

RETENTION HANDBOOK

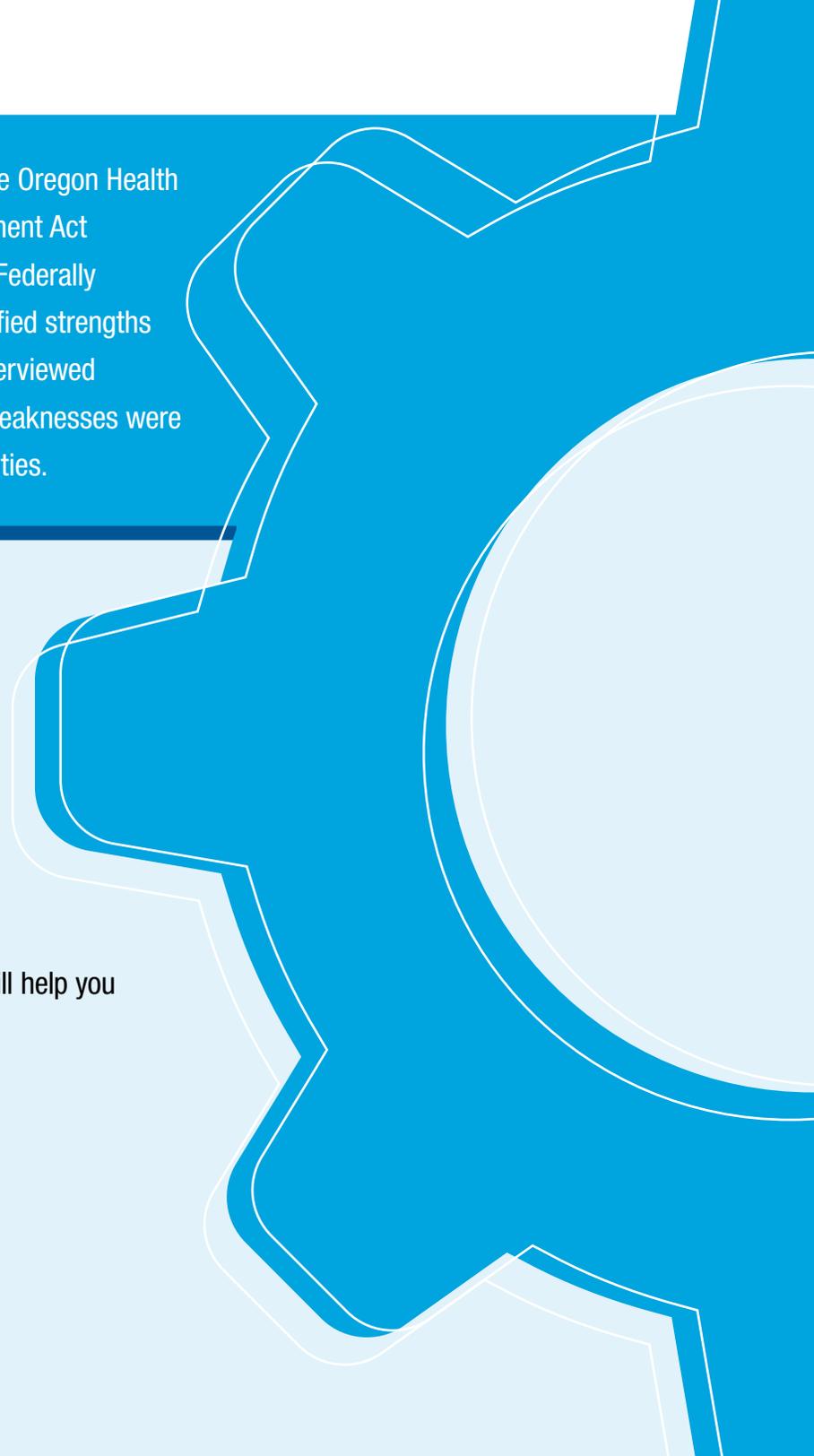


Background



In spring 2012, the Oregon Primary Care Office (PCO), a part of the Oregon Health Authority, began work on the American Recovery and Investment Act (ARRA) Workforce Retention Project. Collaborating with four Federally Qualified Health Centers throughout the state, the PCO identified strengths and weaknesses in recruiting and retaining clinicians. We interviewed clinic staff, clinicians and community members. Strengths and weaknesses were identified for both the clinics and their surrounding communities.

