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West Virginia Hospital Association Releases 2023 Health Care Workforce Report

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The core mission of hospitals is caring for people. To fulfill that mission, hospitals need compassionate, skilled, trained, and dedicated professionals. In West Virginia, more than 49,000 compassionate caregivers are employed by hospitals, representing the largest segment of health care in the State. In fact, new data from the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that West Virginia employs the highest percentage of individuals in health care compared to its total workforce.

Our hospital workforce is our most precious resource. That's why to gain further insight into hospital employment in West Virginia, we recently surveyed West Virginia hospitals to produce the *WVHA's 2023 Health Care Workforce Report*. This is a snapshot – *a continuous effort* – to understand the challenges and opportunities available to help hospitals think innovatively and act boldly to support, retain and recruit staff. To view the full Report visit: <http://wvha.org/>

Some key findings:

- **Multiple converging factors have created a perfect storm of conditions that has exacerbated hospital staff shortages.** Factors such as national declining college enrollment, increased burnout, an aging workforce with less people entering health care fields overall, and COVID-19, illustrate that the shortages do not show any sign of decreasing over time.
- **West Virginia hospitals spend an estimated \$97 million dollars due to Registered Nurse vacancies alone.** Nursing is the backbone of health care – this includes licensed staff- Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), but also includes unlicensed patient care techs, also called nursing aides, nursing techs and more. This group has the single highest turnover rate of 42.9%. RNs are the biggest workforce, but

the care model is shifting to a more team-based approach, meaning the demand for LPNs and other health care professionals is increasing.

- **Diagnostic imaging not only aids in medical decision-making, but also delivers lifesaving treatments.** Diagnostic imaging is often overlooked. It is its own allied health profession. Professionals run X-rays, CT scanners, MRI machines, and aid in the delivery of medications when radiation is needed. Physicians rely heavily on the results of these tests to determine the plan of care.
- **Medical laboratory professionals are critical for hospitals to deliver care. 60-70% of physician clinical decisions are based on medical laboratory test results.** Clinical decision making relies on lab work. This profession is struggling with low enrollment in classes, and a lack of visibility.
- **While nursing is a critical profession, we need to focus on supporting the entire health care workforce to protect access to high quality health care in West Virginia.** Respiratory Therapy, as one example, is a critical profession. We saw during the peak of COVID-19 how important it is to have these trained professionals for ventilators – especially in a state with high rates of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, smoking and black lung.

Increased workforce vacancies and turnover in hospitals can negatively affect quality of care, patient safety, health care spending, patient satisfaction, and employee engagement. This means that any threat to the stability of our workforce is a threat to our infrastructure. For example, West Virginia hospitals are licensed for 6,441 acute care beds, but today, can only staff approximately 4,800 beds, impacting timely access to care.

While we continue to face these challenges, we applaud the West Virginia Legislature for consistently considering the myriad of health care workforce issues into their policymaking process. We are thankful to them, and to the many stakeholders invested in the on-going effort to address current and anticipated challenges impacting the entire health care workforce.

The WVHA also thanks Governor Justice and his administration on the second investment, another \$20 million dollars, into the *Nursing Workforce Expansion Initiative*, which was originally launched in 2021 with an initial investment of \$48 million dollars. This initiative



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began to aggressively address West Virginia's nursing workforce shortage through a multi-pronged plan to attract, train and retain nurses in our state.

I have worked in the health care field for more than 25 years and have felt this to be an extraordinary privilege. There is nothing straightforward or easy about being a caregiver – whether in a hospital or other setting. The work can be exhilarating as well as exhausting. Yet it is always meaningful. Thank a member of the hospital workforce or a health care worker today.

Recruiting and retaining our hospital and health care workforce isn't exclusively a local challenge or problem with an immediate solution. Rather, the road to build the health care workforce requires continuous investments, and regular targeted and timely recalibration. It demands innovation and collaboration at all levels – local, state, and federal – with a focus on new, strategic investments to recruit and retain all West Virginia health care professionals. We are fortunate there is a great partnership between our federal policymakers, the Governor, state legislative leaders, our education community, and our hospitals as we continue to address this ongoing challenge.

The West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA) is a not-for-profit statewide organization representing hospitals and health systems across the continuum of care. Learn more: www.wvha.org.