

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Nursing Homes and Skilled Nursing Facilities

This Findings Brief highlights current workforce needs reported to the state's Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington's nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities during October/November 2023. Between 2016 and 2023, over the course of 15 reporting periods, nursing homes and skilled nursing 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 with exceptionally long vacancies*							
Rank	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023
1	Nursing assistant	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	Registered nurse	Registered nurse
2	Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse
			Nursing assistant		Registered nurse	Nursing assistant	
3	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Occupational therapist	Nursing assistant	Cook / Food services	Cook / Food services	Nursing assistant
			Physical therapist				
4	Occupational therapy assistant	Occupational therapist	Speech-language therapist	Cook / Food services	Dietitian / Nutritionist	Environmental Services	Occupational therapist
	Physical therapist					Occupational therapy assistant	
	Physical therapy assistant						

← 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 vacancies reported by nursing homes/skilled nursing facilities

Many employers in skilled nursing facilities reported not enough applicants for open positions as the main reason for exceptionally long vacancies, with fewer responses citing recruitment and retention issues not related to salary/wage/benefits, as well as salary/wage/benefits issues.

- [Licensed practical nurse] Multiple LPN openings, difficulty hiring due to lack of staffing in the community and competing with agency wages.
- [Certified nursing assistant] There hasn't been enough certified nursing assistants searching for jobs, so we have had to sponsor quite a few applicants to take a nursing assistant training course to have certified nursing assistants. We have not been able to fill all of our open positions in over a year.
- [Registered nurse] Fear of working in long term care industry, burned out from long term care industry, belief that LTC is not good place for RN growth and development.
- [Physical therapist] Cannot convince anyone to come [to our area], even though we have exceptional schools [nearby]. Many applicants want to work either in a hospital setting or sport teams.

Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (Fall 2023)

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

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by nursing home/skilled nursing facilities

Respondents indicated that retention and turnover problems are driven by salary/wage/benefits issues, competing with other employers and temp agencies for wages, as well as issues around work culture and retirement.

- *[Registered nurse] Turnover in RN positions due to staffing shortages, choosing to leave the nursing field completely, and leaving to work for agency PRN*
- *[Licensed practical nurse] I am not sure it is just reflective of the last 6 months, but some of the challenges with retention are paying competitive wages, increase in higher acuity residents which make the workload very heavy.*
- *[Speech-language pathologist] Competing with other facilities and clinics for wages.*

Changes in nursing homes'/skilled nursing facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees

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.

- *[Nursing occupations] We have offered huge signing bonuses (\$25,000). We also meet with the new hires after 7 days, 14 days, 30 days, 60 days, and 90 days to make sure they are getting the training they need, as well as help them to grow. This gives us the chance to build stronger relationships with them early on.*
- *[Multiple occupations] We ask all new candidates to shadow for a day or two before they choose to complete the onboarding process. We have improved our orientation process and have added some 90-day retention incentives in place. Two step interview process has been an ongoing tool for us to use.*
- *[Physician/Surgeon] We have a two-step interview process, along with a meet and greet experience.*

Changes in nursing homes'/skilled nursing facilities' priorities regarding training for existing/incumbent workers

Respondents highlighted changing training for existing employees to address the needs of workers with limited prior experience, changes to scheduling or content, and adding training on electronic health records and health information technology.

- *[Nursing occupations] We have implemented more robust on-line training. We used to do more of the training in-person, but due to shortages of management staff, we have shifted a lot of the general training to an online company. This isn't as good as in-person training, but it does give uniformity to the training, and frees up management from having to do training multiple days each month.*
- *[Nursing occupations] How to deal with difficult patients and patients with substance abuse issues. There has been an increase in the number of referrals that are homeless, mentally ill and have a substance abuse issue.*
- *[Nursing occupations] Electronic health care training platform for onboarding and CE's.*

New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by nursing homes/skilled nursing facilities

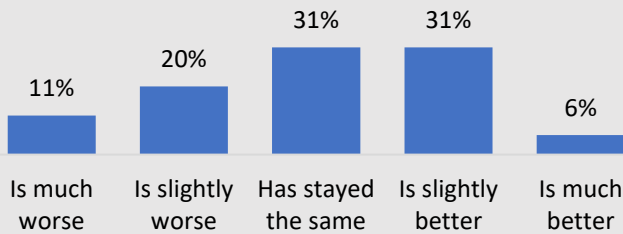
- *[Registered Nurse] Resident Care Managers have had to work the floor passing medication and doing treatments.*
- *[Certified Nursing Assistant] used in Medical Records, Activities, Social Services*

Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (Fall 2023)

Responses by nursing homes/skilled nursing 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/.

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

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



- *[Is much worse]* Speaking with other administrators and DNS in the community this is a systemic issue for many facilities
- *[Has stayed the same]* Our 2 biggest variances are in RN's and SLP. We have been aggressively advertising to hire, offering ample sign on bonuses, but the market is saturated with "for hire" ads and the pool to draw from is quite small.
- *[Is slightly better]* In the last month we have had two RNs apply. NACs have been applying, and we have had applicants for the Nursing Assistant Class.

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

Across nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities many respondents indicated that staffing challenges have impacted services and their ability to respond to patient demand, resulting in delayed care, reduction in patient intake, and reduction in the number of patients they're able to care for.

