

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network *Findings Brief: Assisted Living Facilities*

Assisted living facilities provided information about their workforce needs to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network, most recently in April/May 2021. This Findings Brief provides response themes as well as examples of specific comments, with an emphasis on the most recent findings. Responses from assisted living facilities from 2016 to the present may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/.

Themes from assisted living facilities' responses to pandemic-related questions are highlighted below. More pandemic-related findings from earlier in the pandemic are at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reported by Assisted Living Facilities: Themes and examples

In the past 6 months, have there been overall staffing changes at your facility due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

THEMES: About half reported no changes. For those that did have staffing changes, the details varied.

- A shift of some duties to care staff simply due to their knowledge of PPE and infection control for going into areas requiring them to cover more duties for kitchen and activities.
- Fear of Covid has led some employees to obtain notes from their doctor so that they can collect unemployment.
- Some - specifically in the area of Certified Nursing Assistant position, but have been able to back fill.
- None.

In the past 6 months, what about the staffing arrangements at your facility made it easier to respond to the pandemic? What made it harder?

- More infection control processes, not being open for visitors so residents get lonely.
- Very small number of staff makes it easy to get the info to everyone as guidance changes.
- Lack of full time and part time staffing limiting facility coverage.
- The need for singular individuals to cover larger numbers of [residents] made it much harder but not having the visitors to manage as well made that more manageable.

Describe the workforce impact, if any, of the use of telehealth at your facility over the past 6 months.

THEMES: About half of respondents reported no or minimal impact, but others reported challenges.

- It does increase the workload on the care staff - while we don't have to provide transportation we still need to have a staff member with the resident - to provide assistance to resident and a resource for the doctor.
- It has been miserable- we are in an older area that has horrible wifi- that has caused difficulties with completing visits and making connections.
- It's awkward and confusing for the elderly residents. We must have an aid with them during the visit, which is a change.
- Minimal.

Did your organization do anything to encourage your staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, what strategies were or were not successful?

THEMES: Education was a common strategy. Not all facilities ran active campaigns.

- We had a pretty good success with acceptance- it was written into the policy that additional PPE [would be] required at all times if not taken. We provided a lot of education on it.
- Provided education and offered it free at the facility.
- No staff encouragement.
- Spent time in small groups to talk about the concerns over the vaccine - reviewed each question and focused on the facts. We had around 30% of the staff take the vaccine the first time, but ended up with 96% vaccinated.

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by policy, regulatory, and/or payment changes?

- Adequate reimbursement for the cost of care to Medicaid residents would go a long way towards attracting and keeping qualified applicants.
- Availability of training is difficult. And the online training that is available is of very poor quality.
- Reduce the duplicate paperwork.

Assisted Living Facilities (Spring 2021)

Assisted Living 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 Assisted Living findings, along with those from other health care facilities, are at wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

Assisted Living Facilities - Occupations with exceptionally long vacancies 2019 - 2021

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting						
Rank	Spring 2019*	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	
1	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	Home health aide or home care aide	Nursing assistant	Nursing assistant	
2	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	Licensed practical nurse	
			Registered nurse			
			Nursing assistant			
3	Home health aide or home care aide	Home health aide or home care aide	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	
	Registered nurse	Registered nurse			Personal care aide	
4	Personal care aide	Personal care aide		Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Home health aide or home care aide	Cook
	Chemical dependency professional	Cook				Home health aide or home care aide
	Social worker					
5	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Personal care aide	n/a	
5	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency	Multiple occupations cited at the same frequency		Food service		
				Housekeeping		

← Most cited

*Before spring 2019, assisted living facilities were folded in to the “intermediate care facility” category so findings cannot be shown here

Demand for healthcare workforce reported by assisted living facilities

THEME: Challenges associated with COVID have led to higher demand for healthcare workers.

- [Nursing assistant] Concern over COVID has placed a high demand on finding qualified Certified Nursing Assistant. The pool is very limited and several staff members left over fears of COVID.
- [Registered nurse, LPN, nursing assistant] Higher demand related to COVID pandemic and cohort staffing of COVID unit in already diminished staffing.

Reasons for vacancies reported by Assisted Living Facilities

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced some new challenges, but many pre-COVID challenges persist.

