Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: *Small Hospitals*

Spring 2025

This brief highlights workforce needs reported by Washington's **acute care hospitals (25 beds or less, "small hospitals")** 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.

Small Hospitals

Top occupations with exceptionally long vacancies*

Rank	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
1	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Registered nurse
2	Medical assistant Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Cook / Food services	Medical / Clinical lab technologist	Environmental services	Nursing assistant Physician/ Surgeon	Physical therapist
3	Physician/ Surgeon	Cook / Food services	Nursing assistant	Medical / Clinical lab technician Nursing assistant	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency**	Mental health counselor Social worker (Healthcare)	Diagnostic Medical Sonographer Occupational therapist Respiratory Therapist Speech-language therapist

← Most cited

*Findings prior to Fall 2021 not shown due to space constraints. Occupations cited by the same number of responses share the same rank number. **Medical assistant, medical/clinical laboratory technologist, nursing assistant, physical therapist, physician/surgeon

Reasons for Exceptionally Long Vacancies

Respondents cited not enough qualified applicants as one of the main reasons for exceptionally long vacancies across occupations and recruitment difficulties due to rural location.

- *[Registered nurse] Specifically, OB RN has been very difficult to fill because of the lack of qualified candidates in the area, being in a rural location, and having low birth rates. Affordable and available housing would greatly increase interest.*
- *[Registered nurse] We have had a hard time filling the night nurse positions in Acute/ED over the past year.*
- *[Diagnostic medical sonographer] Lack of qualified candidates. New grads are not fully trained. Candidates who have been interested have had no previous experience. Agency staff and some per diem staff had covered the vacancies. Solutions we have looked at is offering sign on bonus and using resume searching on external recruiting websites.*
- *[Social worker] This position was grant-funded. Filled twice with turnover due to a lack of training and understanding of Rural Healthcare in a Hospital setting experience. The position then remained vacant until the funding was lost and the position closed.*
- *[Multiple occupations] Lack of trained therapist wanting to move to the area - high cost of housing.*

Reasons for Retention/Turnover Problems

Respondents highlighted lack of qualified applicants, rural facility locations, and patient acuity and workload as a common reasons for retention/turnover problems.

- *[Nurse practitioner] Under-skilled NPs and a lack of NPs. Rural healthcare requires providers to be excellent generalists who are highly motivated self-starters. Specialized providers often struggle to keep up.*
- *[Registered nurse] Finding Nursing staff is a challenge. A large portion of our staff is travelers. Travelers are always on the move. We have opened up no restriction PRN positions, went through the process of how to get Canadian Travelers, recruiting new grad nurses.*
- *[Social worker] Unable to perform necessary duties due to a lack of education and experience to support rural healthcare needs.*
- *[Occupational therapist] it is difficult - we can not impact the housing market and we are not of organizational size to buy housing to rent to employees for a reasonable financial amount.*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

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

- *"It has been difficult to recruit for certain positions such as Mental Health Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Ultra-sonographers due to the lack of qualified individuals in our area and our rural location. Some actions we've taken have been expanding our recruitment efforts and broadening the depth of the outreach for our postings."*

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.

- *"We offer a WABON Certified CNA program, with four class cohorts each year. Usually, hiring several CNAs in the LTC after each course and license completion. We have hosted several successful MA-C apprenticeships over the past five years and retained our staff."*
- *"All occupations are up for participation in our job shadow program targeted only for internal shadows and interest."*

