

HEALTH CENTER EXCELLENCE



Essential Steps & Assessment for Workforce Retention & Recruitment: A Fact Sheet

Powered by a dedicated workforce, community health centers (CHCs) offered patient-centered care to 31.5 million patients in the U.S. in 2022.¹ To better fulfill their mission, CHCs should work to develop excellence in retention and recruitment practices to develop and sustain a robust, diverse workforce. This factsheet and [accompanying brief](#) aim to provide leaders and workforce professionals with key concepts, essential steps, and visualized stages in achieving excellence in effective, inclusive workforce initiatives.

The Health Center Workforce

To help meet the needs of underserved communities, health centers and look-alikes employed a workforce of more than 284,000 healthcare professionals, administrative and support staff, and care coordination and outreach personnel across more than 15,000 service delivery sites in 2022.^{2,3} These CHCs served diverse patient populations, and HRSA has identified increasing workforce diversity as a primary strategic objective in FY24.⁴ The CHC workforce is also highly mission-driven, and in 2022, 87% of HRSA survey respondents reporting satisfaction with their job.”⁵

Ongoing Challenges

Health centers can take steps to build a stronger, more diverse CHC workforce and overcome challenges to recruitment and retention. Far more clinicians are needed to fully meet community needs,⁶ and CHCs face sharp competition in recruiting staff from other healthcare sectors offering potentially higher pay or benefits.⁷ 23% of CHC staff surveyed in 2022, for example, disagreed that their benefits and pay were adequate.⁸ Stress, burnout, and other factors also pose challenges to staff retention initiatives, which should be guided by justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.⁹

Key Facts

284,507

Total FTEs at community health centers in 2022¹⁰

**102
MILLION**

Individuals live in primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas¹¹

68%

of health centers reported losing 5-25% of their workforce in the last six months in 2022¹²

60%

of CHC leaders stated that retaining staff is the top challenge to their goals¹³

What CHCs Can Do: Achieving Excellence in Workforce Recruitment & Retention

“Most FQHCs have a recruitment and retention plan, but you have to go beyond that and plan for eventualities. You don’t just build the document and consider it done. It’s a living, breathing plan, and it’s meant to grow with your organization.”

- **SUZANNE K. SPEER, VICE PRESIDENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, ACU**

To best meet the needs of underserved communities, health centers can take integrated approaches to strengthen their workforce through a well planned, inclusive, and responsive approach to retention and recruitment. To do so, CHCs should create, implement, and update comprehensive workforce plans informed by the unique needs of their patient populations, the distinct dimensions of their institutional vision, and the lens of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

KEY APPROACH: Comprehensive Workforce Plan

Establish and follow actionable, data-driven comprehensive workforce plans informed by justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion by assessing community needs and identifying strategies to strengthen your capacity to support those needs through qualified personnel.

When possible, have these initiatives guided and regularly updated by a Chief Workforce Officer, a dedicated C-suite leader who will help shape the comprehensive workforce plan.

KEY PERSONNEL: Comprehensive Workforce Officer

KEY STEPS: Create, Implement, & Update Your Workforce Plan

- Create an institutional vision
- Assess your workforce needs
- Create a retention strategy
- Create a recruitment strategy
- Create a development strategy
- Form an action plan grounded in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Regularly update your plan

Assessing Your Health Center: Steps in the Journey to Excellence

Every health center is on its own stage of the journey to excellence in workforce recruitment and retention. The following graphic visualizes four categories of CHC advancement in this area, from beginning to leading, with added consideration given to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. What step of the journey is your health center on?



Advancing on Your Journey to Excellence: Further Resources

“Especially since COVID, many CHCs are struggling to keep up with competitors to become employers of choice. Burnout and engagement have also been concerns . . . Strategic workforce planning is crucial.”

- NATALY DIAZ, DIRECTOR OF HEALTH CENTER OPERATIONS,
CALIFORNIA PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION

KEY RESOURCE: Comprehensive Workforce Plan Template

Read the [CHC Comprehensive Workforce Plan](#) for an editable template, instructions, action plan, candidate tracking sheet, and more.

KEY PARTNER: ACU's STAR² Center

The [STAR² Center](#) provides resources, training, and technical assistance (TA) to health centers seeking support in addressing their workforce challenges.

- [Definition of a Comprehensive Workforce Plan](#): This robust, BPHC-approved definition provides health centers with details on both the process and its components.
- [Components of a Comprehensive Workforce Plan](#): This diagrammed definition showcases the elements of plans and how Health Professions Education and Trainings Plans complement them.
- [Building an Inclusive Organization Toolkit](#): This quick guide provides information and resources to support CHCs in their journey to achieve a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.

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