

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Primary Care Medical Clinics (not FQHCs or Community Clinics)

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's primary care medical clinics (not FQHCs/community clinics) during October/November 2023. Between 2016 and 2023, over the course of 15 reporting periods, primary care medical clinics and other health care facilities in Washington provided key, on-the-ground information to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. 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*							
Rank	2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022 & Spring 2023	Fall 2023	
1	Medical assistant	Medical assistant	Medical assistant	Medical assistant	There were not enough responses during these time periods to rank occupations	Medical assistant	
2	Physician/surgeon	Registered nurse	Physician/surgeon	Registered nurse		Physician/surgeon	Physician/surgeon
				Office Staff / Front desk staff / Scheduler			
3	Mental health counselor	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse	Physician/surgeon		Registered nurse	
4	Registered nurse	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Mental health counselor Nurse practitioner Licensed practical nurse Nursing assistant	Nurse practitioner		← Most cited	Licensed practical nurse
	Nurse practitioner			Licensed practical nurse			
				Healthcare social worker			
5	Licensed practical nurse	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Community health worker, Mental health worker, Child family & school social worker	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency		
	Physician assistant						

*Does not include FQHCs and community clinics. Responses shown are from data collection dates with sufficiently large numbers of responses to support meaningful findings. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number.

Reasons for exceptionally long vacancies and retention/turnover problems reported by primary care clinics

Wage competition, scheduling preferences and geographic location were frequently referenced as a barriers to retention and recruitment.

- *[Medical assistant] Better pay/Better PTO options [elsewhere].*
- *[Multiple occupations] Lack of interest in working in rural areas.*
- *[RNs & LPNs] have a better schedule and more pay working at our local hospital. Most hospital nurses are used to working 3 days a week and they do not want to switch to a 5 day work week.*
- *[Registered nurses] I suppose there have been many people that have left healthcare in general.*
- *[Nursing assistant, LPN] Very low start pay, overwhelming job duties due to nurses leaving profession.*
- *[RN & LPN] Staff are burnt out due to increased workload/ expectations, staff are looking for better working conditions.*

Primary Care Medical Clinics (not FQHCs/Community Clinics) (Fall 2023)

Highlights of current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's primary care medical clinics during October/November 2023 (continued).

Changes in priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers reported by primary care medical clinics.

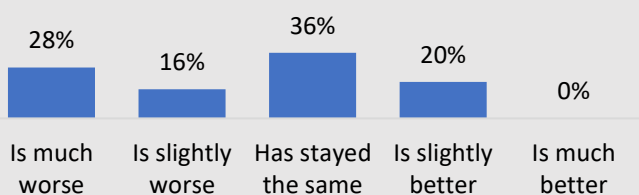
Comment examples

- [Medical assistant] After onboarding and orientation, they check in with MAs to address any questions or concerns.
- [Medical assistant] We are having an abbreviated orientation due to lack of staffing.
- [Multiple occupations] Health Equity training and more robust onboarding/training.

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Responses by primary care medical clinics 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 6 months, how has your organization's ability to staff your facility(ies) changed?



Comment examples

- *Has stayed the same: We have more difficulty filling open MA positions than any other position. After that, RN positions are harder to fill than Physician/provider positions.*
- *Is slightly better: There will be more providers but we're still lacking in medical assistants and front desk people.*
- *Is much worse: Instead of hiring staff, many roles are running on skeleton crews*

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	52%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Longer wait times for patients when less staff is working, cancelled appointments have increased due to staffing.</i> • <i>Patients currently have to wait more than 2 weeks to see their primary care provider.</i>
Inability to take new patients/clients	0%	
Reduction in the number of patients/clients you are able to care for	16%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have had to reduce the amount of new pts we have taken on. If one person is out it can cause delays in care for pts as well.</i>
No effect, operations continue as usual	28%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[We are] able to hire replacement in a timely manner.</i> • <i>The problems listed in the survey are known and being addressed. I am proud to tell people where I work.</i>
Other	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We used to be able to give IV fluids when we had RNs on staff. Now with MAs, they would need additional certification to do that.</i>

