

Oregon's Health Care Workforce Needs Assessment 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

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Note—The full report may be found at: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-HCW/Documents/2023-Oregon-Health-Care-Workforce-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

This biennial Health Care Workforce Needs Assessment informs Oregon’s efforts to ensure culturally and linguistically responsive care for all.

[House Bill 3261](#) (2017) directs the Oregon Health Policy Board (OHPB) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to produce a biennial assessment of the health care workforce needed to meet the needs of patients and communities throughout Oregon by February 1 of each odd-numbered year. Oregon’s goal of eliminating health inequities requires the preparation, recruitment, and retention of a diverse workforce that can deliver culturally and linguistically responsive health care. This is the fourth such report, which provides insights into workforce needs in communities across Oregon as well as general guidance on how to expand and diversify the health care workforce, including distributing health care provider incentives.

Findings and Recommendations

The report synthesizes policy recommendations across all segments of Oregon’s health care workforce, based on its review of health care workforce development investments, workforce resiliency, trends and COVID-19 impacts, and specific workforces requiring attention. The findings point to some priority recommendations that are provided below.

Improve the diversity of health care providers

Oregon must have a more diverse workforce to achieve the strategic goal of eliminating health inequities. Key recommendations include:

- Increase investments in training, recruiting, and retaining health care workers who can provide culturally and linguistically responsive care
- Reduce barriers to entry and advancement for people of color in the workforce

Improve the supply and distribution of the health care workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated Oregon’s shortage of many types of health care providers, especially in rural areas. Key recommendations include:

- Continue to fund financial incentives to increase opportunities for training and education, such as those in the Health Care Provider Incentive Program
- Invest in workforce training through the public workforce system and allied health educational partners

- Address other factors that influence workforce recruitment and retention—especially in rural areas—such as housing cost and supply, economic opportunities for partners/spouses, and quality of K-12 education

Enhance the resiliency and well-being of the health care workforce

Health care worker burnout exacerbates workforce shortages, quality of care, health inequities, and health disparities. Addressing workforce wellness and resiliency is essential and will require collective action to be effective. Key recommendations include:

- Coordinate collective actions from public and private stakeholders, as well as community partners, to cultivate a health system that supports health care workers, including action to create trauma-informed, anti-racist workplaces
- Invest in assessment and research to inform evidence-based and practice-based strategies to optimize health care workforce well-being

Expand training/education and career pathways for many segments of the health care workforce

Expanding training is especially urgent for segments of Oregon’s workforce where shortages are most acute, such as behavioral health and long-term care. Education and clinical training opportunities should be expanded for all types of health care providers. Key recommendations include:

- Ensure adequate numbers of faculty and clinical training placements for nurses and other licensed professionals
- Establish and fund clear pathways for positions that do not have defined career ladders based on licensure, including parallel training and work, with a progression to increased pay and responsibility based on training and experience

Expand use of care delivery models that improve patient access and promote workforce retention

Although Oregon has been a leader in transforming its health care delivery system, innovative care models can be expanded to improve patients’ access to care, promote culturally and linguistically appropriate care, and increase workforce satisfaction. Key recommendations include:

- Expand telehealth, coupled with health care interpreters, to improve access to culturally specific or linguistically appropriate services
- Continue to invest in the integration of physical, behavioral, and oral health care delivery

Increase health care systems' use of community-based health care providers

Traditional health workers—including peer wellness specialists—and health care interpreters come from and/or share common lived experiences with their local communities. OHA should continue to reduce barriers to recruit and retain this workforce. A key recommendation is:

- Find ways to increase compensation for many health professionals, in particular traditional health workers—including peer wellness specialists—and health care interpreters who are underpaid and are underrepresented in certain regions of the state and among persons of color relative to Oregon's population

Improve data collection to promote evidence-informed strategies and diversify the health care workforce

Data collection must be improved to help improve the understanding of challenges to the workforce. Key recommendations include:

- Ensure that standardized REALD (race, ethnicity, language, and disability) and SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) data are collected for all Oregon providers and patients
- Expand data collection to include more provider types that incorporate community-defined evidence practices and improve consistency of data collection over time

Conclusions

Workforce shortages and lack of diversity in many areas of the health care workforce are a national problem experienced in Oregon, stemming from historic underinvestment, current economic and social forces, and systemic racism. There are barriers to entry and advancement for people of color in the health care workforce, and to receiving culturally and linguistically responsive care for people experiencing health inequities. In order to stabilize, expand, and diversify Oregon's health care workforce so that it can deliver culturally responsive, effective health care services to all:

- **Some** professions need increased compensation to attract new individuals and increase retention
- **Many** professions with unclear career pathways need better, focused paths for increasing skills, pay, and impact
- **All** professions need more support around resiliency and well-being

All the report's recommendations warrant action by government and non-governmental entities to ensure Oregon has the workforce it needs to deliver on the commitments of optimal health for everyone and the elimination of health inequities.