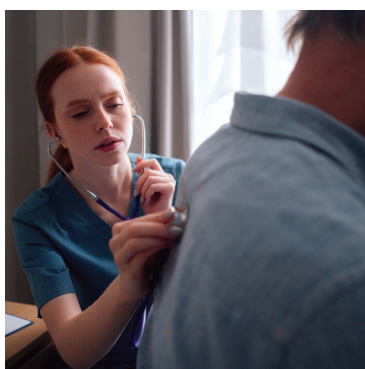


Care Across the Continuum

How Health Care Workforce Shortages Affect Pennsylvanians' Access to Care

April 2025



Pennsylvania’s nursing homes and hospitals are developing a robust and diverse health care workforce to both serve their communities today and meet a growing need as the commonwealth ages. But they continue to navigate workforce shortages that threaten Pennsylvanians’ access to care.

Investment and collaboration between educators, providers, and government will be essential to changing this trajectory.

The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP), LeadingAge PA, and Pennsylvania Health Care Association (PHCA) surveyed Pennsylvania hospitals and nursing homes about efforts to grow care professionals, current workforce challenges, and how they affect Pennsylvanians’ access to care.

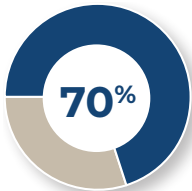


ACCESS TO CARE

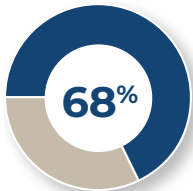
Pennsylvania’s hospitals and nursing homes are both facing workforce shortages, and patients and residents feel the effects throughout the continuum of care. When nursing homes are forced to limit admissions due to staffing ratio requirements, patients must wait longer in hospitals, further delaying and reducing access to care in our communities.

Hospital Care

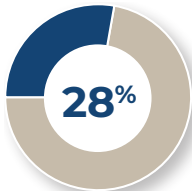
Workforce shortages strain hospitals’ ability to care for their communities. As a result of workforce shortages during 2024:



reported increased emergency department wait times



reported increased wait times to schedule appointments or procedures



eliminated or scaled back a service line



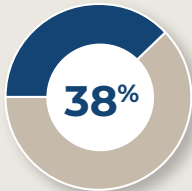
had to reduce available beds on a regular basis

Nursing Home Care

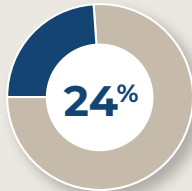
In nursing homes, workforce shortages have caused providers to limit access to care and defer needed improvements to facilities and programming:



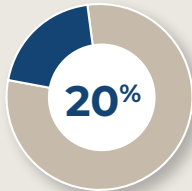
reported limiting admissions or capping census



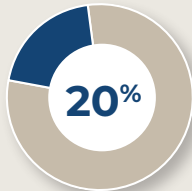
are deferring facility improvements or physical site updates



are putting admission referrals on wait lists*



have closed full wings or units



are eliminating or scaling back non-clinical services or programming

*Not all nursing homes maintain a wait list

Limiting admissions or capping census means that providers are not accepting new residents even though they have available licensed beds at their facility.

25% of nursing home providers reported that they are unable to use over **10%** of their licensed beds due to lack of staff.

2,443
total referrals from hospitals were declined within the last 90 days as reported by nursing home providers.

Staffing Ratio Requirements Reduce Access

The state staffing ratio requirements for nursing homes that went into effect in 2023 and increased in 2024 had an impact on access to care as well.

42% of respondents reported that they are limiting or denying admissions as a result of staffing requirements and the inability to hire more workers to accommodate a change in census.

“We’ve had to delay admissions by days if staffing is tight. This requires the hospital to hold longer and backs up the system, in addition to the negative impacts on the resident. Having to use agency staff to fill holes that we need due to increases in staffing mandates puts a larger hit on our budget and, as a non-profit, takes away from our ability long term to make other positive changes for our residents.”

- Pennsylvania nursing home operator

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Hospitals and nursing homes are competing for many of the same workers. Pennsylvania must increase the number of health care professionals to ensure access to care throughout the entire continuum.

