

North Carolina Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief: Suggested Policy, Regulatory, and Payment Changes

During June and early July 2022, healthcare employers in North Carolina reported on current workforce needs. Employers answered a series of questions about staff vacancies, turnover, training/onboarding priorities and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the questions they answered was, **“What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?”** (hereafter referred to as the policy change question).

Below are examples of priorities mentioned by employers in home care or home health services, local health departments or public health organizations, behavioral health offices/practices or clinics, skilled nursing facilities/nursing homes/assisted living facilities, and hospitals. More findings, including current pandemic-related concerns and responses from other health care settings, may be viewed at nc.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/.

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?

Home care or home health services:

Many employers mentioned the need for increased payment to help recruitment and retention, as well as the need for increased educational opportunities and some regulatory changes.

- *“Need the ability to pay more to... recruit and retain staff”*
- *“Increase Medicaid reimbursement... We need to be competitive with the other healthcare options”*
- *“Increase funding for community college programming to... [improve the] availability of qualified clinical staff [and] to increase [the] applicant pool”*
- *“[We need] more CNA [certified nursing assistant] grants & more CNA schools”*
- *“Allow for better utilization of Personal Care Aides with proper supervision of RN to assess their skills”*

Local health departments or public health organizations:

Most respondents indicated a need for higher salaries and a change to state job classification requirements.

- *“More stable state allocated funding to Local Health Departments to ensure continuity of services, to allow us to recruit and retain a well-trained, and well-paid staff”*
- *“Raise all Public Health salaries, [to] ensure PH Staff feel valued and appreciated by county politician[s]”*
- *“[We need a] higher pay scale to entice new employees along with [changes to] Public Health Nurse requirements that have deterred possible candidates from applying due to them not being Fully Qualified as deemed by the state”*

Respondents mentioned specific occupations that were in high demand at local health departments.

- *“[We need] more nurses... Expand Public Health clinical flexibilities to allow wider use of LPNs”*
- *“[Hiring of] Clinical staff: RN, LPN, phlebotomist [is hindered by] salary - the cost of housing is crazy, gas prices, groceries, etc.”*
- *[Due to local and federal requirements, we need]: CD Coordinator RN, Home Health Supervisor, Preparedness Coordinator, [and] HIPAA Compliance Officer.*

Behavioral health offices/practices or clinics:

Key themes mentioned by respondents included: increasing reimbursement rates, adequate payment for telehealth services and decreased documentation requirements.

- *“I would love for all the insurance companies to agree to pay as much as Medicare, which is still low but [others are even lower, including Medicaid]”*
- *“The reimbursement rate for community health esp. in behavioral health has not been changed in many years. Paperwork has increased but reimbursement rates have not, so many skilled workers leave for another setting”*
- *“[The] burden of insurance paperwork, prior authorizations [is high]”*
- *“Telehealth reimbursement equity [needs to be] maintained”*
- *“Need all insurances to continue to cover telehealth for mental health services beyond the pandemic”*

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?

Skilled nursing facilities/nursing homes/assisted living facilities

Many employers felt greater oversight of contract staffing agencies was needed.

- *“Enact legislation that calls for regulation of Staffing Agencies in terms of how and when they adjust their pricing so that we can compete”*
- *“Cap how much [staffing agencies] can make over the prevailing rate. An uncapped earning requires the facility to pay more at a rate it simply cannot afford but must in order to meet resident’s needs”*

The reporting requirements imposed by federal and local regulations were burdensome to many respondents.

- *“Nursing homes should not be so more heavily regulated than hospitals, doctor offices, etc. regarding covid”*
- *“Relief from some of the paperwork and reporting and long surveys... Surveys used to be done in 2.5 days before computers. With computers it takes 4.5 days”*

Higher reimbursement rates would allow employers to increase wages to retain current workers.

- *“Better payment to nursing homes for services provided would increase the likelihood of getting better wages and ability to compete with nonhealthcare settings”*
- *“Payment that is commensurate with the cost associated with giving the care our residents need. That in turn can be invested into the workforce.”*

Some employers indicated that more workers, especially nurses, are needed.

- *“Develop more training programs and initiatives for C.N.As, LPNs & RNs”*
- *“[We need] more CNAs. [Allow] nurse aide trainee programs back at facilities”*

Hospitals:

Many respondents suggested that contract staffing agencies should be regulated.

- *“There needs to be some attention on [travel agency pricing]. It felt like prices were hiking up just for profit for these companies. Price gauging [sic]. Many hospitals can't maintain these costs.”*
- *“Regulate the costs of contract labor”*
- *“Oversight of agencies and how they increase the rates [is needed]”*

Ways to mitigate poor behavior by patients and ensure the safety of workers was a priority for some respondents.

- *“Implement workplace violence legislation to protect healthcare workers from all assaults, including from behavioral health patients”*
- *“Determine effective coping options for staff as it relates to burnout and patient/visitor behavior, which has gotten worse”*

Other responses focused on the need to ensure an adequate pipeline of healthcare workers, especially nurses.

- *“Increase capacity of colleges and universities to allow more students to enroll in nursing programs. Incentivize students with grants/scholarships to enter nursing programs”*
- *“Ensuring there are enough nursing school seats available to meet the demand”*

Several respondents said new or continued payment models for telehealth and care coordination were needed.

