

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network *Findings Brief: Assisted Living Facilities*

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by assisted living facilities in Washington State during October and November 2021. More findings from 2021 and earlier may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/.

Assisted living facilities' current pandemic-related concerns are summarized below. Earlier pandemic-related findings may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reported by Assisted Living Facilities: Themes and examples

How have your facility's staffing arrangements/configurations affected your ability to respond to patient demand during the past 6 months?

Almost all respondents reported challenges, such as limited admissions, curtailed services, working longer hours.

- We have had to reduce things like # of activities per day to use the activity director as a caregiver. Have had to have med-techs work the floor to help cover care, cooking etc.
- Limited number of new move-ins.
- We have had to have our nurses work overtime for more than 6 months. They are working 50-60 hours a week.
- Less staff results in longer wait times for residents who need care.

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by policy, regulatory, and/or payment changes?

- Better Medicaid reimbursement for patients so we can pay our staff better.
- This vaccine mandate has inspired a large portion of my staff to consider leaving the field or even the state.
- Decrease regulatory visits and instead do visits from OSHA and DSHS (RCS) to HELP facilities with things like fit testing programs and infection control.

How has the pandemic affected your ability to support educational/training opportunities ?

Almost all said they could not offer clinical training for students due to COVID restrictions and staff shortfalls.

- We would love to [bring in students] but we have nurse leaders also covering shifts so we have limited bandwidth to support the necessary and important oversight and mentoring and coaching for students.
- Educational/training opportunities have been put on the back burner. We are so short staffed right now that we are doing damage control.

To what extent has your organization used recruitment incentives like sign-on bonuses during the pandemic?

What recruitment strategies have been most successful?

Most respondents said they offered bonuses (sign-on or referral) or higher wages, but the results have been inconsistent.

- We have used sign on bonuses and increased wages which have not helped recruitments.
- Even with bonuses and higher wages, we have been struggling just to keep workers in the field.
- We cannot afford to offer bonuses. We barely have enough to cover daily overhead costs and payroll.

Have you implemented new retention strategies during the pandemic? Please describe.

Most said they have raised pay, provided retention bonuses or provided non-monetary incentives.

- We have given tenure bonuses, performance bonuses, referral bonuses, gas stipend for every employee.
- We have raised the salaries of current staff as much as we are able and try and be flexible and creative with staff schedules as much as possible.
- Employee appreciation efforts are stepped up. Birthdays, years of service, etc.

Compared with 2 years ago, how would you describe the number of vacancies you're now trying to fill?

Most report a significant increase in the number of vacancies and fewer applicants for open positions.

- I have about twice as many vacancies which have occurred for a variety of reasons: leaving for better pay, leaving because of burnout, leaving for medical reasons.
- Advertisements that would once garner 20+ responses now only get 5-10, if that.

Assisted Living Facilities (Fall 2021)

Assisted living facilities and other health care facilities in Washington shared information about their workforce needs with the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More Assisted living facility findings, along with those from other health care facilities, are at wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting							
Rank	Spring 2019*	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	
1	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Home health aide or home care aide	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	
2	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse	
			Registered nurse				
			Nursing assistant				
3	Home health aide or home care aide	Home health aide or home care aide	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Home health aide or home care aide	
	Registered nurse	Registered nurse			Personal care aide		
4	Personal care aide	Personal care aide		Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Home health aide or home care aide	Cook	Licensed practical nurse
	Chemical dependency professional					Cook	
	Social worker	Home health aide or home care aide					
5	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency		Personal care aide	n/a	Personal care aide
					Food service		
				Housekeeping			

← Most cited

*Before spring 2019, assisted living facilities were folded in to the “intermediate care facility” category so findings cannot be shown here

Demand for healthcare workforce reported by Assisted Living Facilities

Challenges associated with COVID have led to higher demand for healthcare workers.

- [Multiple occupations] We need more staff to support the requirements for mandates, we need more staff to meet patient's level of care, we need more staff due to overall lack of staffing.
- [Multiple occupations] Due to COVID-19 many staff members quit or did not return to work.
- [Licensed practical nurse, nursing assistant, home care aide] Since COVID - we have had a higher need for LPNs, NACs and HCAs... Our current employees are burning out.

Reasons for prolonged vacancies reported by Assisted Living Facilities

Employers report fewer applicants for open positions compared with earlier in the pandemic.

