

“What Opportunities?": Understanding Committed Frontline Healthcare Workers' Perceptions of Career Advancement Opportunities

Report of Research Findings

Presented by the Workforce & Organizational Research Center

October 2023

1. Introduction and Acknowledgements

Healthcare organizations play a critical role in US society and yet persistently face recruitment and retention challenges with their frontline workers, particularly Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), Medical Assistants (MAs), and Patient Service Representatives (PSRs). These in-demand roles can be physically and emotionally draining and generally pay low wages. Although the challenges of retaining frontline healthcare staff predate COVID-19, the pandemic exacerbated this strain as healthcare organizations struggled with the growing demand for qualified workers and a limited candidate pool. As healthcare organizations have sought solutions to these challenges, career pathways have emerged as an important potential strategy.

United by the goal of improving retention and advancement of entry-level workers into roles offering wealth-building wages, the Chicagoland Healthcare Workforce Collaborative (CHWC) and the Workforce & Organizational Research Center (WORC) partnered with five healthcare systems: UChicago Medicine, UI Health, Northwestern Medicine, Rush University Medical Center, and Advocate Aurora, to identify and articulate career pathways for Certified Nursing Assistants, Medical Assistants, and Patient Service Representatives and ways in which the healthcare systems can help facilitate the movement of incumbent workers into roles that offer wealth-building wages. CHWC previously collected data from eight collaborative members and determined that labor shortages are most acute for nurses, nursing assistants, and medical assistants. These findings suggested that these entry-level clinical positions should be the primary focus for this work. Because patient service representatives are also highly in demand, this non-clinical, frontline role was also included.

This study was conducted between January 2022 and September 2023. Although all healthcare systems were dedicated to the project, navigating the intricacies of large healthcare organizations amidst a pandemic caused serious project delays, resulting in a 12-month extension of the initial project timeline.

In general, the participating hospital systems were extremely short-staffed, a situation which extended into Human Resource (HR) departments and created conflicts for our primary contacts between balancing their research project responsibilities with the regular duties of their jobs. Staff turnover at some of the healthcare systems increased delays as new staff members were being onboarded concurrently to the research project and their new roles. At one site, four different staff members rotated through the project during the course of the 21 months. At another healthcare system, the friction between fulfilling research project responsibilities and HR needs related to retaining their frontline workforce resulted in the system dropping out of the study halfway through the project.

This study would not have been possible without our partner, CHWC, and WORC would like to thank them for their support in assisting us with this research. Generous support for this work was provided by the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance. WORC would also like to acknowledge all the senior leaders, human resource managers, and frontline supervisors who met with us for interviews and shared their valuable insights. Lastly, WORC would like to thank all the frontline employees who completed the survey.

2. Research Design

To understand perspectives on available career pathways, best practices for career growth, and any advancement challenges that employees may face, WORC used a mixed-methods study design intended to surface both employer and employee views. The following data regarding employers' perspectives on career pathways were collected:

- Administrative data (benefits eligibility, job requirements, wage data, current advancement rates, and tenure) for five healthcare systems
- Senior leader interviews with five healthcare systems (nine interviews)
- Frontline supervisor interviews with three healthcare systems (UChicago Medicine, Rush University Medical Center, and Advocate Aurora; 14 interviews)

Interviews were conducted between May and August 2022 and results were synthesized in order to develop a survey instrument used to investigate employees' perceptions of available career pathways, facilitators to their advancement, and challenges to advancement. Prior to survey fielding, one healthcare system dropped out of the study.

The four remaining healthcare systems administered the survey by distributing information to frontline supervisors to share with their staff. Of the 7,557 frontline employees who received the survey, 155 CNAs (4.3% response rate), 270 MAs (10.0% response rate), and 153 PSRs (11.9% response rate) completed the survey between February 15, 2023 and June 16, 2023 for a total response rate of 7.6%.

