

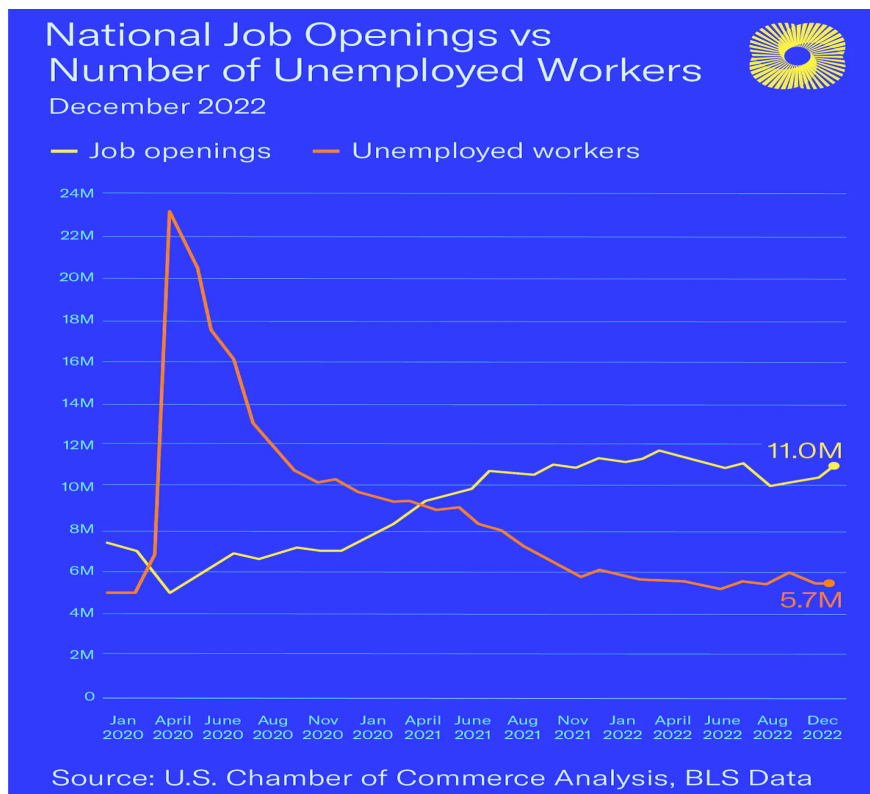
**Introduction**

If you have worked in healthcare for 30+ years as I have, you recognize cycles in the industry that tend to repeat themselves and/or challenges that never seem to go away. Examples include the cost of healthcare, care coordination and quality, overall health outcomes, and an alarming workforce shortage.

While these are complex issues with many opinions, explanations and “here is how you fix it” notions, it can be overwhelming for leaders who are dealing with these challenges daily. The purpose of this article is to provide the reader with a basic overview of the current landscape and provide a sense of hope through concrete strategy and tactic examples to alleviate the workforce shortage.

**Current Landscape**

We all feel the labor shortage, but how bad is it exactly? According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), we have almost 11 million job openings in the United States, but only about half as many people available to work. Furthermore, the labor force participation rate (aka the percentage of our population that is working or actively looking for work) has decreased especially since the pandemic and continues to stay low.



“If every unemployed person in the country found a job, we would still have over 5 million open jobs.”

*U.S. Chamber of Commerce*

**What about the Healthcare and Social Services Sector?**

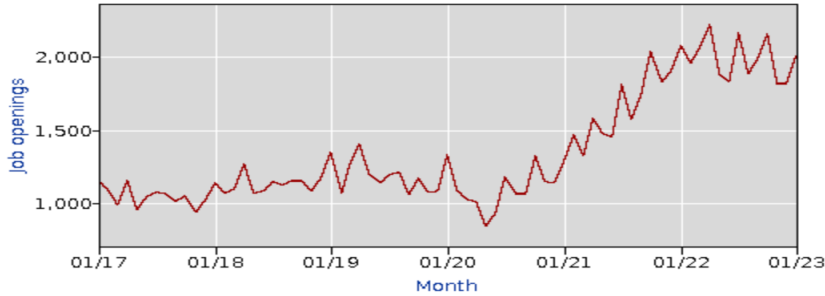
While the last several decades have shown crescendos of shortages in different modalities and specialties, there is a consistent undercurrent of lack of primary care providers, mental health professionals, and nurses. The BLS Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey data shows 2.046 million unfilled jobs in the healthcare and social assistance sector June 2022, compared to 1.234 million only 18 months prior.