- [Multiple occupations] We have had many apply but not show up for the interview
- [Multiple occupations] Not enough applicants responding to ads, those responding not vaccinated
- [Nursing assistant, licensed practical nurse, physical therapy aide] Not able to compete with hospital wages or bonus' offered by other facilities. Staff that did stay, left due to burn out.
- [Nursing assistant] There are simply so many positions available and there seems to be more demand than supply. We just increased our NAC rates of pay by 20% and we still are not getting many applicants.
- [Home care aide] No one wants to be around COVID-19 and if they can make more on unemployment, why work?

Assisted Living Facilities (Fall 2021)

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by Assisted Living Facilities

- [Psychiatric aide] Very hard job for very low pay. Cannot compete with other businesses for these staff.
- [Nursing assistant] The rapid changing of recommendations, all the extra steps that need to be taken... it all adds up. A lot of them feel burned out and demoralized.
- [Multiple occupations] Staff are leaving for higher wages elsewhere. Some have left due to the vax mandate.
- [Multiple occupations] Many of my employees who left told me that the stress of watching declines in our residents' acuity, connected with the physical separation from family and friends, made their job seem impossible.

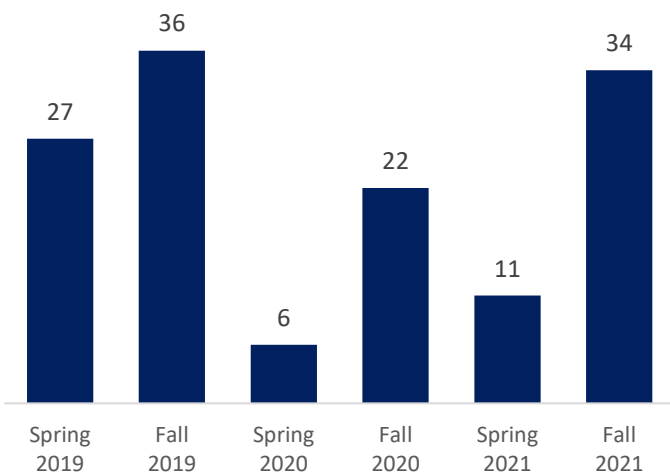
New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by Assisted Living Facilities

- Directors started taking on nurse aide shifts. Dietary aides have been asked to start their CNA training so that they can work the nursing side. This has been a direct result of the staffing shortages caused by the pandemic.
- Pulling caregivers to help with housekeeping/dietary as needed.
- New roles hired: Cook, server.

Changes in Assisted Living Facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

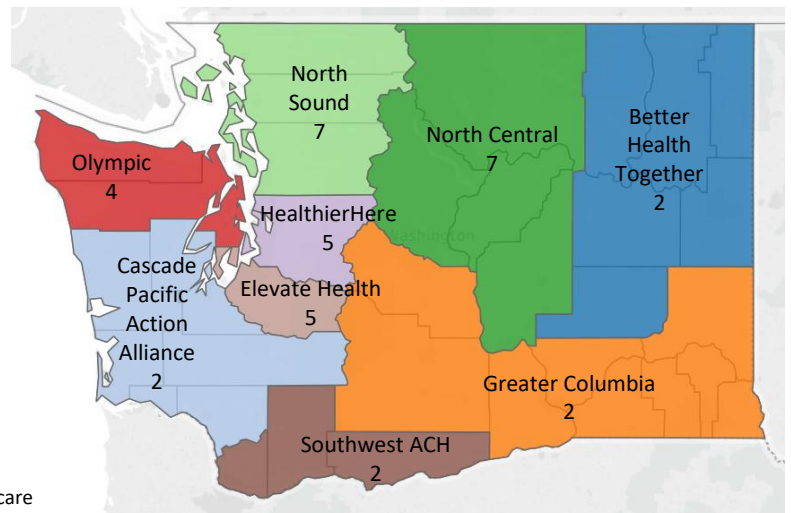
- Increased education on PPE, exposure, prevention and identification of covid.
- All training is now online, which is not as engaging.
- Everyone hired now has to be either fully vaccinated or apply for an exemption.

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Assisted Living Facilities in WA by Data Collection Date*



*Before spring 2019, assisted living facilities were folded in to the "intermediate care facility" category

Number of Assisted Living Facility Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Fall 2021)



About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Health Workforce Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from Governor Inslee's office and the Washington State Legislature.

Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your workforce needs and ensure that the state is prepared to respond to the transforming healthcare environment.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization: www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

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