors if you have questions or comments, or if you think that there are problems with the data for your county. The county level data were estimated using several sources, and some of these sources may have been inaccurate. The authors appreciate public feedback.

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## Executive Summary

The health care sector makes substantial contributions to the Thomas County economy. The sector employs more than 650 people directly and pays out over \$41.4 million in labor income (based on 2023 data). Health care employers provide about 10.6 percent of the county's jobs and 12.7 percent of labor income.

In addition to providing direct employment and income, the health care sector creates multiplier effects as businesses purchase local goods and services, such as utilities, and employees spend their income at local businesses such as stores and restaurants. Including multiplier effects, the Thomas County health care sector supports 887 jobs and almost \$51 million in labor income. Hospitals and nursing facilities comprise the largest health care employers in the county. The table below details the contributions of individual industries within the health care sector.

In addition to jobs and income, the health care sector provides economic development effects that are less easily quantified. A quality health care sector improves the well-being of the population, and that, in turn, improves business productivity. In addition, quality health care aids in the recruitment and retention of businesses, and health care attracts and retains retirees.

### Contributions of Individual Thomas County Health Care Industries, 2023

Industry	Direct Employment Contribution (jobs)	Total Employment Contribution (jobs)	Direct Labor Income Contribution (\$1000)	Total Labor Income Contribution (\$1000)
Hospitals	337.1	498.0	26,751	33,489
Offices of Physicians	3.3	4.7	307	361
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	155.0	193.3	7,578	9,149
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	60.8	70.9	2,801	3,216
Offices of Dentists	18.0	21.3	1,071	1,200
Health and Personal Care Stores	23.3	27.5	366	563
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	0.0	0.0	0	0
Outpatient Care Centers	9.9	13.5	547	684
Home Health Care Services	26.4	30.1	1,164	1,311
Residential Treatment Facilities	0.0	0.0	0	0
Veterinary Services	24.8	27.9	866	1,002
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	0.0	0.0	0	0
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	0.0	0.0	0	0
Total	658.6	887.2	41,449	50,975

Sources: IMPLAN proprietary data and Kansas Department of Labor (see Appendix A)

## **Introduction**

A vigorous health care system is essential not only for the health and welfare of a community's residents, but also for regional economic opportunity. Historically, health-related industries have grown faster than the state's economy as a whole. Given demographic trends, this growth is likely to continue. Health care industries provide jobs, income and tax revenue, with hospitals often counting among the largest employers in rural areas. Quality health care improves business productivity, aids in the recruitment and retention of businesses and attracts and retains retirees.

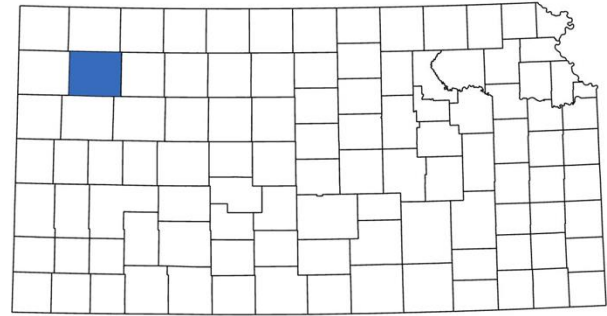
With these factors in mind, we examine the health care sector of individual Kansas counties. Our report is organized into three main sections:

- An overview of Thomas County's population and income, focusing on factors that can affect the demand and accessibility of health care
- A detailed analysis of the Thomas County economy, with a focus on individual health care industries and their contributions to jobs, income and tax revenue
- A discussion of the impact of health care on economic development, including effects on productivity, business attraction and retention, and retention and attraction of retirees

The primary purpose of this report is to quantify the economic contributions of the health care sector in providing jobs and income. But it is important to recognize that the health care sector plays a role in a county's future stability and potential growth. Furthermore, the health care sector makes significant contributions to the physical and mental well-being of county residents.

## Overview of Thomas County

Thomas County is a rural county located in Northwest Kansas. With a declining population of 7,913 residents, Thomas County ranks 48<sup>th</sup> highest in population among the state's 105 counties. Its most populous city and county seat is Colby.



Residents of Thomas County are younger, have higher incomes, and are more likely to be uninsured when compared to typical Kansans. The median age is 35.3 years (Table 1). People 65 years and older comprise 17.9 percent of the county's population, which is more than the statewide average of 15.8 percent. Children under 18 comprise 24.2 percent of the county's population, compared with 24.4 percent statewide. Median household income stands at \$73,575, more (1.3%) than the overall Kansas median income level. As of 2022, 12.6 percent of Thomas County's population under 65 were uninsured, higher than the state average (10.2%).

Services other than health care is the county's largest sector in terms of employment, providing about 21.9 percent of county jobs.

One general community hospital operates within the county. The county averaged 606 people for every active physician in 2021, higher than the Kansas average of 374.