	%	Comments
Delay in care for current patients/clients	26%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients have to wait longer due to staffing as well as new, increased requirements. Not only is it harder to recruit and maintain staff, but so many tasks anymore are paperwork/compliance which take care away from the patient's bedside.
Inability to take new patients/clients	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been times that we have had to limit the number of admissions or space them out to accommodate not having a RN or LPN to complete the admission. • Our ability to provide adequate staffing limits our ability to admit and influences our decisions on who we are able to admit.
Reduction in the number of patients/clients you are able to care for (e.g. unit/service line closure)	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With our nursing shortage, we are not able to safely care for a variety of residents. If the clinical need is too great, we may have to pass on admitting them as we do not want to offer subpar healthcare to any of our residents. We also must turn away residents that need any form of Speech-Language Pathologist care as we do not have this available at this time. With staffing shortages, we do the best we can to accommodate the residents we have and to try to keep care consistent.
No effect, operations continue as usual	40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are adequately staffed for the number of residents in our building. • We do go through ups and downs related to staffing but we do figure it out and make things to support taking admissions.

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?

The majority of respondents answered "yes" to this question, indicating that they provide grants, tuition assistance or reimbursement, flexible scheduling, and other assistance to their employees.

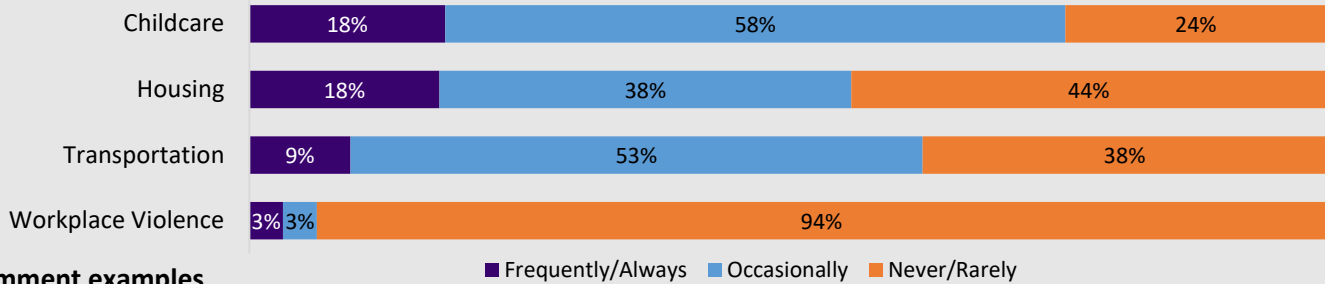
- Facility will pay a percentage of education costs related to advancing in nursing career opportunities.
- We will work with schedules to allow for school/studying, we encourage staff to further their education and assure them we will find a place in our organization once they complete training.

Those who answered "no" to this question indicated that they don't have the time or funding to provide these offerings.

Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (Fall 2023)

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples (continued)

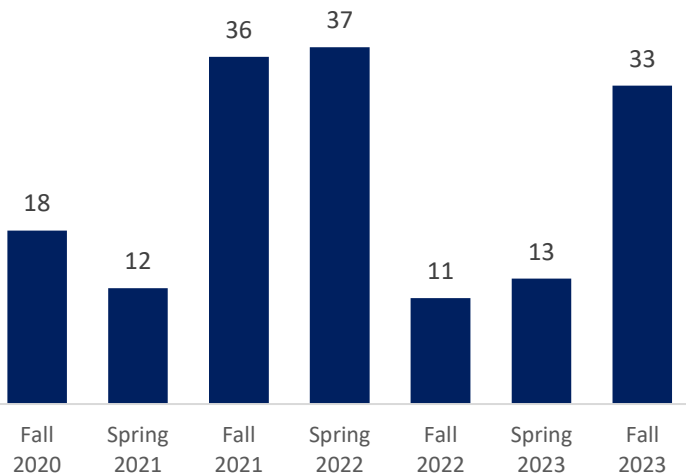
To what extent have childcare, housing, transportation, and/or workplace violence affected your ability to recruit and retain staff in the past year? What strategies have you used to address these challenges?



Comment examples

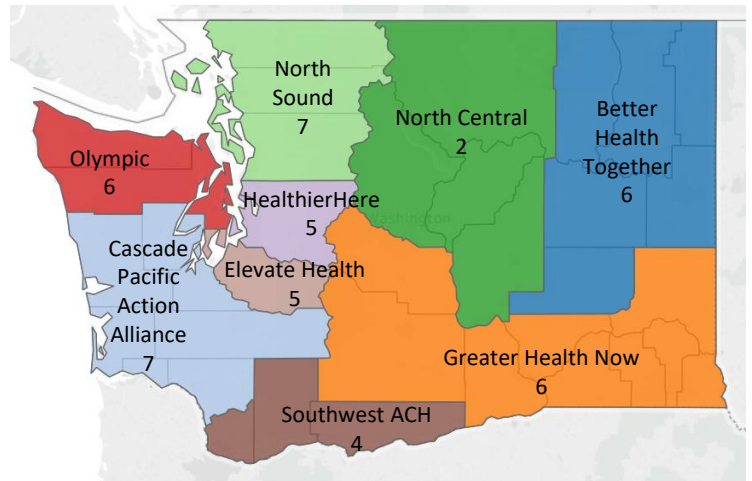
- Pay for childcare and housing, still ineffective.
- In some settings we are exploring opening our own daycare.
- Most workers know they need to find childcare or arrange shifts to accommodate their family responsibilities.
- [Transportation] My DON gave a car away to a CNA because she couldn't get to work consistently. We have staff who come from outlying communities, so I have often paid mileage for them... Sadly many of these staff drive an hour to get here, passing by hospitals or other nursing homes, and ...eventually [they] give up and take a job closer to home.
- We offer to assist in finding housing and sometimes will transport the person to/from work until better arrangements can be made. Childcare is difficult at best, we have no good options for this.

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities in WA by Data Collection Date*



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

Number of Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing 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.

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