

Managing Healthcare Staffing Shortages during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Staff shortages are a primary challenge when managing patient surges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff may become ill, family concerns may decrease ability of staff to work extra hours, and school closures may inhibit staff from performing normal duties.

The steps below assist workforce decision-makers in optimizing healthcare workforce assets, assessing ongoing staffing needs, and identifying resources to meet these needs.

For more detailed information on managing staffing shortages download Strategies for Managing a Surge in Healthcare Provider Demand (<https://files.asprtracie.hhs.gov/documents/healthcare-workforce-strategies-for-managing-a-surge-in-healthcare-provider-demand.pdf>) on ASPR TRACIE.

STEP 1

Implement Policies and Practices to Maximize Existing Workforce

Examples include:

- Review published strategies to maximize the existing healthcare workforce from [CDC](#), [National Academy of Medicine*](#), and the [COVID-19 Healthcare Resilience Working Group](#).
- Consider practices to optimize clinical staff capacity.
- Consider policies to increase staff ability and availability including access to [self-care resources](#).
- Provide staff with [PPE](#) to mitigate staff loss due to COVID-19 exposure.

STEP 2

Quantifying Future Healthcare Workforce Needs

Examples include:

- Project healthcare workforce needs by cadre, type, and skill level through workforce staffing calculators.
- Reassess as the situation evolves by ongoing monitoring.

STEP 3

Supplement Healthcare Workforce Staff

Examples include:

Local-Level Resources

- Hire staff through staffing agencies, the public workforce system including [American Job Centers](#), and vocational rehabilitation agencies.
- Develop a staff sharing plan.
- Consider hiring furloughed or underutilized staff.

State-Level Resources

- Request a [temporary reassignment](#) of personnel.
- Leverage Reservists and National Guard.
- [Request assistance through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact \(EMAC\)](#).

Volunteer Resources

- [Leverage state-registered healthcare provider volunteers](#).
- Identify [Medical Reserve Corps \(MRC\)](#) units
- [Coordinate with the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(VOAD\)*](#).

Federal Government Resources

- Be prepared to provide specific information on the staffing need, such as data describing the status of existing workforce resources.
- Use emergency management (ESF-8) mechanisms to submit a request.
- ASPR Regional Emergency Coordinators (RECs) and Administrators (RAs) work with the requestor to identify support needed.

Note: Federal resources should be requested only when other options are not available, as they are limited in availability, short-term, and may complicate billing and reimbursement for local health systems.

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