Table 1: Thomas County Demographic and Economic Characteristics

Characteristic	County	Kansas
Type of County*	Rural	
Population, 2023	7,913	2,932,099
Percent growth or decline, 2000-2023	-3.3%	9.0%
Population rank (largest to smallest)	48	out of 105
Median age of population, 2019-2023	35.3	37
Population Under 18	24.2%	24.4%
% of population over 65, 2019-2023	17.9%	15.8%
% uninsured, age 0-64, 2022	12.6%	10.2%
Median household income, 2019-2023	\$73,575	\$72,639
Number of general community hospitals	1	
Number of other hospitals	0	
Persons per active physician, 2021	606	374

\*Metropolitan counties contain or are closely tied to cities of over 50,000. Micropolitan areas contain or are tied to a city of 10,000-50,000. Other counties are rural.

Sources: See Appendix A.

## **Contributions of the Health Care Sector to the Thomas County Economy**

This section of the report defines the health care sector and quantifies its role in the Thomas County economy. Economic contributions of the sector include not only the direct jobs and income generated, but also **multiplier effects** that occur when businesses in the health care sector purchase goods and services, and when employees spend their income within the county on goods and services.

### **Definition of health care industries**

This report uses a definition of health care that is more inclusive than most definitions used in national studies. The definition includes 13 industries as developed by Professor John Leatherman, formerly with the Office of Local Government at Kansas State University, in consultation with the Kansas Hospital Association. Table 2 shows the key industries included within the broad definition of the health care sector. Health care industries include establishments owned and operated by government entities, such as a Veteran's Administration hospital or a sports facility owned by a city. Note that not every county in the state has employment in every individual health care industry.

Employees are counted in whatever industry setting they report to every week. For example, physicians that work exclusively in hospitals (hospitalists) are counted in the hospitals industry, whereas physicians that provide care in outpatient clinics are counted in the offices of physicians industry. The same goes for counting the nurses, laboratory workers, and everyone else who works in a particular health care setting.

Throughout our report, we use the definition of health care industries in Table 2 below to summarize employment and income in the county health care sector. Telehealth providers and traveling clinicians could serve patients in more than one county. We calculate the economic impact of these services based on the location of the health care employers, not the patients.

Table 2: Key Health Care Industry Definitions

Health Care Industry	Businesses and Establishments Included
Hospitals	Medical and surgical hospitals, psychiatric hospitals and other specialty hospitals
Offices of Physicians	Offices of health practitioners with M.D. or D.O. degrees, primarily engaged in the independent practice of general or specialized medicine
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	Skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, hospices, continuing care communities and similar residential facilities
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	Optometrists, mental health professionals, audiologists, chiropractors and other practitioners without M.D. or D.O. degrees
Offices of Dentists	Family dentists, dental surgeons, periodontists, orthodontists and other dental practitioners with doctorate level degrees
Health and Personal Care Stores	Pharmacists/pharmacies, optical goods stores, medical goods and equipment stores, vitamin and nutritional supplement stores, wheelchair and other mobility equipment stores and similar establishments
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	Testing laboratories, breast and other diagnostic imaging centers, ultrasound imaging centers, radiological laboratory services and similar establishments
Outpatient Care Centers	Fertility clinics, family planning centers, non-residential drug addiction and substance abuse treatment centers, non-residential mental health treatment centers, free-standing emergency medicine and urgent care centers and similar facilities
Home Health Care Services	In-home hospice services, visiting nurses, home care of the elderly and home health care agencies
Residential Treatment Facilities	Residential facilities providing intellectual disability, mental health, substance abuse and other support services
Veterinary Services	Veterinary hospitals, small animal veterinary services, livestock veterinary services and veterinary testing services
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	Blood banks, organ banks, air and ground ambulance services, employee drug testing services and smoking cessation programs
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	Gyms and other physical fitness facilities, skating rinks, swimming pools, tennis courts, recreational sports facilities and youth athletic facilities



## Composition of the Thomas County economy

Health care industries comprise a significant portion of the Thomas County economy, as shown in Table 3 and Figures 1 and 2. The sector employs about 659 people (as of 2023) and pays out over \$41.4 million in wages and benefits. However, the health care sector provides a smaller share of jobs (10.6 percent versus 10.7 percent) and a smaller share of income (12.7 percent versus 12.8 percent) when compared with Kansas as a whole.

Services other than health comprises the largest single economic sector in the county, providing more than one in every five jobs and about 21 percent of labor income.

