



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD:
LEADINGAGE**

**Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)
Committee Hearing:**

**“Examining the Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do
We Go from Here?”**

February 16, 2023

We are pleased to submit this statement from LeadingAge. LeadingAge represents nearly 5,000 nonprofit, mission-driven aging services providers, including affordable senior housing, life plan communities, nursing homes, hospice, home health and home and community-based services. Alongside our members and 38 state partners, we applaud the Senate, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee for holding a hearing on February 16, 2023, titled, “Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do We Go from Here?”

Exploring the shortage of health care providers is of tremendous importance to our organization. However, workforce shortages, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted most long-term care providers. The shortage of aging services professionals at all levels in long-term care is also truly a crisis, and aging services providers across the country need immediate support to expand and enhance the workforce.

These long-standing workforce challenges are punctuated by the fact that the population of the United States is rapidly aging. In fact, 10,000 people turn 65 every day, many of whom will need professional aging services at some point in their lives. By 2034, the United States will need 3.5 million caregivers working in the field of long-term services and supports (LTSS) to keep up with the growing needs of our rapidly aging population.

While there is no single solution to address the health care workforce shortage, LeadingAge encourages the Senate HELP Committee to simultaneously consider initiatives that would help mitigate the health care workforce crisis impacting aging services providers. America’s current long-term care system needs a workforce sufficient to ensure older adults and families can access needed care and services. Solving this requires an all-of-government approach to help fund and build training programs, change policy to help build the prospective pipeline (aging population + increased demand) and, most importantly, increase reimbursement to improve wages.

What the Workforce Crisis Looks Like for LeadingAge Members

The top findings in a LeadingAge Poll, conducted in June 2022, using an opportunity sample, illustrated what the workforce crisis looked like on the ground for LeadingAge members on a variety of issues.

Staff Vacancies: Many of the Poll respondents indicated significant staff vacancies. Several respondents shared they needed to hire at least 50 percent more staff to become fully staffed. In one case, a member that has 35 full-time positions when fully staffed, currently has 20 vacancies. Another has 102 full-time positions when fully staffed and they had 49 vacancies. In many cases administrative and managerial staff were filling in to cover for staff vacancies. On-call staff are also filling positions, or existing staff work extra hours.

When we asked why staff were leaving at such high rates, three-quarters said staff were leaving for higher pay. Further, 72 percent of the respondents told us that staff were leaving because they are simply burned out. We also heard from members the pipeline is not getting stronger – CNA, home health care and nursing positions are especially difficult to fill.

Temporary Staffing Agencies: To assist with filling staff vacancies, the majority of LeadingAge members have relied more heavily on temporary or agency staff, especially since the pandemic. Fifty-seven percent of Staffing Poll respondents indicated they are filling vacant positions with temporary or agency staff. One nursing home respondent shared 75 percent of their shifts were filled with agency staff. Several respondents commented they were unable to use temporary or agency staff, because agencies did not have available staff, or providers can’t get contracts at a reasonable price. It was also noted that agency staff were also sadly not dependable; attendance issues are much more common and agency staff might not show up.

Staff Recruitment: The Poll responses reflected significant shortages for in demand workers who provide high-quality long-term services and supports (LTSS) for older adults. Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs)

were the most difficult for 52 percent of the respondents to recruit; 24 percent had difficulty attracting Registered Nurses; and 9 percent had difficulty hiring Licensed Practical Nurses.

Employee Retention: Retention was also one of the top operational challenges for LeadingAge members. When asked about the reasons staff members were leaving their organization, an overwhelming 75 percent of the responses shared “seeking better pay” as a reason. Anecdotally, many LeadingAge providers said it was hard to compete with retail and food service businesses in the area when most aging services providers are dependent on public programs and must tie wages to reimbursement.

Inability to Admit Residents and Consumers: When asked whether respondents were unable to admit residents or consumers due to staffing shortages, 42 percent indicated they are experiencing significant challenges. Additionally, 25 percent of the respondents had challenges so significant that they had to shut down units or building or neighborhoods due to staffing shortages.

