



# **REPORT SUMMARY:**

# **Upstate New York's Hospital Staffing Crisis**

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# Executive Summary

Upstate New York's hospitals urgently need a plan to increase staffing of both Registered Nurses (RNs) and ancillary support staff. The 2021 Clinical Staffing Committee Law attempted to ensure safe patient care by setting forth standards for RNs and ancillaries—but, as this report shows, the reality falls far short of these requirements.

Approximately 90 percent of shifts in Upstate hospitals are understaffed, either by RNs or by ancillary support staff. RN understaffing occurs in over 70 percent of shifts outside of the ICU (which typically has adequate RN staffing), rising to 84 percent of shifts in step-down units. Ancillary understaffing occurs in between 75 and 95 percent of all hospital shifts—including the ICU, where about 80 percent of shifts are understaffed by ancillaries.

Chronic understaffing undermines patient care, leading to increased patient mortality overall. Past research on such mortality risks, when applied to the findings in this report, indicates an increase in patient mortality by over 14 percent for the worst 10 percent of hospital shifts. This is equivalent to an additional 280 patient deaths for every 100,000 hospitalizations (up from a baseline of 2,000 deaths per 100,000 hospitalizations).

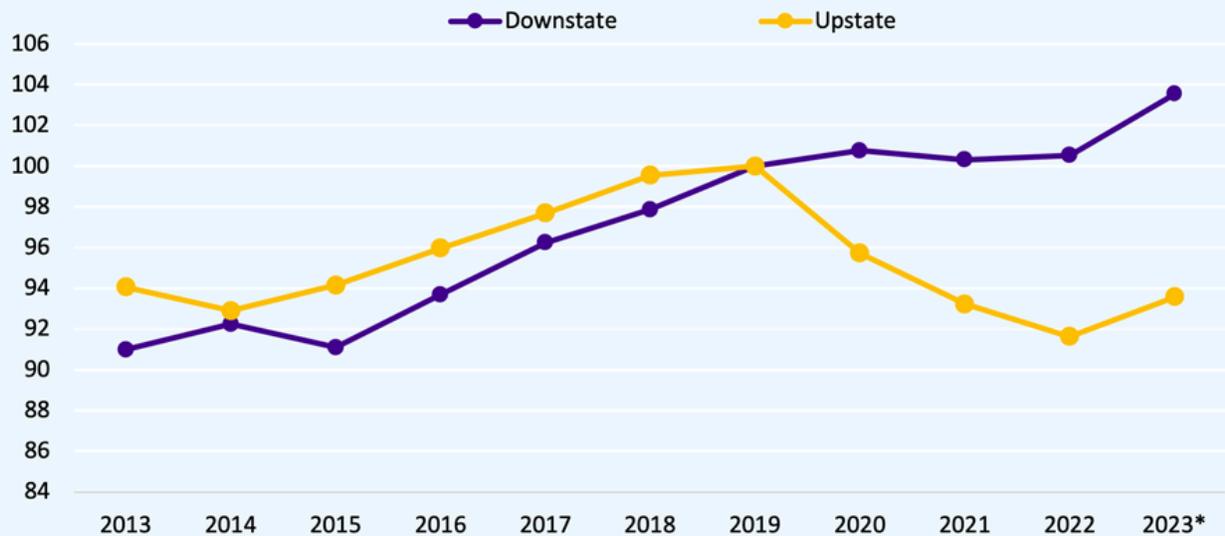
Moreover, chronic understaffing poses a threat to the hospital workforce, which has seen high burnout rates among overwhelmed nurses and ancillaries, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses report high levels of moral injury, stress, and burnout. In turn, many RNs and ancillary caregivers leave the workforce to find less stressful work or to retire early. While the Upstate hospital workforce has slowly started to recover from some of its pandemic decline, this recovery has been so gradual that it would take over 9 years to reach safe staffing levels given the current trend; and this optimistically assumes there will be no increases in staff burnout.

Solving this crisis for Upstate New York's hospitals will require a staffing increase of about 5,000 RNs and about 20,000 ancillary staff. Fortunately, there are already about 70,000 trained RNs in the state who do not work as nurses, who could be recruited into nursing roles with adequate incentives.

Many of these nurses are well-trained and could provide vital support as the healthcare workforce develops a new generation of healthcare workers and continues to recover from the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic.

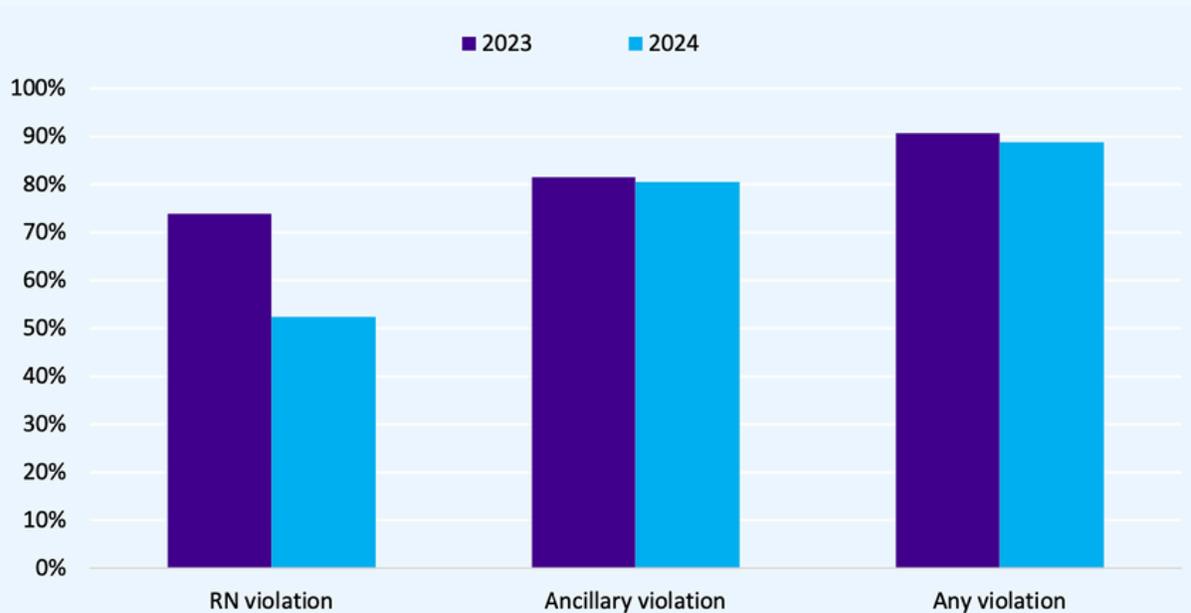
1. Upstate NY hospitals require an increase of 5,000 Registered Nurses and 20,000 ancillary support staff. Without any policy intervention, it will take over 9 years to recruit these additional workers.

