

FACT SHEET: Safe Patient Limits Increase Nurse Retention Rates and Improve Patient Outcomes



By: Jill Manzo and Frank Manzo IV | March 25, 2019

Illinois is experiencing a shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs). This shortage of RNs is caused by numerous factors, including rising demand for health care services, the labor market competitiveness of Illinois nursing jobs, and insufficient staffing levels that can exacerbate the occupational hazards of the profession and undermine the quality of patient care.

While demand for care is rising, the nursing workforce is not keeping pace.

- By 2060, the 65 years old and older population is expected to more than double.
- 89% of Illinois nurses are women and 50% are aged 55 years old and older.
- Over the next ten years, Illinois is estimated to need about 20,000 more Registered Nurses.

Occupational hazards are a barrier to retaining qualified nurses.

- Registered Nurses suffer from overexertion, sprains, cuts, psychological trauma, and other injuries.
- 90% of Illinois' nurses experienced workplace violence or sexual harassment in the past 12 months.
- Illinois has the 2nd-highest injury rate for nurses in the Midwest.
- 30%-50% of all new RNs decide to either change positions or leave nursing completely within the first 3 years of clinical practice.

Registered Nurses are highly educated but relatively underpaid in Illinois.

- In Illinois, 67% of full-time RNs have at least a bachelor's degree.
- Illinois' RNs earn 6%-10% less than their counterparts in other states, relative to their high levels of educational attainment.
- Average pay for full-time RNs in Illinois ranks 22nd in the nation— trailing states with lower costs of living like Minnesota, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Texas.

Safe patient limits promote better outcomes for patients, workers, and health care facilities.

- 75% of Registered Nurses report that understaffing affects the quality of their care.
- A comparison between Illinois and eight neighboring Midwest states reveals that as nurse staffing levels increase, injury rates for nurses fall.
- Patient mortality rates are 17% lower in hospitals with above-average nurse staffing levels.
- Some Illinois nurses report to having as many as 15 patients at one time.
- California has safe patient limits: at least one nurse for every 2 patients in intensive care units, 3 patients in labor and delivery, 4 patients in pediatrics, and 5 patients in medical-surgical units.
- After California implemented safe patient limits for nurses, the likelihood of in-patient death, the time spent in intensive care units, and hospital readmission rates all fell.
- Research has found that by improving patient outcomes, reducing injuries, and decreasing employee turnover costs, safe patient limits produce financial savings for hospitals.

To improve patient outcomes, Illinois needs to attract and retain more Registered Nurses. Illinois nurses suffer from overexertion, cuts, workplace violence, sexual harassment, and other risks. The way to retain these professional workers is to pay them competitive salaries and promote staffing standards, through safe patient limits, to reduce occupational hazards for nurses while improving patient outcomes and saving lives.

ILLINOIS NURSING SHORTAGE

1 in 3
nurses change
jobs after 3 years



Half of nurses are
55+
years or older



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ILLINOIS NURSING SHORTAGE

2nd highest
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ILLINOIS NURSING SHORTAGE

Mortality rates are
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