

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 May and June 2022. More findings from 2022 and earlier may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings.

Assisted living facilities' responses to questions about current overarching and pandemic-related workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier pandemic-related findings may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

Overarching and Pandemic-Related Workforce Issues: Themes and examples

What strategies has your organization used over the past 6 months to cover worker absences and fill vacancies caused by worker turnover? How successful have these strategies been?

Many have asked current employees to expand their roles, have used staffing agencies and other strategies to fill gaps.

- We have adjusted shift schedules, offered retention bonuses, increased hourly wages, approved overtime, required administrative and non-front line workers to assist in other departments.
- Used [an] agency which is extremely expensive, massive overtime for our current staff, increased working hours for all salaried staff... worked short for a couple hours at a time which is not ideal for resident safety/care.
- Staffing agencies, however the staffing shortages extend to staffing agencies as well. Asking nurses from medical clinics to cover shifts at long term care facility.
- We have hired non-licensed staff to complete most of the non-medical tasks (freeing up licensed staff to ONLY do the medical tasks).
- Recruited new regular staff, used contract/traveler agencies, increased hours of remaining staff. Have been able to maintain a fairly stable staffing level.

What employee benefits are, or would be, the most helpful to improve your facility's ability to retain its workforce? If you have been able to implement or increase access to any of these benefits within the past 6 months what effect have they had on retention?

- Childcare, increased wages, fully covered healthcare benefits, increased transportation, gas stipends.
- Primarily for us, flexible scheduling has had the greatest impact in recruiting.
- Increase in wages has led to increase in employee retention and satisfaction.
- We increased wages, offered bonuses for referrals, retention, and attendance. We provided personalized, flexible schedules, and honored all vacation requests. These measures were only moderately successful.

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?

Streamlining credentialing/licensing, educational incentives and payment increases were mentioned as priorities for many employers.

- Staffing agencies have soaked up a lot of caregivers and pay them more than we could dream of, then they turn around and charge facilities more than they pay their RN for a caregiver that's totally unfamiliar with how each facility runs.
- Modify clinical training requirements to allow on-the-job training in assisted living settings.
- If there could be another pause in the requirement of CNA/HCA license that would greatly help us fill openings and retain those that pushed through our short staffing.
- Long term care reimbursement rates are very low. The acuity level of care patients need has increased while reimbursement rates have remained the same.

How would you describe your facility's use of telehealth/virtual visits now compared with your use a year ago? If your organization provides telehealth/virtual visits, how would you describe the impact on recruiting and retaining your workforce?

Two-thirds of respondents said they offer telehealth services, but it is primarily for their residents to complete medical appointments. This is often a burden for workers and most employers report it has not helped retention.

- This hasn't affected staffing. We use telehealth for our patients to communicate with their provider if need be.
- The assisted living is having to do more work due to Telehealth. Emails, transportation, scheduling, and follow ups.

Assisted Living Facilities (Spring 2022)

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	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	
1	Nursing assistant	Home health aide or home care aide	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	
2	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse	Cook / Food services	
		Registered nurse					
		Nursing assistant					
3	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	Home health aide or home care aide	
	Registered nurse			Personal care aide		Licensed practical nurse	
4	Personal care aide		Home health aide or home care aide	Cook / Food services	Home health aide or home care aide	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse
	Cook / Food services						
5	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency		Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Personal care aide	n/a	Personal care aide	Environmental services
		Cook / Food services					
		Housekeeping					

← Most cited

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

Reasons for prolonged vacancies reported by Assisted Living Facilities

Almost all respondents report a lack of qualified applicants, with multiple reasons cited.

- [Home health aide or Home care aide] Not enough trained CNAs, HCAs, or NARs around, Medicaid rates not high enough to provide decent wage/benefits to attract quality workers, have not and will not get the Covid vaccine.
- [Cook/Food services] We have had 4FTEs of dietary aides and 1 FTE for Cook that have been unfilled for over 4 months. Very few applicants and those that apply are not willing to be vaccinated.
- [Licensed practical nurse] Stress related to Covid burnout, increased workload, employees leaving the LTC industry in general for higher wages, benefits, work/life balance etc.
- [Nursing assistant] Many potential candidates do not have an HCA or CNA [certification] due to training/testing availability and absence of required settings to complete clinicals.
- [Personal care aide] Can get a lot of applications, but few are qualified and even fewer show up for interviews.