**Figure 1** *Employment in NY hospitals, as percent of 2019 level*



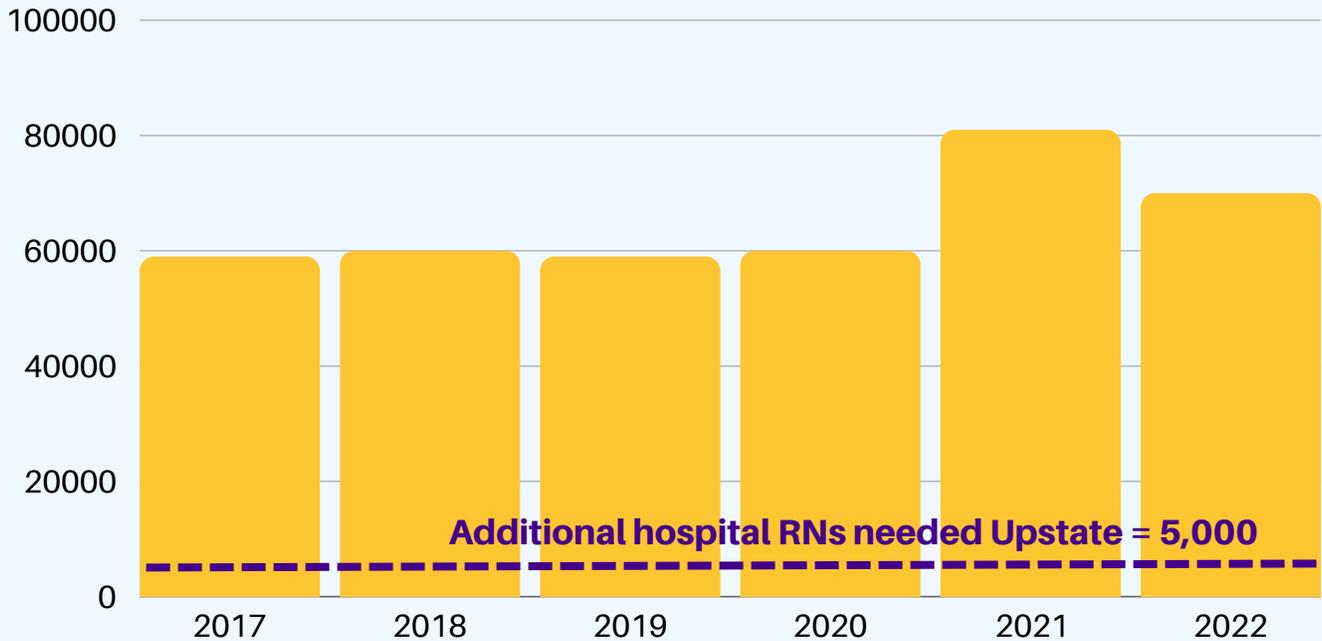
2. The Upstate shortage of both Registered Nurses and ancillary support staff causes unsafe staffing in 90 percent of hospital shifts. Mortality risk rises by over 14 percent for patients on the most understaffed hospital units. This is equivalent to an additional 266 patient deaths for every 100,000 hospitalizations.

**Figure 2** *Percent of shifts that violate safe staffing requirements*



**3. Approximately 70,000 individuals in New York are Registered Nurses and are not currently working as nurses — over 35 percent of all trained Registered Nurses.**

**Figure 3** *Estimated number of individuals with RN training who live in NY and are not currently working as a nurse, ages 20-65.*

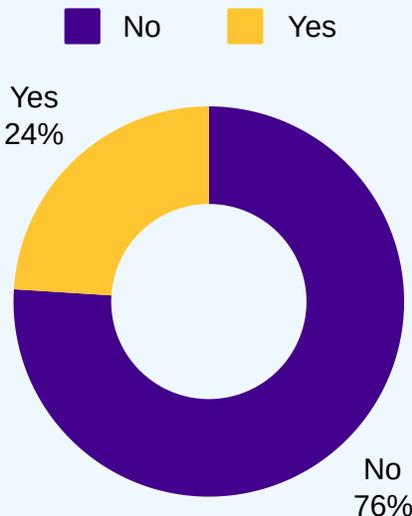


**4. Most Upstate hospital staff believe that their employers have not taken adequate measures to fix the understaffing crisis.**

**5. Nurses care for too many patients on under-staffed shifts, causing burnout, moral injury, and risking patient lives.**

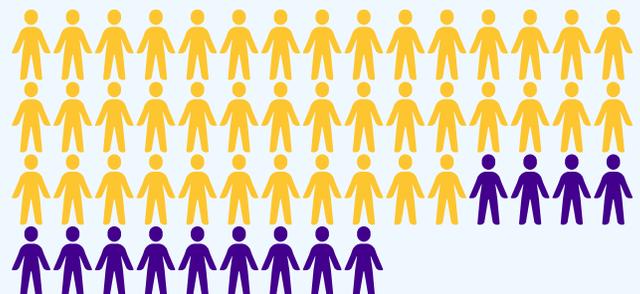
**Figure 4**

Hospital staff response to question: *“Do you believe your employer has taken adequate measures to solve understaffing?”*



**Figure 5**

*On the average hospital shift with an RN staffing violation, 10 RNs have to care for 13 patients more than the 41 they can safely care for.*



# Acknowledgments

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