

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network Findings Brief: Nursing Homes and Skilled Nursing Facilities

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities in Washington State during May and June 2022. More findings from 2022 and earlier may be viewed at wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/. Nursing homes' and skilled nursing facilities' responses to questions about current overarching and pandemic-related workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier pandemic-specific 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 respondents said that contract agencies filled gaps but sometimes agency workers were also unavailable. They also asked existing staff to do more.

- *[Use] agency workers when available... and overtime [pay]. Also reduction in residency census to keep it safe and maintain quality care at all times.*
- *Used agencies, pay bonuses to existing employees, had managers work in other areas. None have worked very well, there are not enough people to go around.*
- *Overtime, bonuses, contract agencies.*
- *Implemented a Med Aide training program - we have put 8 thru but we are unable to get them tested thru the state.*

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?

- *We are offering flexible schedules, we have employee assistance programs, tuition reimbursement. Creating more flexibility with our schedules has shown some improvement [but] other [benefits] have not.*
- *Mental health support, and other ways to keep the workforce from burning out as quickly. Healthcare is draining, and stressful. A covered therapist service [for employees] would do wonders.*
- *Being able to offer flexible schedules and/or rotating weekends may help with retention.*
- *Wage increases [have] increased retention and employee satisfaction*

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

Streamlined licensing processes, the ability to train CNAs in-house and better reimbursement rates were priorities for many.

- *Making it easier for nurses to transfer in from out of State into WA [LPNs]... Consider becoming a Compact State [for RNs]. Ensuring we can get new CNA's licenses very [quickly].*
- *Temporary permits [for nurses] while credentials are being approved.*
- *Minimize red tape related to H-1b visa program.*
- *CMP sanctions against facilities with IP [infection prevention] tags prevents facilities from offering training of CNA's while sanctions are in place. This takes away an avenue for CNAs to be trained in-house.*
- *Better reimbursement for care provided so employers can pay better wages.*

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?

Eighty-three percent 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 some employers report it has not helped retention.

- *I don't know that it has impacted staffing as much as the quality of life for the residents. It is hard to assess someone over video and very impersonal.*

Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (Spring 2022)

Between 2016 and 2022, over the course of 12 reporting periods, nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, 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 nursing home and skilled nursing 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	Summer 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022
1	Nursing assistant	Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse
2	Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	Licensed practical nurse Nursing assistant	Licensed practical nurse
3	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse Dentist	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Occupational therapist Physical therapist	Nursing assistant
4	Dentist Physician/ Surgeon	Occupational therapy assistant Physical therapist Social worker Psychologist	Speech-language therapist	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Occupational therapy assistant Physical therapist Physical Therapy Assistant	Occupational therapist Physical therapist Social worker Speech-language therapist	Speech-language therapist	Cook / Food services
5	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency		Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	n/a	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Environmental services

← Most cited

* Findings prior to Summer 2018 can be viewed on the Sentinel Network Dashboard: wa.sentinelnetwork.org

Reasons for vacancies reported by nursing homes/skilled nursing facilities

Many employers in long term care feel they are competing with other industries or contract agencies.

- [Nursing assistant] No one is applying.
- In general, we are experiencing shortage of nursing staff [LPNs, CNAs and RNs] in long term care. Many opted for career change during pandemic, decided to retire earlier, or would rather work in different setting, i.e. hospitals.
- Many LPN staff leave to be paid astronomically high wages at staffing agencies.
- [Registered nurse] Hard to find RN's for long term care - they come and get trained and then leave for hospitals - and our benefits don't compete.
- [Cook/Food services] Staff are able to get jobs at local restaurants/retailers making more than they can get even with increased wages in Skilled Nursing. Our current reimbursement doesn't allow us to meet what others offer.

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by nursing home/skilled nursing facilities

Facilities frequently reported that employees left looking for higher pay, flexible schedules and lower workload.

- [Multiple occupations] Can't compete with wages others are offering. Workload has increased greatly with COVID protocols, shorter length of stay = increase work, more acute patients.
- [Nursing assistant] We have done several wage increases for CNA staff to compete with agency and other facilities in our area and keep our current staff. Many staff still leave for higher wages with agency.
- [Licensed practical nurse] Want more pay, patients hard to care for - behaviors, physical abuse from patients.

Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (Spring 2022)

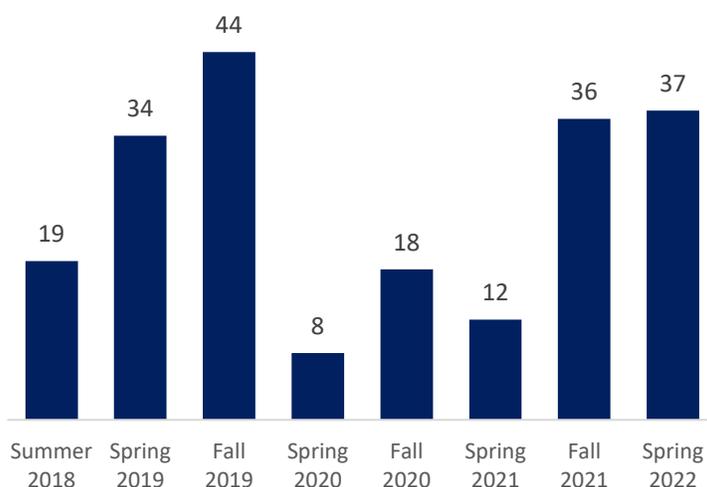
Changes in nursing homes'/skilled nursing facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

- [Nursing assistant] Newly licensed staff not having enough hands-on experience and needing more one on one and longer orientation to the caseload.
- [Nursing assistant] [We are] bringing staff in roles like hospitality aide and nursing aide and having them go through our NAC program until they receive certification.
- [Nursing assistant] Mentoring program in multiple facilities for newly hired employees, especially nursing aides.
- [All occupations] Significant increase in training in infection control, especially related to COVID.

New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by nursing homes/skilled nursing facilities

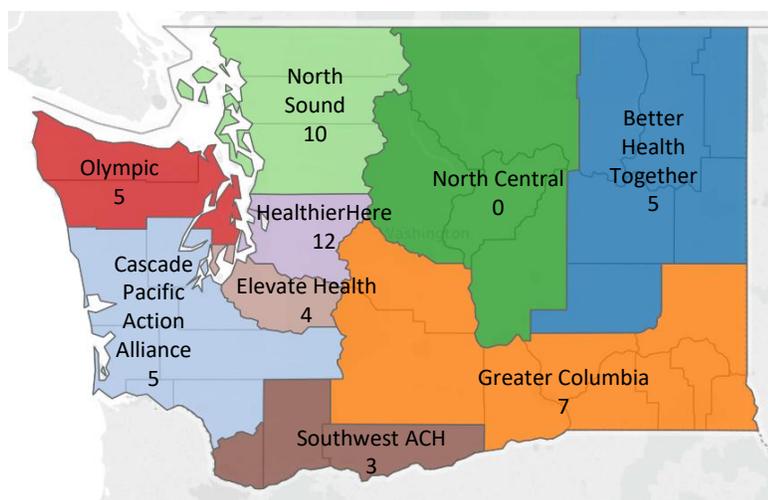
- [Hospitality aide] Assist floor staff with tasks that do not require skilled direct care training - make beds, pass trays, 1:1, emotional support, etc.
- [Activities coordinator] Assisting nursing aides during meals.
- [Physical therapist, Occupational therapist] Working as an aide on the floor.

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities in WA by Data Collection Date*



* findings prior to Summer 2018 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing 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.

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