Due to low survey response rates across the three positions, the results of this research likely represent the perspectives of the most engaged stakeholders – frontline healthcare workers who are invested in and excited about the topic of career pathways. However, these findings cannot be generalized to all frontline employees across participating systems. Nonetheless, understanding the perspectives of the most engaged stakeholders is useful for developing effective solutions. Strategies that address the needs of the most invested workers will likely be beneficial to less-invested stakeholders as well.

3. Summary of Employee Survey Findings

When aggregating survey responses across the four systems, CNA, MA, and PSR perceptions of career pathways and advancement opportunities were quite similar. Four major themes emerged from the survey data. Survey participants indicated that they:

- Are generally happy at their healthcare systems
- Feel they have opportunities to gain skills, but cost remains a barrier
- Are interested in advancing their careers, but are unsure about the likelihood of success
- Desire more career guidance

3.1 Job Satisfaction

Overall, CNAs, MAs, and PSRs who responded to the survey reported relatively high job satisfaction. Most respondents agreed that they are not planning to leave their current jobs or the healthcare field in the near future and seem to be committed to career advancement. Respondents reported satisfaction with their work-life balance, felt they have supportive co-workers and supervisors, and believed they receive adequate recognition for the work that they do.

3.2 Skill-Building Opportunities and Barriers

When asked about skill building, survey respondents agreed that they have opportunities to develop skills at their healthcare systems, both on-the-job through their day-to-day responsibilities and through education or training available outside of their organizations.

Overall, respondents seemed to be aware of the education benefits available to them but were less certain about internal training programs offered by their healthcare systems. This variation in awareness may be due to the fact that internal training opportunities are not provided. It is also possible that such programs are available, but employee awareness of these opportunities is low.

While most respondents had at least some awareness of the training opportunities available to them, many expressed concerns about potential costs and believed they could not afford the education and training required to advance.

3.3 Advancement Opportunities

Although respondents reported generally high levels of job satisfaction, most reported larger career aspirations and many viewed their current roles as stepping stones to roles that offer greater earning potential than their current roles.

Most respondents agreed that they were on the road to reaching their career goals. At the same time, they expressed some doubt about their ability to advance within their current departments, practices, or work locations. Respondents agreed that leaving their current department, practice, or location would allow them to get a better job in their healthcare systems. Some believed that leaving the system altogether would provide better job opportunities.

Participants indicated that their career prospects seem good and reported knowing about people like them who have advanced in the system. That said, respondents also expressed some uncertainty about opportunities for advancement at their healthcare systems being the same for anyone who works hard.

As noted previously, participants indicated that education and training were a barrier to advancement due to the cost of earning a new certification or degree.

3.4 Career Guidance and Organizational Trust

In general, survey participants indicated they did not receive a great deal of career guidance from their supervisors. Interestingly, a greater proportion of respondents indicated there was someone within their healthcare system who could help guide them in their careers.

Although participants generally agreed that their healthcare systems, “keep the promise that this is a great place to work,” fewer agreed that their systems would act on the results of the survey.

4. Summary of Opportunities for Improving Career Pathways

Overall, MAs, CNAs, and PSRs who responded to the survey indicated interest in advancing their careers and agreed that there are opportunities available in their healthcare systems while at the same time expressing doubt that they could achieve their goals. These findings highlight an opportunity for healthcare systems to retain frontline healthcare workers by strengthening career pathways. Indeed, research suggests that lower-wage workers prefer to stay within their organizations rather than leave for other jobs – as long as career growth opportunities are available to them (Fuller & Raman, 2022).

Figure 1 below presents barriers that surfaced in this research and ideas to strengthen opportunities for advancement for frontline healthcare workers.

