



2026 HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE SCAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The American Hospital Association 2026 Health Care Workforce Scan provides an annual snapshot of America's workforce outlook. It offers valuable insights and practical recommendations from health care experts and your peers to help your organization navigate the field's most pressing workforce-related challenges of today and tomorrow.

As hospitals and health systems face significant workforce shifts in 2026, they have the opportunity to reshape their workforce strategies. Staffing shortages and rising patient demand are pushing health care organizations to reconsider how they deliver care, develop their workforce and manage costs. Many are deploying new staffing models that incorporate more team-based care, which creates new roles that require accelerated training and redesigned education pathways. They are addressing emotional stress and turnover with welcoming cultures and employee engagement strategies better positioned to retain early-career clinicians and sustain their multigenerational workforce over the long term. Hospitals and health systems are adopting technology to ease administrative burden and better allocate staff time to direct patient care, such as pairing the expanded and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) with redesigned workflows and care models.

Top opportunities for rethinking workforce strategies

The 2026 Health Care Workforce Scan focuses on five ways hospitals and health systems are reimagining their strategies to thrive in today's environment.

1. REDESIGN STAFFING MODELS AND WORKFLOWS WITH TEAM-BASED APPROACHES

Health care leaders are devising creative strategies to address rising patient acuity and a shortage of primary care clinicians, nurses, allied health professionals and behavioral health specialists. They are moving from compartmentalized workflows to more collaborative, team-based care delivery. For short-term needs, float pools, internal agencies and predictive scheduling help to reduce overtime, turnover and incentive spending. To expand access, leaders augment care teams with advanced practice professionals and licensed practical nurses, embed behavioral health specialists into routine care and add hospital-at-home programs. Expanded training programs and community partnerships support these initiatives by creating new entry points into health care careers.

2. BUILD THE FOUNDATION FOR AI TO DELIVER VALUE

AI's value relies on thoughtful implementation. Leaders are aligning AI with redesigned workflows — demonstrated to be the strongest link to improved financial performance — to maximize AI investment benefits, including improved care coordination and efficiency.¹ They use tools like predictive analytics and virtual monitoring — backed by robust data infrastructure — to support care across the full continuum rather than isolated tasks. Governing leaders face a growing priority to ensure responsible adoption of AI, with organizations creating AI policies, training staff around ethical and safe use and disclosing AI use to patients.



3. IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING

Staff engagement is a strategic priority for hospitals and health systems as emotional stress, burnout and turnover continue to rise — particularly among newer nurses. Hospital leaders are responding by offering flexible scheduling and professional development opportunities and strengthening workplace safety. Staff retention efforts include fostering a sense of belonging and purpose, often with peer-recognition and mentorship programs. Leaders are improving staff well-being through engagement strategies such as shared governance structures and removal of stigmatizing behavioral health credentialing questions. While leaders are leveraging automation to relieve administrative burden, they're being careful to involve staff in selecting and implementing new tools, demonstrating that technology will support — not replace — team members.

4. REDEFINE WORKFORCE NEEDS

Technology advancements, staffing shortages and emerging care models are reshaping the types of roles for which leaders are hiring — and the skills those roles require. Health systems are creating new positions in digital health, virtual care, cybersecurity, AI and complex care coordination. To keep pace, many organizations are upskilling existing staff, partnering with colleges and training programs, and weighing whether to recruit from technical or clinical backgrounds.

5. SUPPORT A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Health care leaders are adapting to a four-generation workforce by rethinking staff support and training. To retain Generation Z, who cite inflexible schedules and limited growth opportunities as reasons for their high turnover, organizations offer self-scheduling, mentorship and leadership development pathways. They are also training preceptors to address generational learning styles. Hospitals and health systems partner with schools to meet staff expectations for updated training on AI and other digital tools. Leaders also tailor support to each age cohort: Younger staff value flexibility, behavioral health benefits and feedback, while baby boomers prefer formal recognition.

Use innovation to grow, retain and support our dedicated workforce

Hospitals and health systems should continually reevaluate their approaches to workforce management. Shifts in the workforce landscape demand that we act innovatively to embrace new opportunities and commit to supporting, engaging and empowering the team members who put patient needs front and center every day at every level of our organizations.

¹ Singla, Alex et al. "The State of AI: How Organizations Are Rewiring to Capture Value," McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai>