

NEW PATHWAYS, HIGHER SALARIES BRING NURSES BACK

Hospital turnover rates drop and retention rises, but ‘there’s still going to be a problem’ as nurses and patients age

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Caregiver staffing shortages are the norm in health care. So it seemed surprising in June when Providence, the largest health care provider in Washington, announced it was eliminating dozens of certified nursing assistant (CNA) roles at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett (PRMCE).

The layoffs reflect changes that have happened in nursing since the pandemic waned in 2023, Renee Rassilyer-Bomers, chief nursing officer for the hospital system’s north division, told the Business Journal.

“During the pandemic we didn’t have experienced nurses in high availability, so we increased CNA staffing purposefully in order to assist our nurses to help them take care of patients with volume increase,” Rassilyer-Bomers said.

Since then, PRMCE has filled 500 registered nurse positions, and the CNA layoffs are a way to “rightsize” the mix, she said.

Load balancing caregiving staff is the new normal for Rassilyer-Bomers, a stark contrast to the worst month of the pandemic, September 2022, when one in four bedside nurses left Providence Swedish. That forced the system to use agency, or travel, nurses and overtime to fill the gap.

Now, staff nurses are back, allow-

ing hospitals to send travel nurses packing. In September 2025, Providence Swedish’s bedside nursing turnover dropped to 14%, less than the national average, according to a nationwide survey by nurse recruiting firm NSI.

“Improvement in that retention is what enables us to fiscally support the mission,” Rassilyer-Bomers said.

Fiscal support – perhaps even constraint – is a necessity for health care systems in Washington. In 2024 statewide hospital operations shortfalls were nearly \$400 million, according to the Washington State Hospital Association. That’s a huge improvement over 2022 when shortfalls were more than \$2 billion.

June Altaras, outgoing executive vice president chief nursing officer at Tacoma-based MultiCare Health Systems, touts a nurse turnover rate of 8.8%. She said the best way to keep it in the single digits is to create environments where nurses don’t want to leave.

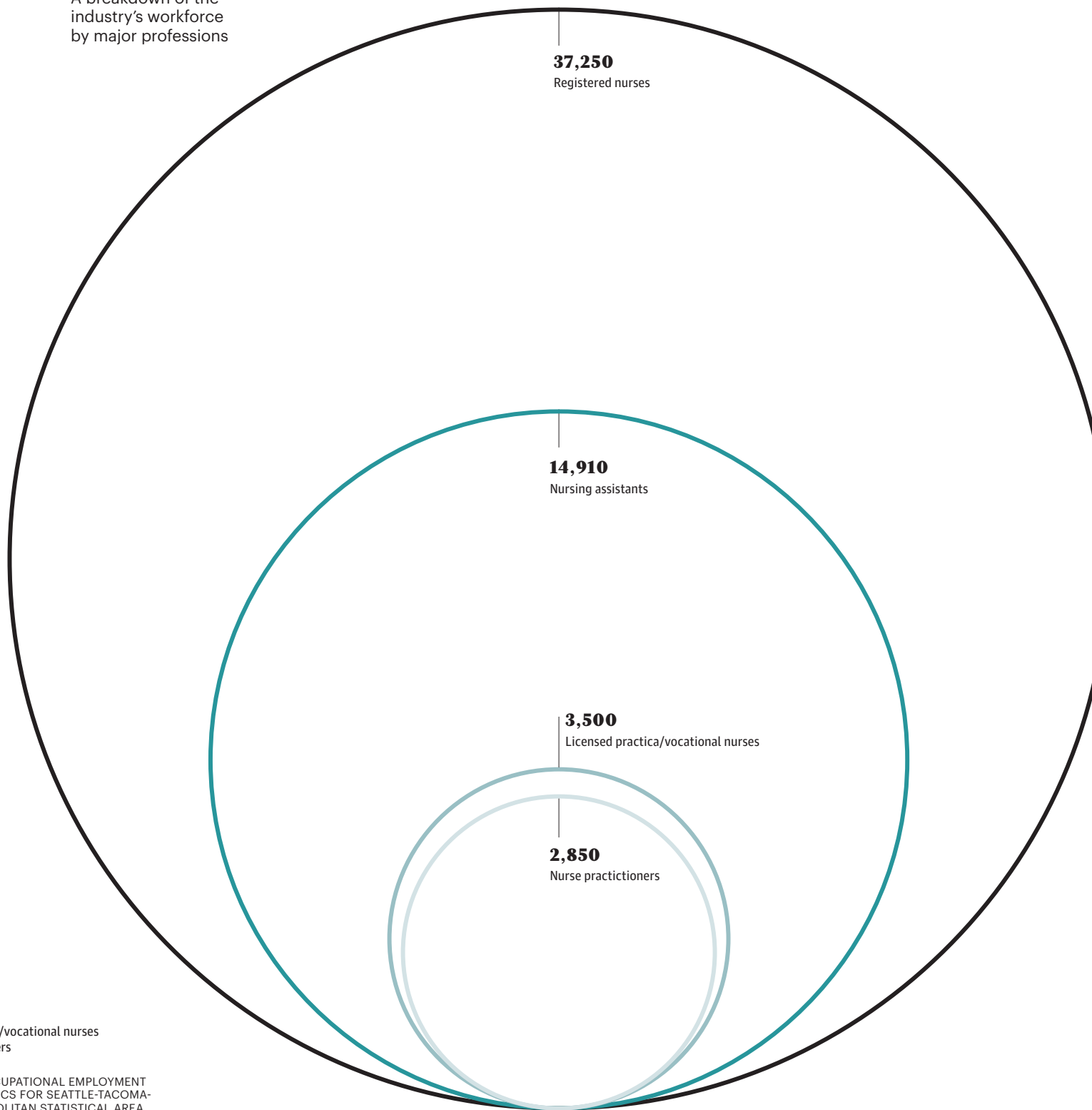
The hospital system, Altaras said, seeks to “create environments where they believe their professional career will be developed, that they are in environments of psychological safety that contribute to their resilience, and they’re also in environments that create structural empowerment so nurses can own their practice and have agency and autonomy.”



