



Skilled Nursing Facilities Issues in Brief

2025 Legislative Session

WASHINGTON SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES

Background

The State Legislature has worked hard to invest in critical long-term care models. However, the sunset of one-time COVID investments and a worsening workforce shortage threaten to destabilize skilled nursing facility care in communities throughout Washington. The State must take action to preserve and expand skilled nursing care for an anticipated 35% increase in adults 75 and older who will rely on long-term care supports by 2029.

2025 Legislative Priorities

In order to maintain and expand our state’s ability to care for those in need, we urge the Legislature to continue work to stabilize a sector plagued by chronic underfunding by:

Keeping up with the cost for labor, food, utilities and critical care supplies in nursing homes (HB 1555):

- Washington’s skilled nursing facilities are challenged by a Medicaid payment system that fails to recognize actual costs for care and services and instead relies on these temporary legislative “fixes” that do not address the systemic problem of chronic underfunding.
- Permanently adopting annual rebasing legislation is essential if providers are to compete for workers. Nursing facility costs for labor, food, housekeeping supplies and other essential supports are now based on costs from 2022. Deep payment shortfalls make competing for staff and providing quality care impossible.
- The legislature has recognized this problem and has provided rebases annually for the last five years, narrowing the rates funding shortfall from \$150 million to \$60 million annually.

Passing the Essential Worker Healthcare Program (SB 5344/HB 1523)

- Washington has a long-term care workforce crisis. The Essential Worker Healthcare Program will stabilize our long-term care system by providing quality, affordable healthcare to skilled nursing facility workers. There are not enough workers to meet the growing demand and the need for long-term care will only grow in the next decade.
- Workers in skilled nursing facilities do not have access to quality, affordable health care, leaving workers largely uninsured or afraid to use benefits because of costs. It is imperative to continue rebuilding a skilled nursing facility workforce decimated by the three-year public health emergency.
- The Essential Worker Healthcare Program will help stabilize the workforce, protect residents, and offer skilled nursing facility workers the healthcare they deserve.

KEY FACTS

In WA, there are **197** licensed Skilled Nursing Facility providers

Skilled Nursing provides care to **12,800 older adults** in our state.

7,800 older adults rely on **Medicaid** for their care in Skilled Nursing.

18,000 workers are employed in Skilled Nursing.

WA is **#6 in overall quality**, #7 for the number of facilities with top quality ratings and #4 in staffing levels. (1)

Medicaid costs currently **exceed state investments** by more than \$60 million per year.

A **reliance on contracted nursing** exacerbates costs, with \$115 million in costs for providing care not covered by state investment.

(1) National rankings according to the AARP 2023 Scorecard and U.S. News.

Everyone Deserves Care. Quality care relies on quality caregivers.

For additional information, please contact:

Lauri St. Ours
EVP of Government Relations, WHCA
lauristours@whca.org
360.352.3304 x104

Maddie Foutch
Director of Public Affairs, SEIU 775
madeleine.foutch@seiu775.org
206.250.2311



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“Our state should be proud of the investments that we have made to provide care for older adults. As our population ages and the need increases, we cannot take our leadership for granted. We are proud to work alongside nurses, administrators and state leaders as partners in supporting effective, inclusive and viable long-term care in our state.”
— **Carma Matti-Jackson, CEO, WHCA**

Who provides care?

Long-term care relies on the trained expertise of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants and personal care aides. In Skilled Nursing, an aging workforce is contributing to a staffing shortage (10.5% vacancy for registered nurses, 13.7% vacancy for licensed practical nurses).

A TRAINED WORKFORCE

61% of staffing in Skilled Nursing Facilities consists of **11,000 trained RNs, LPNs, and CNAs**

Skilled Nursing Facilities have had **mandatory staffing minimums** since 2016 in WA State

Washington staffing **ranks higher than the national average** on hours per resident, per day (2)

(2) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services PBJ data as reported by Itc-analytics.com

Who relies on Skilled Nursing Facilities?

Skilled Nursing Facilities provide post-surgery therapies, transportation for on-going treatments (e.g. chemotherapy, dialysis), care for intense needs related to chronic medical treatment, diet (liquid, soft, tube), complex wound care, bowel/bladder programs, oxygen therapies and condition management (e.g. cancer, kidney failure, tracheotomy). Adults in Skilled Nursing Facilities are:

- 77 years old, on average
- 59% have moderate/high cognitive impairment, 42% diagnosed with Alzheimer’s/dementia
- 32% are obese, 85% are bladder incontinent, 70% are bowel incontinent, 75% have hypertension and 28% have congestive heart failure.
- 17% are bedfast
- 7,800 residents rely on Medicaid

Workforce bottlenecks

Wages in Skilled Nursing facilities **struggle to compete with WA hospitals, clinics, physician offices and other health care employers.** The staffing shortage has led to the WA overtime average exceeding the national average.

Staffing shortages have also forced providers to rely on expensive contracted nursing services, which quickly drives up costs and doesn’t provide a long-term staffing solution. The reliance on agency staffing demonstrates skilled nursing facilities face a structural funding challenge that requires the legislature to act.

“We cannot take quality care for granted for our state’s older adults. Quality care relies on quality direct care staff. If we fail to invest in Skilled Nursing Facilities, we are failing to invest in quality and the people who proudly serve our family members in communities across our state.”
— **Sterling Harders, President, SEIU 775**

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