Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: *Rural Health Clinics*

Spring 2025

This brief highlights workforce needs reported by Washington's **rural health clinics** 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.

Rural Health Clinics

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*

Rank	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2025
1	Medical assistant	Medical assistant Registered nurse Physician/Surgeon	Medical Assistant	Medical Assistant Physician/Surgeon	Physician/Surgeon Medical Assistant
2	Registered nurse Physician/ Surgeon	Mental health counselor Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	Nurse practitioner Registered nurse Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	Registered nurse
3	Licensed practical nurse	Marriage & family therapist Nurse practitioner	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency
4	Office staff/ Front desk staff/ Scheduler	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency			

↑ Most cited

**Rural health clinics were added as a standalone reporting category in Spring 2022. Before that, RHCs were included with primary care clinics. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number. No occupations are shown for Spring 2024 due to low number of responses.*

Reasons for Exceptionally Long Vacancies and Turnover/Retention Problems

Respondents cited not enough qualified applicants as one of the main reasons for exceptionally long vacancies and turnover across occupations, specifically challenges recruiting candidates to rural areas.

- *[Medical assistant] Local CC stopped MA-C program - we have developed an MAR program which has helped but has created other obstacles.*
- *[Physician/Surgeon] Lack of interest in moving to the area and our inability to compete with urban salaries. Shared call with [another] hospital and [that is] creating challenges for community collaboration.*
- *[Registered nurse] We are no longer able to recruit nurses due to the high wage that other facilities offer.*
- *[Nurse practitioner] Seeking experienced NPs for primary care - we have new grads available sometimes, but their experience and schooling hasn't been robust enough to manage the complexity of the patients we serve independently.*
- *[Registered nurse] Higher wages elsewhere across the board. We can't compete with hospital or state or federal agencies. The cost of living in our town is very high in comparison to other communities in WA*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

Currently, what are your organization's top workforce issues?
Most respondents representing behavioral and mental health facilities said: **recruiting new workers/filling vacancies** and **retaining current workers/increasing worker satisfaction**,

- *"Because we are a rural area and our pay and benefits are not as competitive. With daily living expenses increasing all the time and our reimbursement is not increasing we are not able to pay competitive salaries."*
- *"Unsure, multiple positions open with lack of qualified applicants"*
- *"Due to what employee feel is a remote location and lack of amenities in a small rural Washington town. Many employees either move to bigger communities or take jobs in the communities they are already living so they do not have to drive to work."*

Over half of respondents representing rural health clinics said they experienced delays in licensing.

- *"WA State department of health is delayed. We have an MAR whose been waiting for her MAC for over two months."*
- *"It is taking longer and longer for staff's licensure to come in after applications. Delays at the state level have been a real problem. "*

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, specifically around medical assistants and certified nursing assistants.

- *"Medical Assistant apprenticeship has landed us several MAs for our clinic. Staff who would like to advance their career and are seeking a higher education are offered tuition assistance with a commitment to be employed afterwards with the facility for a period of no less than two years."*

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

Childcare availability

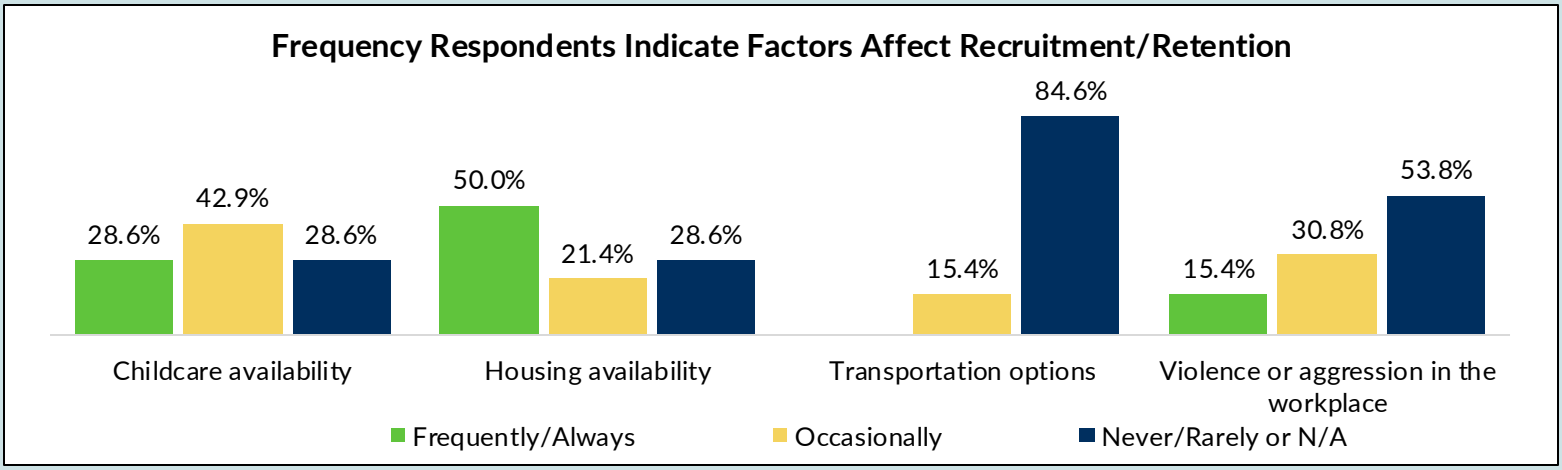
- *"There is very little daycare available in [our area], both private and state pay options are limited so staff don't come back to work after maternity leave."*
- *"A lack of qualified childcare that meets state reimbursement options for low-wage earners."*