A more detailed look at our sector from 2017 – 2023 further highlights a concerning trend:

Data extracted on: March 11, 2023 (1:07:08 PM)

**Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey**

**Series Id:** JTU62000000000000JOL  
 Not seasonally adjusted  
**Industry:** Health care and social assistance  
**State/Region:** Total US  
**Area:** All areas  
**Data Element:** Job openings  
**Size Class:** All size classes  
**Rate/Level:** Level - In Thousands



Since the pandemic, we also experience a significant shortage in entry-level and lesser paid jobs in healthcare, such as aides, technicians, clerical, custodial, and other important frontline jobs. We are competing with equal or higher-paying, lower stress jobs in various sectors and industries.

**The Geography Factor – Hawai’i**

Living and working in the beautiful state of Hawai’i is a privilege and an honor. Yet being an island state geographically isolated has its unique challenges when it comes to recruiting and retaining people. This is not a new challenge, but one that has been pronounced through the pandemic, rising costs of living, and wages that are often not competitive with those available on the mainland. The advent of major pay transparency legislation in several states will further highlight this and drive applicant expectations.

So what is the general labor situation in Hawai’i? In looking at Hawai’i compared to the rest of the country, Hawai’i is actually categorized in the “least severe” category of worker shortage index according to a report by the U.S. Chamber of commerce. It sure doesn’t feel that way! Nevertheless, here are three states for comparison:

Least Severe	More Severe	Most Severe
<p>Hawaii has 84 available workers for every 100 open jobs.</p> <p><b>0.84</b></p> <p>Hawaii's Worker Shortage Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Openings: 31,000</li> <li>Unemployed Workers: 21,296</li> <li>Labor Force Participation Rate: 60.4%</li> <li>Quit Rate: 2.6%</li> <li>Hiring Rate: 3.2%</li> </ul>	<p>New Mexico has 65 available workers for every 100 open jobs.</p> <p><b>0.65</b></p> <p>New Mexico's Worker Shortage Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Openings: 69,000</li> <li>Unemployed Workers: 36,857</li> <li>Labor Force Participation Rate: 55.7%</li> <li>Quit Rate: 2.6%</li> <li>Hiring Rate: 4.1%</li> </ul>	<p>Utah has 44 available workers for every 100 open jobs.</p> <p><b>0.44</b></p> <p>Utah's Worker Shortage Index</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Openings: 107,000</li> <li>Unemployed Workers: 38,912</li> <li>Labor Force Participation Rate: 68.1%</li> <li>Quit Rate: 3.0%</li> <li>Hiring Rate: 3.7%</li> </ul>

## **The situation seems hopeless at times - What can I do?**

Regardless of national statistics, the reality is that healthcare is a niche field with specific skills required for many jobs. The need and urgency are real. Healthcare organizations should therefore address multiple touch points simultaneously to reach a tipping point. Listed below are examples of specific strategies and tactics to consider in the focus areas of **recruitment, workforce development, onboarding, and retention.**

### ***Recruitment:***

- Get the basics right: The how, where, and what of recruitment. Understand your market and competition as far as available talent pool (think beyond healthcare!), total benefit package incl. non-traditional benefits, work flexibility, and how your organization's brand and name recognition stack up. How and where do you advertise? Have you recruited your employees to assist in promotional videos and recruitment incentives? How long and duplicative is your application process? Are you using technology like QR codes? How quickly will candidates hear from you once they apply? What does the handoff look like to hiring managers?
- Generational considerations: We have an unprecedented five generations in the workforce now, including returning retirees. Is your recruitment and onboarding strategy too narrow? Generation Z will make up approx. 27% of the workforce by 2025. Unlike millennials, their highest priorities are job stability, benefits, salary, and things like growth opportunities and mentoring. Are you prepared to address this?
- When was the last time you reviewed and updated job descriptions? For example, the job summary is critical as it is often pulled into ads and postings. If the summary doesn't speak to a candidate, they will keep scrolling. Are the listed educational and experience requirements truly still what's still needed today? Are you creating unnecessary barriers by listing things under "required" when they really ought to be "preferred"?
- What does the interview process look like? Are you using behavioral based interview questions to make sure you know how a prospective employee would react in a certain situation and in your work environment? Have you incorporated a peer-interview process to ensure fit?

