

Survey: Personnel Shortages Cited Above Financial Challenges by CEOs as Top Issue Confronting Hospitals in 2021

CHICAGO, February 4, 2022—Personnel shortages ranked No. 1 on the list of hospital CEOs’ top concerns in 2021, according to the American College of Healthcare Executives’ annual survey of top issues confronting hospitals. Financial challenges, which had led the rankings since 2004, was listed second. Patient safety and quality ranked third.

“This is the first time since 2004 that financial challenges has moved from the most significant challenge to the second position. Both long- and short-term solutions are needed to address the shortages in critical front-line staff shown in our study to ensure hospitals have workforces that can meet the demands for safe, high-quality care both today and in the future,” says Deborah J. Bowen, FACHE, CAE, president and CEO of ACHE. “Longer term solutions include increasing the pipeline of staff to these positions, as well as organization-level efforts to increase staff retention. More immediate solutions include supporting and developing all staff, building staff resilience and exploring alternative models of care.

In the survey, ACHE asked respondents to rank 11 issues affecting their hospitals in order of how pressing they are and to identify specific areas of concern within each of those issues. Following are some key results from the survey, which was sent to 1,327 community hospital CEOs who are ACHE members, of whom 310, or 23%, responded. The issues cited by survey respondents are those of immediate concern and do not necessarily reflect ongoing hospital priorities.

Issue	2021	2019	2018
Personnel shortages (all types, including physicians)	1.6	4.6	5.2
Financial challenges	4.1	2.7	2.8
Patient safety and quality	5.0	5.3	5.1
Behavioral health/addiction issues	5.4	5.0	5.3
Governmental mandates	5.4	5.2	5.1
Access to care	5.7	5.9	6.2
Patient satisfaction	6.1	6.3	6.1
Physician-hospital relations	7.8	7.1	6.6
Technology	8.1	7.7	7.7
Population health management	8.4	8.1	8.1
Reorganization (e.g., mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, partnerships)	9.4	8.7	8.3
The average rank given to each issue was used to place the issue in order of how pressing they are to hospital CEOs, with the lowest numbers indicating the highest concerns. The survey was confined to CEOs of community hospitals (nonfederal, short-term, nonspecialty hospitals).			

Within each of these 11 issues, respondents identified specific concerns facing their hospitals. Following are those concerns in order of mention for the top three issues identified in the survey. (Respondents could check as many as desired.)

Personnel shortages (n=310)	
Registered nurses	94%
Technicians (e.g., medical technicians, lab technicians)	85%
Therapists (e.g., physical therapists, respiratory therapists)	67%
Primary care physicians	45%
Physician specialists	43%
Physician extenders and specially certified nurses (physician assistants, nurse practitioners, certified nurse midwives, etc.)	31%
Other	N = 52

Financial Challenges (n=310)	
Increasing costs for staff, supplies, etc.	87%
Reducing operating costs	53%
Medicaid reimbursement (including adequacy and timeliness of payment, etc.)	52%
Managed care and other commercial insurance payments	44%
Bad debt (including uncollectable Emergency Department and other charges)	39%
Competition from other providers (of any type—inpatient, outpatient, ambulatory care, diagnostic, retail, etc.)	39%
Government funding cuts (other than reduced reimbursement for Medicaid or Medicare)	39%
Medicare reimbursement (including adequacy and timeliness of payment, etc.)	39%
Transition from volume to value	39%
Inadequate funding for capital improvements	35%
Revenue cycle management (converting charges to cash)	32%
Pricing and price transparency	27%
Emergency Department overuse	26%
Moving away from fee-for-service	25%
Other	N = 11

Patient safety and quality (n=310)	
High price/insufficient reimbursement for medications	45%
Engaging physicians in improving the culture of quality/safety	44%
Redesigning care processes	44%
Public reporting of outcomes data (including being transparent, fairness of measures, reporting burden)	39%
Patient engagement in treatment	39%
Engaging physicians in reducing clinically unnecessary tests and procedures	37%
Redesigning work environment to reduce errors	33%
Compliance with accrediting organizations (e.g., Joint Commission, NCQA)	32%
Leapfrog demands (i.e., computerized physician order entry, ICU staffing by trained intensivists and evidence-based hospital referral—moving patients to facilities that perform numerous surgeries or treat high-risk neonatal conditions)	28%
Pay for performance	27%
Medication errors	15%
Lack of availability of medications	14%
Other	N = 13

About the American College of Healthcare Executives

The American College of Healthcare Executives is an international professional society of more than 48,000 healthcare executives who lead hospitals, healthcare systems and other healthcare organizations. ACHE’s mission is to advance our members and healthcare leadership excellence. ACHE offers its prestigious FACHE® credential, signifying board certification in healthcare management. ACHE's established network of 77 chapters provides access to networking, education and career development at the local level. In addition, ACHE is known for its magazine, *Healthcare Executive*, and its career development and public policy programs. Through such efforts, ACHE works toward its vision of being the preeminent professional society for leaders dedicated to advancing health. The Foundation of the American College of Healthcare Executives was established to further advance healthcare management excellence through education and research. **The Foundation of ACHE** is known for its educational programs—including the annual Congress on Healthcare Leadership, which draws more than 4,000 participants—and groundbreaking research. Its publishing division, Health Administration Press, is one of the largest publishers of books and journals on health services management including textbooks for college and university courses.

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