Over the course of a year, the PCO helped each pilot clinic develop an action plan to identify and address a particular weakness that affected their retention of health care practitioners. The clinics' various retention activities conducted over the past year included implementing a mock recruitment plan for a new CEO, customer service training for support and mid-level staff, and distribution of a community survey to identify the surrounding area's health care needs. Lessons learned through this project are included in this handbook, as well as strategies for addressing common things associated with low retention of clinicians. We hope this handbook will help you support and retain health care providers in your clinic and community.





Part 1

Promote retention through good recruitment.

The first step in retention is recruiting the right provider for your clinic and community. Focusing on retention will only become more important as changes to insurance coverage and payment methodology affect how you recruit primary care providers in the future. Here are some steps to follow when recruiting providers to your clinic and community:

1. Actively promote your site on a consistent, ongoing basis.

Recruiting a provider to your clinic will depend on how effective you are in advertising your site and making the right clinician aware of opportunities to practice at your clinic when they arise. To ensure your clinic is always viewed as an attractive place to work, it is essential to consistently advertise and promote all your site's positive aspects, even when your site does not have vacant positions. You can advertise on your organization's or clinic's website, the National Health Service Corps Job Center, the 3RNet website, and community resources you feel may help.

Additional information and resources for effective advertising can be found in the addendum "Resources for Retention."

If your clinic is located in a rural area, remember to highlight all of the positive aspects of practicing there. These include:

- » Broad scope of practice, more autonomy and continuity of care;
- » Financial incentives (rural provider tax credit, NHSC loan repayment program);
- » Small close-knit community.

2. Ensure the provider is the right fit for your clinic and community.

It may be hard to turn away a provider when your clinic is understaffed. However, if you want to promote long-term retention (five years or longer), ensure that the provider and his or her spouse/family are the right fit for your clinic and your community. During the screening and interview process, ask all candidates the following questions:

- » Have they lived or worked in a community similar to yours? If so, did they leave because they were dissatisfied with this type of community?
- » If they're currently working, are they planning on transitioning to a new position because they are unhappy with things related to the community or clinic? What are those things?
- » What things do they value? Some values may include:
 - A small community to raise their children;
 - Excellent school system;
 - Outdoor recreation opportunities;
 - Access to shopping and other services;
 - Proximity to a large metropolitan area;
 - Employment opportunities for their spouse;
 - Religious preferences and places of worship;
 - Cultural events;
 - Diverse community.

In addition, discuss the following with the provider:

- » Describe your patient population and difficulties that may be associated with serving this population. Does the provider want to serve a population similar to that of your clinic? From the very beginning, be honest and open about your practice's environment and your patients' characteristics.
- » Communicate your clinic's expectations. Some expectations may include requiring providers to use electronic health records, expecting a certain amount of call time and no option of working a flexible schedule. You should communicate these and any other requirements specific to your clinic to providers before they accept a position with your clinic.

In summary, always determine what the provider needs to be happy in the practice environment and community; then decide if your clinic and community are a good fit. If not, the provider will likely not remain at your clinic for longer than five years.

3. Implement a thorough orientation process.

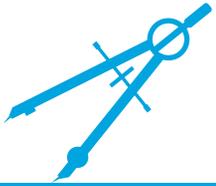
Once you have found a provider you believe is a good fit for your clinic and community, a thorough orientation and on-boarding process is essential. Providers and medical staff consistently report not receiving an adequate orientation to their new work environment and policies. This contributes to long-term dissatisfaction.

If you don't have a formal orientation and on-boarding plan in place but are considering implementing one, start with asking existing staff what questions they had after starting with your clinic and how they believe on-boarding could improve. This will give you an idea of where to start focusing your efforts. Generally, most plans focus on outlining ways to carry out the following activities:

- » Welcome and orient the new provider and spouse/partner/family to the clinic and community.
- » Arrange opportunities for the provider and family to give a clinic administrator feedback and ask questions.
- » Partner a new provider with a mentor (fellow employee) during the first year of employment.
- » Address concerns or issues as soon as possible that may cause the provider or family to leave the clinic or community.
- » Recognize the provider for accomplishments.
- » As much as possible, support the provider's compensation, education and benefit needs.

