

The Burnout Crisis in Senior Care —and 3 Ways to Solve It

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By Dr. Jacquelyn Kung, Ed Frauenheim, and Laura Ewing

Employees in the senior care industry are at a breaking point as COVID drags on.

Even though vaccinations are happening every day and the end of the pandemic is in sight, burnout levels among staffers have soared over the past year.

The data points to a burnout crisis in senior living and SNFs in particular—one that threatens employee wellbeing as well as organizations' employee attrition rates, care quality and reputation.

Burnout

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. People experiencing burnout feel depleted or exhausted, may become cynical about their job, and tend to perform their roles less effectively.

Workplace burnout occurs when a person feels:

- Limited control of their environment and over their schedule
- Limited participation in decision making and lack of clarity regarding work
- Communication is poor, especially with management

Using this definition from WHO, Great Place to Work—the global workplace authority and parent company of Activated Insights—created a “[burnout risk factor index](#)” of nine Trust Index survey statements. When an employee responds positively to only three or fewer statements, they are likely experiencing burnout.

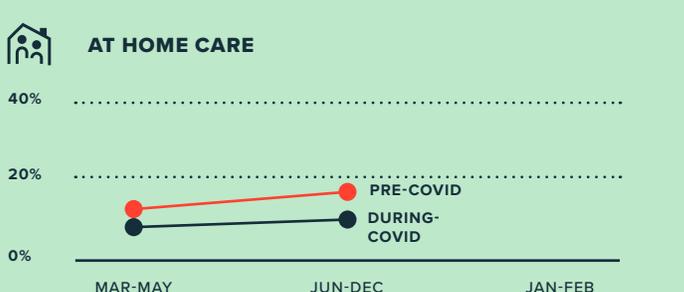
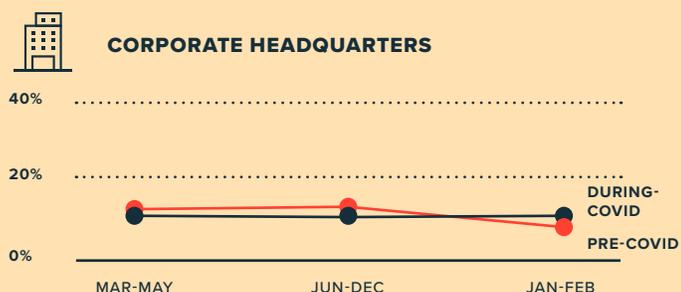
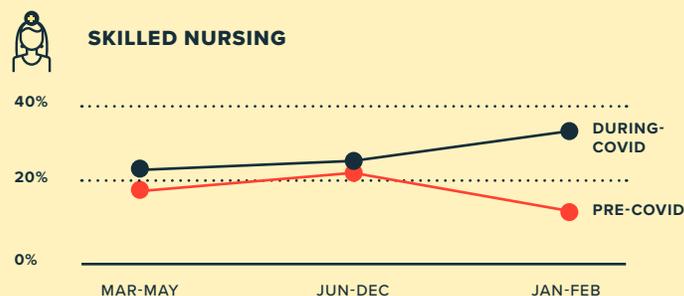


The senior care burnout crisis in numbers

Activated Insights examined survey results from more than **330,000 employees** in senior care over the past two years. January and February of this year mark a significant change in employee burnout.

- A year ago, burnout at senior living facilities (independent living, assisted living, and memory care complexes) was just 17 percent in January and February. It climbed 59 percent in the first two months of this year
- Likewise, burnout at skilled nursing facilities a year ago was a modest 13 percent in January and February, but has skyrocketed to 36 percent