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

- [Multiple occupations] Covid, pay, competitors bonus for new hires, burnout, masks, vaccine mandate, position is difficult mentally and physically, high acuity with residents, applicants having mental health challenges of their own.
- [Registered nurse] Overall fatigue for having to cover shifts on the floor to provide care in the absence of staffing.
- [LPN, CNA] COVID burnout and stress, increased gas prices, and cost of living.
- [Medication Aide] People don't want to work doubles... or come in on days off to cover shifts. We can't meet the wages of McDonalds because we are [primarily funded by] DSHS/Medicaid. I can't admit until I have staff, but can't increase wage until I admit.

Assisted Living Facilities (Spring 2022)

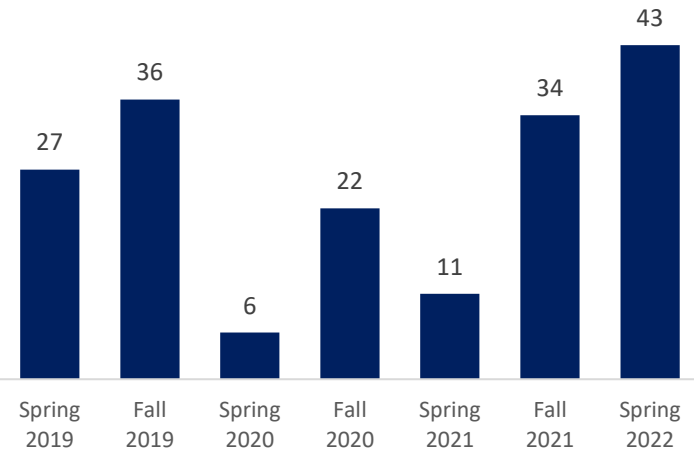
Changes in Assisted Living Facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

- [Caregivers] More on-the-job training and shadowing is required, as the new care staff applicants have little to no experience providing patient care.
- [Home care aide] I am now paying to get employees certified. This has been a financial commitment to my small business.
- [Caregiver/Med tech] Reprioritizing training to comply with changes in state requirements that were set aside during Covid; trying to find time to get the training done in a challenging labor environment with short staffing.
- [CNA/Home care aide] A real focus on flexibility, immediate and frequent recognition, extended training times.

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

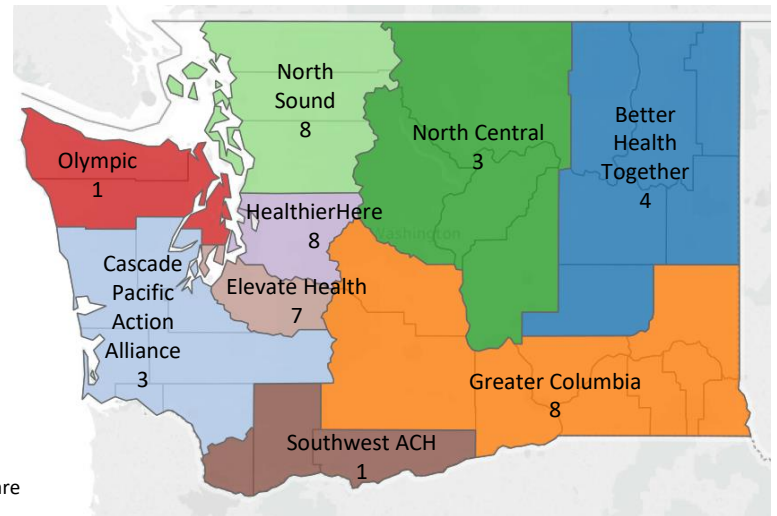
- [Licensed practical nurse] Needed to switch position to RN because there were no LPN's available for hire.
- [Office Staff/Front Desk Staff/Scheduler, CNAs] Helping in dining room, kitchen, Covid protocols, Housekeeping.
- [Administrator/Director] appropriately licensed personnel assisting with care of residents/CNA tasks due to severe staff shortages.
- [Housekeeper] We have had our housekeeping staff help do laundry and deliver meal trays to residents, which were previously part of the caregiving job.
- [Associate director] RN and management; provided more direct care than in years past because of shortage of CNAs.

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, so response numbers cannot be shown here.

Number of Assisted Living Facility Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Spring 2022)



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.

Contact: healthworkforce@wasentinelnetwork.org

Operations Director: Benjamin Stubbs, Research Scientist, UW Center for Health Workforce Studies bstubbs@uw.edu

Program Director: Susan Skillman, Senior Deputy Director, UW Center for Health Workforce Studies skillman@uw.edu