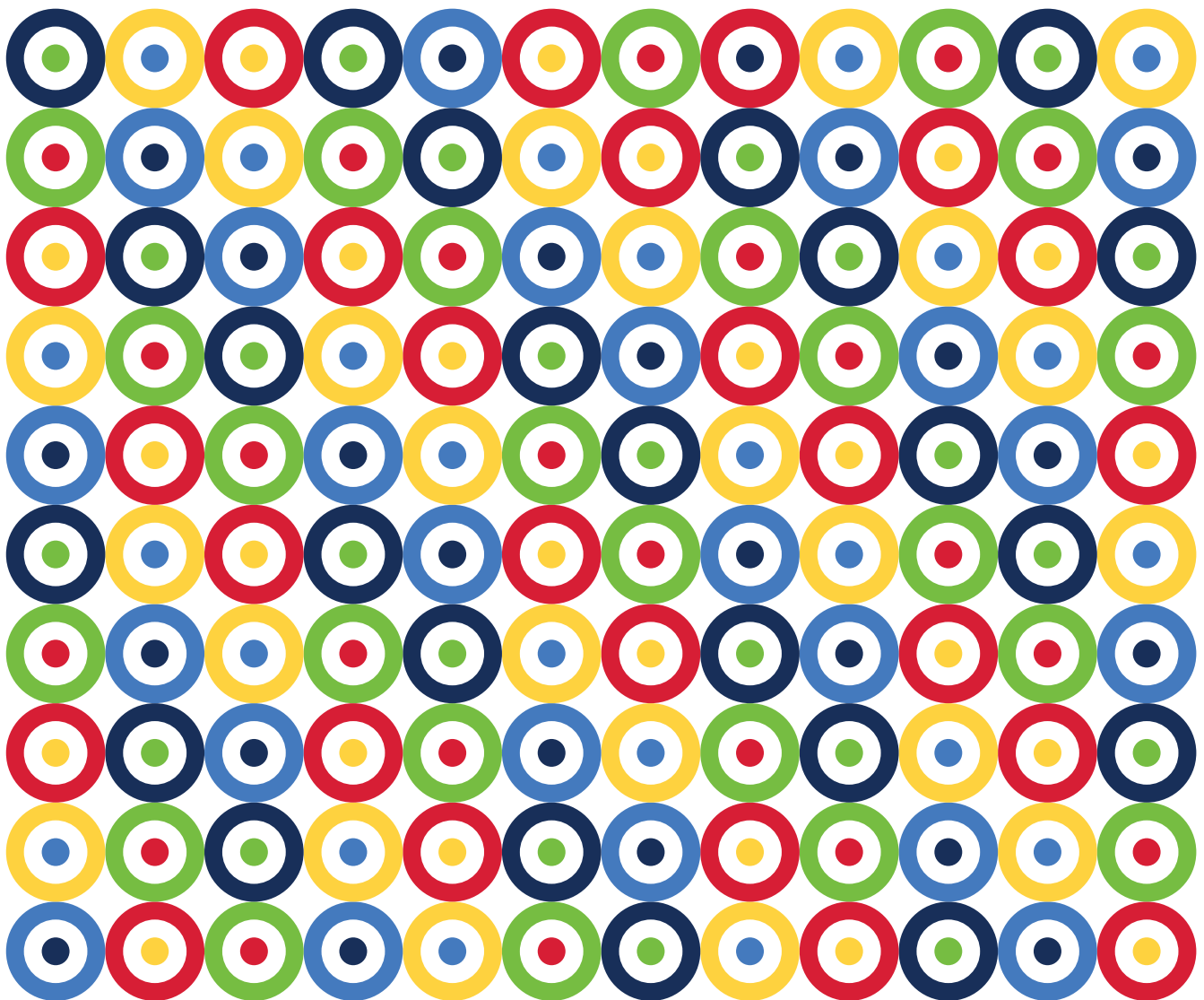


January 2024



DEI Data Insights

Workforce Diversity in Hospitals and Health Systems



Introduction

As the leading national advocate for hospitals and health systems, the American Hospital Association (AHA) and its Institute for Diversity and Health Equity (IFDHE) support their member organizations' efforts to improve the health of the communities they serve.

To fulfill this mission, AHA periodically surveys the field's efforts, successes and challenges in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). IFDHE's biennial DEI Benchmark Survey provides a snapshot of member and non-member hospitals' attitudes and practices regarding diversity in the workforce; leadership and governance; equity; and inclusive policies and behavior. The survey provides insights into hospitals' progress and highlights opportunities for improvement.