To find the best process for your clinic, create a written plan and use checklists to guarantee the plan is followed with every new employee. In addition, assign the various tasks and responsibilities outlined in your on-boarding plan to specific employees and have them sign off that the activities have been completed. This will reduce the likelihood that information is forgotten or overlooked.

A “New Provider Orientation Checklist” is included in this tool kit.



Part 2

Understand the things that affect retention.

The top five things that providers consistently cite as reasons for leaving their clinic include:

- » Provider dissatisfaction with the clinical practice environment.
- » Spouse/partner dissatisfaction with the community, including:
 - Lack of employment opportunities for spouse/partner;
 - Inadequate social network for spouse/partner.
- » Dissatisfaction with other community aspects for the provider and family such as:
 - Quality of public schools;
 - Availability of affordable quality housing;
 - Availability of other health care partners and specialists;
 - Availability of continuing education opportunities;
 - Access to shopping and other services.
- » Insufficient income potential.
- » Provider problems with patient relations or patient mix.

Specific aspects found at the ARRA project pilot clinics that have negatively affected provider retention or may affect it in the future include:

- » Substandard public schools;
- » Poor communication and follow-through from clinic administration;
- » Lack of community activities;
- » Proximity to family;
- » Limited employment opportunities for spouse/partner;
- » Spouse/partner unhappy with community;
- » Lack of cultural diversity;
 - » Patient and payer mix;
 - » Excessive call requirements/limited support for time off and vacations.

Although many of these aspects may be difficult to address because of the nature of your community or limited resources, remember that regular contact with providers can help identify issues early and begin to address them — before the situation worsens and there is no chance of keeping the provider at your clinic. It is essential to start focusing on retaining a provider as soon as that person accepts an offer of employment. Building a strong foundation for a relationship is fundamental to retaining each provider.



Part 3

Follow these steps to retain your providers.

Follow and implement these activities to improve the likelihood of providers remaining at your clinic and in your community:

1. Have a thorough orientation and on-boarding process.

Make sure you support and assist providers before and during their relocation to your clinic and community. This may include helping them find housing, providing contact information for schools and other services their children may need, giving them a map of the area and organizing a welcome basket and/or gathering once they arrive in the community. Supporting the providers' transition will help them feel welcomed into the community they are serving. You may also consider involving community members outside your organization to help in this process; this will allow the provider to meet other community members and begin to form social relationships outside their work environment.

Once a provider begins employment, it's critical to provide a thorough and comprehensive orientation to your clinic. Start with reviewing all aspects of working in your clinic: the provider's, support staff's and front office's workspace locations; where supplies are stored; and the location of exam rooms. In addition, cover where administration offices are located and who the clinician should contact with questions about payroll, vacation, sick leave, etc. Introduce the provider to his or her mentor and schedule frequent check-ins with the provider, particularly during the first two weeks of employment.

Use the checklists and resources included in this tool kit as a reference; refine and make changes based on your clinic's needs.

2. Schedule and implement formal check-ins with all providers.

Once a provider and spouse/partner and their family arrive at your clinic and community, regularly check in with them, especially in the six months after they arrive. Provider check-ins can be a simple short conversation, but formal check-ins (at least 15 minutes set aside in a provider's schedule every three months) are essential. You will find out how they are settling in and if they have concerns that the clinic needs to address. This practice should continue for the duration of their employment with your clinic. Check-ins should also be scheduled with your other clinic providers.

During the formal check-ins with each provider (new and existing) consider using the clinician matrix tool included in this tool kit. This matrix can be a helpful guide to your conversations. The matrix categories can be modified to be specific to your clinic and community. For help with and more information about this tool, contact the Primary Care Office or the Rimrock Health Alliance (see "Resources for Retention" page in this tool kit).

Arrange a time to meet (in person or over the phone) with the provider's spouse or partner (if applicable). If meeting in person, make it informal and consider including the spouse of another clinic provider, particularly if the new provider's partner doesn't have any social connections in the community. A spouse's or partner's satisfaction is as important as a provider's. A spouse must also be a good match for the community. If the spouse or partner is dissatisfied, is unable to establish social connections or find employment, the provider will likely not stay at your clinic or in the community.

