

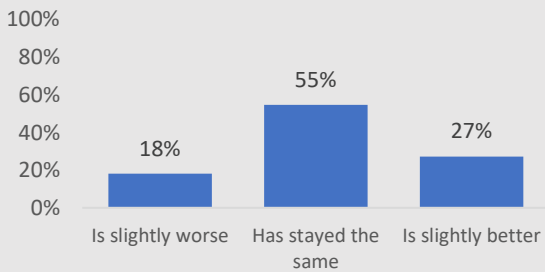
# Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

## Findings Brief: Rural Health Clinics

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported by rural health clinics in Washington State during March and April 2023. More findings from 2023 and earlier may be viewed at [wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings](http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings). Responses to questions about current overarching workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier overarching and pandemic-related findings may be viewed at [www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19).

### Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

#### In the past six months, how has your organization's ability to staff your facility/facilities changed?



- *[Slightly better]* We have stopped all traveler contracts and have so far converted at least 4 to employees.
- *[Slightly better]* It has remained more difficult than in the past, but the past few months have seen more candidates than in recent years.
- *[Stayed the same]* Receiving very few applications.
- *[Slightly worse]* Employees continue to contract COVID which then is a challenge to cover shifts for the 10 days the employee is required to be out.

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

**Themes:** Responses ranged from addressing the costs of travelers, promotion of workforce training, and housing and childcare supports.

- We need to have a program similar to the MA Apprentice program the one being proposed is too long and does not allow for the employee to work full time.
- Funding and/or grants for rural housing and childcare centers.

#### Has your organization made any of the following changes in the past year?

	Yes % (#)	Comments
Hired or assigned workers with higher-level qualifications to fill lower-skilled roles or positions.	0% (0)	
Hired workers with fewer qualifications than would normally be considered.	18% (2)	• Applicants for our MA Apprentice program have minimal or no healthcare experience.
Implemented new outsourcing/contracting of specific services (or 'service lines').	0% (0)	

#### In the past year, how has your ability to support clinical training experience/preceptorship/rotation opportunities for students/learners (not newly hired or incumbent employees) at your facility changed? What strategies/policies (e.g., financial incentives, student housing, etc.) have been - or would be - the most helpful for supporting clinical training experiences at your facility?

**Themes:** Most respondents reported that clinical training opportunities have stayed the same in their rural health clinics, while that there has been some improvement.

- *[Stayed the same]* We continue to try to improve training and the number of opportunities. But we have been fortunate to have the ability to participate in programs like the MA-C Apprenticeship program.
- *[Stayed the same]* Increased wages.
- *[Much better]* Lead pay incentive for support staff who is training or shadowing for the day

## Rural Health Clinics (Spring 2023)

In Spring 2022, Rural Health Clinics were added as a standalone reporting category. Previously, between 2016 and 2021, RHCs were grouped with primary care clinics. Below are highlights of recent findings. More findings from Rural Health Clinics, along with those from other health care facilities, are at [wa.sentinelnetwork.org](http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting			
Rank	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
1	Medical assistant	Medical assistant	Medical Assistant
		Registered nurse	
		Physician/Surgeon	
2	Registered nurse	Mental health counselor	Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler
	Physician/Surgeon	Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	
3	Licensed practical nurse	Marriage & family therapist	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency
		Nurse practitioner	
4	Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	

↑ Most cited

### Reasons for vacancies reported by rural health clinics

Themes: Respondent reported a range of reasons for exceptionally long vacancies, including recruitment and retention problems not related to salary/wage/benefits and not enough applicants for open positions.

- [Office staff/Front desk staff/Scheduler] Lack of candidates interested in a job - several have reported applying only due to unemployment requirements.
- [Psychologist] Reasons have been little to no housing options and little to no childcare options. [...] Our area is slowly dying without modernization and people who want to live here. If there could be affordable housing or apartments built and maybe some chain restaurants or stores. Our economy needs some revitalization.
- [Medical assistant] Although we have an MA-C apprenticeship program, that has allowed us to put 4 employees through to become MA-Cs, we are still facing a shortage and aren't receiving any qualified applicants for the position. We are lacking affordable housing or any housing really and childcare shortages [...]

### Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by rural health clinics

Themes: rural health clinics frequently reported that staff left looking for higher pay and benefits, flexible schedules, lower cost of living, and lower workload.

- [Office Staff/Front Desk Staff/Scheduler] A Medical Receptionist can use their skillset in other industries to make more money.

## Rural Health Clinics (Spring 2023)

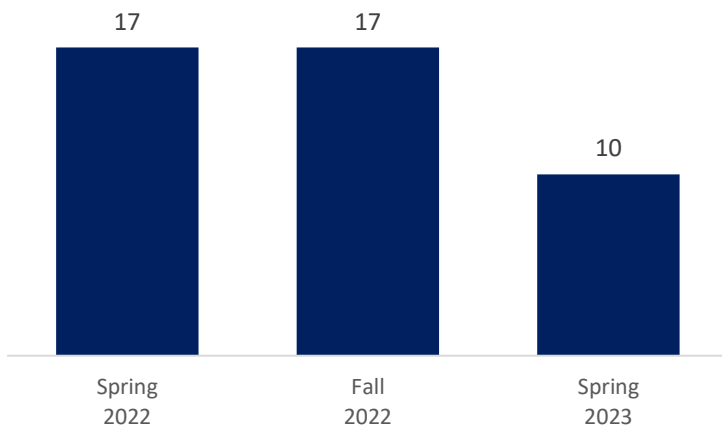
### Changes in rural health clinics' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

- *[Family medicine physician] We have been trying to create a better departmental onboarding and orientation process for new providers. We have [produced] checklists to follow that encompass the needs of the new provider from receiving IT access to ordering business cards, to EMR training and everything in between. Our hope is that this will standardize the process and ensure each new provider receives the same information.*
- *[Medical assistant] We enhanced our clinical informatics training to include some training that occurs before they start. It helps prevent immediately "overload" when they begin learning the system.*

### New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by rural health clinics

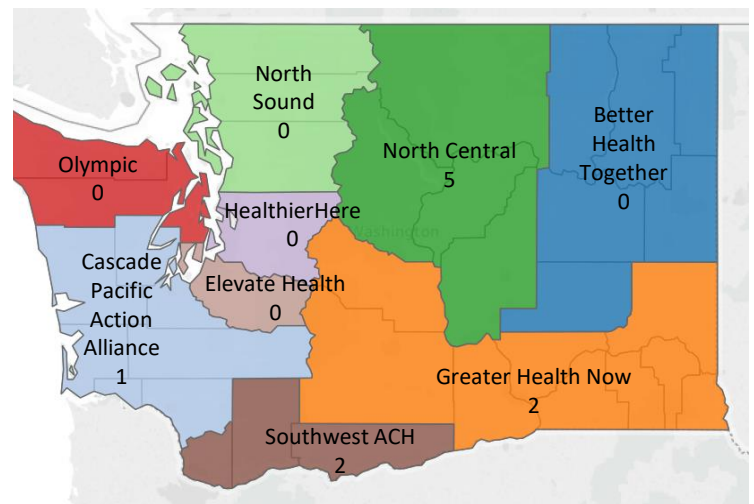
- *[Clinical nursing director] We moved all clinic nurses to reporting to another nurse. We were hearing that being led by a non-clinical employee was a struggle for our clinical staff.*
- *[Provider relations manager] Assist Providers with additional resource.*

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Rural Health Clinics in WA by Data Collection Date\*



\*Rural health clinics were added as a standalone reporting category in Spring 2022. Before that, RHCs were grouped with primary care clinics.

Number of Rural Health Clinics Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Spring 2023)



### 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](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

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