

Travelers

REDUCING OUR RELIANCE ON TEMPORARY WORKERS



Like health care facilities across the country, the UVM Health Network is experiencing difficulty hiring in almost all roles, in no small part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workplace violence, mental health, and increased stress. There just are not enough qualified workers to hire at all levels of patient care. To fill the gap, health care organizations everywhere have contracted with temporary health care staff, known as travelers.

From nurses to clinicians, support staff and physician locums, these temporary travelers have been critical in supporting our full-time staff and providing the care our patients need now. The current demand for travelers, however, has made securing them more difficult and expensive—and these increased rates are unsustainable in the long term. While we need to rely on travelers in the short term, we must recruit and retain more permanent staff to reduce our reliance on, and the significant expense of, these temporary workers.



We appreciate the necessary work traveler staff perform in our Network, providing relief for and supporting our dedicated permanent health care staff who have been tirelessly working on the front lines in our communities for the past two years. Our work is now focused on reducing our reliance on this important resource, and ensuring our employed workforce can meet most of our patient care needs.

—Annette Macias-Hoag, Network Chief Nursing Officer
& Senior Vice President

Facing and solving this challenge:

Steps we are taking to “grow our own”

We remain focused on attracting talented health care providers and staff by:

- Improving and increasing efforts to recruit and retain permanent staff
- Increasing wages, as well as providing bonuses, additional pay or incentives
- Converting travelers to permanent staff
- Investing in the development of attainable housing for employees through partnerships with local housing developers
- Offering training for the critical jobs we need filled, including through:
 - the Network Licensed Nursing Assistant Pathway
 - partnerships with state and local governments
 - partnerships with UVM and area colleges to create opportunities for students
 - the Surgical Technician Training Program at the University of Vermont Medical Center

OVER THE LAST
FEW MONTHS:

20  travelers

have been converted to permanent staff.

Solutions at the federal level:

We also continue to advocate for federal action by pushing for:

- Federal rate caps for travelers (possibly with regional variation)
- Medicare factoring in traveler costs into its reimbursements to hospitals and health systems
- Non-taxable housing and living stipends inherent in many travel staffing contracts

We still need travelers' help, though.

Traditionally, travelers were used to ease the burden on permanent staff during busy times, meet unexpected and/or temporary needs, or fill gaps during times of unprecedented crisis. Increasingly, due to the pandemic, our aging population, increased mental health care needs and a dramatic increase in the national workforce shortage, we've relied more heavily on travelers to:

- Fill vacancies left by burnt out permanent staff who've retired or sought less stressful employment
 - Staff for additional capacity to increase access at hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and home health and hospice providers
 - Address higher than expected patient caseloads from patients delaying care early in the pandemic and then needing more critical care due to the delay
 - Allow permanent staff to take time off for much-needed vacations
 - Allow permanent staff to get trained on the Network's electronic health records software, Epic
 - And much more
- Clearly, without travelers working alongside our dedicated, permanent staff, we would not have been able to keep our doors open for our patients.

But we must decrease our reliance on travelers.

The cost of employing travelers has dramatically increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to rise due to the high demand for travelers across the country. We will continue to review our traveler rates on a monthly basis, but with the goal of bringing them down in a thoughtful way that does not inhibit our ability to recruit.

IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF OUR CURRENT FISCAL YEAR 2022:



Standard rates* in 2018 for traveler RNs

\$75-85
per hour

*These rates include the fees charged by traveler staffing agencies.

Current urgent rates* for traveler RNs

\$140-185
per hour

a 46%-54% increase from 2018

Current highest rates* nationally for traveler RNs

\$190-225
per hour

a 61%-62% increase from 2018

Working together, we improve people's lives.

The University of Vermont Health Network is a health system serving more than one million residents across Vermont and Northern New York. We deliver trusted local health care connected to a network of expertise. We are your friends and neighbors, dedicated to improving the health of our communities and the patients we serve.

Learn more at uvmhealthimpact.org