Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: *Public Health Organizations*

Spring 2025

This brief highlights workforce needs reported by Washington's **public health organizations** to the Health Workforce Sentinel Network in **May/June 2025.** These facilities have contributed workforce insights since 2016, across 17 reporting periods. More findings are available at wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings.

Public Health Organization

	Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*				
Rank	Fall 2021 – Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025	
1	There were not enough responses during these time periods to rank occupations	Physician/ Surgeon	Physician/ Surgeon	Physician/ Surgeon	↑ Most cited
2		Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Social worker (Mental health/SUDP)	
3		Licensed practical nurse	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Dentist	
4		Multiple occupations cited at same frequency		Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	

* Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number.

Reasons for Exceptionally Long Vacancies

Respondents cited not enough qualified applicants and a variety of issues as some of the main reasons for exceptionally long vacancies across occupations. Examples of responses below:

- *[Peer counselor] It was hard to find a candidate that was willing to do all the duties assigned for the compensation that was offered.*
- *[Multiple occupations] In the Eastern part of the state where the vacancies were most prevalent, it was hard to identify candidates who were willing to deal with the political resistance to HIV work in this part of the state.*
- *[Multiple occupations] Availability of providers and suspect that there is an aversion to going into Government work.*
- *[Multiple occupations] Decreased qualified staff, rate of pay not equivalent to private pay rate, increased demand, better pay and benefits with other agencies - unsure of possible solutions.*

Reasons for Retention/Turnover Issues

Respondents cited recruitment and retention problems, such as flexible scheduling needs, salary and compensation, and not enough qualified applicants as some of the main reasons for retention and turnover problems across occupations. Examples of responses below:

- *[Medical assistant] They find work closer to their home so that they can care for their growing families. Some go into other job classes that are higher compensated.*
- *[Nursing assistant] the person that was hired was not a good fit, so was let go; when we were trying to re-hire, budget cuts from the state and federal prevented us from being able to fill this position as it was grant funded.*
- *[Social worker] It took a while to fill maybe because of the pay. This was a position was renewed after many years (10+) without a social worker. It took a long while to find a person to fill the position.*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Currently, what are your organization's top workforce issues?
Respondents representing public health organizations said **recruiting new workers/filling vacancies** and **retaining current workers/increasing worker satisfaction.** Examples of responses include:

- *"Some positions are difficult to recruit for due to non-competitive salary, telework. Salary survey conducted to bring positions up to market although nursing positions cannot compete with healthcare system positions. Advertise other benefits of working in 8-4:30 environment."*
- *"With recent budget constrictions staff are facing increased workloads, loss of earning power, and lack of flexible schedules. Additionally, our department does not allow remote work which is an increasing preference of our workforce."*

In the past year, has your organization supported "grow-your-own" programs (i.e., apprenticeships, residencies or on-the-job training opportunities) to train workers for specific roles?
A majority of respondents supported "grow-your-own" programs.

- *"Nurse Family Partnership program has a lot of training and mentorship to do the job. The other program [program name], that is in our Parent Child Health program has been filled for years. We have another program called [program name] that is usually filled by a NFP nurse. We have several outreach education positions that are filled, and their responsibilities are always evolving to meet our changing needs. We have one nurse position that is for Access and Resources that we can't seem to keep filled and I am not sure why."*

To what extent have the following affected your ability to recruit and retain your workforce in the past year?
Childcare and housing availability remain a top issues for employers, impacting their recruitment and retention efforts.

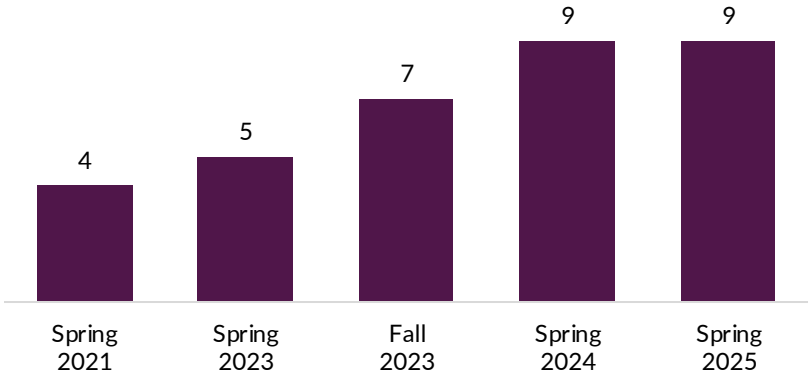
Childcare availability

- *"Childcare availability is very tight/competitive in our [area]."*

Housing availability

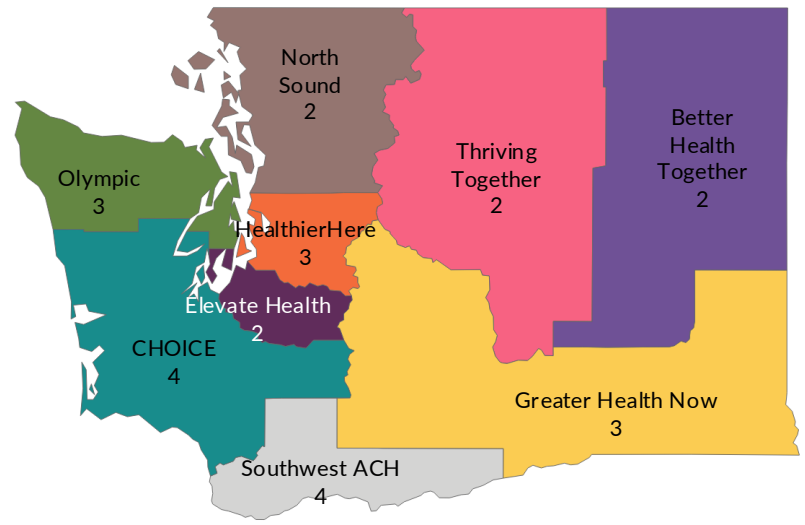
- *"Both rent and purchase housing unaffordable for many looking at our jobs."*
- *"The cost of housing has doubled with the rental availability very competitive due to three colleges in this area."*

Number of Responses from Public Health Organizations in WA by Data Collection Date



*Responses shown are from data collection dates with sufficiently large numbers of responses to support meaningful findings.

Number of Responding Public Health Organizations by Accountable Community of Health (ACH), Spring 2025



Note: Each organization 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, with a focus is 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 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:
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WA Workforce Board: Renee Fullerton, Donald Smith