### ***Workforce Development:***

- It's time to learn about and invest in workforce development! If you are too small to have your own workforce development function, pool resources and partner with another organization or two.
- Connect with schools and generate interest and enthusiasm about specific fields and professions. Partner with high schools and colleges to create meaningful internship programs. Elementary and high school students may not be ready to join you now, but they'll remember you when they are!
- Participate in Sector Partnerships. In Hawai'i - an "industry-led, community-supported collaborative that strengthens local economies by preparing and connecting Hawai'i's young people to careers in in-demand industries." If you are not actively at the table, you need to be.
- Support Hawaii is Hiring - connects kama'āina to job opportunities, training programs and career navigation. It provides local job seekers and new graduates with a streamlined job board and simple access to training and education tools valued in Hawai'i's in-demand and emerging industries.
- Build your own: Partner with schools and universities to create rotations and fellowships both in clinical and non-clinical areas. Develop training programs for lower skilled jobs that are critical to your daily operation.

### ***Onboarding:***

- Employee retention begins with recruitment and onboarding. This is much more than new-hire orientation. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), “onboarding is the process in which new hires are integrated into an organization. It includes not only an initial new-hire orientation process, but an ongoing introduction to an organization's structure, culture, vision, mission, and values.”
- Make sure the recruitment expectations meet the actual job. The experience in the first 90 days on the job can be an indicator whether employees will stay or quit within the first year on the job. We must pay much better attention to the beginning chapter of someone’s employment, provide a sense of belonging, invest in onboarding, 30- and 90-day check-ins and more.
- Develop re-entry programs for professionals and retirees returning to work.

### ***Employee Engagement:***

- An ever-growing body of research and evidence since the original studies of William Kahn in the 1990s, this is where employers leave most opportunity on the table in my opinion. This is surprising given the tremendous cost of turnover. Replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee's annual salary - and that's conservative. Turnover also means losing your reliable people, your innovators, and your problem solvers. It impacts team morale, productivity, quality, and service. It can ultimately damage your brand.
- According to one Gallup Study, 52% of voluntarily exiting employees say their manager or organization could have done something to prevent them from leaving their job. We expect managers who are themselves burning out to keep their employees engaged. We often ask them to do so without formal structure, expectations, support, or training.
- Similar to how we address patient satisfaction with the help of surveys and data correlations provided by third party companies such as NRC Health, Press Ganey, and others, understanding key engagement drivers for our employees is a prerequisite for a meaningful approach to retaining them. Employee engagement and/or stay surveys are a great way to check the pulse of the organization, implement informed action, and measure the effectiveness of actions taken.
- There are several studies and sources that show consistent results across similar engagement drivers. With the addition of local work culture and generational factors, and consistent application of core leadership practices, each organization can develop an evidence-based recipe for success.

Note: Broader industry strategies, change in care models, delivery systems, and payment models are additional and important considerations and were outside the scope of this article.



Claudia Crist RN, MHA, FACHE is President of Kalaukia Enterprises LLC, which partners to elevate people and organizations. An experienced C-Suite executive with a successful 25-year career in leadership, Ms. Crist’s key to success in leadership has been elevating those around her to recognize and reach their potential. Ms. Crist earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Healthcare Administration from Bellevue University and earned her Master of Health Administration degree from the University of Southern California. She is board-certified in healthcare management. Ms. Crist completed her nursing studies at College of the Canyons in California and worked for several years in critical care and emergency departments in both urban and rural settings. Outside of work, she is active and explores the natural beauty Hawai’i has to offer, writes, and volunteers her time in mental health, healthcare leadership development and other causes. Ms. Crist is bilingual (English/German).