



A Comprehensive Snapshot of Nursing Home Staffing in Florida

Overview of Staffing Change

In the 18 months between April 2021 and October 2022, direct care staffing declined across Florida's more than 700 nursing homes. The number of nursing staff members providing direct care dropped from an average of more than 3.9 hours per resident per day, well above the state's minimum requirement, to 3.6. This change translates to an average difference of roughly 30 fewer hours of nursing care per day in a nursing home with 100 residents.

Background

Multiple factors play into this decline, including the workforce shortage that has plagued many sectors of the economy. Florida lawmakers took steps to ease the challenge for nursing homes during the spring legislative session of 2022 by passing a significant change in minimum staffing requirements. Prior to 2022, nursing homes were required to provide each resident with 3.6 hours of nursing care per day, as averaged over a week. This was to include at least 2.5 hours of care from a certified nurse assistant (CNA) and at least 1 hour of care from either a registered nurse (RN) or licensed practical nurse (LPN).

Legislation signed into law in April 2022 reduced the CNA requirement to 2.0 hours per resident per day and named a new category of non-nursing direct care staff to fulfill part of the overall 3.6 requirement. This new category of direct care workers includes a range of personnel, from physical therapists to feeding assistants.

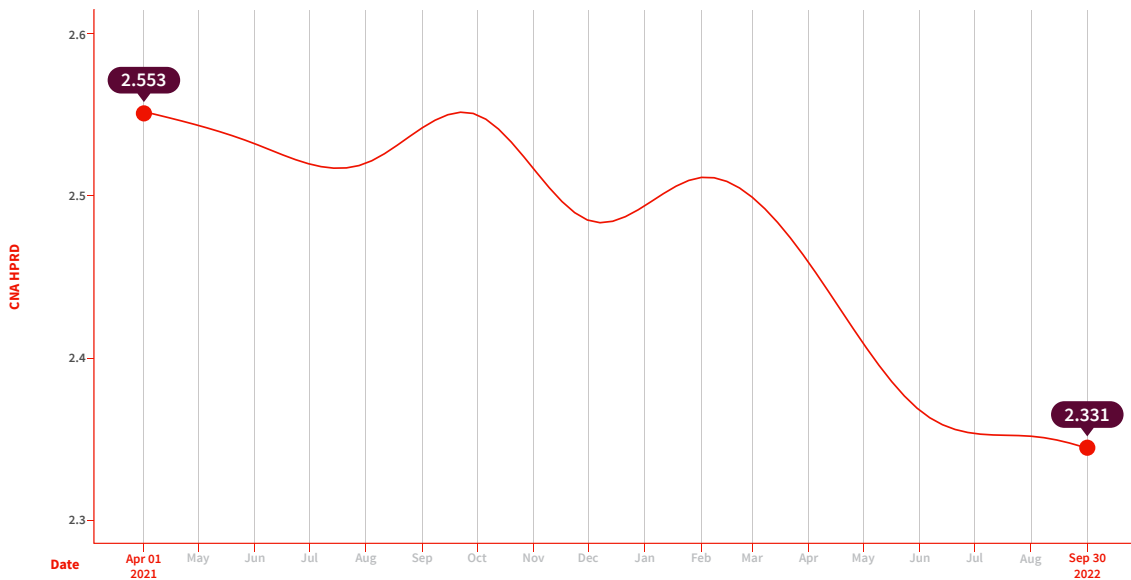
Data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reveal how staffing changed before and after the 2022 legislation – starting in April 2021, one year before the legislation was signed into law and ending in October 2022, the most recent date that data were available.

The data shown were collected from the CMS records of payroll-based staffing reported by each nursing home in Florida.



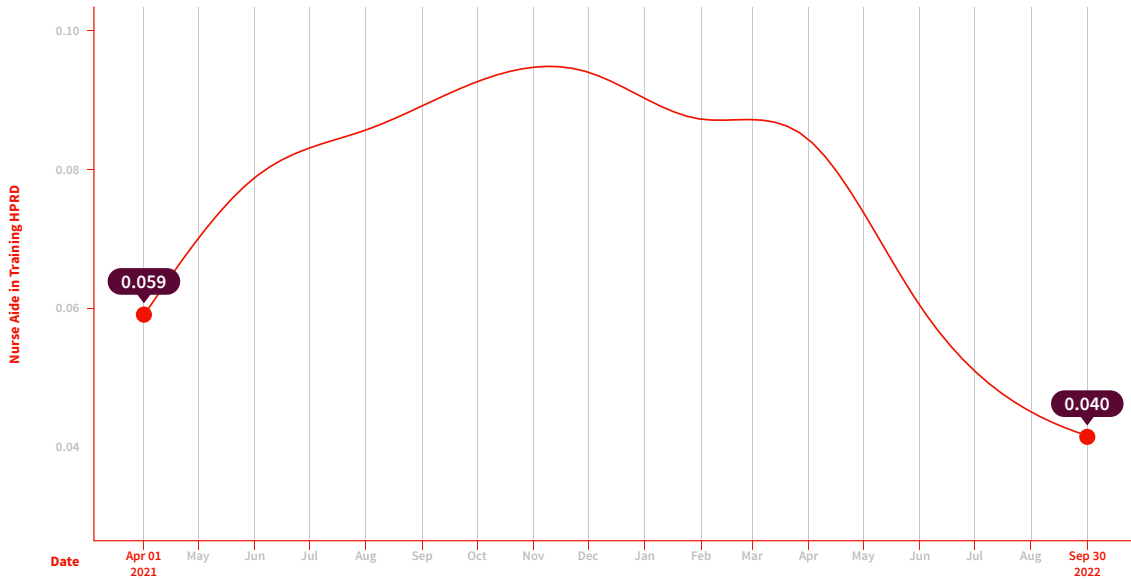
CNA Staffing

Our data show that numbers of CNAs, who represent the greatest share of nursing home nursing staff, declined the most, from an average of 2.55 hours per resident per day to 2.33, lower but above the current minimum requirement of 2.0 hours. This decrease translates to nearly 22 fewer hours of care per day on average in a nursing home with 100 residents. Over a week's time in a nursing home with 100 residents, this would amount to a total of 154 fewer hours of CNA hands-on care, or nearly 4 full-time CNAs on 40-hour/week shifts. The decline became most pronounced after the new staffing legislation became law. It is not clear what is behind the drop in CNA staffing. Causes range from these legislative changes to widespread post-pandemic burnout and economic shifts.



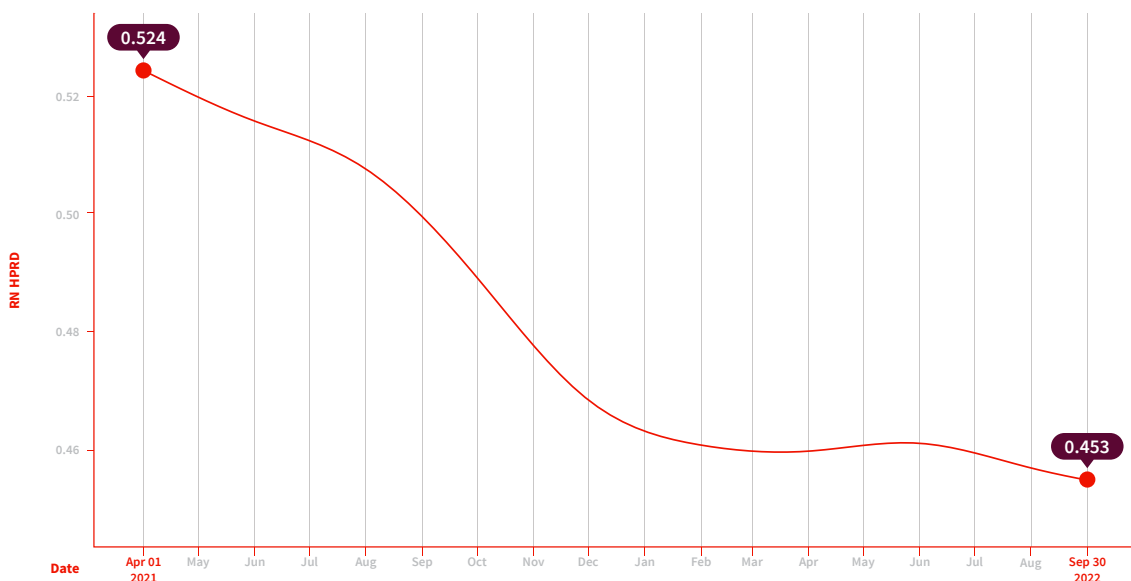
PCA Staffing

Some staffing support also came from personal care attendants (PCAs) after lawmakers approved a measure in April 2021 that allowed PCAs in a state-regulated training program to be counted as CNAs for the purposes of meeting state minimum staffing requirements. Starting at nearly .06 hours per resident per day, PCA numbers grew to nearly .1 – about 6 minutes per day – in November 2021, but dropped to less than half of that amount as of October 2022.