3. Engage and recognize all clinicians.

Focus on actively engaging all new and established clinicians at your clinic by soliciting their feedback and keeping them informed of any changes within your clinic before they happen. Doing this will encourage them to have a “voice” within your clinic and to feel like they are valued members of your organization. Engagement can be achieved through check-ins with each clinician, employee feedback/satisfaction surveys (preferably done on an annual basis), and invitations to be on clinic committees. In sum, simply keep them informed and ensure that they feel included in decisions that affect them.

In addition to engagement, recognizing practitioners directly contributes to their level of job satisfaction and their long-term retention (defined as a provider staying five years or more at a site). Recognition activities are particularly important if your practice is located in a rural community; providers in rural areas may tend to feel that their work goes unnoticed or that they aren’t appreciated. Find what recognition activities work best for your organization and your clinicians; don’t be afraid to ask your providers what type of feedback and recognition they appreciate the most. This will give you an excellent starting point. Recognition can be done through press releases, plaques/certificates presented to the clinician, your clinic website, staff or board meetings or a clinic newsletter. Some events or accomplishments that could be recognized are:

- » Years of service;
- » Any publications, presentations or research in which a clinician participated;
- » Patient satisfaction survey results or testimonials;
- » Teaching students or serving as their preceptor;
- » National Nurse Day, Mental Health Provider Day, National Primary Care Week, National Health Service Corps Community Day, etc.

4. Develop and implement a formal retention plan.

Using a retention plan will help ensure that retention activities are an ongoing focus of your clinic. If you have an existing retention plan but aren't following it, take a look at what is included in the plan. Are the activities still relevant and do they apply to your clinic and providers? If not, ask relevant clinic members for their input, decide what needs to be changed and make those changes. If the activities still apply but are not in sync with your plan, determine why. Is someone designated to make sure that activities occur? Does this person have clinic leadership's and support staff's help to schedule and carry out these activities?

If you do not have an existing retention plan, here are some steps that may help you develop one at your site:

- » Form a committee made up of clinic administration, a provider, a member of the community and whoever else you feel may be relevant and support you in your endeavors.
- » Ask for feedback and input from other providers and incorporate their suggestions, if appropriate, into your plan.
- » Identify strategies and activities you believe will help you retain providers and then pair them with action steps to be carried out by clinic members.
- » Finally, once your plan is in place, it's important to review and make any necessary changes on an annual basis. It's critical to identify what isn't working and ways your plan could be improved to better retain clinicians. If you're continually losing clinicians, your first step should be to evaluate your retention plan and determine what parts of it are not working.