Figure 1: Possible Career Advancement Strategy Solutions for Healthcare Employers

Possible Career Advancement Strategy Solutions for Healthcare Employers		
Barrier	Opportunity	Explanation
Cost of training/education needed to advance	Redesign employer-sponsored education benefit programs	Many education benefits are structured as reimbursements where employees must pay the full cost upfront. Lower-level workers may struggle to afford these upfront costs. Replacing reimbursement models with upfront-payment models may increase benefit uptake rates and make obtaining certifications and degrees more accessible to frontline workers.
	Develop paid apprenticeship programs or other “earn and learn” opportunities	Earn and learn programs enable workers to obtain certifications without creating financial strain.
Lack of awareness of internal training opportunities	Improve communication and expand eligibility/program capacity	Making frontline workers aware of internal training and development programs directly or via their supervisors may improve their perceptions of opportunity at their healthcare systems. Expanding eligibility/program capacity may enable more workers to improve their career prospects within their healthcare systems.
Lack of career guidance	Strengthen frontline supervisors’ career guidance skills	Providing training for supervisors can help improve their ability to provide career guidance for frontline healthcare workers. In addition, managerial skill-building opportunities can enable frontline supervisors to advance their own careers within their healthcare systems.
	Post promotion opportunities internally before seeking external candidates and engage frontline supervisors in recruiting	Communicating promotion opportunities to frontline employees and supervisors before seeking external candidates can encourage a “grow your own” mentality. A culture of internal promotion can create career pathways that may improve retention of committed frontline employees.

Appendices

Appendix A: References

Chicagoland Healthcare Workforce Collaborative (September 2022). Quarterly meeting presentation.

Fuller, J. & Raman, M. (January 2022). Building From the Bottom Up. Published by Harvard Business School.

Appendix B: Complete Employee Survey Results

The employee survey was used to uncover major themes around career advancement opportunities at the participating healthcare systems. Survey participants indicated that they:

- Are generally happy at their healthcare systems
- Feel they have opportunities to gain skills, but cost remains a barrier
- Are interested in advancing their careers, but are unsure about the likelihood of success
- Desire more career guidance

B1. Aggregated Average Survey Results for All Healthcare Systems

The four hospital systems that participated in this study administered the survey by having supervisors send it to their frontline staff. The survey was completed by 155 CNAs (4.3% response rate), 270 MAs (10.0% response rate), and 153 PSRs (11.9% response rate) for a total response of 578 (7.6% response rate) across four hospital systems between February 2023 and June 2023.

Aggregated Average Survey Results for All Healthcare Systems

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All Healthcare Systems Combined
My career prospects look good at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.6 N= 502
I have real opportunities for pay increases in my current job.	Average= 2.9 N= 501
It is easy to find out about other job opportunities at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.6 N= 510
I would need to move to a different department/practice/ location within my healthcare system to get a better job.	Average= 3.6 N= 493
I could get a better job by leaving my healthcare system.	Average= 3.2 N= 477
I have real opportunities to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.2 N= 483
I am aware of people like me who have advanced at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.4 N= 485
I know what I would need to do to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 483
I can advance at my healthcare system without earning a new certification or degree.	Average= 2.5 N= 454
Opportunities for advancement in this healthcare system are the same for anyone who works hard.	Average= 3.0 N= 469

Aggregated Average Survey Results for All Healthcare Systems (cont.)

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All Healthcare Systems Combined
I have opportunities to develop new skills during my day-to-day work.	Average= 3.4 N= 464
I get on-the-job training at my job.	Average= 3.7 N= 465
There are training programs offered to employees at my healthcare system that I could be part of if I wanted to.	Average= 3.2 N= 414
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a new certification.	Average= 3.7 N= 418
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a college degree.	Average= 3.9 N= 436
My supervisor would give me the flexibility if I needed it to get the training I would need to advance.	Average= 3.4 N= 426
My goal is to stay in the job I have today—I am happy where I am right now.	Average= 2.8 N= 438
I see my current job as a stepping stone to the job I really want.	Average= 3.6 N= 443
I feel like I am on the road to reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.4 N= 438
There is someone at my healthcare system who can guide me toward reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.2 N= 404
My responsibilities outside of work prevent me from reaching my career goals.	Average= 2.6 N= 441
I can't afford the education/training I would need to reach my career goals.	Average= 3.4 N= 439
My supervisor talks to me about my career goals and how I can reach them.	Average= 2.7 N= 439
My healthcare system keeps the promise that this a great place to work.	Average= 3.4 N= 426
I can count on my supervisor to help me when I have a problem.	Average= 3.7 N= 436
When I do a good job, I get the recognition I deserve.	Average= 3.3 N= 434
My coworkers will lend a hand if I need help on the job.	Average= 4.0 N= 438
I struggle to manage my responsibilities outside of work because of my job.	Average= 2.1 N= 428
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.	Average= 2.4 N= 422
I plan to stop working in healthcare in the next year.	Average= 2.1 N= 415
I am confident that the results of this survey will be acted on.	Average= 3.0 N= 394