Table 3. Structure of the Thomas County Economy, 2023

Sector	Employment	Labor Income (\$1000)	Output (\$1000)
Agriculture	733.6	34,947	261,264
Mining and Extraction	91.8	2,305	33,745
Construction	360.8	18,891	58,359
Manufacturing	121.0	6,787	76,088
Transportation, Utilities and Warehousing	404.5	29,759	128,976
Information, Communications and Publishing	122.9	10,470	140,571
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (F.I.R.E.)	518.3	27,923	139,181
Wholesale and Retail Trade	1,054.6	47,795	202,184
Services (other than health)	1,363.3	67,108	164,632
Health Care Services	658.6	41,449	88,872
Government	783.3	38,184	53,810
Total	6,212.6	325,617	1,347,681

Health Care Services as % Total			
Kansas	10.7%	12.8%	7.2%
County	10.6%	12.7%	6.6%

Sources: IMPLAN proprietary data and Kansas Department of Labor (see Appendix A)

Note: Labor income includes employee benefits.

Figure 1: Jobs by Sector, Thomas County, 2023

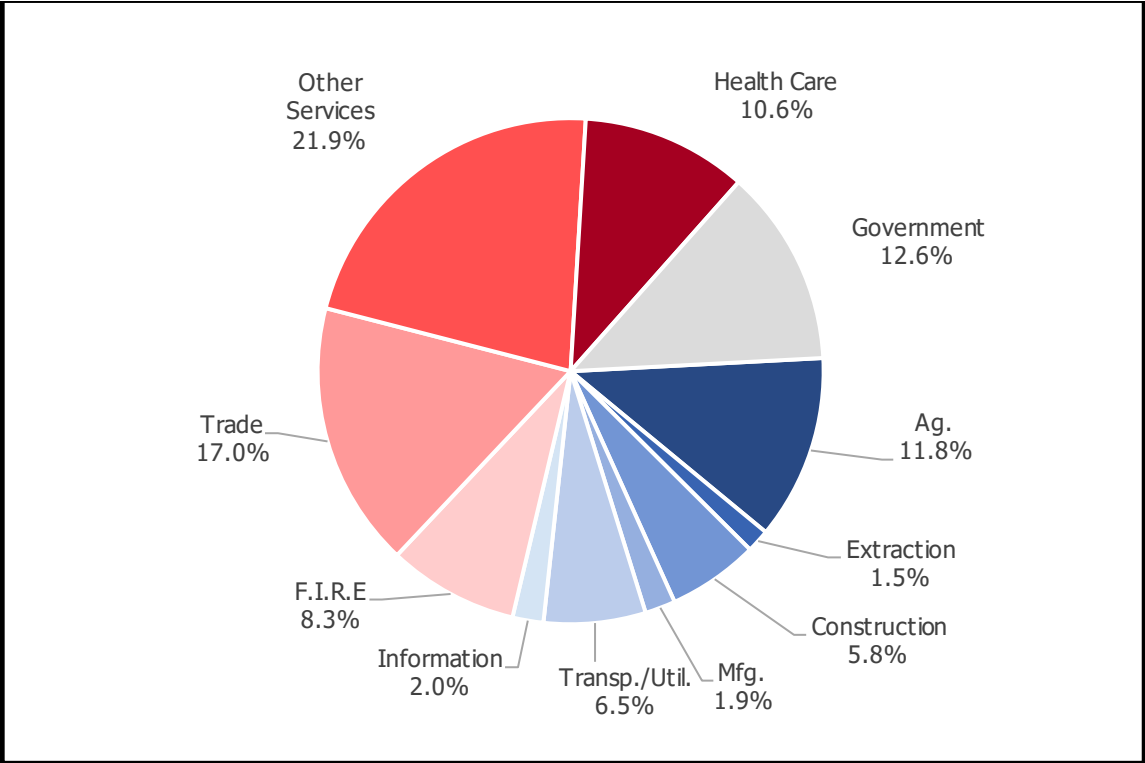
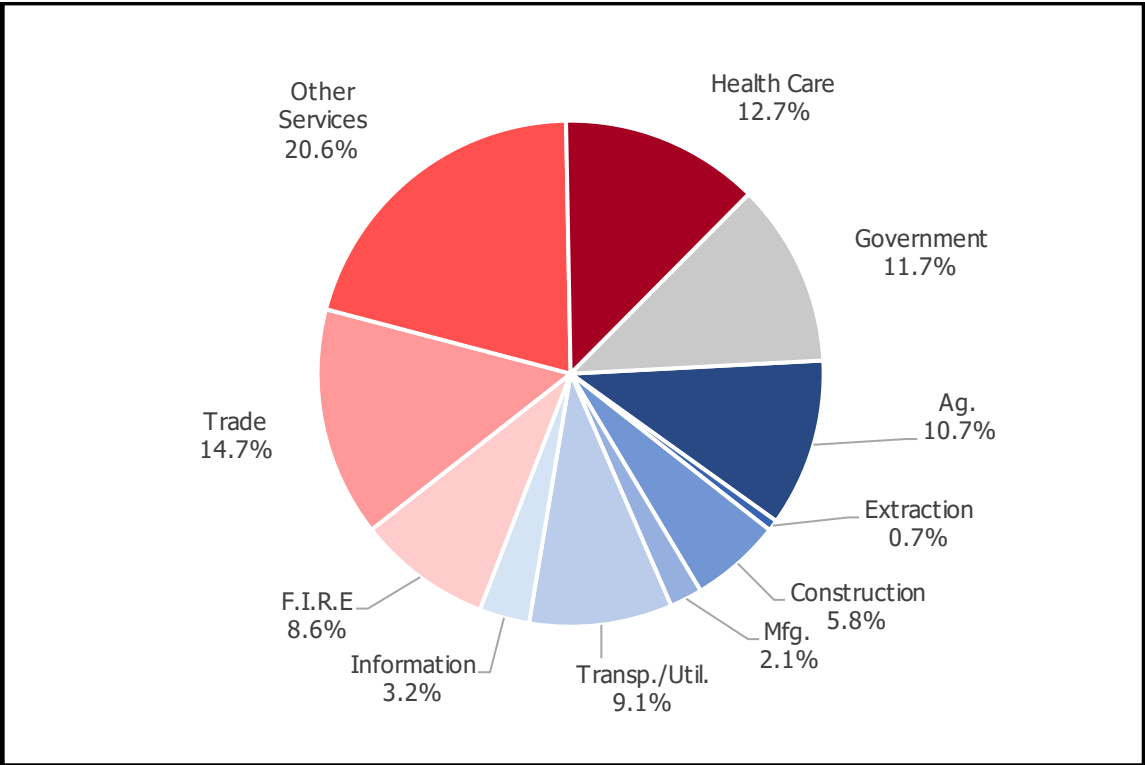


