

Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: Higher Education and Research Organizations

Spring 2026

This brief highlights workforce needs reported by Washington's **higher education and research organizations** to the Health Workforce Sentinel Network during **April/May 2026**. These facilities have contributed workforce insights since 2017. More findings are available at wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings.

Compared to prior rounds, more respondents reported that exceptionally long vacancies and turnover/retention challenges did not affect their ability to fully staff positions or provide services. Of the 16 responses to the Sentinel Network from **higher education and research organizations**, 12 (75%) indicated that no occupations were affected.

Reasons for Exceptionally Long Vacancies and Retention/Turnover Problems

Compared with prior rounds, more respondents representing higher education/research organizations indicated that occupations did not experience exceptionally long vacancies or retention/turnover problems. Respondents who reported challenges identified factors that may contribute to faculty and leadership vacancies and turnover, including high workloads and budget constraints. Examples of responses below:

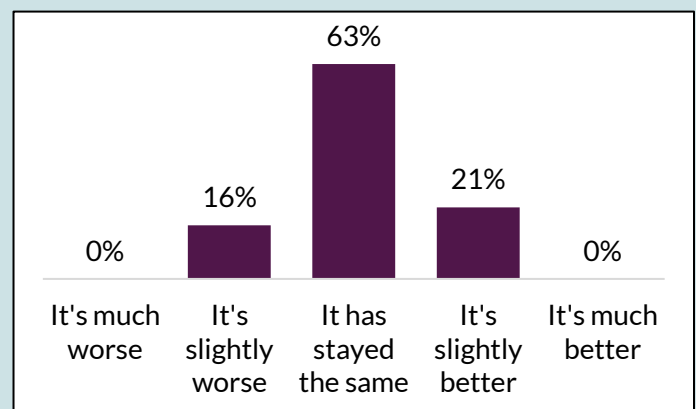
- *[Administrator/Director] [An assistant dean] position has been open for more than 2 years. Additionally, an Administrator position has been open for more than 3 years. Human Resources has done extensive searches but to no avail.*
- *[Registered nurse] Applicants are not fully qualified and need lots of professional development support upon hire, which we are not equipped to handle appropriately.*
- *[Registered nurse] The very nature of the job requires a high workload. Not every person is cut out to become a nurse educator.*

Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

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

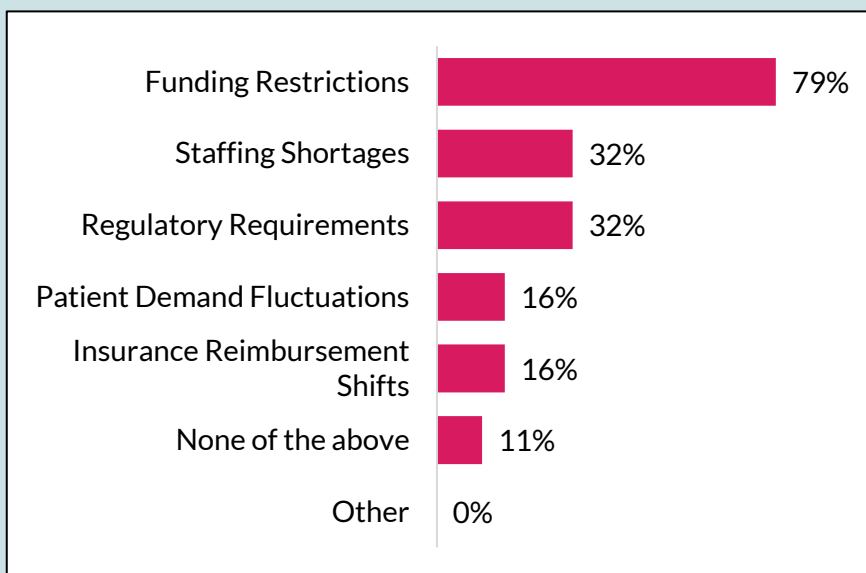
About half of respondents (53%) indicated that their ability to staff has stayed the same, and less than a quarter (21%) of respondents from higher education/research organizations indicated that it's slightly better. Examples of responses include:

- *[It's stayed the same] We have been understaffed with full time faculty and adjuncts that are unable to meet the workload needs. It's been this way for about 2 years.*
- *[It's slightly better] The director of the department is quick to see the department needs and bring on staff.*
- *[It's slightly worse] Budget constraints have affected this.*