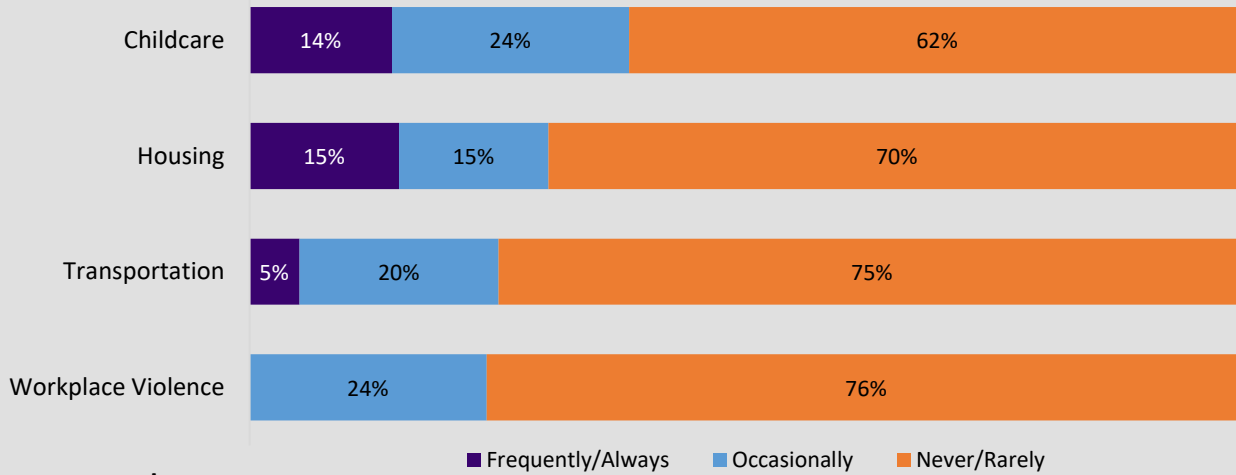
Is your organization assisting workers who are pursuing education or training with the goal of advancing to a higher paying healthcare career? If yes, in what ways is your organization supporting these activities?

- *Scholarships, apprentice program and in house classes for NAC's and MA's.*
- *Tuition reimbursement for workers in approved programs.*
- *Free tuition to state institutions. However, the process of access classes is complicated and a deterrent.*
- *We allow students to attend class during work hours.*
- *We have many students that we bring in to do their clinicals as well as hopeful students who want to learn more that shadow providers or staff.*

Primary Care Medical Clinics (not FQHCs/Community Clinics) (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples (continued)

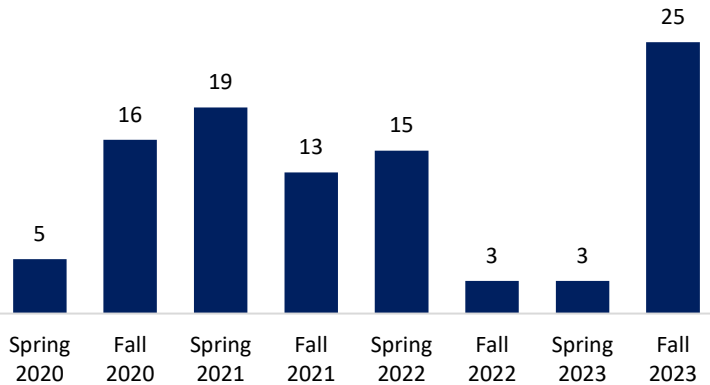
To what extent have childcare, housing, transportation, and/or workplace violence affected your ability to recruit and retain staff in the past year?



Comment examples

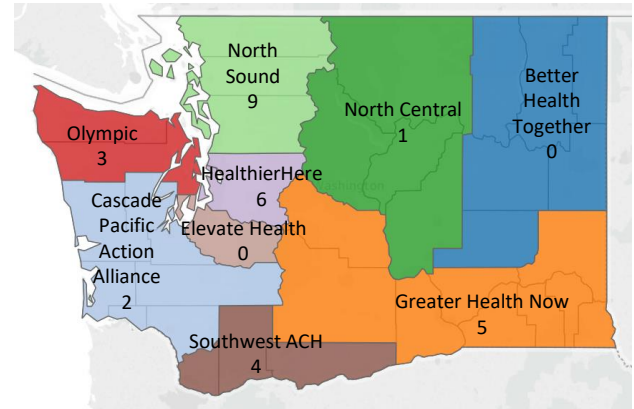
- *Implementing competitive wage plans.*
- *[Our facility] offers to reimburse employees who carpool or use ride-share apps.*
- *Unable to impact housing availability.*
- *These have not been a challenge to my knowledge.*

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from primary care clinics in WA by Data Collection Date*



* Responses prior to Spring 2020 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of primary care clinics by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (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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