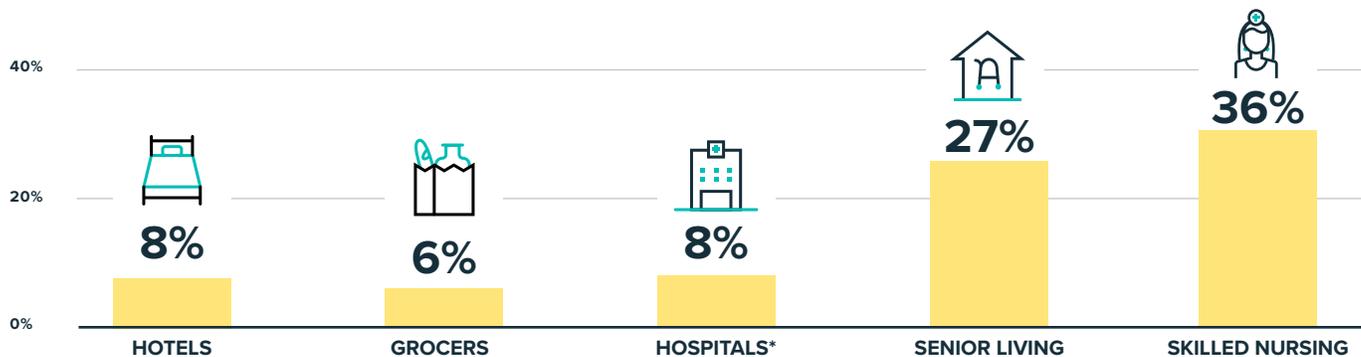
EMPLOYEE BURNOUT PRE AND DURING COVID



Burnout benchmarks

How do these levels of burnout compare to other industries? The differences varied by sector. Hospitals, hotels and grocery stores (i.e., retail) are often compared to senior living and senior care in terms of direct care skills and hourly employee dynamics. Using Great Place to Work data for after March 2020, we find that employees in these sectors are much less burned out—less than 10% of the workforce is overwhelmed on the job.

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING BURNOUT (COVID BENCHMARKS)



*Hospital data includes all staff members. Burnout index is likely higher in hospital staff working in COVID units.

Three solutions to the burnout crisis

Senior care employees at the front lines of COVID are clearly at their wits' end as the grueling pandemic continues. But leaders in the industry can take three simple steps to help bolster their people's wellbeing and prevent burnout from damaging their business.

1

Listen to Employees. This may sound too basic to be effective, but leading organizations have seen the power of listening to employees in these difficult times. There are two pieces to this step. First, leaders must declare that burnout is a real risk and is likely affecting employees. Second, leaders should invite staffers to share their feelings. Make clear it is Ok for employees to say "I am not doing well, I am burned out." Create spaces for employees to discuss how they are doing, such as small group (4-6 person) listening sessions. Publicize counseling services available to staff members, such as through Employee Assistance Programs.

2

Educate Staff about Self-Care. The science is now clear: a variety of strategies are effective at reducing stress and increasing resilience. Many of these techniques fall under the umbrella of "self-care." They include meditation and mindfulness practices, breathing techniques, sound sleep, regular exercise, a healthy diet, and proper hydration. This last item makes for a straightforward company-wide campaign. Give out branded 32-oz bottles and challenge everyone to drink two bottles' worth of water each day.

3

Support People with Resources and Reforms. Last but not least, reduce your employees' stress with material help and management changes. The material aid employees need is often additional headcount. Workers at short-staffed facilities may be desperate for extra hands, especially during night shifts and weekends. More managers may be needed as well. But it is just as vital to make management more skilled, streamlined and oriented towards servant leadership. Train supervisors to cultivate psychological safety. Reduce corporate initiatives to just a few priorities. And develop leaders to see themselves as coaches in service of those on the front lines—who often have great ideas when asked.

The senior living industry can recover from the body blow of COVID. We even have an opportunity to heal our broader society along the way. But a brighter future depends on how well we care for the men and women in the trenches of senior care. More and more of them are hurting now. Will you commit to come to their aid?



Dr. Jacquelyn Kung is CEO of Activated Insights, the senior living partner of workplace culture authority Great Place to Work.

Ed Fraunheim is co-author of several books on workplace culture, including A Great Place to Work for All.

Laura Ewing is Chief of Staff at Activated Insights.



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