- [Registered nurse, LPN, nursing assistant] Experienced exceptionally long vacancies prior to COVID pandemic. Salary/wage/benefits issues, inadequate interview and reference processing, inappropriate positional hiring (hiring of on call vs. full time/part time).
- [Registered nurse, LPN, nursing assistant] Need for added tasks within the job description with doctors offices being closed [made hiring difficult].

Assisted Living Facilities (Spring 2021)

Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by Assisted Living Facilities

- [Nursing assistant, personal care aide] Workload and demands physically and emotionally as well as constant changes in the field... Many left the field for less stressful and less risky positions.
- [Nursing assistant, home health aide, cook] Unemployment and stimulus money, as well as fear of contracting Covid.
- [Multiple occupations] Existing issues prior to COVID pandemic.

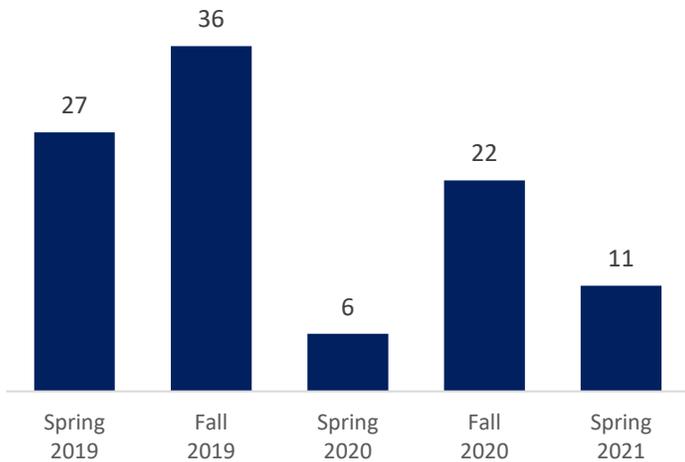
New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by Assisted Living Facilities

- [Nursing assistant] Utilizing agency staff to fill the need as well as borrowing COTA [certified occupational therapist] from rehab department in SNF to provide direct nursing assistant care in ALF.
- [LPN, personal care aide] Additional tasks now with completing state forms and medical office forms.
- New roles hired: Infection control representative (screener).

Changes in Assisted Living Facilities' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

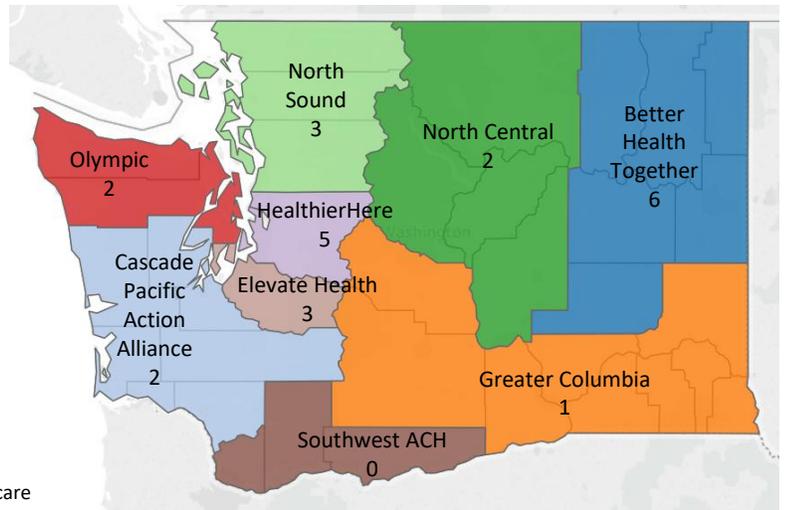
- With the new policies had to adjust onboarding with a emphasis on dealing with COVID.
- We have added training for PPE, infection control and emotional support.

Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Assisted Living Facilities in WA by Data Collection Date*



*Before spring 2019, assisted living facilities were folded in to the "intermediate care facility" category

Number of Assisted Living Facility Responses by Accountable Community of Health (ACH) (Spring 2021)



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 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 Governor Inslee's office and the Washington State Legislature.

Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your workforce needs and ensure that the state is prepared to respond to the transforming healthcare environment.
- 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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