Introduction

Staffing levels in California’s nursing homes are a key indicator of the quality of care. A study from the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) found that homes with low staff levels have an increased probability of causing serious harm to residents. In 1999, the state passed a law increasing minimum staffing level from 3.0 to 3.2 hours per resident day.

Since that time the percentage of nursing homes not meeting the new standard fell from 41 to 24 percent. Among other findings in this snapshot:

- Seventy-nine percent of hospital-based facilities and 21 percent of free-standing facilities meet the 1999 standards.
- Homes with more staff have higher staff satisfaction rates, significantly less turnover, and fewer documented deficiencies in care.
- Nearly half of resident complaints center on poor food and more than 38 percent of complaints concern quality of care.

Although there have been improvements in increasing staffing levels for California’s nursing homes, this snapshot illustrates that levels are still not at the recommended level for providing high quality care to nursing home residents across the state.
Number of Fulltime Nursing Staff in Hospitals and Nursing Homes, 2000 vs. 2003

Of the almost 200,000 nursing staff working in California in 2003, about a third worked in nursing facilities and a majority of those were nursing assistants.
Nurse Staffing Hours, 2000–2003

Average Hours per Resident Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4.06</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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Higher levels of nurse staffing are related to better quality of care. Since legislation was passed for a minimum of 3.2 hours per resident day in California in 1999, average nurse staffing hours for residents in nursing homes have increased.

Nurse Staffing Levels, 2001 vs. 2003

Between 2001 and 2003, the number of homes that failed to meet state-mandated staffing standards fell 58 percent. Still, nearly one in four homes did not meet the standard in 2003.

Nursing Hours by Ownership Type, 2003

In 2003, 11 percent of nursing hours in for profits were provided by RNs while 26 percent of nursing hours were by RNs in nonprofit facilities.

Facilities that Meet Staffing Goals by Ownership Type, 2000–2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Profit</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
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Most (93 percent) nonprofit nursing homes meet the minimum state staffing standard (3.2 hours per resident day); staffing levels have increased over this four-year period.
Studies have shown that a staffing goal between 4.1 and 4.5 hours per resident day, depending on the needs of the residents in a facility, provides the most appropriate level of care. Most nursing homes that meet this staffing goal are hospital-based or nonprofits.

Nursing homes that met the recommended goal (4.1 to 4.5 hours per resident day) had more than one-third fewer deficiencies than those that met the state minimum staffing standard (3.2 hours per resident day).

Almost half of surveyed nursing facilities reported food-related deficiencies; more than a third reported deficiencies that were quality of care-related.
The number of total complaints and quality of care complaints is higher at nursing homes that meet the minimum state staffing requirement (3.2 hours per resident day) than those that meet the recommended goal (4.1 to 4.5 hours per resident day).

Staff Turnover and Satisfaction in Nursing Facilities, National, 2003

Share of Very Satisfied Staff in a Facility with...

- **Very Few Satisfied Staff**
  - 8% Satisfied Staff
  - 79% Turnover Rate

- **Fair Number of Satisfied Staff**
  - 18% Satisfied Staff
  - 66% Turnover Rate

- **High Number of Satisfied Staff**
  - 36% Satisfied Staff
  - 58% Turnover Rate

Nursing facilities with higher percentages of satisfied staff have lower turnover rates.

Freestanding Nursing Home (FNH) Turnover Rates, 2000–2003

Turnover rates for nursing staff in freestanding nursing homes decreased by 19 percent from 2000 to 2003.

The turnover rate for nursing homes that met the recommended nurse staffing goal of 4.1 to 4.5 hours per resident day was significantly lower than for nursing homes that did not meet the goal.

In 2003, nursing homes with the highest turnover rates received a higher number of deficiencies than those nursing homes with average or low turnover rates.

Nonprofit nursing facilities have lower turnover rates and fewer deficiencies than for-profit facilities.
Wages in Freestanding Facilities by Nursing Turnover Rates, 2003

Wages for nursing assistants and licensed nurses were significantly lower in nursing homes with high turnover rates than in nursing homes with low turnover rates. Low wages is one of the primary reasons for high turnover rates among nursing staff.

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