This is the second in a series of Insight Reports that highlight results from the 2022 DEI Benchmark Survey. In these reports, we will discuss the survey data and share case studies and resources that can aid hospitals in taking actions to accelerate their health equity, diversity and inclusion journey.

This set of data insights addresses **Workforce Diversity**.

The other four topics in this series include:

- [DEI Strategy](#)
- DEI Leadership and Governance
- Social Drivers of Health and Equitable Care
- Data Collection

Key Terms

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI):

the values, practices and policies that support the representation of individuals from all backgrounds.

Health Equity:

different from DEI, is the fair and just opportunity for all individuals to achieve their highest level of health.

Diversity:

the presence of individual differences that may include race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity, age, disability, etc.

Equity:

promoting fair, just and unbiased treatment for all people, regardless of background or social status.

Inclusion:

ensuring that all populations feel safe, respected, heard and valued.

About the Survey

The survey was administered from Jan. 19 - June 3, 2022, to 6,234 AHA member and non-member hospitals in the U.S. and its territories. Of these, 1,356 completed the survey, for a 22% response rate. While the sample offers valuable insights, there were statistical differences in characteristics between respondents and non-respondents. Survey responses were not necessarily reflective of the entire hospital field. The data will help set a baseline for future surveys. The next administration of the survey is expected to begin in January 2024.

About this Topic

Hospitals and health systems across the nation are committed to engaging in DEI efforts. The first [installment](#) of this series examined DEI strategies in hospitals and health systems and provided a glimpse into the possible future trajectory of DEI in health care. We learned that 96% of survey respondents believe diversity is “extremely” or “very important” to the future of health care in the U.S. Furthermore, at least half of survey respondents reported taking steps to advance health equity and DEI efforts at their organizations.

Workforce diversity is a vital component of those efforts. Research has shown numerous benefits associated with a diverse workforce, such as higher productivity, retention, employee satisfaction and better clinical outcomes. The survey results highlighted the importance of workforce diversity to health care leaders and revealed strategies hospitals and health systems have implemented to achieve a diverse workforce. The results revealed several key takeaways:

1. Having a diverse workforce that is representative of the hospital’s patient population is essential to advancing DEI efforts.
2. Hospitals and health systems are increasingly designing strategies to diversify their workforce.
3. Investing in career development for diverse groups is key to expanding and retaining workforce diversity.



PODCAST

A Workforce for the New Era of Equitable Health Care

In this [podcast](#), hear from three experts who believe that expanding and integrating the talent pool of community health workers into America’s hospitals and health systems could provide a bridge to meeting the nation’s future health care needs.



AWARD-WINNING PROGRAMS

Models in workforce development

Two of the honorees for the 2023 AHA Quest for Quality Prize — [Main Line Health](#) and [University Hospitals](#) — showcase how equity is embedded throughout their organizations with their approaches to care for patients and their employees.

Findings and Discussion: Steps Taken to Diversify the Health Care Workforce

A growing number of hospitals and health systems are implementing policies and practices to diversify their workforce and hire from historically marginalized groups.

When asked if they had a strategy to hire individuals from historically marginalized populations (Figure 1), nearly two-thirds (61%) stated they did have a strategy in place. Of those, 53% stated their primary strategy was investing in diverse talent pipelines (Figure 2).

Talent pathway investments are essential strategies to workforce diversity. For many underrepresented groups, entry into fields of study and professions must be brokered by personal relationships or targeted programs. In many cases, these individuals' social and professional networks are often restricted to limited opportunities as a result of structural racism and other biases. This is most notable in nursing, where gender stereotypes limited the professional trajectory of many women in health care, resulting in an overrepresentation of them in the nursing profession and an overrepresentation of white men in the physician workforce. Strategic investments in programs that seek to remedy these biases are significant opportunities to advance equity and improve quality.

Respondents also reported focusing on: training/career development programs (21%), followed by local hiring (13%), and professional recruiting (10%). Word of mouth and personal referrals (2%) were rarely reported.

Hospital leaders are encouraged to increase investments in professional development opportunities as a diversity strategy. Unfortunately, many from historically underrepresented groups are often the first and the only in the roles they occupy. The learning curve for these positions is often steep with little guidance. Professional development in the form of management coaching, mentoring and sponsorship can help to preserve the mental health and mitigate the effects of "weathering."

What is weathering?