Figure 2: Labor Income by Sector, Thomas County, 2023



## Individual health care industries

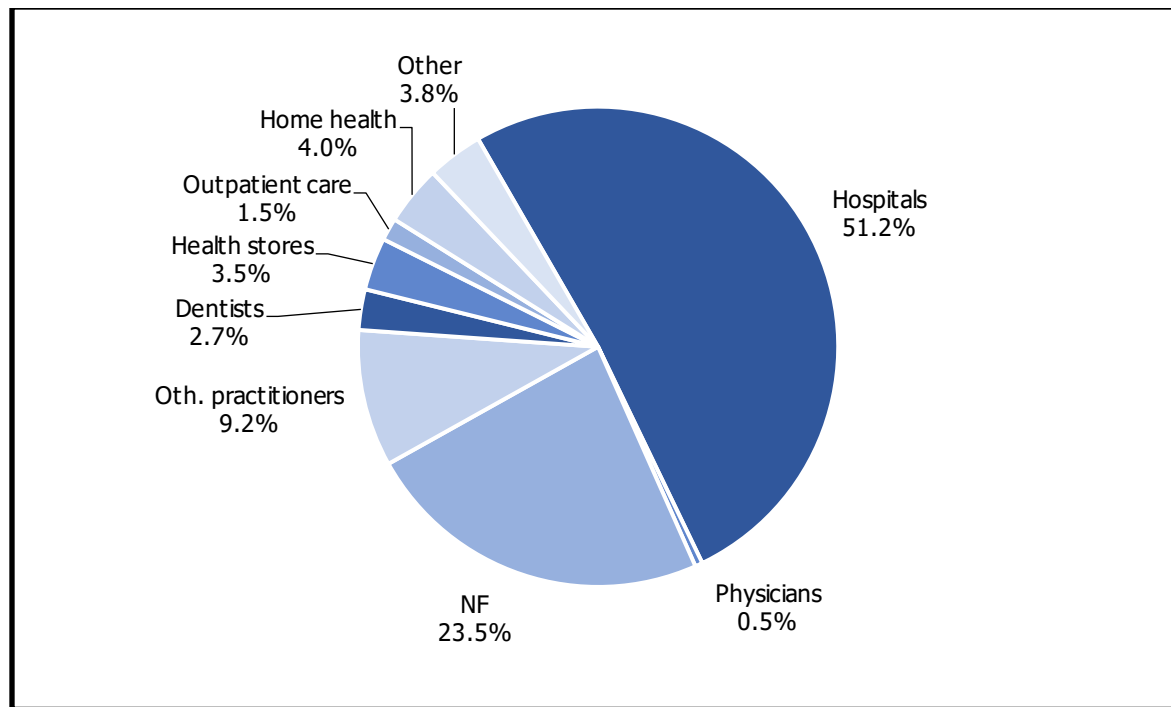
The Thomas County economy includes employment and income in 11 individual health care industries. Hospitals and nursing facilities lead the health care industries in terms of employment (Table 4 and Figure 3). Labor income per employee, including benefits, ranges widely by health care industry, from a high of over \$92,000 for physicians' offices to a low of about \$16,000 at health and personal care stores. The hospital industry is the largest health care industry in the county and is one of the best paying, with wages and benefits averaging \$79,000. Overall, income in health care industries averages nearly \$63,000.