2024 Statewide Average Hospital Vacancy Rates

Position	Vacancy Rate	Position	Vacancy Rate
Certified registered nurse anesthetists	30%	Physician assistants	16%
Surgical techs	28%	Pharmacy techs	15%
Clinical nurse specialists	22%	Radiologic techs	14%
Registered nurses*	19%	Central Sterile Processors	14%
Medical assistants	19%	Certified registered nurse practitioners	14%
Respiratory therapists	18%	Medical/lab techs	13%
Nursing support staff	17%	Certified nurse midwives	12%



*Staff nurses providing direct patient care, excludes nurse managers, case managers, and education staff

Challenges for Rural Hospitals

Rural hospitals report even higher average vacancy rates for some key positions:

- 23%** physician assistants
- 23%** medical assistants
- 21%** registered nurses
- 20%** radiologic techs
- 19%** central sterile processors
- 18%** certified registered nurse practitioners

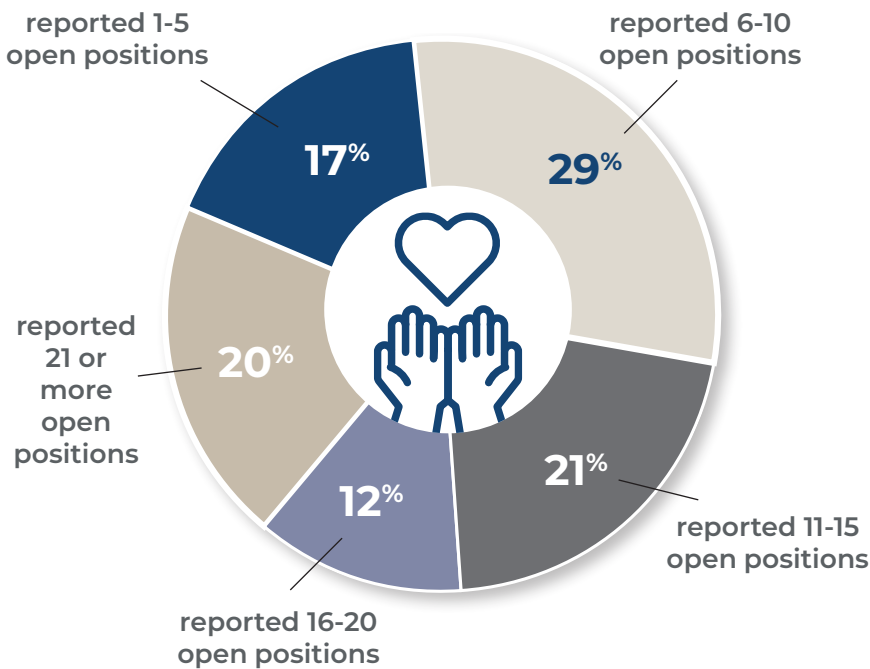


A Growing Need

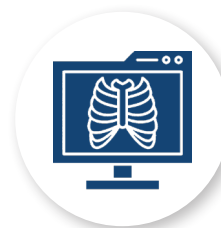
Filling current vacancies for health care professionals is not enough. Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry projects that **each year** through 2032, the commonwealth will need **8,890 more registered nurses** and **11,232 more nursing assistants** to replace those leaving the workforce and meet increasing demand for care.

Direct Care Staff Vacancies at Nursing Homes

When asked how many direct care staff positions (CNA, LPN, RN) do you have open at your facility, respondents reported the following:



Hospitals' Top Needs for Allied Health Professionals



Diagnostic radiology techs



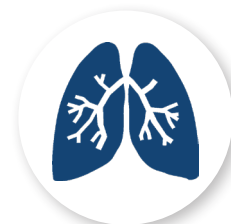
Surgical techs



CT/MRI techs



Lab techs



Respiratory therapists

Temporary Staffing Agency Use in Nursing Homes

When staffing needs can't be met by in-house staff, nursing home providers will contract with temporary staffing agencies to fill shifts.

- **57%** of respondents have had to increase their use of contracted temporary agency staff within the past year because of increased state staffing requirements.

Nursing homes reported the following amounts of daily direct care staff (CNA, LPN, RN) currently contracted through temporary staffing agencies:

29% reported no use of temporary agency staff

45% reported <20% were agency staff

18% reported 20-40% were agency staff

7% reported that <40% were agency staff



GROWING CARE TEAMS

Hospital Recruitment and Retention

Hospitals continued to prioritize workforce recruitment and retention initiatives in 2024:



✓ Increasing base pay



✓ Offering professional development/tuition reimbursement



✓ Allowing flexible work schedules



✓ Providing retention bonuses and other incentive pay



✓ Providing childcare

“We have been using agencies to supplement our staffing needs, but we are not sure how much longer we will be able to do that. We have been running in a significant deficit over the past few years and will not be able to continue to operate if this continues.”

- Pennsylvania nursing home operator

Innovative Care Models

Hospitals are evolving care models to better support patients and providers:

- ✓ Virtual nursing
- ✓ Team-based care
- ✓ LPNs and patient care techs in direct care
- ✓ Home-based care
- ✓ Advanced practice providers
- ✓ Technology

Hospitals reduced turnover for the second consecutive year:

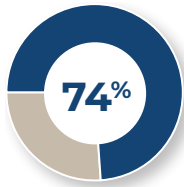
19% reduction in turnover rates for direct-care positions from 2023–2024

Hospitals are expanding care teams to meet growing needs.

