

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on California's Registered Nurse Workforce: Preliminary Data

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August 2021

Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous concerns about the nursing workforce have been reported. This study used data from two surveys conducted in California to assess the current and future supply and demand of RNs and to learn how the coronavirus pandemic is affecting this essential workforce.

Data

Preliminary data from the 2020 Survey of California Registered Nurses and final data from the 2019-20 Annual Schools Survey were analyzed.

Methods

We calculated employment rates and other descriptive characteristics to produce a preliminary update to the forecasts of RN supply and demand in California. The supply projections are based on a stock-and-flow model and the demand projections are based on historic RN employment and rates of hospital utilization by population age group.

Results

The preliminary data from the 2020 Survey of Registered Nurses indicate that many older RNs have left nursing, and a large number intend to retire or quit within the next two years. At the same time, unemployment among younger RNs increased and there were (small) decreases in new enrollments in RN education programs during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Together, these changes have led to a reduction in the supply of RNs compared with previous projections. A shortage of RNs is estimated to exist in 2021. RN education enrollments are projected to surpass pre-pandemic levels during the 2022-23 academic year, which will lead to a closing of the shortage by 2026.

Conclusions

With a shortage of RNs likely underway now, employers need to redouble their efforts to retain RNs and develop career paths for newly-graduated RNs. They also need to rapidly develop and implement strategies to mitigate the potential harm of shortages over the next five years.

Key Words: registered nurses, COVID-19, nurse shortage

Full Article: <https://healthworkforce.ucsf.edu/publication/impact-covid-19-pandemic-california's-registered-nurse-workforce-preliminary-data>