Table 4: Individual Thomas County Health Care Industries, 2023

Industry	Employment	Labor Income (\$1000)	Labor Income per Employee (\$)
Hospitals	337.1	26,751	79,357
Offices of Physicians	3.3	307	92,240
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	155.0	7,578	48,876
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	60.8	2,801	46,096
Offices of Dentists	18.0	1,071	59,391
Health and Personal Care Stores	23.3	366	15,718
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	0.0	0	0
Outpatient Care Centers	9.9	547	55,178
Home Health Care Services	26.4	1,164	44,088
Residential Treatment Facilities	0.0	0	0
Veterinary Services	24.8	866	34,972
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	0.0	0	0
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	0.0	0	0
Total/Average	658.6	41,449	62,935

Sources: IMPLAN proprietary data and Kansas Department of Labor (see Appendix A)

Figure 3: Employment in Health Care Industries in Thomas County, 2023



### Connections between the health care sector and other industries in the county

In the previous section, we analyzed the **direct effects** of the health care sector on a county's economy—that is, we calculated the employment and income generated directly within the health care sector. But the health care sector also triggers additional spillover effects of two types:

- **Indirect effects** work through the supply chain channel. Suppose, for example, a dental office contracts with a software developer in the county to organize and maintain its appointment records. The software firm uses the receipts from the dental office to pay its own employees. Hence the health care sector supports part of the employment in the software industry.
- **Induced effects** work through the employer payroll channel. For example, when the dental office pays its office administrator, the income of that administrator will be used to purchase food, pay rent, attend entertainment events and to pay electric bills. All these downstream industries benefit from interactions with health care employees.

Collectively, indirect and induced effects create **secondary effects** for the health care sector. Figure 4 illustrates the first layer of secondary feedback due to health care workers. Note that after employees make purchases from retailers, those retailers in

turn pay employees and make additional supply purchases. Similarly, the suppliers initially impacted in turn pay wages and purchase their own supplies. The direct effect of the health care sector initiates iterative rounds of job and income creation, spending and re-spending due to the interactions among firms, industries, households and governments.

The cumulative result of these feedback loops is known as the **multiplier effect**. As an example, an employment multiplier of 1.4 for the health care sector means that for every direct job in the sector, an additional 0.4 jobs are supported elsewhere in the economy. Multipliers vary by industry, by the size of the economic region under consideration, and by the industrial diversity of the regional economy. Large and diversified economies typically show higher multipliers.

Figure 4: Secondary Effects of the Health Care Sector on Suppliers and Consumer Industries



This report makes use of two distinct types of multipliers, depending on the effects under consideration (see Tables 5 and 6). In economics literature, the two approaches are known as **contribution analysis** and **impact analysis**, each with its own multiplier. The multipliers have different uses: if we want to look at the economic impact of one health care industry in the current countywide economy, we use a **contribution multiplier**. This answers the question "what is...?" If we want to measure the hypothetical economic impact of expanding or contracting the health care industry on other economic sectors, we use the **impact multiplier**. Here we answer the question "what if...?"

For example, current employees of a hospital may use their wages to pay veterinarians, who in turn pay their own employees. The veterinary employees have already been tabulated as part of the direct employment and income in Tables 5 and 6, so it would

be double counting to include them as secondary effects as well. This would be a case for using a contribution multiplier versus an impact multiplier to get an accurate picture of the economic impact.

On the other hand, suppose that we want to estimate the potential effect of adding 20 new hospital employees. Now, in our example, the demand for veterinary care would increase in the county due to the spending of hospital employees. To measure this effect on the health care sector, we would include all feedbacks, because veterinarians can expand their businesses to accommodate the new employees and their pets. Here, we would use the impact multiplier.

Both types of multipliers generally range between 1.0 and 2.2, depending on the industry and county. Contribution multipliers are always slightly smaller than impact multipliers because they exclude interactions among health care industries. Both types of multipliers are included in Tables 5 and 6.

Tables 5 and 6 show direct effects, total effects (direct plus secondary) and multipliers for all Thomas County health care industries. Using contribution analysis, we estimate that the county's 659 health care jobs (direct employment contribution, Table 5) and \$41.4 million in direct labor income (Table 6) support an additional 229 jobs and \$9.5 million in added income throughout the county. The additional jobs and income arise in industries such as business services, retail trade, wholesaling, restaurants and rentals that are connected to health care through supply chain and consumer expenditure linkages.

Focusing specifically on the Thomas County hospital industry, we find the 337 current hospital jobs sustain nearly 161 additional jobs outside of health care (employment contribution multiplier = 1.48 in Table 5). The formula is:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Direct Employment Contribution} * \text{Employment Contribution Multiplier} = \text{Total Jobs} \\ &\text{Total Jobs} - \text{Direct Employment Contribution} = \text{Net Additional Jobs (see footnote 1)} \end{aligned}$$

Note that the hospital industry has the largest employment contribution multiplier of all health care industries in the county. That implies employees in hospitals have the greatest impact on "producing" more outside jobs. The multiplier is large because hospitals pay high wages and because hospitals use substantial goods and services from the community, such as utilities and business services.