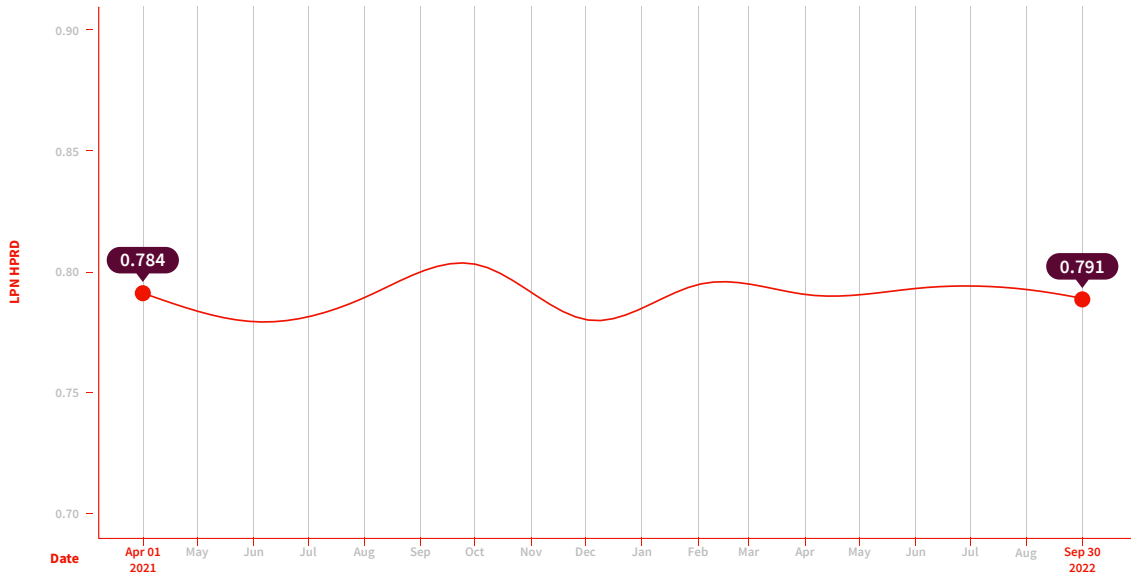


Licensed Nurse Staffing

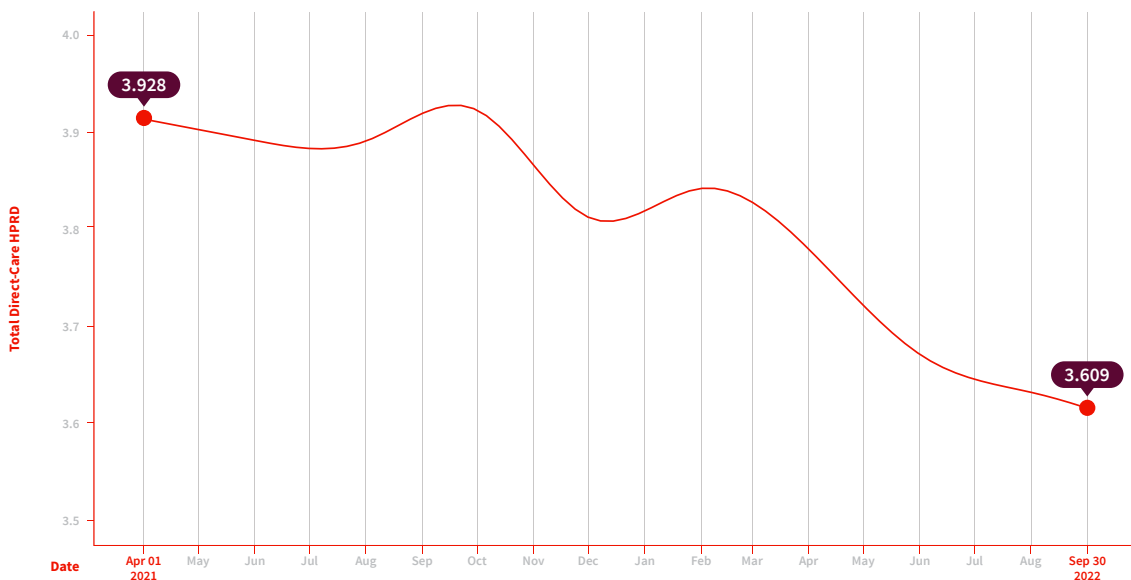
Registered nurses (RNs), who provide needed expertise and skill, experienced declining hours from nearly .53 hours in April 2021 to .45 hours per resident per day in October 2022. This translates to a reduction of nearly 5 minutes per resident per day. In terms of a nursing home with 100 residents, it means the equivalent decline in hours of one fewer RN (working an 8-hour shift) every day.