Housing availability

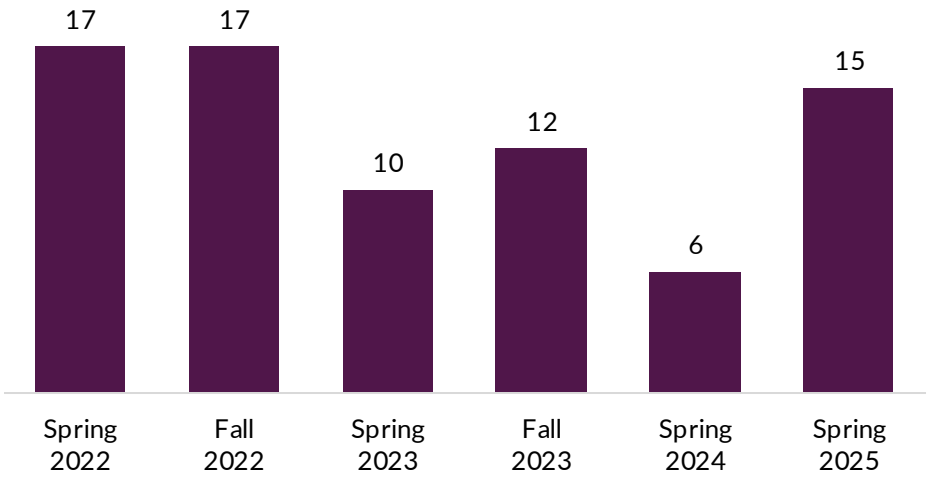
- *"There are no houses or apartments available. When something does become available it is either very, very expensive or is in need a repair. The housing market in the [area] has been at a stand still for several years.*

Transportation options

- *"We do not have adequate transportation for patients to see specialists outside of [our area]."*

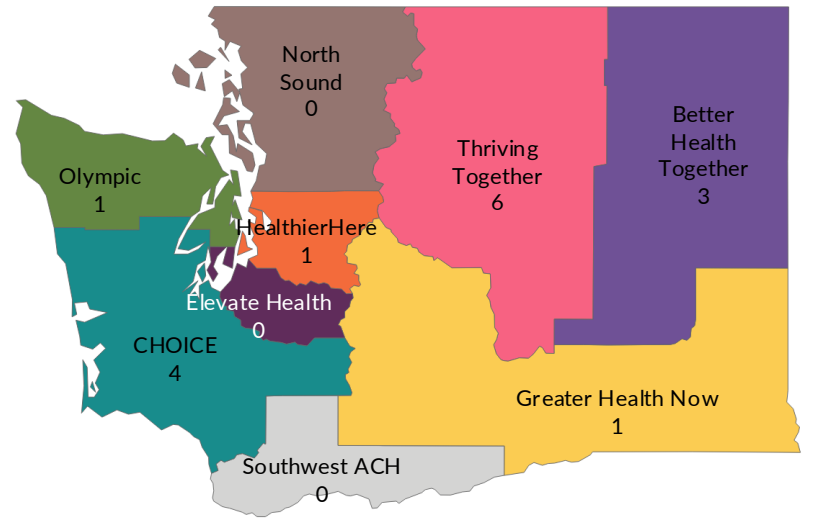


Number of Responses from Rural Health Clinics in WA by Data Collection Date*



*Findings prior to Spring 2022 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Responding Rural Health Clinics by Accountable Community of Health (ACH), Spring 2025



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, 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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