

Strengthening Recruitment and Retention: A Practical Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI) Approach for Nursing Homes

Health Services Advisory Group (HSAG)

October 2, 2026

Agenda



Describe common recruitment and retention challenges in the nursing home setting and the impact these challenges have on workforce stability, staff engagement, and resident care.

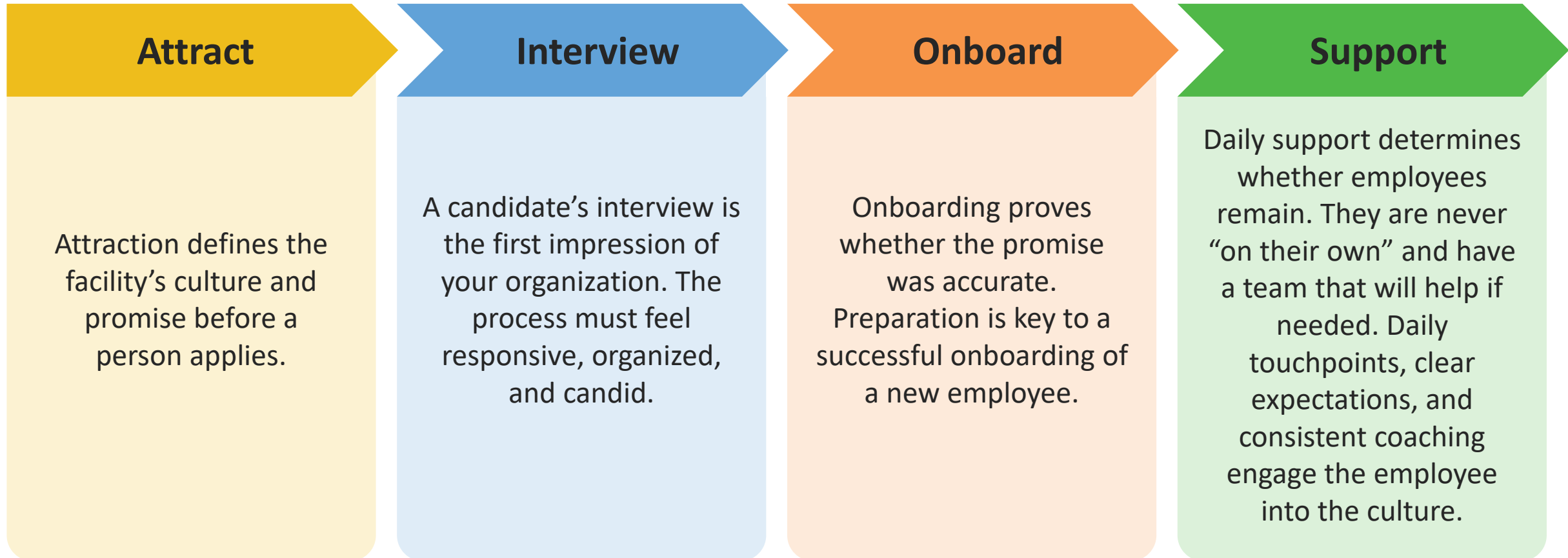


Demonstrate how to evaluate current recruitment and retention practices and identify priority gaps for improvement.



Discuss how to develop a workforce improvement plan that is monitored through QAPI processes.

