

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Small Hospitals

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by small acute care hospitals with 25 beds or fewer (referred to as Small Hospitals in this brief) in Washington State during September and October 2022. More findings from 2022 and earlier may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings. Responses to questions about current overarching and pandemic-related workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier pandemic-related findings are at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

Overarching and pandemic-related workforce issues: Themes and examples

In the past year:

- has access to childcare, housing, transportation, or other factors affected staffing at your organization?

Themes: Childcare and housing were the community factors most frequently cited as affecting staffing at small hospitals.

| | Yes | No | % Yes | Comments |
|----------------|-----|----|-------|---|
| Childcare | 10 | 2 | 83% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several employees have struggled with the reduction in area childcare due to COVID restrictions and fears, as well as periodic closures when childcare facilities are short-staffed. Childcare resources are still good within the community however they are a bit tighter than in the past. |
| Housing | 10 | 2 | 83% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of available rental housing and homes to purchase; and the cost of housing is very high. There is not affordable housing in our town, nor enough housing available for new employees. It is more difficult to attract candidates when there are few housing options available. It's better than the previous year, but still rough. |
| Transportation | 2 | 10 | 17% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because housing is expensive, we have many staff who commute, and the price of gas increasing has made that harder and more expensive. Increase in gas prices makes it difficult to recruit from outside areas |
| Other | 1 | 11 | 8% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued increase in min wage is forcing wage increases to healthcare facilities that already have financial concerns |

- how have your staffing arrangements affected your ability to respond to patient demand?

Themes: Staffing difficulties have led to longer wait times, in-patient admissions limits, and increased use of contract staff.

- Yes, we have had to limit in-patient admissions due to a shortage of RNs and CNAs.
- We have several travelers in multiple positions, ... have had to refer patients to other facilities [and] ... have had to transfer patients from the ED to other facilities due to lack of staff.
- We have managed the patient load but strained the workforce.

- what institutional actions has your organization has taken to improve workforce diversity or to make your organization more representative of the population it serves.

Themes: Some indicated organization-level efforts, and providing more diversity, equity and including (DEI) training.

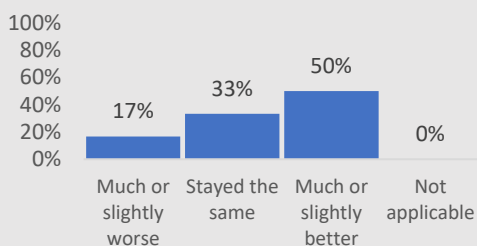
- We have made DEI part of our organizational strategy. We are talking about the topic more as an organization and developing an ongoing training curriculum.
- We have had minimal action with diversity efforts. HR has recently implemented the use of pronouns as an option for staff badges. We will be capturing SOGI-P [sexual orientation, gender identity and pronouns] data from patients.

- has the overall behavioral health status of your workforce changed? What resources are needed?

Themes: Many reported declines in workforce behavioral health status, largely due to pandemic and related burnout.

- It's been tough - people get worn out with COVID stress ... and we see shorter tempers at times.
- Additional resources for mental health availability support would be helpful, funding for additional programs, etc.
- Generalized burnout, compiled with grief ... We have utilized our EAP (Employee Assistance Program).

- has your ability to support clinical training experience for students/learners ... at your organization become better, stayed the same or gotten worse? What strategies/policies have been – or would be – the most helpful?



- [Slightly better] Time, right now we don't have enough staff and don't have the time to give Nursing Staff long orientation periods.
- [Slightly worse] Our experienced nurses are too busy, [with] unfilled positions.
- [Stayed the same] Local students conducting preceptorships then applying once their program is finished. We have hosted 7 RN students in 2022, all from urban areas who live too far away to commute to our facility for permanent positions.

Small Hospitals (Fall 2022)

Small hospitals 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 small hospital 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 | Fall 2020 | Spring 2021 | Fall 2021 | Spring 2022 | Fall 2022 |
| 1 | Registered nurse | Physician/ Surgeon | Registered nurse | Registered nurse | Registered nurse | Registered nurse | Registered nurse |
| 2 | Physician/ Surgeon | Registered nurse | Medical assistant | Nursing assistant | Medical assistant | Nursing assistant | Cook / Food services |
| | | Nursing assistant | Nursing assistant | | Nursing assistant | | |
| 3 | Physical therapist | Multiple occupations cited at same frequency | Multiple occupations cited at same frequency | Medical assistant | Physician/ Surgeon | Cook / Food services | Nursing assistant |
| | Marriage & family therapist | | | Med/Clin Lab technologist | | | |

← Most cited

* Findings prior to Spring 2019 not shown due to space constraints and can be viewed on the Sentinel Network Dashboard: wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

Reasons for exceptionally long vacancies reported by Small Hospitals

Themes: Most reported few qualified applicants and wage competition.

- [Mental health counselor] We posted for a licensed mental health professional for 9 months and got 1 qualified applicant. We have pulled the job listing.
- [Nursing roles] Candidates are able to set their own wages when they are travelers - we are seeing \$150+/hour wages.
- [Surgical technologist] Very few candidates at all.
- [Cook/Food services, Environmental services] Struggling with the quality of the candidates; few with interest and/or experience in food services and have a lot of applications submitted by candidates who fail to respond to communication attempts.

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by Small Hospitals

Themes: Similar to reasons cited for prolonged vacancies, including wage competition and burnout.

- [Registered nurse, Nursing assistant] Not enough RNs in our area, difficult to recruit to a rural area. With that, the inflation of gas to/from work, housing for staff are huge issues in our area.
- [Radiologic technician] We're still seeing some staff leave to become travelers to cash in on that high rate of pay.
- [Medical assistant] We're seeing staff leave for more pay after obtaining additional certifications/etc. as well as staff leaving healthcare and deciding to work in other capacities with a stronger income.
- [Phlebotomist] Have had several Phlebotomist leave for other opportunities and it has been difficult to re-hire...

Small Hospitals (Fall 2022)

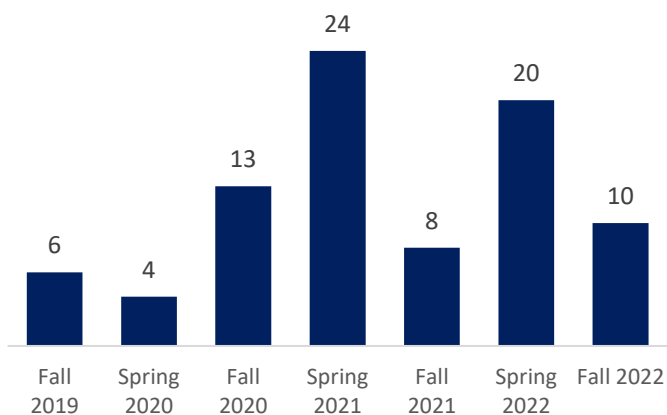
New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by Small Hospitals

- [Clinical pharmacy coordinator] Setting up pharmacy refills for the clinics. Currently this task is being done by our Medical Assistants and Nurses.
- [Clinical nursing informatics] Focusing more on nursing and provider EMR [(Electronic Medical Record)] needs.
- [No reported changes for roles in Fall 2022]

Changes in Small Hospitals' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

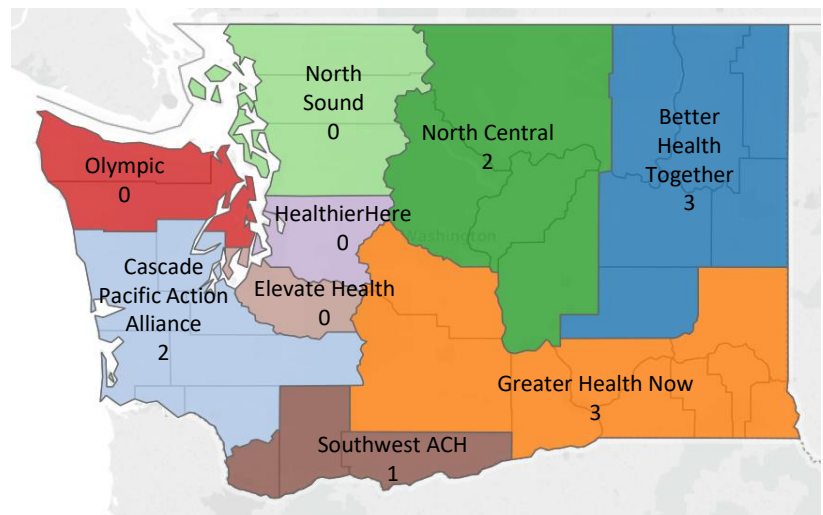
- Building a stronger and more thorough orientation program to get staff off to a stronger start.
- Working with all clinical managers/providers and clinical new hires for EMR [(Electronic Medical Record)] onboarding.
- [No reported changes for training for existing/incumbent workers for Fall 2022]

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



*Response counts prior to Fall 2019 are not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Small Hospital Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Fall 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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