Licensed practical nurse (LPN) staffing remained largely flat, holding at just under 1 hour per resident per day in the 18 months after April 2021.



Overall, licensed nurses (RNs and LPNs) provided 1.31 hours of care per resident per day in April 2021 and 1.22 hours in October 2022, a difference of a little more than 5 minutes of less care per resident per day. The RN and LPN numbers combined show a shift in the expertise of the licensed nursing staff provided in Florida nursing homes. RNs made up 40% of the licensed care hours in April 2021 and only 37% in October 2022. Previous work has also shown that nursing homes that rely on LPNs rather than RNs (called a lower “skill mix” for licensed staff) have a variety of worse resident health outcomes.

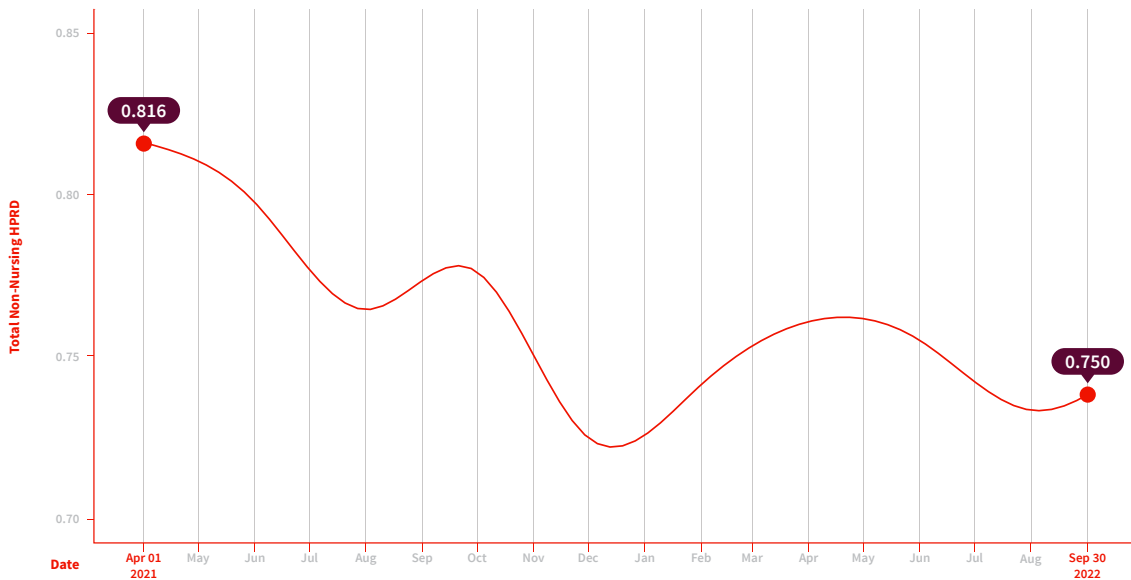