Similarly, the \$26.8 million in hospital wages and benefits produce another \$6.7 million in income within the county (income contribution multiplier = 1.25 in Table 6). The formula is:

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<sup>1</sup> All multipliers in the report tables have been rounded to two decimal places. This may cause a slight discrepancy between the numbers in the report and calculations in the formulas.

Direct Labor Income \* Income Contribution Multiplier = Total Income

Total Income – Direct Labor Income = Net Additional Income

The multiplier effect magnifies the benefits of expanding employment and wages in an industry, but it also compounds the consequences of closures or reduced staffing in industries such as hospitals, as the effects of reduced income and reduced demand for business inputs ripple throughout the county.

Table 5: Contributions of the Health Care Sector to Thomas County Employment, 2023

Industry	Direct Employment Contribution	Total Employment Contribution	Employment Contribution Multiplier excl. Health Care Feedbacks	Employment Impact Multiplier incl. Health Care Feedbacks
Hospitals	337.1	498.0	1.48	1.58
Offices of Physicians	3.3	4.7	1.42	1.49
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	155.0	193.3	1.25	1.28
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	60.8	70.9	1.17	1.20
Offices of Dentists	18.0	21.3	1.18	1.22
Health and Personal Care Stores	23.3	27.5	1.18	1.19
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.00
Outpatient Care Centers	9.9	13.5	1.36	1.41
Home Health Care Services	26.4	30.1	1.14	1.17
Residential Treatment Facilities	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.00
Veterinary Services	24.8	27.9	1.13	1.15
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.00
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.00
Total/Average	658.6	887.2	1.35	

Sources: IMPLAN proprietary data and Kansas Department of Labor (see Appendix A)

Table 6: Contributions of the Health Care Sector to Thomas County Labor Income, 2023

Industry	Direct Labor Income Contribution (\$1000)	Total Labor Income Contribution (\$1000)	Income Contribution Multiplier excl. Health Care Feedbacks	Income Impact Multiplier incl. Health Care Feedbacks
Hospitals	26,751	33,489	1.25	1.33
Offices of Physicians	307	361	1.18	1.22
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	7,578	9,149	1.21	1.25
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	2,801	3,216	1.15	1.19
Offices of Dentists	1,071	1,200	1.12	1.16
Health and Personal Care Stores	366	563	1.54	1.59
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	0	0	0.00	0.00
Outpatient Care Centers	547	684	1.25	1.30
Home Health Care Services	1,164	1,311	1.13	1.17
Residential Treatment Facilities	0	0	0.00	0.00
Veterinary Services	866	1,002	1.16	1.20
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	0	0	0.00	0.00
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	0	0	0.00	0.00
Total/Average	41,449	50,975	1.23	

Sources: IMPLAN proprietary data and Kansas Department of Labor (see Appendix A)

Note: Labor income includes employee benefits.

## The effect of the health care sector on local sales tax collections

Counties and cities throughout Kansas have the option of imposing local sales taxes. When consumers spend money in their local communities, they generate sales tax revenues for county and city government, supporting county and city services such as road maintenance, fire and police protection, sanitation and general administration. Table 7 shows estimates of the retail sales and sales tax revenue that the health care sector produces in Thomas County. Our estimates are conservative because they do not consider the impact of any taxable local purchases made by the health services businesses themselves.

Data from the Kansas Department of Revenue (KDOR) provides the foundation for our estimates. KDOR reports taxable retail sales by county, county-level local sales tax collections, and city-level tax collections. We calculate the ratio of taxable retail sales to county personal income, to create what is known as a **retail sales capture ratio**. Thomas County's ratio is 60.19 percent. The labor income of health employees is part



of overall personal income, so roughly 60.19 percent of health care workers' income is spent on taxable goods and services in the county.

We estimate a local sales tax rate by adding together county and city receipts and then dividing it by retail sales. The average local sales tax rate for Thomas County is 2.44 percent. Our final calculation is based on the formula below:

$$\text{Total Labor Income} * \text{Retail Sales Capture Ratio} * \text{Local Sales Tax Rate} = \text{Estimated Sales Tax (see footnote 2)}$$

We estimate that local sales taxes due to the health care sector sum to \$747,900 annually (Table 7).

