

## Healthcare Workforce – Shortages and Implications for Access

Illinois is facing a growing shortage across its healthcare workforce, affecting nurses, physicians, and other critical providers. Hospitals alone support approximately 521,000 jobs and generate \$135.5 billion in economic activity, yet of Illinois' 102 counties, **89 are designated as health professional shortages areas.**

Illinois faces a significant healthcare workforce crisis, with projections showing a **shortfall of approximately 15,000 nurses** by 2026 and **6,200 physicians** by 2030, including over **1,063 primary care providers.** These gaps extend across allied health and other essential healthcare occupations.

Several factors are contributing to these workforce gaps):

- ▶ **Workplace safety:** High levels of violence against healthcare workers are driving experienced staff out of the field and discouraging new entrants. Up to **76% of healthcare workers have reported experiencing violence**, with more than 80% experience verbal violence and 33% experiencing physical violence.
- ▶ **Regulatory barriers:** Licensing processes can be lengthy and duplicative, with limited reciprocal recognition for in-demand fields such as nursing and other healthcare professions, **slowing the pipeline of qualified providers.**
- ▶ **Legal and Financial pressures:** Illinois' status as one of the most litigious states, combined with high malpractice insurance costs, affects provider recruitment and retention, particularly in high-risk service areas such as obstetrics.
- ▶ **Lack of educational opportunities:** There are only 237 residency slots in Illinois for primary care each year, **and more than 45% of those residents will leave to practice out of state.** Fewer than 8,000 nurses graduate each year, and faculty shortages at nursing schools are limiting student capacity, with budget constraints, an aging faculty, and increasing job competition from clinical sites contributing to this crisis.
- ▶ **Retirement:** An estimated **32.3% of Illinois physicians** are within retirement range right now, while **52% of the state's nurses** are over 55 and 27% are expected to retire in the next five years. One study predicted one third of the current nursing faculty workforce in baccalaureate and graduate programs were expected to retire by 2025.
- ▶ **Expiration of regulatory flexibilities:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois allowed more than 25,000 out-of-state healthcare workers to provide care in Illinois. The expiration of these measures coincided with rising demand, highlighting the potential impact of streamlined licensing and workforce mobility.

These pressures have measurable impacts on patient care. Average **emergency department wait times have increased to 175 minutes**, and essential healthcare services, especially in rural and underserved areas, have been reduced or eliminated, **limiting access to care for many Illinoisans.**