
*Technical Report*

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Overview

Federally qualified health centers (HCs) face major barriers in recruiting and retaining health professionals, yet there have been no projections of key health professions staffing needs for HCs and proposed new HCs. A study by the University of Washington Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) and collaborators described the current staffing needs of HCs across the U.S. and the staffing, recruitment, and retention issues that HC chief executive officers (CEO) regard as most critical throughout the nation as a whole.* Presented here is a subset of the findings from the larger national study for HCs located in Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (WWAMI) overall and by urban and rural geography.

Methods

The survey was conducted between May and September 2004. Of the 846 HCs in the national study, 62 were located in the WWAMI region. Survey responses were received from 53 of the 62 WWAMI HCs (85.5%). Nationally the survey response rate was 79.3% and the national response rate for HCs in rural locations was 97.5%. Questionnaires were mailed to the CEOs of all federally qualified HCs in the nation. The questionnaire profiled their current staff vacancies, projected staffing needs, recruitment and retention issues, center site expansion plans, and CEO perception of policies that would facilitate recruitment and retention.

Findings and Collaborators

This report includes graphs of selected survey results for HCs located in the WWAMI region. Results are reported overall and by geographic location of the HCs when there are large enough numbers to protect respondent confidentiality. Vacancy rates for selected health personnel are reported at the state level in addition to for the WWAMI region overall.

These data were collected via a collaborative project between the WWAMI RHRC, South Carolina RHRC, National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), Bureau of Health Professions (BHPPr), Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), and the federal Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP). Core funding for data collection came from ORHP and BPHC. These WWAMI region analyses were funded by the School of Medicine, University of Washington. The WWAMI RHRC is solely responsible for these WWAMI results.

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Figure 2. Expansion Plans of Federally Funded WWAMI Health Centers by Location

- Urban: 76.1% Plan to expand clinical operations, 23.9% No expansion plans
- Rural: 73.9% Plan to expand clinical operations, 26.1% No expansion plans
Figure 3a. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Physician Types in WWAMI Health Centers

- Family Physicians: 33.2% very difficult, 32.1% somewhat difficult
- Internal Medicine: 36.5% very difficult, 40.7% somewhat difficult
- Pediatricians: 61.0% very difficult, 9.8% somewhat difficult
- Obstetricians: 53.4% very difficult, 23.3% somewhat difficult
- Psychiatrists: 86.3% very difficult, 13.7% somewhat difficult
Figure 3b. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Non-Physician Health Center Personnel in WWAMI Health Centers

- Mental Health Providers: % very difficult = 28.3, % somewhat difficult = 42.8
- Dentists: % very difficult = 44.6, % somewhat difficult = 42.5
- Nurse Practitioners: % very difficult = 10.4, % somewhat difficult = 20.3
- Physician Assistants: % very difficult = 12.9, % somewhat difficult = 29.1
- Certified Nurse Midwives: % very difficult = 59.0, % somewhat difficult = 41.0
- Registered Nurses: % very difficult = 37.6, % somewhat difficult = 32.7
- Pharmacists: % very difficult = 58.3, % somewhat difficult = 34.8
Figure 3c. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Physician Types for WWAMI Health Centers in Urban Locations
Figure 3d. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Non-Physician Health Center Personnel for WWAMI Health Centers Located in Urban Locations

- Mental Health Providers: 30.2% very difficult, 19.8% somewhat difficult
- Dentists: 14.5% very difficult, 62.4% somewhat difficult
- Nurse Practitioners: 12.3% very difficult, 21.3% somewhat difficult
- Physician Assistants: 12.4% very difficult, 28.3% somewhat difficult
- Certified Nurse Midwives: 64.6% very difficult, 35.4% somewhat difficult
- Registered Nurses: 46.5% very difficult, 40.7% somewhat difficult
- Pharmacists: 43.4% very difficult, 45.3% somewhat difficult

Legend:
- Blue: % very difficult
- Red: % somewhat difficult
Figure 3e. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Physician Types for WWAMI Health Centers in Rural Locations

- Family Physicians: 45.7% very difficult, 35.5% somewhat difficult
- Internal Medicine: 58.5% very difficult, 30.1% somewhat difficult
- Pediatricians: 80.9% very difficult, 19.1% somewhat difficult
- Obstetricians: 100.0% very difficult
- Psychiatrists: 100.0% very difficult

Legend:
- % very difficult
- % somewhat difficult
Figure 3f. Perceived Difficulty Filling a Vacancy of Selected Non-Physician Health Center Personnel for WWAMI Health Centers Located in Rural Locations

- Mental Health Providers: 26.4% very difficult, 65.2% somewhat difficult
- Dentists: 65.3% very difficult, 28.8% somewhat difficult
- Nurse Practitioners: 8.4% very difficult, 19.2% somewhat difficult
- Physician Assistants: 13.2% very difficult, 29.8% somewhat difficult
- Certified Nurse Midwives: 51.2% very difficult, 48.8% somewhat difficult
- Registered Nurses: 29.5% very difficult, 25.4% somewhat difficult
- Pharmacists: 81.5% very difficult, 18.5% somewhat difficult
Figure 4. Perceived Factors that Would Aid in the Recruitment and Retention of Health Professionals in WWAMI Health Centers by Location
Figure 5. Perceived Importance of Factors Affecting Recruitment to WWAMI Community Health Centers by Geographic Location

- Noncompetitive Compensation: Urban 2.2, Rural 2.5
- Excessive Workload: Urban 1.9, Rural 2.4
- Poor Schools: Urban 1.1, Rural 2.1
- Difficult Housing: Urban 1.3, Rural 2.2
- Lack of Cultural Activities and Opportunities: Urban 1.3, Rural 2.4
- Lack of Spousal Employment: Urban 1.4, Rural 3.0
- Health Center Facility Condition: Urban 1.4, Rural 1.5

Mean Score (1 = not important, through 4 = important problem)