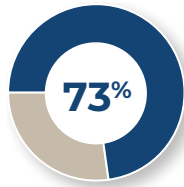
Among respondents:



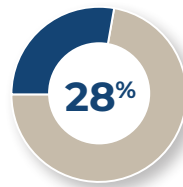
have LPNs
providing
direct
patient care



employ
mental health
therapists



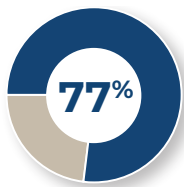
employ
community
health
workers



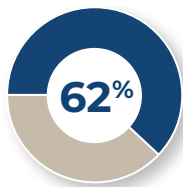
employ
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Barriers Faced in Recruiting and Retention in Nursing Homes

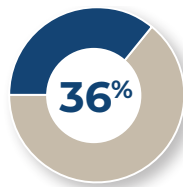
Recruiting: When asked what the top three barriers their facility is facing in employing needed staff, nursing homes responded:



1. Lack of qualified individuals

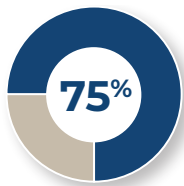


2. Inability to offer competitive wages/benefits due to financial constraints

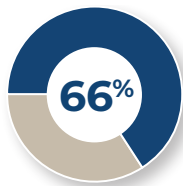


3. Geographical location

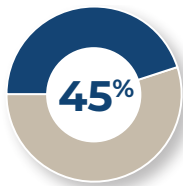
Retention: The top three reasons why staff say they are resigning were reported by nursing homes as the following:



1. Higher wages elsewhere



2. Accepted position at another health care facility



3. Burnout/fatigue

Workforce Development

The following percentage of hospital respondents report workforce development partnerships with each entity:



100%
community colleges



98%
high schools



93%
four-year colleges/universities



41%
other partners



34%
middle schools

Restoring Access to Care:

Nursing home respondents, representing about a third of facilities statewide, reported they would need **1,710 additional CNAs** and **887 additional LPNs** to fill current vacancies and be able to remove caps on admissions while still meeting state staffing ratio requirements.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted from November 11, 2024 to January 15, 2025. HAP, LeadingAge PA, and PHCA coordinated to survey their respective members.

HAP received responses for 119 Pennsylvania hospitals, representing 65 percent of staffed beds statewide and a significant sample size of hospitals across the state and within each region. Individual hospital responses were requested; however, health system responses were accepted if parallel workforce trends were evident across each hospital within the system. Members were instructed to coordinate the completion of the survey through their human resources departments.

LeadingAge PA received 133 responses and PHCA received 78 responses for a total of 211 responses from nursing home providers statewide. This represents more than one-third of nursing homes in Pennsylvania. Multi-site organizations were instructed to complete this survey for each individual facility and to coordinate the completion of the survey between nursing home administrators and human resources departments.



About HAP: *The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) is a statewide member services organization that advocates on behalf of Pennsylvania hospitals and health systems to advance high-quality, accessible, and financially sustainable health care. HAP's more than 235 member organizations include the majority of hospitals across the commonwealth. Learn more at www.haponline.org.*

About LeadingAge PA: *LeadingAge PA is a trade association representing 400+ high-quality, mission-driven, aging services providers across the commonwealth. These providers serve more than 75,000 older Pennsylvanians and employ over 50,000 dedicated caregivers on a daily basis. Services our members offer include Life Plan Communities/Continuing Care Retirement Communities, skilled nursing communities, assisted living residences, personal care homes, L.I.F.E., home and community-based services, and affordable senior housing. In addition to providing high-quality education, leadership development, and business solutions, LeadingAge PA advocates on behalf of our members at the state and local levels to influence positive change and affect a healthy vision for the delivery of quality, affordable, and ethical care for Pennsylvania's seniors. For more information, visit www.LeadingAgePA.org.*

About PHCA: *PHCA stands as the leading advocacy association in the commonwealth, representing the interests of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents and the dedicated providers who care for them. Our core mission is to elevate, educate, and advocate on behalf of these residents, their caregivers, and our network of over 450 long-term care providers. At PHCA, we are committed to sustaining a robust and high-quality long-term care continuum across Pennsylvania and are dedicated to advancing the work of our members, leveraging our extensive industry knowledge to ensure their long-term success in an evolving healthcare landscape. Learn more at phca.org.*