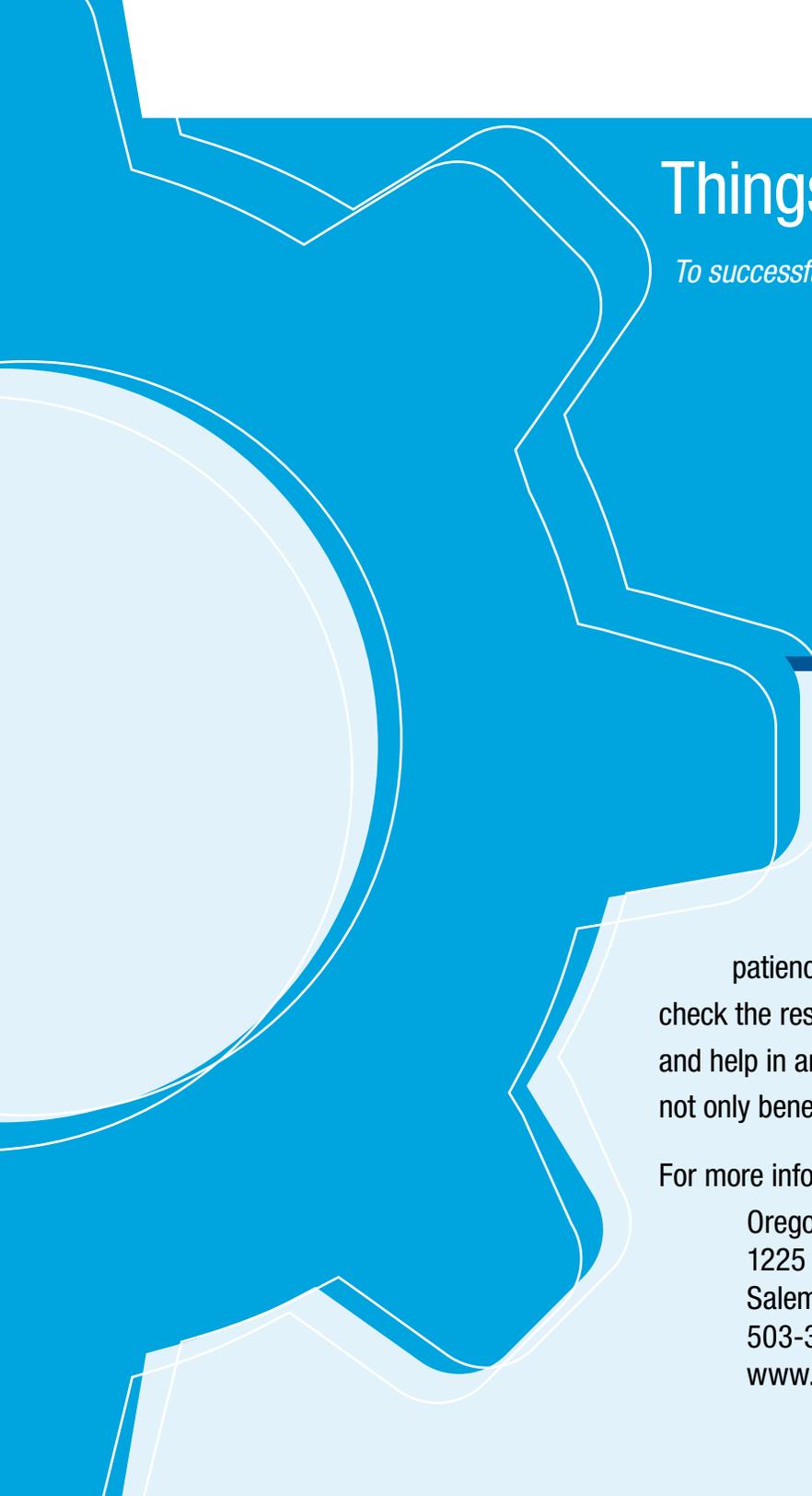
Part 3

A written retention plan

The following key components should be included in the retention plan:

- » Goals for retention activities;
- » Timeline of activities and provider check-ins;
- » Assignment of activities to responsible employee;
- » Identification of a committee to oversee retention activities;
- » Resources available (budget, materials, staff that will carry out activities, community contacts);
- » The elements of retention you feel benefit your clinic the most (e.g., keeping every provider for a minimum of three years);
- » Evaluation of retention plan and activities (outcome measures).

Things to consider and call to action



To successfully retain health care providers, follow these maxims:

- » *View long-term clinician retention as a realistic goal. Retention most likely depends on finding the right provider for your community. If you start with a good fit, retention will follow.*
- » *Increasing a provider's pay is not always the answer. Clinicians most value the community they serve and other things not related to compensation.*
- » *Most importantly, make sure your clinicians are valued and feel satisfied with their practice environment and community.*

In order to retain your providers, you must be prepared and willing to invest both time and resources into identifying and implementing a plan that works best for your clinic. Use this handbook as a guide to help direct your efforts. Start small — pick one or two things to focus on and execute first. Don't try to implement everything at once; making systemic changes takes time and patience. If you encounter difficulties or need support at any time during this process, check the resources provided. The Primary Care Office and its partners are here to support and help in any way we can. Finding providers that are the best fit for your clinic and will stay not only benefits your clinic and community, it supports the health of all Oregonians as well.

For more information or help, contact the
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www.oregon.gov/oha/OHPR/PCO/



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This document can be provided upon request in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request this publication in another format or language, contact the Oregon Primary Care Office at (503) 373-1779 or PCO.Oregon@state.or.us or 711 for TTY.

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