Non-nurse Direct Care Staffing Background

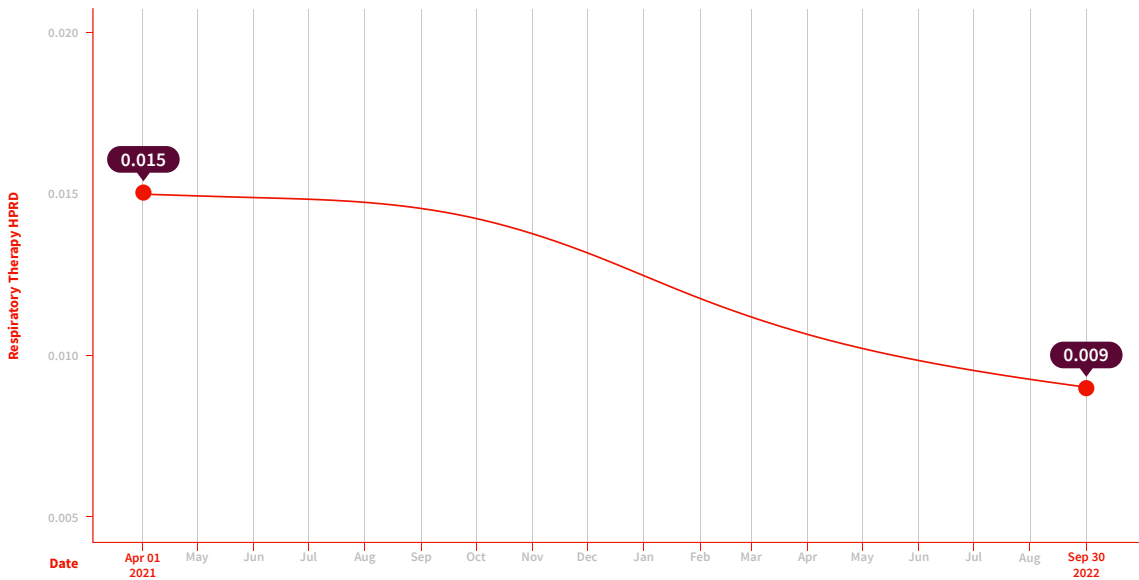
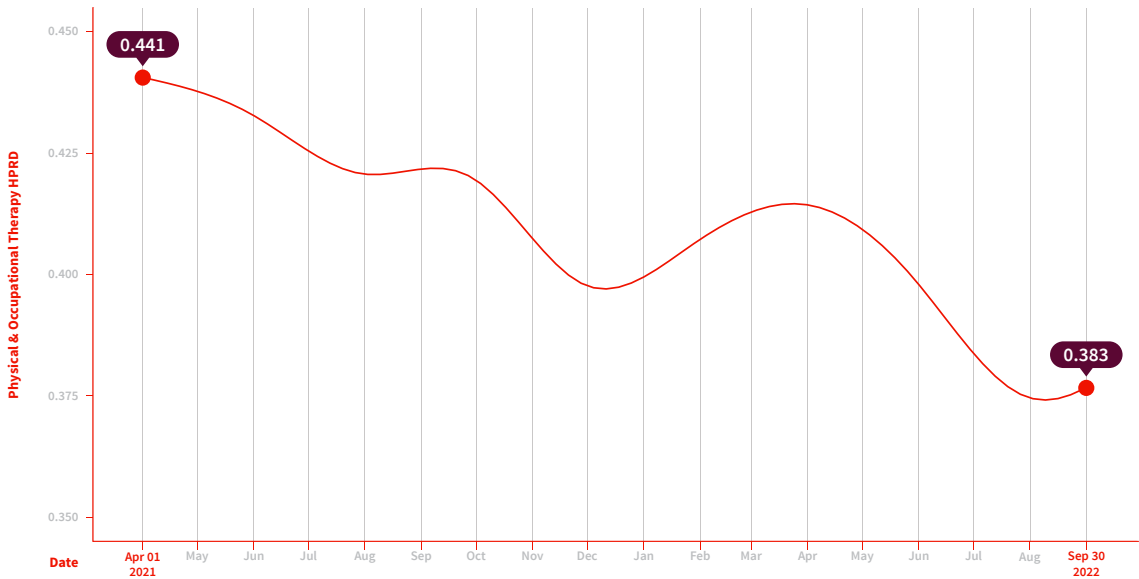
In addition to the CNA staffing change, lawmakers last year redefined what constituted a direct care worker. Previously it had included only nursing personnel, but as of April 2022 it includes other staff who play a direct role in resident care, such as physical and occupational therapists and therapy assistants, speech-language pathologists, social service and mental health personnel, activities directors and assistants, and dietitians and feeding assistants. This change releases nursing homes from the requirement to provide 3.6 hours of *nursing care* per resident per day, because a portion of that requirement can now be fulfilled by non-nursing staff members.

