

## Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

### Findings from Community Health Clinics

Representatives from community health clinics [Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) or community clinics providing care free or on sliding fee scale] provided information to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network every 4 to 5 months from July 2016 to October 2017. This report summarizes the information they provided.

#### Occupations with exceptionally long vacancies or increased demand:



**Medical assistants, registered nurses, physicians/surgeons, dental assistants** and **mental health counselors** were the top occupations listed by community health clinics as experiencing exceptionally long vacancies or increased demand from July 2016 to October 2017. **Nurse practitioners, clinical social workers, dentists** and **dental hygienists** were also frequently mentioned.

#### Examples of reasons for exceptionally long vacancies or increased demand:

- Low compensation /benefits compared other facility types.
- Applicants with required experience or educational attainment are hard to find.
- The new focus on integrated behavioral health care is especially difficult for these clinics. The limited number of providers with these skills are in high demand. Supervision requirements are a challenge for some employers.
- Rural areas report difficulty due to lack of local supply, long commutes and lack of opportunity for spouses. Urban areas report difficulties due to high cost of living.
- A lack of training programs, especially for dental assistants and dental hygienists.
- Many potential applicants seem to prefer working in other settings, such as hospitals or specialty clinics.
- High employee turnover, expansion of services and increased patient loads have caused increases in demand.

*"The clinic is very fast paced and [we offer] less compensation than hospitals."  
[Employer reporting a long vacancy for RNs]*

*"We're now offering a \$1,000 signing bonus for MAs."*

*"Organizations that did not historically provide [behavioral health] services are now doing integrated care and creating more positions for the job market." [Employer reporting on mental health counselors]*

#### New roles and new occupations

Several Sentinels from community health centers reported shifting responsibilities to compensate for a position they were not able to hire, such as using physician assistants instead of nurse practitioners or nursing assistants instead of medical assistants. Many employers are hiring new occupations to integrate behavioral health treatment into their clinic or to allow expanded substance abuse treatment programs.

## Orientation and training changes in community health clinics:

Approximately a quarter of Sentinels from community health centers reported changes in orientation/onboarding priorities for new employees or changes to training priorities for existing employees.

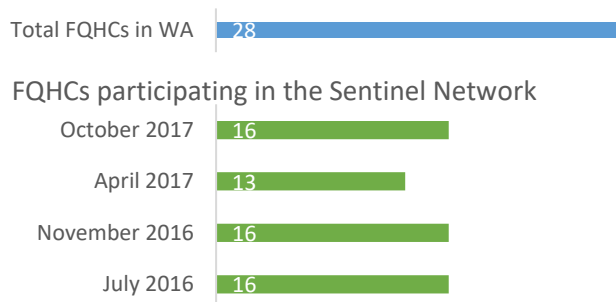
*Examples of changes to orientation and training priorities:*

- New apprenticeship programs for some occupations such as medical assistants and dental assistants. Expanded mentorship or “residency” programs for some occupations such as nurse practitioners, registered nurses and mental health counselors.
- Some employers have added training on team-based care best practices and integration of behavioral health services.
- More focus on specific topics such as electronic medical records, clinical documentation, customer service cultural competency, and data reporting requirements.
- More time devoted to initial orientation/training and more follow-up afterwards in an effort to limit turnover.

*“We have begun... pairing [new hires] with existing employees to address the new integrated [behavioral health] model.” [Mental health counselors and chemical dependency professionals]*

## FQHCs were active participants in the Sentinel Network in all four data collection rounds.

There are 28 community health centers in Washington that are federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). These facilities play an important role in providing healthcare services to all patients regardless of ability to pay. Sentinels from over 50% of Washington FQHCs participated in the Sentinel Network in three of the four data collection periods, and their responses came from all of Washington’s 9 Accountable Community of Health regions in each data collection period.



### About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus is on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers.

The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington’s Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington’s Workforce Board and the University of Washington’s Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from Governor Inslee’s office.

#### Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your workforce needs and ensure that the state is prepared to respond to the transforming healthcare environment.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

Interactive summary of findings: [www.wasentinelnetwork.org](http://www.wasentinelnetwork.org). Contact: [healthworkforce@wasentinelnetwork.org](mailto:healthworkforce@wasentinelnetwork.org)  
To provide information from your organization: <https://tinyurl.com/SNDataCollection>