Overarching Workforce Issues: Themes and Examples

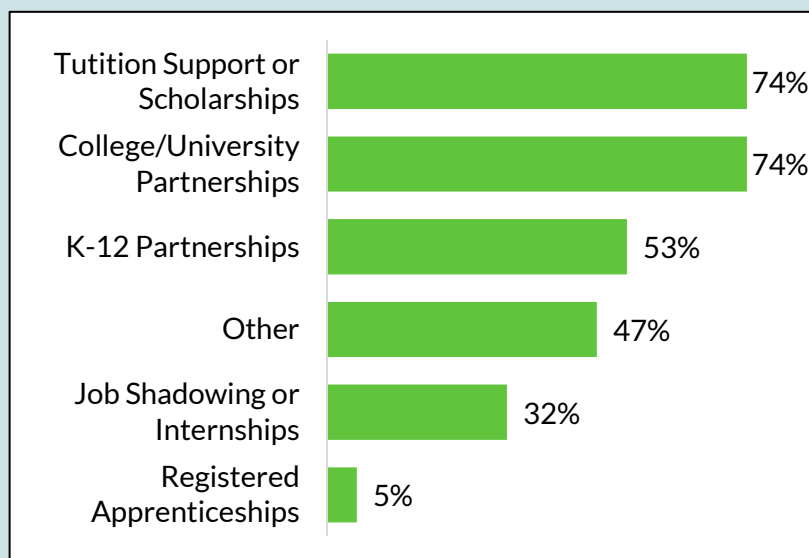
Has your organization recently taken steps or made plans to take steps to navigate uncertainty or prepare for potential changes in any of the following areas? (check all that apply) Responses included:



- Increased simulation use for clinical placement. Revising curriculum to increase and be more intentional in partnering with community-based care organizations.
- We are a high demand field. Our dental hygiene students do not have a difficult time finding a job. For this reason, we would like to increase our student cohort size; but we don't have the institutional funds needed to do this.
- Currently waiting for budget approval, anticipating potential [reduction in force] or required unpaid leave days.

Which of the following workforce outreach, pipeline development, or early-career development strategies does your organization support? (check all that apply) Responses included:

- Dental assisting, medical assisting, and nursing have utilized a variety of partners for externship/preceptorships.
- Our college offers programs across nursing, medical assisting, surgical sciences, emergency services, dental, respiratory care, imaging, and substance use counseling fields. All of these programs are in high demand and we are seeing significant increase in student applications, especially in radiologic technology.
- We are trying to create a workforce pipeline by implementation of a CNA program at the High School level.

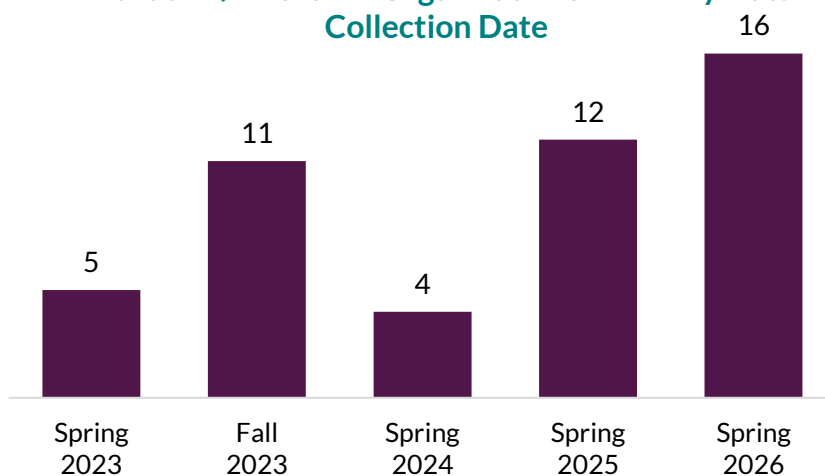


Has your organization adopted, or is it considering adopting, any new or existing technology?

About half of respondents reported using or exploring AI and other emerging technologies in instructional practices and administrative tasks. Examples include:

- We are beginning to integrate AI into instructional practices. We have also increased our use of medical simulation technologies. [We have] just approved a formal AI Committee as part of our shared governance system.
- We use Copilot within the institution, but it is inconsistently used, only a limited people have access (it's not standard for all users) and it isn't really a directed effort.
- AI - used within HIPAA approved applications for charting and patient scheduling.

Number of Responses from Responding Higher Education/ Research Organizations in WA by Data Collection Date



*Findings prior to Spring 2023 not shown due to space constraints.

Number of Responding Higher Education/Research Organizations by Accountable Community of Health (ACH), Spring 2026



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:

<https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/>.

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