Non-nurse Direct Care Staffing

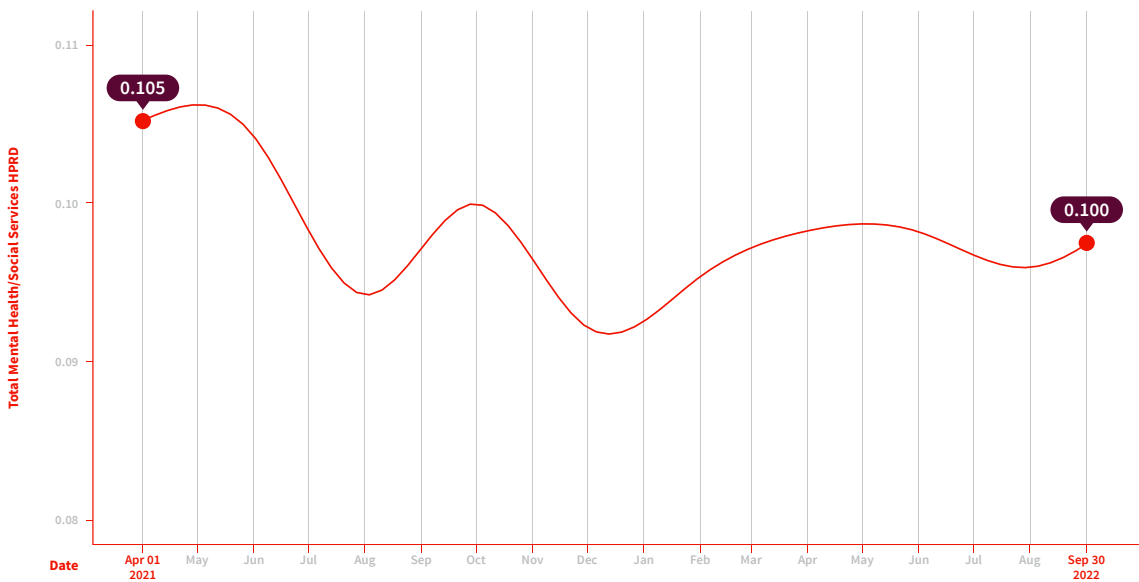
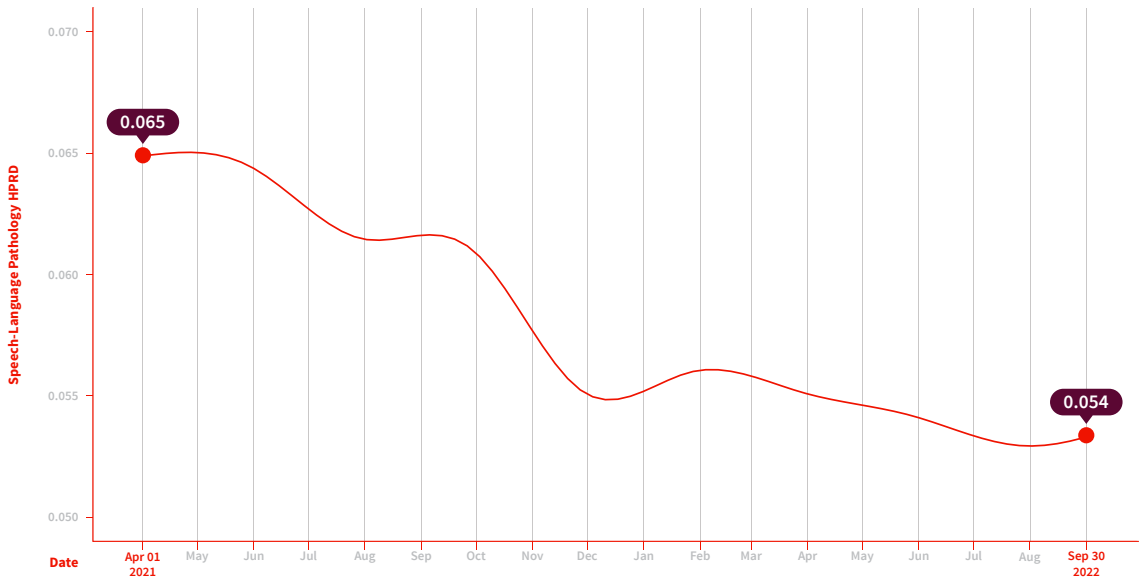
From April 2021 to October 2022, the total number of people in these non-nursing positions decreased from .82 per resident per day to .75, about 4 minutes per resident per day.



