

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network *Findings Brief: Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies*

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's community/retail and hospital pharmacies during October/November 2023. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More findings from 2023 and earlier, as well as for other health care facilities, may be viewed at <https://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings>

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*				
Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021 – Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Rank
Pharmacy technician	Pharmacy technician	There were not enough responses during these time periods to rank occupations	Pharmacy technician	1
Registered nurse	Pharmacist		Pharmacist	2
n/a	Pharmacy aide		Pharmacy aide	3
n/a	Registered nurse		n/a	4

↑ Most cited

*Pharmacies were first included as a Sentinel Network facility type option in Spring 2020. Fall 2020 was the first time that pharmacies participated as Sentinels.

Reasons for exceptionally long vacancies reported by Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies

Themes: Barriers due to low pay, stressful work environment, and training/certification requirements.

- [Pharmacist] Lack of local talent or talent wanting to move to a remote/rural area and salary.
- [Pharmacist] Low wage other options with retail and clinic pharmacies in the area with better hours and pay. Poor starting wage. [Our new owner] tried to help this as they took over but not new pharmacist starting wage.
- [Pharmacy technician] Difficult to find trained nationally certified pharmacy techs in our area.
- [Pharmacy technician] Typical pay range is about the same as minimum wage - the same that someone at a coffee shop or grocery store would make and the work environment is high stress and fast-paced. Many people would prefer a slower paced and less stressful environment or would require higher compensation to be motivated to take on a pharmacy technician role. Also, certification is required after one year of training with an assistant license. This time period doesn't work for all candidates.
- [Pharmacy technician] Workload is exceptionally difficult. Customers can be rude and threatening. Solutions are raising pay levels and adding pharmacy assistants to run the cash register etc.
- [Pharmacy aide] No applicants.

Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies (Fall 2023)

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies

- [Pharmacist] Burnout, lack of support from upper management, additional tasks and duties being added without addition staffing hours. Pharmacists are exempt from FLSA so many days work 12 hours days with only 1 30 minute lunch break and limited time to take a restroom break.
- [Pharmacy technician] Burnout, lack of compensation, additional task requirements and certification without incentives or pay increases
- [Pharmacy technician] Leaving due to better pay and hours.

Changes in Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

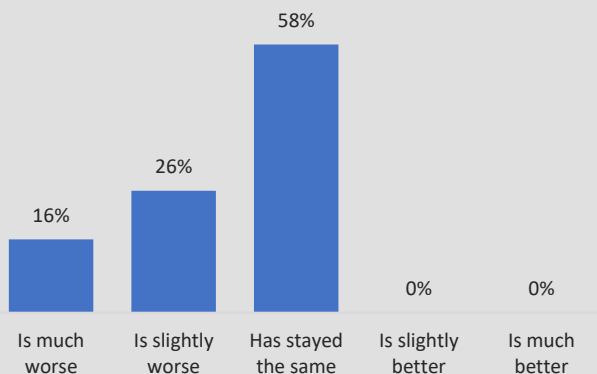
Respondents highlighted changing orientation and onboarding for new employees to address the needs of workers with limited prior experience and changes to scheduling or content.

- [Pharmacy technician] Orientation takes longer due to staff shortage.
- [Pharmacy technician] Technicians were offered the opportunity to enroll in a training program to allow them to give vaccinations. This was optional and only a few agreed to it. The organization likes to hold vaccination days in various community settings and the thought was they would have more vaccinators available for these mass events.
- [Pharmacy technician] Trying to offer more education and training.
- [Pharmacy technician] Accepted assistant instead of technician which cannot train in workplace training due to short staffing.

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Responses by Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies to questions about current overarching workforce issues are summarized below. Earlier overarching and pandemic-related findings are at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

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



- [Much worse] It has been equally difficult to hire and retain both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians
- [Much worse] Dangerous amount of workloads and zero focus on patient safety. It's 100% about the money
- [Slightly worse] ...there is no real shortage of pharmacists in the marketplace....just a shortage of pharmacists willing to work in retail conditions.
- [Stayed the same] We have been able to staff our pharmacy with a Pharmacy Coordinator and a Pharmacy Tech.
- [Stayed the same] A bit better than nursing but not much.

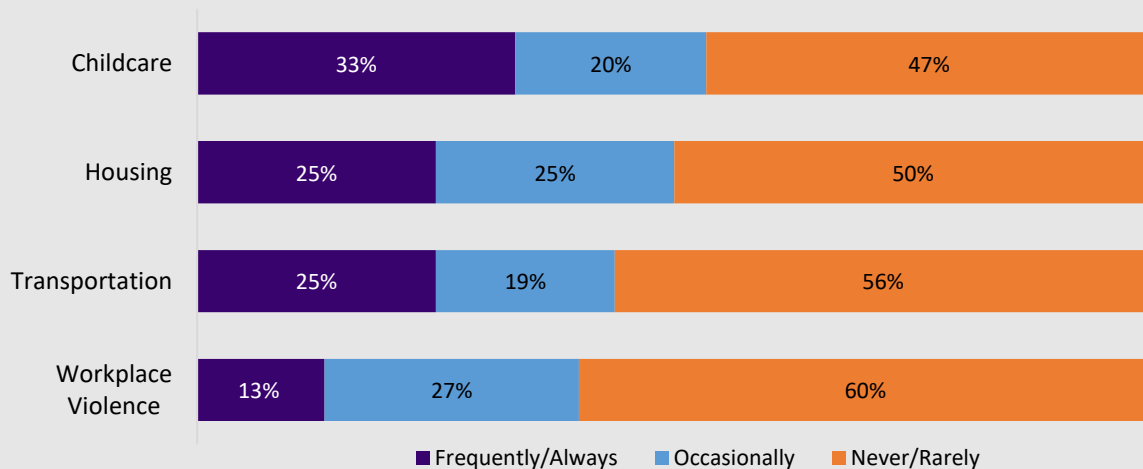
Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples (continued)

How has your facility's staffing affected your ability to respond to patient/client demand during the past year?