The concept of "weathering" was first introduced in 1992 by Arline T. Geronimus, Sc.D., to describe deteriorations in health resulting from cumulative socioeconomic disadvantages.

FIGURE 1

Does your hospital have a strategy to hire individuals from historically marginalized populations? (N = 1,242)

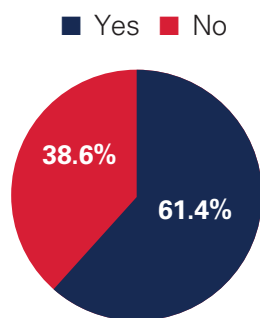
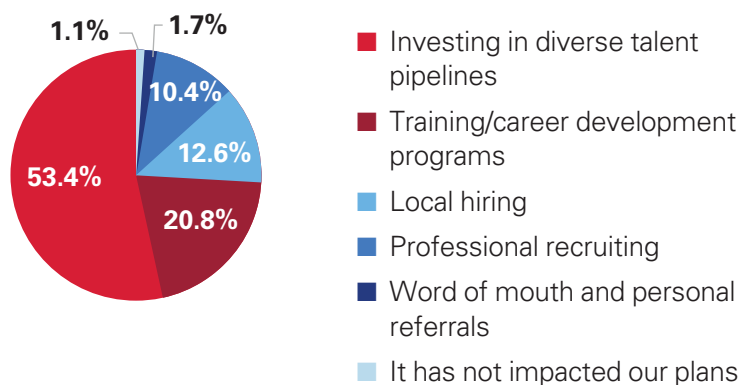


FIGURE 2

What is your primary strategy for hiring individuals from historically marginalized populations? (N = 760)



To gauge diversity efforts, respondents were asked about their policies and practices (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Which of the following statements best describe your hospital's policies and practices regarding workforce diversity? (Check all that apply)



Providing access to frontline workers to explore career advancement was the most reported policy/practice (72%), followed by evaluating policies to eradicate disparities and promote equity in the workplace (63%).

Holding executive leaders accountable for policies and practices (59%) and designing workforce [policies/strategies to promote equity](#) (59%) were tied as the third most common, followed by assessing policies and practices on an annual basis (55%), and investing in career development for historically underrepresented groups (51%). Holding leaders accountable for advancing DEI through compensation and promotion structure was the least reported (47%) and the only option with less than half of respondents reporting it.