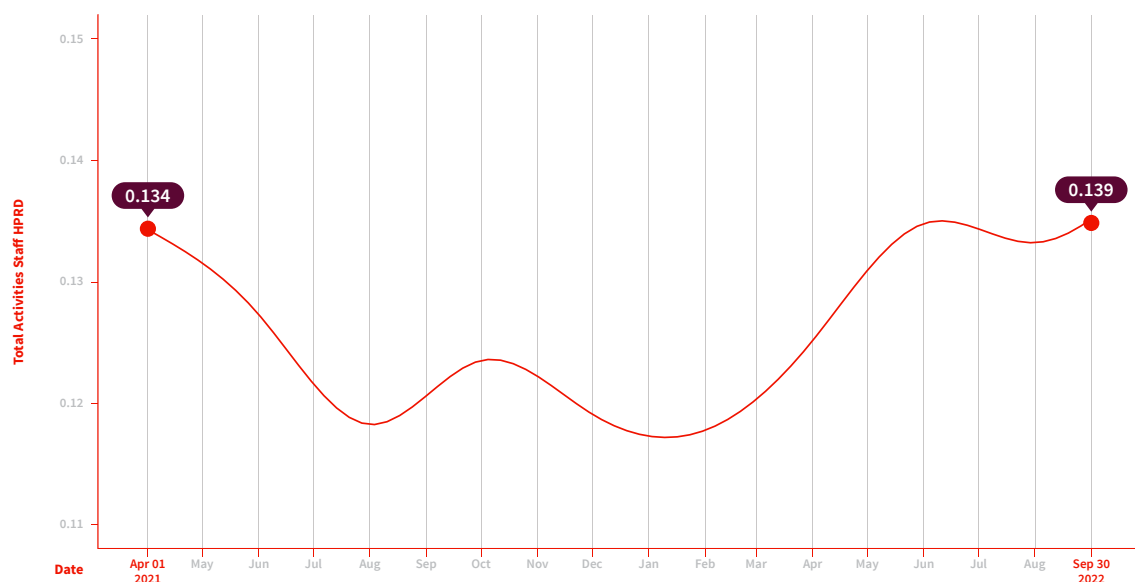
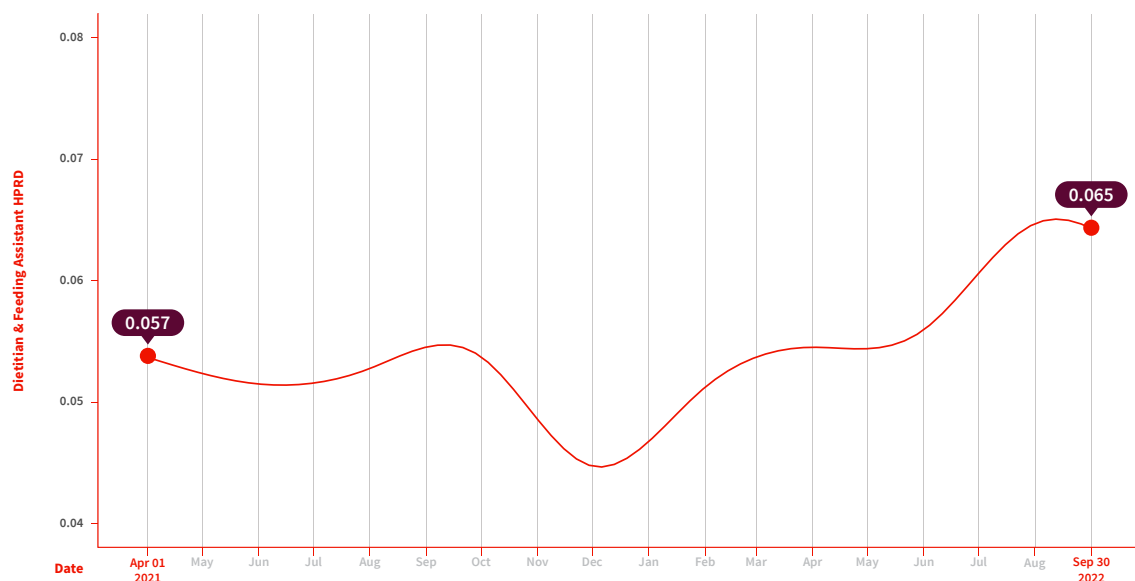
Of the categories, physical and occupational therapy hours decreased the most, wavering from about .44 hours of care per resident per day in April 2021 to .38 in October 2022 – from 26 minutes per resident per day to less than 23 minutes.