Renee Rassilyer-Bomers, chief nursing officer at Providence Swedish north Division

WASHINGTON’S NURSING WORKFORCE

Nursing by type
A breakdown of the industry’s workforce by major professions



- Registered nurses
- Nursing assistants
- Licensed practical/vocational nurses
- Nurse practitioners

SOURCE: 2025 OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT AND WAGE STATISTICS FOR SEATTLE-TACOMA-BELLEVUE METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS



June Altaras retired Oct. 31 as chief nursing officer at Tacoma-based MultiCare Health System.

She said MultiCare committed to doubling the number of registered nurse (RN) graduates they brought into the organization and, more important, have a yearlong transition-to-practice program.

“That’s the No. 1 reason nurses leave their first job; they don’t feel they were transitioned,” she said. “I still remember driving to work at night, saying, ‘Oh please don’t let me hurt a patient tonight.’ It’s a lot.”

Pay is another retention driver. In the greater Seattle area RNs broke the \$100,000 annual salary barrier in 2023. The average annual salary for RNs in 2025 is estimated to be more than \$123,000, a 25% increase over the pre-pandemic average.

Like MultiCare, Providence Swedish also has a residency program for new nurses. Both also offer fellowship programs to experienced nurses who want to advance their expertise.

“When I entered nursing 23 years ago it was difficult to get into specialty areas,” Rassilyer-Bomers said, adding that “today’s nurses don’t want to stay in the same place. Now we’re opening up pathways for nurses to try something new, whether they’re burnt out or want to try to, say, become a labor and delivery nurse.”

Still, making the day-to-day work less of a grind is critical, MultiCare’s Altaras said. She thinks technology might reduce job “administrivia.”

“We’ve overburdened them with documentation. I’m very excited about the potential of AI to decrease that burden. Our nurses, quite frankly, spend a third of their 12-hour shift in documenting. That’s not what nurses thought they were going to do,” she said.

While the pandemic staffing crisis

Where nurses work

Top five places caregivers work statewide:

● Nurse practitioners	
Hospital inpatient department	13.20%
Other	11.43%
Private practice clinic	10.49%
Community health center	7.49%
NP-owned private clinic	7.45%

● Registered nurses	
Hospital inpatient department	35.94%
Other	7.29%
Hospital emergency department	6.45%
Hospital – other	4.70%
Hospital outpatient clinic	4.41%

● Licensed practical/vocational nurses	
Skilled nursing facility/home	20.32%
Other	9.89%
Rehabilitation/long-term care	8.07%
Other inpatient setting	6.90%
Home healthy/day care	6.37%

is in the rear-view mirror, the nursing shortage is not over. By 2030, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing expects the largest ever cohort of nurses – baby boomers – to retire. Altaras herself officially retired from MultiCare Oct 31.

By the mid-2030s, boomers in their 80s will be hitting hospitals hard, she said, “so, there’s still going to be a problem.”

“We have to be innovative, we have to think differently in how we work with patients and with our caregivers,” Rassilyer-Bomers said. “Health care is a human enterprise.”

Nursing wage trends

Estimates for annual average salaries for the greater Seattle area, 2020-2025:

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
● Nurse practitioners	\$148,807	\$156,250	\$139,900	\$137,830	\$131,577	\$127,405
● Registered nurses	\$123,528	\$119,833	\$105,540	\$99,310	\$97,050	\$92,676
● Licensed practical/vocational nurses	\$85,215	\$81,637	\$73,510	\$66,380	\$62,513	\$61,655
● Nursing assistants	\$53,993	\$50,415	\$44,520	\$40,590	\$39,219	\$36,166