

The Home Health and Hospice Care Nurse Staffing Study (HHHCNSS) assesses nurse staffing and related issues in home health and hospice agencies. In 2024, the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies (TCNWS) administered the HHHCNSS to 435 Texas home health and hospice agencies with a patient census of at least 200. Previously, agencies with a census of 250 or greater were surveyed. Respondents provided data for 77 agencies for a response rate of 17.7%.

This report presents highlights and recommendations from the findings of the 2024 HHHCNSS. The full set of HHHCNSS reports contain more detail on each topic.

2024 HHHCNSS: Vacancy and Turnover

Nurse vacancy and turnover rates are among the key measures for assessing a nursing workforce shortage, the severity of the shortage, and changes in the nursing labor market over time. High vacancy and turnover rates can lead to negative outcomes that can affect quality of care such as losing experienced staff and increasing the workload and stress levels of existing staff.¹

The position vacancy rate describes the proportion of all full-time equivalent (FTE) positions vacant across all responding agencies in an area. The median facility turnover rate describes the mid-point of responses for each agency.

Vacancy Rates

- The median facility vacancy rate for all nurse types was 0.0% in 2024. In 2022, the median facility vacancy rate was 16.7% for registered nurses (RNs), 20.0% for licensed vocational nurses (LVNs), and 41.7% for home health and nurse aides (HHAs/NAs/CNAs).

RN Position Vacancy Rate

- The statewide position vacancy rate was 14.2% for RN positions, a decrease from 16.3% in 2022.

LVN Position Vacancy Rate

- The position vacancy rate for LVN positions increased from 19.9% in 2022 to 22.2% in 2024.
- LVNs had the highest position vacancy rate of the nursing staff types, similar to 2022.

HHA/NA/CNA Position Vacancy Rate

- The statewide position vacancy rate increased from 12.6% in 2022 to 13.5% in 2024 for HHA/NA/CNA positions.
- HHAs/NAs/CNAs had the lowest position vacancy rate of the nursing staff types, similar to 2022.

Turnover Rates

RN Median Facility Turnover Rate

- The median facility turnover rate for RNs decreased from 26.7% in 2022 to 20.0% in 2024.

LVN Median Facility Turnover Rate

- The median facility turnover rate for LVNs decreased from 30.0% in 2022 to 18.3% in 2024.

HHA/NA/CNA Median Facility Turnover Rate

- For HHAs/NAs/CNAs, the median facility turnover rate remained at 0.0% from 2017 to 2024, and was the lowest among nursing staff types.

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing, "Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet", 2012, <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/NrsgShortageFS.pdf>

2024 HHCNSS: Staffing

Respondents reported employing RNs, LVNs, and HHAs/NAs/CNAs with a total of 1,301.4 FTEs reported.

- RNs made up the largest proportion (51.3%) of the nursing staff mix within Texas home health and hospice agencies.
- 33.1% of nursing staff were LVNs and 15.6% were HHAs/NAs/CNAs.
- Respondents would reportedly add 515.7 nursing staff FTEs in the next fiscal year to meet patient demand if they were able.
- 24 of 57 responding agencies (42.1%) reported they would need more RNs with no home health or hospice experience.
- 50 out of 74 responding agencies (67.6%) reported they would need more RNs with more than 1 year of home health and/or hospice experience.
- 49 out of 71 responding agencies (69.0%) reported they would need more LVNs.
- 46 of 65 responding agencies (70.8%) reported they would need more HHAs/HAs/CNAs.

2024 HHCNSS: Recruitment and Retention

- RNs, with and without home health experience, were the most difficult positions to fill with 47.0% of agencies indicating it was difficult.
- HHAs/NAs/CNAs were found to be the least difficult positions to fill and 39.7% of responding agencies said the positions were filled in 1-30 days.
- 34 out of the 77 responding agencies (44.2%) declined 6,625 patients due to not having available staff to provide the necessary care in 2023.
- Agencies were asked to select the strategies they use to recruit and retain nurses. Paid time off (72.7% of respondents) was the most frequently selected strategy followed by flexible scheduling (63.6%) and gas allowance or use of a company car (63.6%).
- Of the 7 agencies that selected “other” for the recruitment/retention strategies, 1 agency reported each of the following: additional pay for difficult patients, holiday bonuses, paid cell phone, Health Savings Account (HSA) with employer contribution, paid mileage, increased paid time off, and salary increase/incentive.
- 42 agencies said a pay increase would have the greatest impact on nurse retention. 10 agencies indicated that effective management/leadership is the intervention to have the greatest impact on retention of nurses and other direct patient care staff.