Table 7: Impact of the Health Care Sector on Local Sales Tax Revenue, 2023

Retail Sales Capture Ratio		60.19%	
Average Local Sales Tax Rate		2.44%	
Industry	Total Labor Income (Health Care) (\$1000)	Retail Sales from Labor Income (\$1000)	Local Sales Tax Revenue (\$1000)
Hospitals	33,489	20,156	491.4
Offices of Physicians	361	217	5.3
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	9,149	5,506	134.2
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	3,216	1,936	47.2
Offices of Dentists	1,200	722	17.6
Health and Personal Care Stores	563	339	8.3
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	0	0	0.0
Outpatient Care Centers	684	412	10.0
Home Health Care Services	1,311	789	19.2
Residential Treatment Facilities	0	0	0.0
Veterinary Services	1,002	603	14.7
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	0	0	0.0
Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers	0	0	0.0
Total	50,975	30,681	747.9

Sources: Labor income based on proprietary income from IMPLAN and on data from Kansas Department of Labor. Sales tax data from Kansas Department of Revenue. Personal income from US Bureau of Economic Analysis. See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> The capture ratio and the sales tax rate have been rounded to two decimal places. This may cause a small discrepancy between the numbers in the table and the results of the formula in the text.

### **Economic contributions summary**

In summary, the health care sector in Thomas County generates significant employment and income for local residents and generous tax revenue for local governments. Health care businesses provide about 659 jobs and over \$41.4 million in labor income. When the multiplier effect is included, the contributions rise to about 887 jobs and almost \$51 million in labor income in the county. The health care sector supports almost \$748,000 in local sales tax revenue.

The health care sector in the county may be constrained by the high rate of uninsured people under age 65 relative to the state. Uninsured people affect hospital revenues, and the lack of insurance limits the ability of residents to access health care services.

## **The Effects of Health Care on Economic Development**

So far, this report has focused on the effects of the health care sector on wages, income and taxes. However, the health care industry has numerous effects on regional economic development and labor force sustainability that are beyond the scope of a traditional economic contribution or impact analysis. First, access to health care plays a role in improving worker productivity. Second, health care can help attract and retain businesses and employees. And third, a strong health care sector stimulates in-migration and retention of retirees.

A substantial body of research supports the proposition that healthy, fulfilled employees are more productive at work, less prone to absenteeism and less likely to lose their jobs. This is known as the “happy-productive worker hypothesis,” as described by Christensen (2017). Diseases such as asthma, cardiovascular disease and depression lead to missed workdays, and impact productivity through “presenteeism,” that is, when employees are operating at less than full capacity throughout their workday (Isham, Mair and Jackson 2021).

Chronic health conditions can also impact the productivity of informal caregivers, who deal with fatigue and competing time commitments. One study found that friends and relatives who care for people with advanced cancer outside of a professional health care setting experienced a 22.9 percent loss in workplace productivity (Mazanec et al. 2011). This study was limited to caregivers who are currently employed, but further studies suggest that a large portion of informal caregivers quit their jobs entirely to focus on providing care (Committee on Caregiving for Older Adults 2016). This impact shows the benefits of health care access in a community, which not only lessens the responsibilities placed on informal caregivers, but also helps prevent chronic conditions.

Additionally, the health care industry fosters sustainable economic growth through the attraction and retention of businesses and the working-age population, especially in rural areas. This effect is visible in county level wage and employment data, as counties with a hospital see higher employment and wage levels in non-health care industries than similar counties with no hospital (Mandich and Dorfman 2017). Similarly, rural counties that have suffered hospital closure see lower employment and wage growth rates than rural counties that have no closures (Edmiston 2019), suggesting that access to local health care keeps and attracts non-health care businesses and employees, creating local jobs and raising local wages in all industries.

Strong health care systems support the efforts of businesses to attract and retain a skilled and motivated workforce. Access to a quality workforce is the number one factor influencing a business’s decision of where to locate or expand, according to Site Selection’s Business Climate Ranking (2022). Furthermore, quality-of-life is rated among the top 10 location factors, tied with business incentives offered by states, cities and

counties. Avery (2007) comments that “a general rule of thumb is that the greater the number of professionals who will be transferred or recruited from elsewhere, the more important quality of life factors will be.” Millennial and Gen Z employees rank health care, including access to mental health services, as the top employer-offered benefits (Mearian 2022).

The health care sector also plays a role in attracting and retaining retirees, who contribute to economic development through local spending and tax revenue. One study examining rural counties in Michigan found that the presence of health care facilities and number of health care workers had a positive effect on net migration (those who move in minus those who leave) within the 70+ age group. This effect was found to be similar in magnitude to the effects of other amenities, such as educational and recreational institutions (Oehmke et al. 2007). A broader study across urban and rural counties throughout the United States found that increases in hospital beds, number of doctors and total health expenditures were all positively associated with increased in-migration in the 60-74 and 75+ years of age groups (Dorfman and Mandich 2016).

In summary, the health care sector provides economic benefits beyond those considered in traditional contribution and impact modeling. Health care access improves the productivity of the labor force, by treating and preventing conditions that would otherwise impact an individual’s work productivity and by reducing the amount of informal care required from non-health workers. Health care access plays a role in helping grow a community’s working age population, attracting and retaining businesses as well as drawing and retaining retirees. Because of these effects, a robust health care sector should be considered an important contributor to economic development.