Aggregated Average Survey Results for All Healthcare Systems (cont.)

How interested are you in moving into this job? 1 = not at all interested, 5 = very interested	All Healthcare Systems Combined N= 449
Nurse	Average= 3.6
Supervisor	Average= 3.3
Radiology Technician	Average= 3.3
Surgical/Operating Room Technician	Average= 3.0
Administrative Professional	Average= 3.0
Medical Assistant	Average= 2.9
Community Health Professional	Average= 2.8
Mental Health Professional	Average= 2.6
Patient Service Representative	Average= 2.5
Respiratory Therapist	Average= 2.5
Leave healthcare	Average= 2.5
Pharmacy Technician	Average= 2.4
Physical Therapist	Average= 2.3
Certified Nursing Assistant	Average= 2.2
Physician	Average= 2.0
Pharmacist	Average= 2.0

Aggregated Average Survey Results for All Healthcare Systems (cont.)

Index Scores	
Low = Improvement needed, Medium = Opportunity for improvement, High = Strength	All Healthcare Systems Combined
Job Satisfaction Index (N=422)	Low=17% Med=45% High=38%
Opportunities for Advancement Index (N=426)	Low=13% Med=64% High=23%
Opportunities for Skill-Building Index (N=376)	Low=6% Med=56% High=38%
Availability of Career Guidance Index (N=398)	Low=29% Med=45% High=27%
Barriers to Advancement Index (N=435)	Low=19% Med=60% High=21%
NOTE: Reverse scaled Low = Strength, Medium = Opportunity for improvement, High = Improvement needed	

B2. Analysis of Aggregated Survey Results by Job Type

When investigating survey results by job type, survey responses for Certified Nursing Assistants, Medical Assistants, and Patient Services Representatives were quite similar. However, statistical

analyses revealed several survey questions where variation existed. It is important to note that the reasons for the observed variation are unclear.

The following table displays variation observed in responses by job type.

Key:

Red = Lower than other job types

Green = Higher than other job types

Analysis of Variation in Aggregated Survey Results by Job Type

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All CNAs Averages	All MAs Averages	All PSRs Averages
I have real opportunities to advance at my healthcare system.	3.5	3.0 p<0.01	3.3
I know what I would need to do to advance at my healthcare system.	3.8 p<0.01	3.3	3.4
I can advance at my healthcare system without earning a new certification or degree.	2.4	2.4	2.9 p<0.01
My supervisor would give me the flexibility if I needed it to get the training I would need to advance.	3.7	3.2 p<0.01	3.6
I see my current job as a stepping stone to the job I really want.	3.9 p<0.01	3.5	3.5
I feel like I'm on the road to reaching my career goals.	3.7 p<0.01	3.2	3.2
There is someone at my healthcare system who can guide me toward reaching my career goals.	3.5 p<0.01	2.9	3.2
I can't afford the education/training I would need to reach my career goals.	3.5	3.5	3.2 p<0.01
My supervisor talks to me about my career goals and how I can reach them.	2.8	2.5 p<0.05	2.9

B2.1 Survey Results by Job Type: Certified Nursing Assistants

Of the 3,572 CNAs who received the survey across the four healthcare systems, 155 responded. Survey analysis revealed that CNAs were **more likely** than MAs or PSRs to:

- ✓ Know what to do to advance
- ✓ See their current job as a stepping stone
- ✓ Feel like they are on the road to reaching career goals
- ✓ Feel they have someone who can guide them toward career goals

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in moving into a range of possible jobs. Across all four healthcare systems, CNA respondents (n=116) ranked their top five job preferences as follows:

1. Nurse
2. Radiology Technician
3. Surgical/Operating Room Technician
4. Certified Nursing Assistant (remain in their current job)
5. Medical Assistant

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Certified Nursing Assistants

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All CNAs (4 healthcare systems)
My career prospects look good at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.8 N= 132
I have real opportunities for pay increases in my current job.	Average= 2.9 N= 133
It's easy to find out about other job opportunities at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 136
I would need to move to a different department/practice/location within my healthcare system to get a better job.	Average= 3.7 N= 130
I could get a better job by leaving my healthcare system.	Average= 3.3 N= 126
I have real opportunities to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 125
I'm aware of people like me who have advanced at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.7 N= 127
I know what I would need to do to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.8 N= 127
I can advance at my healthcare system without earning a new certification or degree.	Average= 2.4 N= 115
Opportunities for advancement in this healthcare system are the same for anyone who works hard.	Average= 3.3 N= 123
I have opportunities to develop new skills during my day-to-day work.	Average= 3.5 N= 117
I get on-the-job training at my job.	Average= 3.8 N= 118
There are training programs offered to employees at my healthcare system that I could be part of if I wanted to.	Average= 3.3 N= 107
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a new certification.	Average= 3.7 N= 106
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a college degree.	Average= 3.9 N= 111
My supervisor would give me the flexibility if I needed it to get the training I would need to advance.	Average= 3.7 N= 109
My goal is to stay in the job I have today—I'm happy where I am right now.	Average= 2.6 N= 111
I see my current job as a stepping stone to the job I really want.	Average= 3.9 N= 113

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Certified Nursing Assistants (cont.)

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All CNAs (4 healthcare systems)
I feel like I'm on the road to reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.7 N= 112
There is someone at my healthcare system who can guide me toward reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.5 N= 108
My responsibilities outside of work prevent me from reaching my career goals.	Average= 2.8 N= 113
I can't afford the education/training I would need to reach my career goals.	Average= 3.5 N= 113
My supervisor talks to me about my career goals and how I can reach them.	Average= 2.8 N= 112
My healthcare system keeps the promise that this a great place to work.	Average= 3.4 N= 107
I can count on my supervisor to help me when I have a problem.	Average= 3.7 N= 109
When I do a good job, I get the recognition I deserve.	Average= 3.2 N= 109
My coworkers will lend a hand if I need help on the job.	Average= 4.0 N= 112
I struggle to manage my responsibilities outside of work because of my job.	Average= 2.2 N= 108
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.	Average= 2.4 N= 108
I plan to stop working in healthcare in the next year.	Average= 2.5 N= 116
I am confident that the results of this survey will be acted on.	Average= 3.0 N= 98

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Certified Nursing Assistants (cont.)

How interested are you in moving into this job? 1 = not at all interested, 5 = very interested	N=116
Nurse	Average= 4.1
Radiology Technician	Average= 3.2
Surgical/Operating Room Technician	Average= 3.1
Certified Nursing Assistant	Average= 2.8
Medical Assistant	Average= 2.8
Supervisor	Average= 2.7
Respiratory Therapist	Average= 2.7
Community Health Professional	Average= 2.7
Mental Health Professional	Average= 2.7
Pharmacy Technician	Average= 2.6
Administrative Professional	Average= 2.6
Patient Service Representative	Average= 2.5
A position outside of the healthcare field	Average= 2.5
Physical Therapist	Average= 2.2
Physician	Average= 2.2
Pharmacist	Average= 2.1

B2.2 Survey Results by Job Type: Medical Assistants

Of the 2,696 MAs who received the survey across the four healthcare systems, 270 responded. Survey analysis revealed that MAs were **less likely** than CNAs or PSRs to:

- ✓ Feel that they have real opportunities to advance
- ✓ Believe that their supervisor would give them the flexibility to obtain training
- ✓ Report that their supervisor talks to them about their career goals

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in moving into a range of possible jobs. Across all four healthcare systems, MA respondents (n=210) ranked their top five job preferences as follows:

1. Nurse
2. Supervisor
3. Radiology Technician
4. Surgical/Operating Room Technician
5. Medical Assistant (remain in their current job)

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Medical Assistants

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All MAs (4 healthcare systems)
My career prospects look good at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 238
I have real opportunities for pay increases in my current job.	Average= 2.8 N= 239
It's easy to find out about other job opportunities at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 240
I would need to move to a different department/practice/location within my healthcare system to get a better job.	Average= 3.6 N= 235
I could get a better job by leaving my healthcare system.	Average= 3.3 N= 227
I have real opportunities to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.0 N= 228
I'm aware of people like me who have advanced at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.3 N= 228
I know what I would need to do to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.3 N= 230
I can advance at my healthcare system without earning a new certification or degree.	Average= 2.4 N= 219
Opportunities for advancement in this healthcare system are the same for anyone who works hard.	Average= 2.8 N= 223
I have opportunities to develop new skills during my day-to-day work.	Average= 3.4 N= 222
I get on-the-job training at my job.	Average= 3.6 N= 220

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Medical Assistants (cont.)

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All MAs (4 healthcare systems)
There are training programs offered to employees at my healthcare system that I could be part of if I wanted to.	Average= 3.1 N= 203
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a new certification.	Average= 3.6 N= 204
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a college degree.	Average= 3.9 N= 211
My supervisor would give me the flexibility if I needed it to get the training I would need to advance.	Average= 3.2 N= 207
My goal is to stay in the job I have today—I'm happy where I am right now.	Average= 2.9 N= 207
I see my current job as a stepping stone to the job I really want.	Average= 3.5 N= 208
I feel like I'm on the road to reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.2 N= 207
There is someone at my healthcare system who can guide me toward reaching my career goals.	Average= 2.9 N= 192
My responsibilities outside of work prevent me from reaching my career goals.	Average= 2.6 N= 205
I can't afford the education/training I would need to reach my career goals.	Average= 3.5 N= 205
My supervisor talks to me about my career goals and how I can reach them.	Average= 2.5 N= 205
My healthcare system keeps the promise that this a great place to work.	Average= 3.3 N= 204
I can count on my supervisor to help me when I have a problem.	Average= 3.5 N= 206
When I do a good job, I get the recognition I deserve.	Average= 3.2 N= 205
My coworkers will lend a hand if I need help on the job.	Average= 3.9 N= 206
I struggle to manage my responsibilities outside of work because of my job.	Average= 2.1 N= 202
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.	Average= 2.5 N= 197
I plan to stop working in healthcare in the next year.	Average= 2.1 N= 193
I am confident that the results of this survey will be acted on.	Average= 2.9 N= 192

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Medical Assistants (cont.)

How interested are you in moving into this job? 1 = not at all interested, 5 = very interested	N=210
Nurse	Average= 3.9
Supervisor	Average= 3.6
Radiology Technician	Average= 3.5
Surgical/Operating Room Technician	Average= 3.3
Medical Assistant	Average= 3.2
Community Health Professional	Average= 2.8
Administrative Professional	Average= 2.8
Respiratory Therapist	Average= 2.6
Mental Health Professional	Average= 2.6
A position outside of the healthcare field	Average= 2.4
Physical Therapist	Average= 2.3
Pharmacy Technician	Average= 2.2
Physician	Average= 2.0
Certified Nursing Assistant	Average= 1.9
Patient Service Representative	Average= 1.9
Pharmacist	Average= 1.9

B2.3 Survey Results by Job Type: Patient Services Representatives

Of the 1,289 PSRs who received the survey across the four healthcare systems, 153 responded. Survey analysis revealed that PSRs are:

- ✓ **More likely** to feel they can advance without a new certification or degree
- ✓ **Less likely** to report they cannot afford the education needed to reach their career goals

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in moving into a range of possible jobs. Across all four healthcare systems, PSR respondents ranked their top five job preferences as follows:

1. Administrative Professional
2. Supervisor
3. Patient Service Representative (remain in their current job)
4. Radiology Technician
5. Community Health Professional

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Patient Service Representatives

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All PSRs (4 healthcare systems)
My career prospects look good at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 132
I have real opportunities for pay increases in my current job.	Average= 2.9 N= 129
It's easy to find out about other job opportunities at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.7 N= 134
I would need to move to a different department/practice/location within my healthcare system to get a better job.	Average= 3.7 N= 128
I could get a better job by leaving my healthcare system.	Average= 3.2 N= 124
I have real opportunities to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.3 N= 130
I'm aware of people like me who have advanced at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.5 N= 130
I know what I would need to do to advance at my healthcare system.	Average= 3.4 N= 126
I can advance at my healthcare system without earning a new certification or degree.	Average= 2.9 N= 120
Opportunities for advancement in this healthcare system are the same for anyone who works hard.	Average= 3.1 N= 123
I have opportunities to develop new skills during my day-to-day work.	Average= 3.5 N= 125
I get on-the-job training at my job.	Average= 3.7 N= 127
There are training programs offered to employees at my healthcare system that I could be part of if I wanted to.	Average= 3.3 N= 104
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a new certification.	Average= 3.8 N= 108
My healthcare system offers an education benefit that will help pay for me to get a college degree.	Average= 4.0 N= 114
My supervisor would give me the flexibility if I needed it to get the training I would need to advance.	Average= 3.6 N= 110
My goal is to stay in the job I have today—I'm happy where I am right now.	Average= 2.9 N= 120
I see my current job as a stepping stone to the job I really want.	Average= 3.5 N= 122
I feel like I'm on the road to reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.2 N= 109
There is someone at my healthcare system who can guide me toward reaching my career goals.	Average= 3.2 N= 104
My responsibilities outside of work prevent me from reaching my career goals.	Average= 2.4 N= 123
I can't afford the education/training I would need to reach my career goals.	Average= 3.2 N= 121
My supervisor talks to me about my career goals and how I can reach them.	Average= 2.9 N= 122

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Patient Service Representatives

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree 5 4 3 2 1	All PSRs (4 healthcare systems)
My healthcare system keeps the promise that this a great place to work.	Average= 3.5 N= 115
I can count on my supervisor to help me when I have a problem.	Average= 3.9 N= 121
When I do a good job, I get the recognition I deserve.	Average= 3.5 N= 120
My coworkers will lend a hand if I need help on the job.	Average= 4.0 N= 120
I struggle to manage my responsibilities outside of work because of my job.	Average= 1.9 N= 118
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.	Average= 2.1 N= 117
I plan to stop working in healthcare in the next year.	Average= 1.9 N= 115
I am confident that the results of this survey will be acted on.	Average= 3.1 N= 104

Average Survey Results by Job Type: Patient Service Representatives

How interested are you in moving into this job? 1 = not at all interested, 5 = very interested	N=123
Administrative Professional	Average= 3.6
Patient Service Representative	Average= 3.3
Supervisor	Average= 3.3
Radiology Technician	Average= 3.0
Community Health Professional	Average= 2.7
Medical Assistant	Average= 2.6
Pharmacy Technician	Average= 2.6
Surgical/Operating Room Technician	Average= 2.6
Mental Health Professional	Average= 2.6
A position outside of the healthcare field	Average= 2.6
Nurse	Average= 2.4
Certified Nursing Assistant	Average= 2.2
Respiratory Therapist	Average= 2.2
Physical Therapist	Average= 2.2
Pharmacist	Average= 2.0
Physician	Average= 1.8

