

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Assisted Living Facilities

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's assisted living facilities during October/November 2023. Between 2016 and 2023, over the course of 15 reporting periods, assisted living facilities 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 cited as having exceptionally long vacancies*							
Rank	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023
1	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Licensed practical nurse	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant
					Registered nurse		
2	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse	Cook / Food services	Nursing assistant	Cook / Food services	Cook / Food services
						Home health aide or home care aide	
3	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Home health aide or home care aide	Home health aide or home care aide	Cook / Food services	Environmental services	Home health aide or home care aide
		Personal care aide		Licensed practical nurse			Licensed practical nurse
4	Home health aide or home care aide	Cook / Food services	Licensed practical nurse	Registered nurse	Home health aide or home care aide	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Environmental Services
		Home health aide or home care aide					Registered nurse
5	Personal care aide	n/a	Personal care aide	Environmental services	Environmental services	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Personal care aide
	Cook / Food services						Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency
	Housekeeping						Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency

← Most cited

*Findings prior to Fall 2020 not shown due to space constraints. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number.

Reasons for prolonged vacancies reported by assisted living facilities

Reasons commonly cited for prolonged vacancies centered on salary/wage/benefits issues, not enough qualified applicants, and recruitment and retention problems not related to salary/wage/benefits, as well as continuing issues and changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Registered nurse] Difficulty competing with the contract companies and hospital setting for wages. RN burn out s/p pandemic. Increased people working from home or completely changing their profession.
- [Speech-language therapist] High demand at times and other times case load is low resulting in inconsistent workload.
- [Nursing assistant] Lack of applicants, employees didn't meet training requirements in time, employees can't take time off work to go to CNA class, tuition for CNA class is very expensive.
- [Cook/food services] Minimum wage going up and they can find better pay at fast food or places they can make tips. Increased people working from home.

Assisted Living Facilities (Fall 2023)

Highlights of current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by assisted living facilities during October/November 2023 (continued).

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by assisted living facilities

The reason most commonly cited for worker retention and turnover issues were salary/wage/benefits issues, followed by workload/patient acuity issues.

- *[Nursing assistant] CNAs quit due to stress and fatigue. Some found other facility pays more.*
- *[Nursing occupations] Assisted Living facilities cannot compete with hospital wages, even though they can offer better hours and working conditions. Solution would be to pay more competitive wages, but the Assisted Living companies don't want to do this as it cuts into their profits.*
- *[Home health aid] It is not uncommon for someone new to this industry to decide that having to complete coursework, obtain licensing, and to maintain that licensing is more than they are willing to do at the wages we are able to pay. We have also lost staff who are not comfortable working with residents with behavioral outburst issues.*

Changes in assisted living facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees

Respondents indicated making changes to onboarding scheduling or content and addressing the needs of workers with little prior experience.

- *[Personal care aide] Increased training needed due to the higher acuity of care being accepted into the ALF and little training they have coming out of school or being able to work prior to getting certified.*
- *[Home health aide] Referral and retention bonuses; following up with employees shortly after hire to determine if the job is working out well for them (and for us); staff mentors for new employees.*
- *[Cook/food services] Onboarding is all done online now and makes the process so much easier, convenient and fast.*

Changes in assisted living facilities' priorities regarding training for existing/incumbent workers

Respondents highlighted addressing new needs due to structural/policy changes, mainly as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as reasons for changes to training for existing workers.

- *[Multiple occupations] Ever changing regulations for healthcare requirements related to infection control.*
- *[Certified nursing assistant] We are pulling applications for those that have no experience in healthcare and paying for their courses to become nursing assistants.*

New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by assisted living facilities

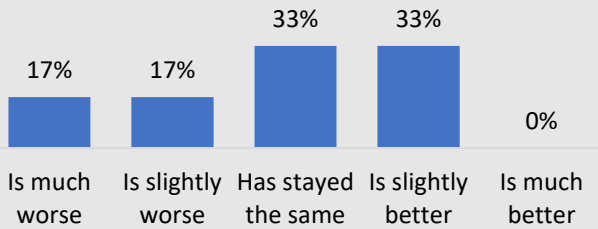
- *[Home Health Aide or Home Care Aide] Our management staff have had to perform many direct care duties due to staffing shortages.*
- *[Health unit coordinator] Support of administration, staff services, resident care*

Assisted Living Facilities (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Responses by assisted living facilities 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?



Comment examples

- *[Is much worse] Our maintenance, housekeeping, laundry, activities, and front desk staff have all been stable. It's been a struggle to keep nurses and CNA's fully staffed. We have never had either position fully staffed to meet our needs.*
- *[Is slightly worse] We used to not struggle so much to find kitchen staff, but that has gotten worse this year.*
- *[Has stayed the same] Continue to struggle the most with clinical team retention.*

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

Responses varied across assisted living facilities, with many citing that patient care is delayed or reduced due to issues related to staffing challenges.

	%	Comment examples
Delay in care for current patients/clients	47%	• <i>[We are] fortunate to have a staff that are dedicated, long-time employees. They constantly go over and above to assure that residents receive the care they want or require. Unfortunately, this takes a toll on the staff. Burn out is a constant threat. Morale is very fragile.</i>
Inability to take new patients/clients	6%	• <i>We need to be fully staffed before we can expand or accept new residents.</i>
Reduction in the number of patients/clients you are able to care for (e.g. unit/service line closure)	24%	• <i>We have limited new admissions a few times due to not having enough staff to meet their needs.</i>
No effect, operations continue as usual	24%	• <i>Our staff are really good about helping out with open shifts. [We use] an on-demand staffing program to request upcoming open shifts. These shifts are filled pretty quick and we get the same caregivers with the on demand.</i>

Is your organization assisting workers who are pursuing education or training with the goal of advancing to a higher paying healthcare career?