	%	Comment examples
Delay in care for current patients/clients	32%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Patients wait longer to receive their medications and vaccinations because we have a hard time staffing our pharmacy •With limited staff and increased demand for additional services, such as vaccinations, we are less available to provide thorough consultations to patients. We are ...1-2 days behind in filling prescriptions which can mean delay in therapy... •The work environment has been in survival mode the last 6 months. Outside agency technicians have been brought in who are unfamiliar with our patients and our processes.
Inability to take new patients/clients	5%	
Reduction in the number of patients/clients you are able to care for	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So many pharmacy techs walk out or strike...
No effect, operations continue as usual	47%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thankfully our Pharmacy has been fully staffed for the last year or so.
Other	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of satisfaction among employees and burnout from long commutes

To what extent have the following (childcare, housing, transportation, workplace violence) affected your ability to recruit and retain staff in the past year? What strategies has your organization used to address these?



Comment examples

Community/Retail Pharmacies:

- It is very difficult for employees to find cost effective child care.
- At times we have paid for rental cars when necessary for shorter periods of time. But that's it. As for aggression in the workplace we just watch training videos once a year and are on our own to navigate violent, aggressive situations.

Hospital Pharmacies

- Commuter benefits were explored; priority access to a local childcare facility.
- Purchasing leases for housing whether they are needed or not to keep on hand.
- The person in charge of housing here at [our hospital] is always working hard to find options for staff.
- Violence education

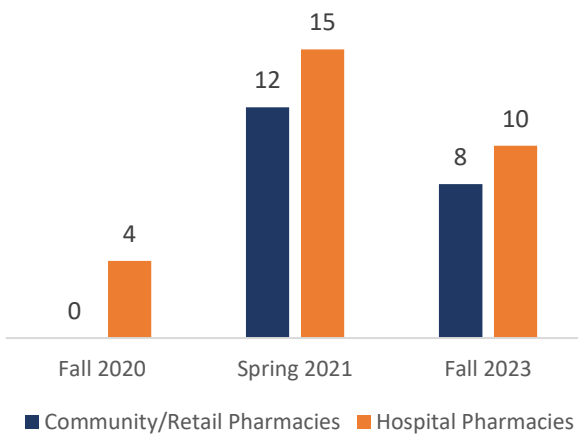
Community/Retail and Hospital Pharmacies (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples (continued)

Is your organization assisting workers who are pursuing education or training with the goal of advancing to a higher paying healthcare career? If yes, in what ways is your organization supporting these activities?

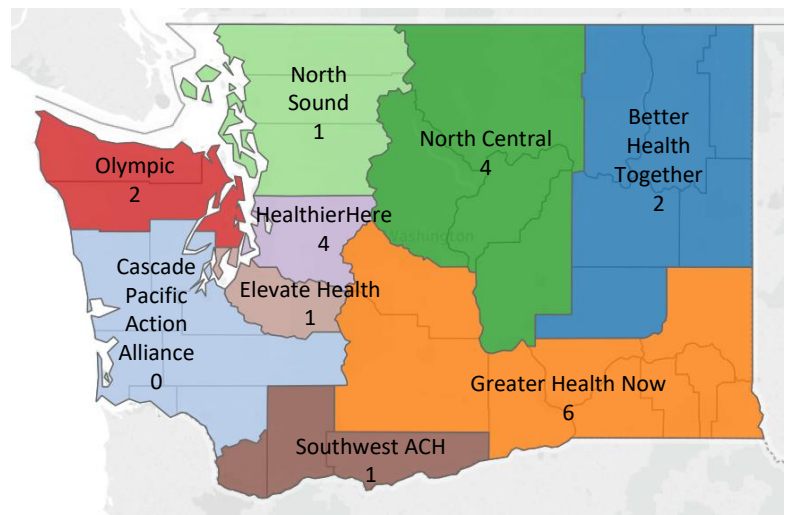
- *Special Education Fund. We currently have a Pharmacy Assistant who is enrolled in a program to become a Pharmacy Technician.*
- *Tuition reimbursement*
- *Internal/external training opportunities*

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



*Pharmacies were first included as a Sentinel Network facility type option in 2020.

Number of Community/Retail & Hospital Pharmacy Responses by Accountable Community of Health (Fall 2023)



Note: Each facility may serve clients/patients in more than one county, which is why map totals may exceed total unique responses.

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. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington’s Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington’s Workforce Board and the University of Washington 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 organization’s workforce needs to inform policy and planning responses.
- 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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