TCNWS Advisory Committee Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Home health and hospice care need 515.7 more FTE nursing staff in the next year to meet patient demand. As it stands, a total of 6,625 patients were declined across 34 Texas agencies due to lack of staff in 2023. Without enough nursing staff, patients must wait longer for care or stay in inpatient units until care becomes available. The median facility turnover rate for LVNs and RNs were 18.3% and 20.0%, respectively, and staffing turnover was the second most selected reason that agencies would need more nursing staff over the next 2 years.

According to the 2024 Home Health and Hospice Care Employer Nurse Staffing Surveys administered by the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, 42 agencies

indicated that a pay increase is the most effective strategy for recruitment and retention of nursing staff. However, agency reimbursement is regulated by the inpatient hospital market pay and then lowered based on a factor mandated by the Affordable Care Act meaning hospice agencies will always be reimbursed at a lower rate than hospitals and therefore will not be able to pay their nursing staff as much.² This drives competition in the nursing workforce with more nurses choosing to make more money through inpatient care.

- The reimbursement rate for home health and hospice care should be reevaluated so these agencies can offer their nursing staff a more competitive wage.

Recommendation 2

According to the Nursing Practice Act (NPA), LVNs are required to have supervision by a more advanced degree.³ This makes it difficult for LVNs to work in home health and hospice settings as they don't have complete independence for practice. That, combined with the decline of LVN programs in Texas (97 programs in 2011 to 86 programs in 2023), the LVN vacancy rates have been increasing in home health and hospice care settings.⁴ In 2011, the vacancy rate was 8.7%, in 2017 the vacancy rate was 8.9%, in 2022 the vacancy rate was 19.9%, and in 2024 the vacancy rate was 22.2%.

- To decrease the vacancy and turnover rates among LVNs, home health and hospice agencies should be encouraged to form affiliations with LVN programs to promote the setting among LVNs. While the Board of Nursing discourages new graduates from entering autonomous settings such as home health, experience and knowledge of the setting through academic programs could help LVNs choose this setting later in their career.
- Agencies and nursing programs should encourage vocational and professional nursing students to complete clinical rotations in the home health and hospice care setting.
- Home health and hospice care organizations, stakeholders, and other interested parties should also consider developing more in-depth studies on LVNs across Texas to understand what factors contribute to their decision on their decided nursing setting. This knowledge would benefit these organizations in the upcoming session.
- Agencies should also consider strengthening the on-boarding process for LVNs entering the home health and hospice setting to ensure they are equipped for the job from the beginning.
- Agencies could identify new and unique strategies to recruit LVNs to the home health and hospice care setting such as offering to pay for professional nursing organization membership. For example, the Texas Nurses Associate offers LVNs membership for as little as \$6 per month.

Recommendation 3

Effective management/leadership was chosen as the second most important intervention for recruitment/retention of nursing staff by 10 responding agencies.

- In order to help recruit and retain nursing staff, and to create a more positive work environment, home health and hospice agencies should encourage management/leadership training for their managers. This will help managers learn to navigate their roles in administration and working in the field. This can include trainings in customer service and organizational empathy.
- Home health and hospice agencies, and nursing programs, should encourage trainings for nursing staff and students to help reduce burnout, cope with stress in the workplace, and develop strategies for work-life balance.

² MLN Matters. (2021). Update to Hospice Payment Rates, Hospice Cap, Hospice Wage Index and Hospice Pricer for FY 2022. <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/mm12354.pdf>

³ Texas Board of Nursing. 2021. Nursing Practice Act. https://www.bon.texas.gov/faq_nursing_practice.asp.html#Regarding%20Position%20Statements

⁴ Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies. 2023. Characteristics of Professional Nursing Programs. https://dshs.texas.gov/chs/cnws/NEPIS/2023/2023_VN_ProgramCharacteristics.pdf

