

The Healthcare Staffing Crisis

JUNE 2024

Healthcare workers saw the staffing crisis coming.

Healthcare workers, unions and advocates have been warning of a staffing shortage for years, long before COVID-19 entered the picture. We must address how we got here if we are going to recruit the next generation and retain experienced health professionals. **Fighting for better working conditions now is about the future of healthcare.**

Systematic underinvestment in the safety and well-being of healthcare workers has created unsustainable work environments.

- Healthcare workers have faced increasing mandatory overtime and on-call hours, creating unstable and unsustainable schedules.
- Healthcare workers are five times more likely to experience workplace violence than other workers.¹
- In 2021, more than half of nurses said they experience burnout once a week or every day.²

Nursing education programs are understaffed, underfunded and costly.

- In 2022, nursing programs turned away more than 78,000 qualified applicants because the programs lacked the necessary faculty, facilities or funding.³
- Even if a student secures a spot in a BSN program, they can expect an average of \$23,711 in student loan debt.⁴
- There is a nurse faculty shortage driven in part by low pay for these roles compared with other roles available to nurses with advanced degrees in clinical settings. With an average monthly loan payment of \$544, many qualified nurses cannot afford to take a pay cut.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the staffing crisis.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, **more than 195,000 nurses left the healthcare workforce** and only 43 percent say they plan to return. The most common factors these nurses say led to their decision were high-risk working conditions, being overworked or burned out, and **inadequate staffing**.⁶
- Younger nurses are more likely to leave the workforce due to unsafe staffing. In a 2024 study of nurses who left the healthcare workforce from 2018-2021, **40 percent of nurses under the age of 30 cited insufficient staffing** as a leading factor in their decision to leave, compared with 21 percent of all nurses surveyed.⁷

THIS IS A PATIENT SAFETY CRISIS.

Adding *just one additional patient* to a nurse's workload results in:

- 7 percent increased risk of 30-day in hospital mortality⁸
- 48 percent increased risk of a child being readmitted to the hospital within 30 days⁹
- Increased risk of infection¹⁰

References

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/foi/workplace-violence-healthcare-2018.htm>

² Health Resources and Services Administration, 2022
National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses:

<https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nursing-workforce-dashboards>

³ American Association of Colleges of Nursing:

<https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/new-data-show-enrollment-declines-in-schools-of-nursing-raising-concerns-about-the-nations-nursing-workforce>

⁴ Nerd Wallet analysis of 2019 federal student aid data from U.S. Department of Education:

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/loans/student-loans/average-nursing-student-debt>

⁵ Nerd Wallet analysis of 2019 federal student aid data from U.S. Department of Education:

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/loans/student-loans/average-nursing-student-debt>

⁶ Health Resources and Services Administration, 2022
National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses:

<https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/nursing-workforce-dashboards>

⁷ Muir et al., 2024

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11004833/>