- *“Payment parity for the use of telehealth services which would allow additional access for patient[s]”*
- *“Reimbursement [for Telehealth / Care Navigation] is a concern and will continue to be one for healthcare orgs”*
- *“Payment for [telemedicine] services rendered”*

Response counts and priorities cited by North Carolina employers across healthcare settings

Response counts

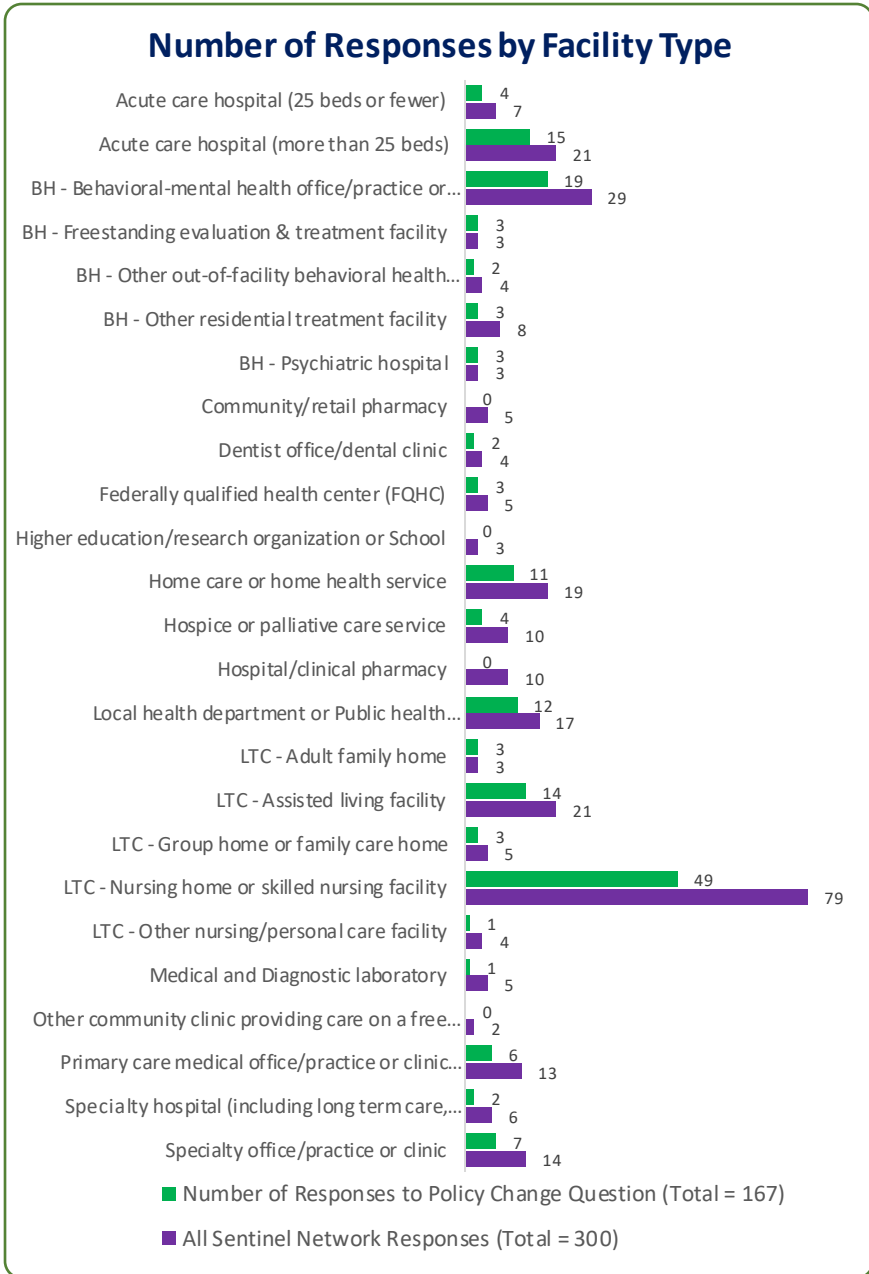
Employers representing 300 facility types responded to the Sentinel Network questionnaire during June and July 2022. Of those, 167 answered the question, “What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?” The chart to the right shows the number of responses by facility type.

Employer priorities across many settings

Across many healthcare settings, employers said that the ability to pay competitive wages, regulating temporary staffing agencies, and ensuring a robust worker pipeline were their top priorities. These match the top priorities reported to the Sentinel Network six months ago.

Priorities mentioned by employers in June-July 2022 that were not cited as often in the Fall included: continued payment for telemedicine services; the need for physical protection for workers when some patients misbehave; access to behavioral and mental health resources for workers; and innovative solutions to housing, transportation and childcare shortages that affect recruitment and retention in some settings.

Like six months ago, the top occupations that employers mentioned in their answers regarding needed policy changes were certified nursing assistants (CNAs), registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs), indicating that these continue to be the workers that employers are most concerned about.



Data Limitations & Notes

Findings presented in the brief represent the responses from a convenience sample of health system administrators who voluntarily participated in the Spring 2022 Sentinel Network questionnaire (June-July 2021). Generalizability of these findings to the broader North Carolina health care system may be limited.

About the North Carolina Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Health Workforce Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners, and educators to identify and respond to changing needs for healthcare workers.

To view an interactive version of all responses and join the network to provide information on your organization’s workforce needs and challenges: <https://nc.sentinelnetwork.org/>

Questions? Contact: nc@sentinelnetwork.org