72% of respondents answered “yes” to this question. Of those who answered “yes,” respondents indicated that they offer scholarships, tuition assistance or reimbursements, and loan repayment as assistance to their workers.

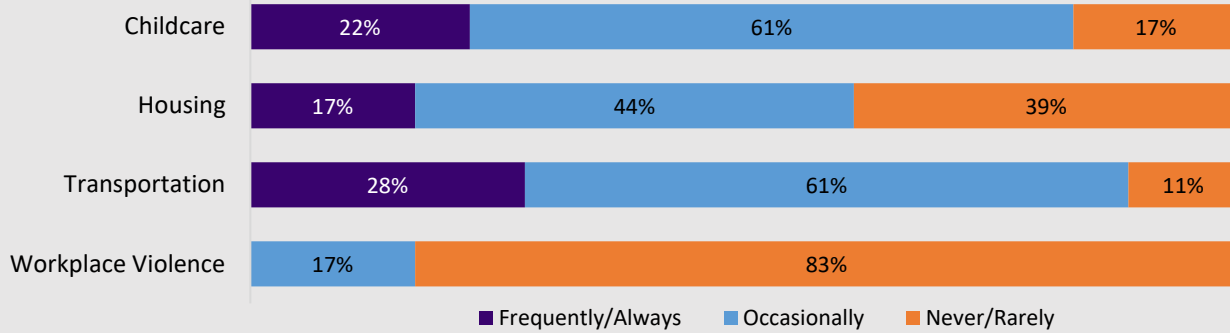
- *We offer tuition reimbursement along with loan repayment assistance.*
- *We pay for all trainings that are required for their positions. We encourage (and pay for) training for advanced roles within our agency.*

Those who answered “no” to this question indicated that they don’t have the budget to provide these offerings.

- *We rely on scholarships and grants from the community. We don't have a budget that can support higher education for staff right now.*
- *We have been struggling to make a profit of any kind, so we have restricted our financial help to paying for the required state trainings needed for our current staff.*

Assisted Living Facilities (Fall 2023)

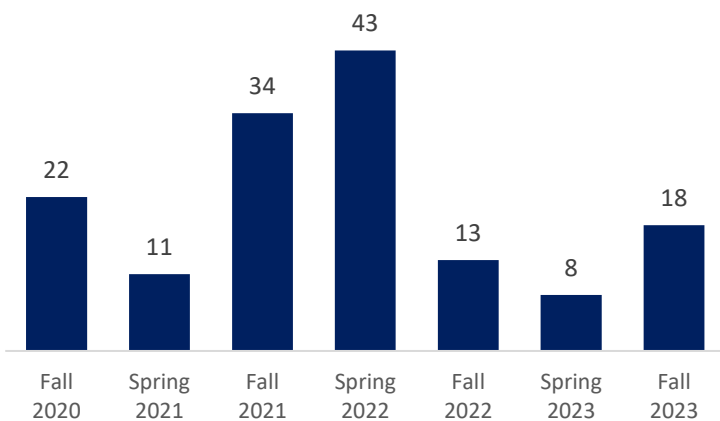
To what extent have childcare, housing, transportation, and/or workplace violence affected your ability to recruit and retain staff in the past year? What strategies has your organization used to address these challenges?



Comment examples

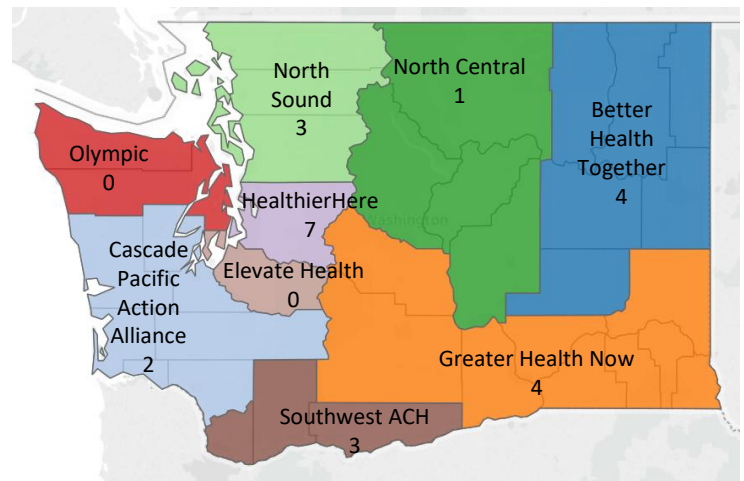
- *[Transportation] We help to organize rides for staff when needed.*
- *...new laws surrounding child day care has forced the closure of a large place in our town.*
- *Childcare on campus available soon.*
- *...housing in [our city] is extremely expensive. So, most of our staff live outside of the city. Transportation services for the out-lying areas is very limited or non-existent. We offer [transit passes] as a benefit.*
- *Increased staff benefits so they receive free medical for employee. Thankful we are a non-for-profit organization that can focus on "Doing the Right Thing."*

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Assisted Living Facilities in WA by Data Collection Date*



*Findings prior to Fall 2020 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Assisted Living Facility Responses 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.

Contact: healthworkforce@wasentinelnetwork.org

Sentinel Network Team:

UW Center for Health Workforce Studies: Benjamin Stubbs, Grace Guenther, Nhu Nguyen, Beverly Marshall, Susan Skillman
 WA Workforce Board: Renee Fullerton, Donald Smith