Speech and language pathologists and social services and mental health staffing also wavered during the 18-month study period, declining slightly.



Only two categories of staff increased – activities and dietary/feeding, both up by less than a minute per resident per day.



Perspective/Context

Overall, the data for October 2022 show that while nurse staffing declined in the 18-month study period, the late 2022 levels would meet Florida's pre-April 2022 requirement to provide 3.6 hours of nursing care to each resident per day. It is worth noting, however, that the numbers represent a statewide average, suggesting that some nursing homes were above this minimum requirement, and some were below. Also, these lower levels are a departure from the past when average staffing statewide well exceeded the state's minimum requirement.

- In April of 2021, combined nurse and non-nurse direct care staff members provided 4.74 hours of care per resident per day.
- By April of 2022, when Florida enacted the new staffing standards, the hours had declined to 4.55.
- By October 2022, they had dropped by 8% to 4.36 hours per resident per day.

Summary/Final thoughts

Overall nurse and non-nurse staffing in Florida nursing homes appears to be on a downward trajectory. Causes range from legislative changes that reduced staffing requirements to widespread post-pandemic burnout and economic shifts. Additionally, it is not clear what effect the staffing changes have had on quality. Data based largely on the time before the state's change in staffing standards indicate that Florida fares better than many other states in the quality of its nursing home care. It is essential that future research is conducted to examine the effect of staffing changes on quality following the staffing changes.

Regardless of what this research shows, there is there is an urgent need to better understand nurse and non-nurse staffing in nursing homes and how to increase the time devoted to resident care. Nearly two years after the creation of the PCA program, it appears not to have remedied staffing shortages as expected.

Similarly, the data presented here raise questions about the staffing changes from 2022. While adding new categories of personnel has increased the numbers now counted toward the state staffing requirement, it does not appear to have increased the actual numbers of people available to care for residents, except in a few categories, such as activities. The numbers of physical, occupational and speech therapists, who provide the type of skilled care residents need today, appear to be declining.

Recommendations

Coordinated efforts are needed to attract more people into the long-term care workforce, from CNAs to social workers to therapists to RNs. We need:

- **Cooperation among researchers, policy makers, lawmakers, and providers** to explore the full range of possible approaches, including pay and career ladders. These efforts should include not only administrators of nursing homes but executives with long-term care management and investment companies.
- **High quality research, including large-scale surveys** and in-depth qualitative research with current and potential nursing home workers. The goal of such research would be to gain a greater understanding of these workers' needs and concerns and what attracts them to other companies and employment fields.

- **Further research that closely examines efforts nationwide** to grow the long-term care workforce in the current climate, to determine what works and why.
- **Funding of Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Programs** that prioritize educating health studies students on long-term care and expose them to nursing homes during internships and clinical rotations.
- **Other policy solutions such as expanding the definition of Professional Shortage Areas** to include nursing homes, to give nurses access to loan repayment programs, and encouraging local organizations to apply for Health Profession Opportunities Grants to fund CNA education and training.

A Comprehensive Snapshot of Nursing Home Staffing in Florida was commissioned by AARP Florida and developed in collaboration with University of South Florida Assistant Professor Lindsay Peterson, Ph.D., Director of the Long-term Care Administration and Aging Sciences Internship Program and Interim Director of the Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging. AARP thanks Dr. Peterson and her team, including Chelsea Goldstein, MSG, for their diligent research and contributions to this project.

