

# Key Messages

## Systemic Workforce Shortages Threaten Health Care for Californians

**California's health care workforce pipeline is struggling to keep pace with the growing demand for services.**

- Statewide, patients in California face a health care system without enough nurses, physicians, pharmacists, behavioral health professionals, lab scientists, home health aides, geriatric specialists, physical therapists, and imaging technologists to provide the care they need.
- A UC San Francisco [study of the state's nursing shortage](#) reports that many older RNs have left nursing and many more intend to retire or quit within the next two years, while unemployment among younger RNs has increased. As a result, it will take until 2026 to close the nursing shortage gap.
- Geographic scarcity — or maldistribution — further complicates the need for health professionals throughout the state. Hospitals and health systems, particularly in rural and low-income areas, struggle daily to ensure Californians receive the care they need and deserve.
- The shortfalls disproportionately affect those lacking health care coverage, individuals with behavioral health conditions, and communities of color.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the health care staffing shortages across the state.**

- California hospitals now face the worst staffing shortage since the beginning of the pandemic. Many health care workers have reached their breaking point and are choosing to leave hospital employment, retire early, or leave the profession altogether.
- A 2021 *Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation* survey found that nearly 30% of health care workers are considering leaving their profession altogether, and nearly 60% reported impacts to their mental health stemming from their work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic has also delayed education and training for thousands of new health care workers and slowed the already insufficient pipeline of those who would care for Californians now and into the future. Today, 33% of the state's doctors and nurses are over the age of 55, and across the country an additional 139,000 physicians are needed by 2033.

**California must close the gap between its existing health care workforce and the one that will be needed to deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century care.**

- Each year, hospitals invest hundreds of millions of dollars in training California’s next generation of health care providers, but they cannot do it alone. This vital effort requires collaboration among educators, elected leaders, and others to establish an adequate pipeline that reflects the diverse communities they serve.
- Potential solutions include regulatory changes that improve efficiency and transparency in the licensing process, address limitations on scope of practice, and enhance education and training for nurses and nurse assistants.
- Public policy should also prioritize greater funding for programs that increase the number of medical school graduates dedicated to working with underserved populations; expanding community college programs that welcome under-represented professionals into the workforce; and more training to maximize the role of nurse practitioners, behavioral health providers, and others.