Appendix C: Aggregated Administrative Data for All Healthcare Systems

The following table shows aggregated administrative data across the five healthcare systems that participated:

Job Status, Wages, Benefits, Turnover			
	CNA	MA	PSR
% Full-Time	68%	92%	84%
% Part-Time	28%	8%	15%
% Benefits Eligible	95%	99%	98%
Average Wage	\$20.73	\$23.77	\$21.91
Voluntary Turnover Rate	33%	22%	18%

Appendix D: Frontline Supervisor Interview Findings

WORC conducted interviews with 14 frontline supervisors across three of the five participating hospital systems to surface perceived strengths and challenges to career mobility. The data were synthesized and the following major themes emerged:

1. Advancement facilitators
2. Advancement opportunities
3. Advancement barriers
4. Job mobility observations
5. Career pathway improvement ideas
6. Reasons for retention
7. Reasons for turnover

1. Advancement Facilitators

Frontline supervisors shared insights into the best practices that allow frontline workers to advance their careers. Interviewees suggested that managers can help frontline staff advance by advocating for more growth opportunities and supporting workers to move along career pathways.

Participants suggested that offering flexible scheduling that enables employees to attend classes could support career pathway advancement. Additionally, respondents noted that apprenticeship and leadership programs that provide skill development opportunities can enhance career pathway opportunities that may allow workers to move into higher-paying roles.

Supervisors also noted that networking and interpersonal relationships help frontline staff advance by giving them the opportunity to hear about and grow into new roles. Respondents suggested providing workers with transparency about available opportunities, including remote opportunities and opportunities to transfer to other departments that may provide more room for growth.

2. Advancement Opportunities

Frontline supervisors discussed opportunities that may help workers advance their salaries and grow their careers including offering tiered career pathways, such as lead roles and assistant supervisory roles, that staff can grow into based on their skills.

Respondents also noted that remote roles may provide workers with an indirect pay increase by enabling them to hire fewer hours of childcare and reducing their transportation costs.

3. Advancement Barriers

Barriers to advancement that frontline supervisors identified included eliminating degree requirements for certain positions, specifically noting that having managerial experience could qualify an employee to take on a supervisory role even if they had not earned a Bachelor's degree.

Respondents suggested that an advancement barrier could be removed for frontline staff by prioritizing hiring internally over posting jobs externally. Participants noted that variations in department budgets can result in barriers to advancement for employees in certain areas as compared to others.

4. Job Mobility Observations

Frontline supervisors also shared their insights on job mobility among their frontline workers. Some participants speculated that MAs and CNAs may find value moving into PSR roles to gain operational experience. Specifically, they noted that the PSR role may provide opportunities to move into administrative roles that may allow employees to grow their skill sets and increase their pay.

5. Career Pathway Improvement Ideas

Frontline supervisors provided ideas to improve career pathways, including providing stronger training during onboarding to provide new hires with an understanding of possible career pathways.

Participants also suggested that frontline employees may benefit from more mentorship and career guidance to increase organizational embeddedness and knowledge of career options.

Respondents also encouraged offering job tiers and job leveling (e.g., MA1, MA2, MA3) to create opportunities for employees to receive pay increases as they build skills.

6. Reasons for Retention

Frontline supervisors also shared their opinions as to why frontline staff remain in their current roles. Some respondents believed staff may become complacent and comfortable in their current role and lack interest in pursuing other options. It is important to note that survey responses did not bear out this hypothesis. Participants also suggested that employees may remain in their roles because they enjoy the work culture and their coworkers. Finally, supervisors believed that some Frontline workers see their current positions as a “foot in the door” that keeps them in their roles.

7. Reasons for Turnover

Frontline supervisors gave their opinions for reasons for turnover among frontline staff. Compensation stood out as a frequently mentioned reason. Respondents believed that many employees seek other opportunities due to low wages, lack of opportunities for wage increases, and better pay at other institutions.

Participants also believed frontline workers may leave due to a lack of career growth opportunities or due to poor work-life balance.