Nursing Homes Facing Staffing Shortages

It is tragically unfortunate that many older adults and their families are currently facing immediate challenges accessing care and services to remain independent, safe, and healthy. Longstanding workforce shortages in the aging services sector, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, mean families’ requests for care go unfilled and countless nursing homes in communities across the country are closing their doors permanently. Data from the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) in [2021](#), determined 99 percent of U.S. nursing homes are facing staffing shortages and 96 percent of U.S. assisted living communities are facing staffing shortages. More recently, analysis prepared by LeadingAge New York, reflects nationwide there were at least 139 skilled nursing home closures in 2022.

Additional LeadingAge Member Experiences with the Workforce Crisis

During a LeadingAge Congressional Briefing held in the spring of last year, Mike King, LeadingAge Board Chair and President & CEO of Volunteers of America (VOA), Alexandria, VA, spoke about VOA’s experiences with the workforce crisis. He noted there was a 35-45 percent turnover rate within VOA facilities, and many had a 25-30 percent vacancy rate and could not accept new clients who came in.

Tom Syverson, Director of Government Relations, Good Samaritan Society / Sanford Health, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, noted during the briefing, that the workforce crisis they were experiencing could not be overstated. In fact, it was nothing like what he ever experienced in his 35-year career in post-acute services. To address this crisis, the Good Samaritan Society supported their staff by making historic investments in wages (\$15 million in 2021 and more than \$5 million in June 2022), created an online CNA training course. Additionally, Sanford Health had a goal to recruit 500 international nurses, as their hospitals also battled this healthcare staffing crisis. While their turnover rate was below the national average, but staffing challenges remained a real concern, and it was even more challenging in rural areas. In June 2022, they had more than 2,540 open positions, which meant about 1 in 4 positions were not filled. It also took on average 60 to 65 days to fill an open position.

Throughout the last two years, Sanford Health had to increase the number of agency staff across all of their locations to maintain the level of quality care their residents deserved. And, in some cases, they were paying physician wages for RNs in their buildings (instead of paying around \$40 per hour they are paid \$120 or more per hour). Additionally, in half of their 22 states where they operated, Medicaid reimbursement rates did not even cover their staffing costs and staffing accounted for only two thirds of their total costs.

Rob Lahammer, Vice President of Engagement and Advocacy, Presbyterian Homes and Services, Roseville, MN, highlighted how their turnover ran anywhere from 40-120 percent. As a result, Presbyterian Homes implemented an International Nurse Recruitment program, which has deployed over 450 people into its organization, by mostly recruiting nurses from the Philippines.

What Are the Solutions?

LeadingAge looks forward to working with the Senate HELP Committee to provide the high-quality care our nation's older adults need to live with dignity and respect. We also encourage careful consideration be given to policies that would:

1. Bolster wages for dedicated aging services professionals, to allow aging services professional to increase pay for direct care staff to at least a living wage (a wage that matches state/local living expenses and conditions).
2. Offer incentives and federal grants to expand training and advancement opportunities, specifically those that hold promise for aging services professionals career opportunities.
3. Mitigate temporary nurse staffing agencies price gouging and empower the Federal Trade Commission and state attorneys general with enforcement tools to ensure their rates are not in violation of federal antitrust or consumer protection laws.
4. Establish and retain a pipeline of foreign aging services workers, and support the enactment of a temporary guest worker program for aging services providers, and improve the process for allowing registered nurses to permanently enter the U.S.
5. Implement common sense proposals, that must be met, prior to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services mandating staffing ratios in nursing homes.
6. Enact meaningful, equitable long-term care financing.

To learn more about our association's 2023 Workforce Policy Platform, visit: <https://leadingage.org/2023-policy-platform/>.

You can also access a LeadingAge fact sheet, "Workforce Crisis: America Needs Caregiving Professionals Now" [here](#)

If you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues further, please contact Andrea Price-Carter, Director of Workforce and Technology Policy, Aprice-carter@LeadingAge.org.