



Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Small Hospitals

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by acute care hospitals with 25 beds or fewer ("Small Hospitals") during October/November 2021. More findings from 2021 and earlier may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/. Small hospitals' 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 Small Hospitals (<25 beds): Themes and examples

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

Some have reduced patient access due to staff limitations, others have not yet surpassed workforce capacity.

- *[W]e have repeatedly had to limit admissions due to lack of staffing, both nurses and CNA's.*
- *We have been challenged with adequate staffing. Our employees have worked many hours of overtime. We have brought in agency nurses, and have had difficulty with them showing up.*
- *There has been an increase in patient load. At this point we are not above needing extra staff but this could happen.*

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

- *More funding for the training programs.*
- *Better reimbursement rates.*

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

After reducing student access early in the pandemic, some report making limited training available.

- *We stopped initially - however we quickly began working with schools to get students in for clinicals. Limited number of students in programs.*
- *We have done our best to support students, and to continue facility trainings.*
- *We have halted our physician assistant rural training program.*

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

What recruitment strategies have been most successful?

Some, but not all, small hospitals reported using recruitment incentives.

- *We have initiated sign-on bonuses for several jobs, including MA's. This has been quite successful.*
- *We have not used signing bonuses. Recruitment strategies promote quality of life, lower acuity patients, not as many COVID patients as the larger hospitals.*
- *Heavily [used sign-on bonuses]. Sign on bonus and our culture [have been most successful].*
- *There are currently no recruitment strategies that have been successful in our rural locations and the mandates and continued "state of emergency" hamper everyone's effectiveness and to run our facilities.*

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

- *Retention bonus paid 6 months apart.*
- *Bonuses, praise, etc. Which we have always done.*
- *No. None.*

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

Most small hospitals reported some increase in vacancies, although reasons varied.

- *About 50% more vacancies than 2 years ago.*
- *More than twice as many vacant positions now compared to before the pandemic.*
- *We have add[ed] new positions to the organization - so this has increased vacancies. With existing positions we have had about the same number of vacancies. We have seen an increase in retirements in this past year which has also increased some vacancies.*
- *We are always short as a rural health care system. Due to increased volume, we have had more demand.*

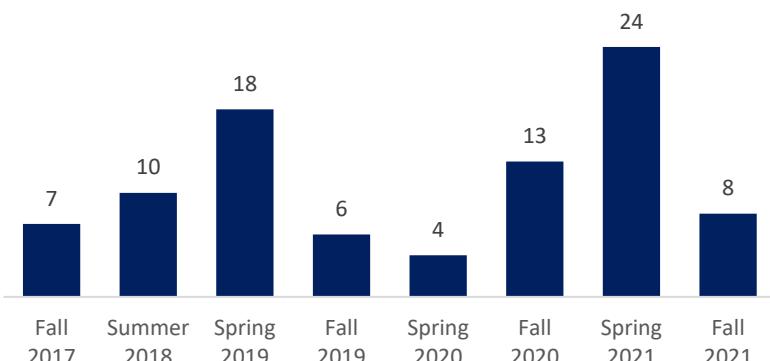
Small Hospitals (<25 beds) (Fall 2021)

Between 2016 and 2021, over the course of 11 reporting periods, small hospitals and other health care facilities in Washington shared information about their workforce needs to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More findings from small hospitals, 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 2017	Fall 2017	Summer 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021	Fall 2021
1	Registered nurse	Registered nurse Physical therapist	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Physician/Surgeon	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse
2	Med/Clin lab technologist	Nursing assistant	Physician/ Surgeon	Physician/ Surgeon	Registered nurse	Medical assistant	Nursing assistant	Medical assistant
	Physical therapist	Physical therapy assistant			Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant		Nursing assistant
3	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Med/Clin lab technologist Nursing assistant Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Physical therapist Marriage & Family Therapist	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Medical assistant Med/Clin Lab technologist	Physician/Surgeon

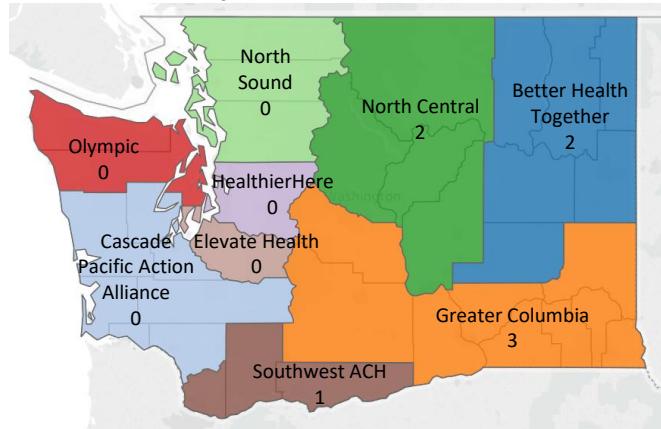
* Summer and Winter 2016 and Spring 2017 findings not shown due to space constraints – may be seen at the Sentinel Network Dashboard: wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Small Hospitals in WA by Data Collection Date*



* Summer and Winter 2016 and Spring 2017 not shown due to space constraints

Number of Small Hospitals' Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Fall 2021)



About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The 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.

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