## **Thomas County Summary**

The health care sector in Thomas County provides significant jobs and income to the community. Each of the 9 individual health care industries in the county have unique impacts on the local economy. The industries include everything from hospitals to veterinary services.

The health care sector provides more than 659 jobs (10.6 percent of all jobs in the county) and nearly \$51 million in labor income (12.7 percent of all income earned in the county). Hospitals, nursing facilities and offices of other health practitioners' supply the largest number of jobs within the county's health care sector. Income from health care jobs averages almost \$63,000 per year.

The secondary effects of the health care sector are also significant. These are the ripple effects of having health care providers working and living locally in the county. These employees will need services from other economic sectors: restaurants, gas stations and the like. Using a contribution factor, we calculate that the hospital industry in Thomas County, with its 337 current hospital jobs, supports about 161 additional jobs outside of health care. Similarly, the \$26.8 million in hospital employee income produces another \$6.7 million in income from additional jobs within the county.

In fact, the hospital industry in Thomas County has the largest contribution multiplier of all health care industries. That implies employees in hospitals have the greatest impact on "producing" more outside jobs. Naturally as the number of jobs increases, so does the total income and sales tax revenue in the county.

In addition to providing jobs and income, the health care sector can provide other substantial economic development benefits. A quality health care sector improves the well-being of the population, and that, in turn, improves business productivity. In addition, quality health care aids in the retention and attraction of businesses and retirees.

## Appendix A: Data Sources and Methods

This appendix discusses: a) what data contributed to each data table in the report and b) how the data in the report were combined to form the tables. The data used in this project come from several sources and refer to calendar year 2023 unless otherwise noted. A list of data citations follows at the end of this appendix. The numbers in brackets indicate the tables for which the data citations were used.

If you have questions about the data or methods used to create any of the tables, please email Thomas Becker ([thomasbecker@ku.edu](mailto:thomasbecker@ku.edu)) for more information.

**Table 1: County Demographic and Economic Characteristics.** This table is a compendium of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment contributed data on active physicians by county, as published in IPSR's Kansas Statistical Abstract. The Kansas Hospital Association served as the primary source of hospitals by county, supplemented by data from the American Hospital Association.

**Table 3: Structure of the County Economy.** This table relies on the two main datasets used for this report: the IMPLAN Model proprietary county-level dataset as well as a special data extract from the Kansas Department of Labor.

The IMPLAN dataset covers all industries in a county including government. Employment numbers in the dataset include both wage and salary workers, and people who are self-employed. Labor income includes wages and salaries, self-employment income, and benefits. For small areas such as counties, data on employment and income is not always reported by state and federal agencies. IMPLAN estimates employment and income based on the best available data, but sometimes these estimates do not appear realistic (see Table 4 discussion). Note that we moved employment and income for hospitals owned by federal, state or local governments out of the IMPLAN government sector and into health care services. For all economic sectors except health care, IMPLAN provided our major source of data for employment and income.

The Kansas Department of Labor (KDOL) provided us with a special extract of county-level employment and wage data. We used the KDOL dataset primarily for health care industries. For these industries, we aggregated the included employment and wage data to match the IMPLAN definition of industries, added self-employment information from IMPLAN and added an estimate of benefits. We then applied appropriate statistical measures to keep detailed employer data confidential.

**Table 4: Individual County Health Care Industries.** Data for individual health care industries incorporate both IMPLAN and KDOL data. As mentioned above, data from KDOL was combined with IMPLAN and then abstracted in order to protect

confidentiality. In some cases, the IMPLAN estimates of self-employment were unrealistic. For example, we found a small county with about 40 self-employed people working in physicians' offices, each earning about \$2,000 per year. In cases with unrealistic data, we looked at IMPLAN data from the previous year and almost always found that the previous estimate was zero. We also verified that no wage and salary employees appeared in the KDOL data. Finally, we reset the estimates to zero. In a few counties with hospitals, IMPLAN data erroneously reported zero hospital employment or wages. In these cases, for our multipliers we calculated the median multipliers of similarly sized counties.

Another data problem we encountered was that for a few counties that actually have a hospital, both IMPLAN and KDOL showed zero employees. This may have been due to hospital systems with two or more hospitals reporting combined employment rather than individual location employment. Data from the American Hospital Association was often able to resolve these anomalies.

**Tables 5 and 6: Contributions of the Health Care Sector.** These tables show direct and total employment and income. In general, we used a formula: Total Effects = Direct Effects \* Multiplier. Multipliers were provided by the IMPLAN model, and are specific to the industry, the county, and the type of effect (employment or income).

**Table 7: Impact of the Health Care Sector on Local Sales Tax Revenue.** This table makes use of the ratio of local sales tax revenue to county personal income. Local sales tax revenue was provided by the Kansas Department of Revenue. It includes both county and city levies. County-level personal income comes from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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