TOOLKIT

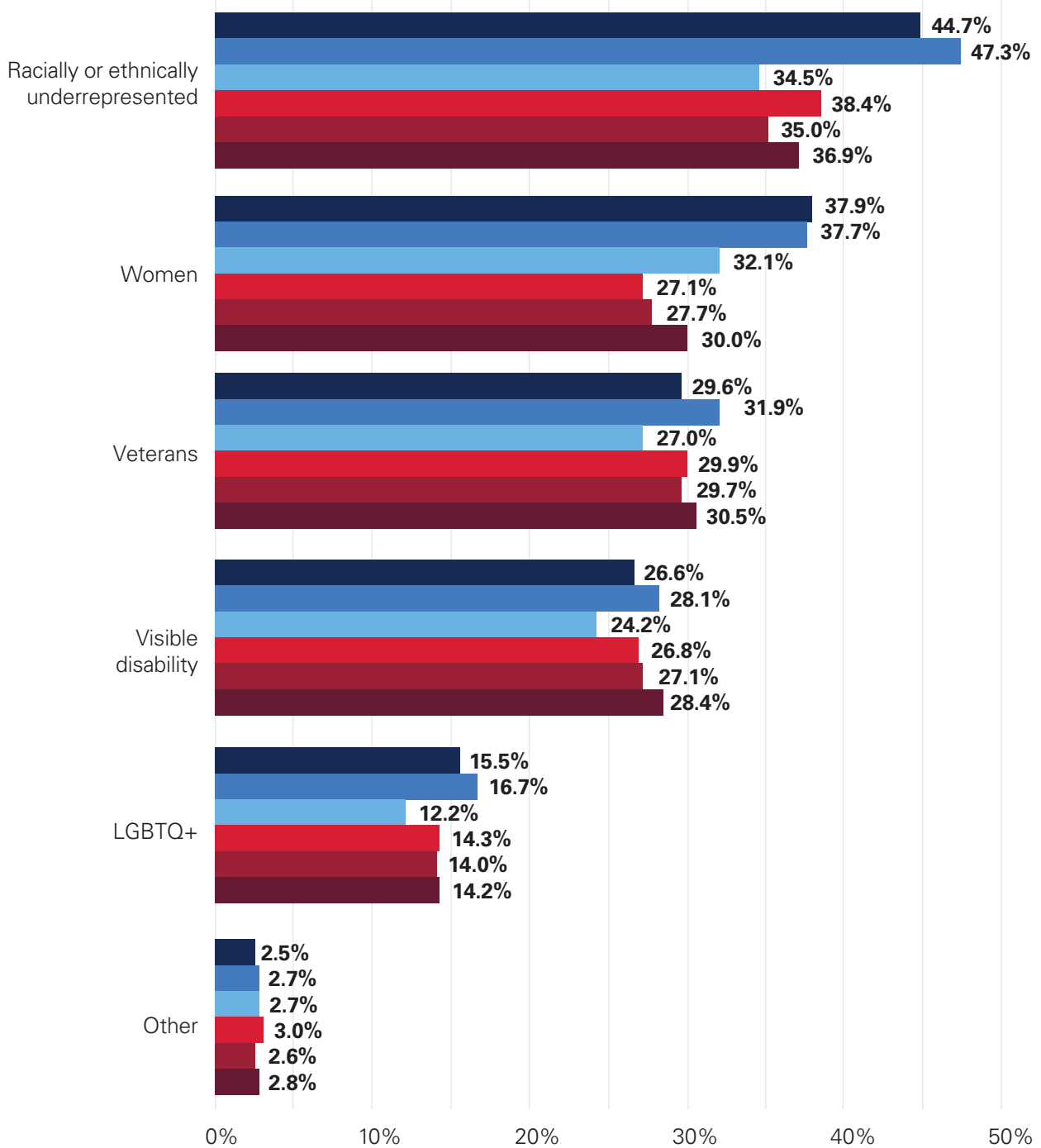
Strengthening the Health Care Workforce

The AHA's resource, [Strengthening the Health Care Workforce](#), notes how a diverse workforce that understands the cultures, issues and needs of local patient populations can result in better decision-making about how to serve those communities. Those decisions then have the potential to positively impact patient experience, safety and quality, and surrounding communities' overall health. "Advancing equity," the guide states, "also can have operational benefits, such as a reduction in insurance claims and reduced costs."

FIGURE 4

For which of these groups does your hospital have a documented plan for improving representation in the workforce? (Check all that apply) (N=1,356)

■ C-Suite ■ Management ■ Physicians ■ Nurses ■ Other Clinical ■ Support Staff



To gauge how hospitals were improving workforce diversity, respondents were asked if they had a documented plan for improving representation of several demographic groups within the following positions: C-suite, management, physicians, nurses, other clinical staff and support staff (Figure 4). The most common demographic group for which hospitals and health systems reported having a documented plan was racially or ethnically underrepresented groups, followed by women, veterans, people with visible disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Diversifying the workforce requires targeted efforts. Hospitals must take specific actions to fill gaps in diversity, but first there must be an appreciation for the benefits of a diverse workforce. Targeted recruitment strategies in different areas of management and clinical care are important to increasing diversity and representation in hospitals. The data reveal an opportunity for hospitals to develop targeted interventions to build pathways and pipelines for military veterans, visibly disabled and LGBTQ+ members of communities to increase diversity in the workforce.



PODCAST

Health Care Transformation Begins With Its People

Hear from experts at Kaiser Permanente and Mass General Brigham in this [podcast](#) about how their organizations are using innovative workforce approaches to give their clinicians the resources and skills needed to thrive professionally and personally.

PROGRAMS

Diversifying the Workforce Through Professional Development

Professional development programs, such as IFDHE's [Summer Enrichment Program](#), and [Executive Certificate in Diversity and Health Equity](#), are geared toward increasing the representation of historically marginalized groups and training health care leaders in diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. The [Summer Enrichment Program](#) is a 10-week, paid internship program for graduate students that are in the process of pursuing an advanced degree within health care or a related field. The [Executive Certificate in Diversity and Health Equity](#) is a 10-month fellowship that provides health care professionals the competencies to effectively lead diversity, health equity, inclusion and justice practices in their hospitals and health systems. Such programs also provide hospitals with the opportunity to invest in the development of individuals who possess diverse characteristics and position them to assume leadership roles within the organization.

Resources/Case Studies

- [The Health Equity Roadmap](#)
- [Summer Enrichment Program](#)
- [Executive Certificate in Diversity and Health Equity](#)
- [Recruiting and Retaining an International Health Care Workforce](#)
- [Rural health system prioritizes workforce diversity to meet community needs](#)