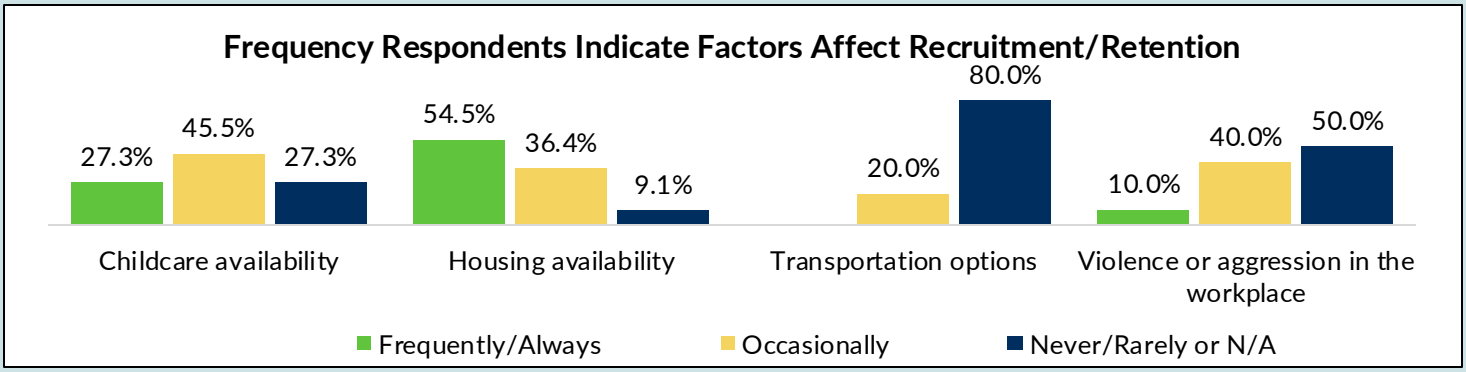
To what extent have the following affected your ability to recruit and retain your workforce in the past year?
Childcare and housing availability remain top issues for employers, impacting their recruitment and retention efforts.

Childcare availability

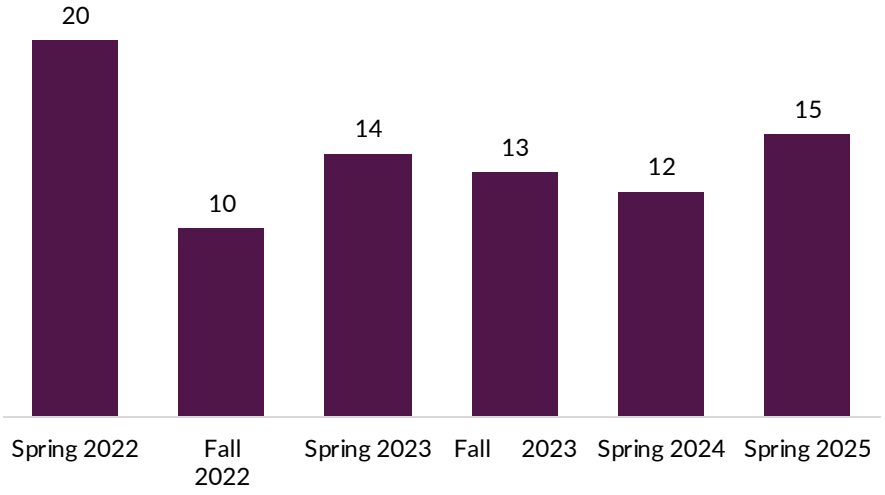
- *"Childcare is in short supply and expensive."*
- *"Limited options. Almost no options for those that work 12-hour shifts or nights and weekends."*

Housing availability

- *"The housing market is very challenging. Homes have gotten very expensive and there is a limited supply. To compound this challenge, there are very, very few rentals available in our region."*

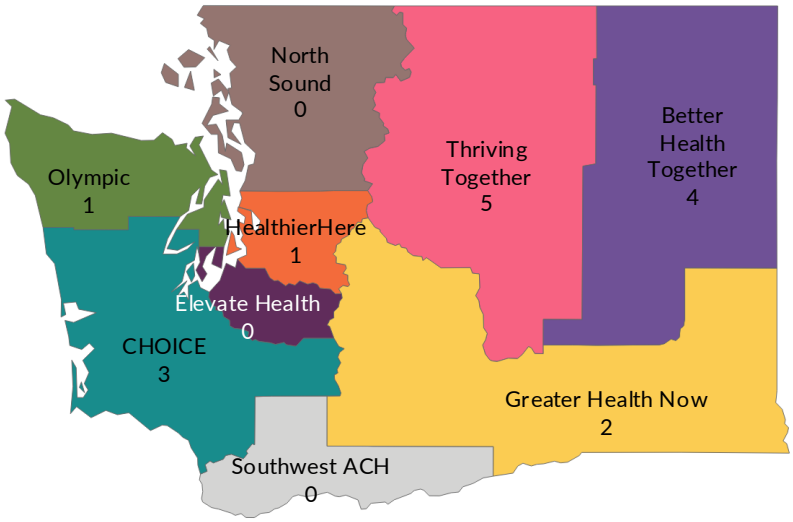


Number of Responses from Small Hospitals in WA by Data Collection Date*



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

Number of Responding Small Hospitals 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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