Recruitment and Retention: A Continuous Process

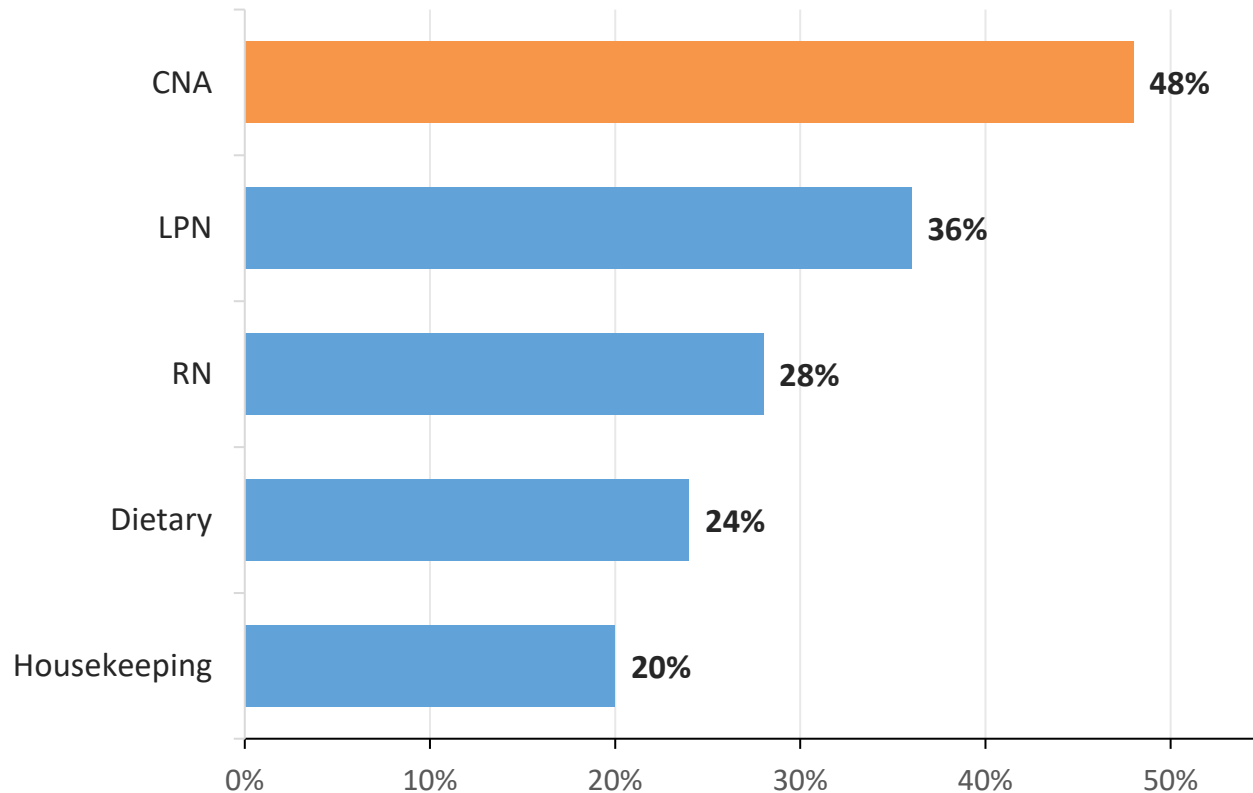


The Workforce Challenge

Why Recruitment and Retention Deserve a Quality Improvement Approach

Turnover Is High, and Residents Feel It

Example: Annual turnover by role



Example rates: Pull your facility's numbers by role, unit, and shift, keeping core staff separate from agency.

Workforce stability

Vacancies drive agency use, overtime, and heavier assignments for the staff who stay.

Staff engagement

Short-staffed teams skip breaks, experience burnout, and lose the connection that keeps caregivers in the building.

Resident care

When residents lose familiar caregivers, consistency, relationships, and quality measures all suffer.

What Attracts Staff and What Keeps Them

1 Flexibility and work design

Open scheduling, shift swaps, every-other-weekend off, and no forced extra shifts.

2 A competitive offer

Benchmarked pay, plain-language benefits, relocation help, and tuition support.

3 Strong starts

Day-one readiness, trained mentors, and check-ins across the first 90 days.

4 Culture and psychological safety

Respectful teams, fast response to bullying, and concerns that get closed out.

5 Connection and belonging

Mentoring, peer huddles, recognition, and leaders who round and listen.

6 Growth pathways

Visible ladders: hospitality aide to CNA to LPN to RN.

These 6 drivers power recruiting and retention. Culture multiplies all of them.

Culture Is the Engine Underneath Everything

Recruitment messages only work when the day-to-day reality backs them up.

Safe to speak up

- Concerns raised without fear of payback.
- Bullying and toxic behavior addressed fast.
- Speak-up forums and closed-loop follow-up.

Supported every day

- Leaders visible on all shifts, rounding weekly.
- Realistic staffing expectations and real breaks.
- Stress support normalized, not stigmatized.

Connected to purpose

- Mentors, huddles, and peer relationships.
- Growth recognized and celebrated.
- Staff stories that match what candidates find.

The leadership test: Would your best employee recommend this workplace today?

Start With a Self-Assessment

Assess: Answer the drop-down questions

Choose: Pick actions for the gaps

**Track: Review progress monthly
in QAPI meetings**

Recruitment Practices

- Same-day applicant response
- Job ads lead with flexibility
- Annual wage benchmarking
- Active sourcing and interview shadowing

Retention Practices

- Day-1 readiness for every new hire
- Trained mentor for every new hire
- Getting-to-know-you form and 30-, 60-, and 90-day check-ins
- Exit and stay interviews

Culture & Safety

- Weekly leader rounding, all shifts
- Open door policy with issues closed out within a week
- Fast bullying response and workplace violence plan
- Burnout supports that staff actually use

Quality Connection

- Monthly turnover review, core vs. agency
- Workforce on the QAPI agenda
- Facility Assessment (F838) kept current

Assess your facility across these 4 domains. Review the findings as an interdisciplinary team. Act on your gaps.

Recruitment Strategies That Work

Recruitment Marketing: Lead With Scheduling Flexibility

Example: Scheduling rotation, shown as a 4-week pattern

Week	Mon–Tue	Wed–Thu	Fri–Sun
Week 1	Work	Off	Work
Week 2	Off	Work	Off
Week 3	Off	Work	Off
Week 4	Work	Off	Work

Confirm operational feasibility by unit and shift before you advertise it.

Make flexibility visible

- Advertise open and flexible scheduling options up front.
- Offer manager-approved shift swaps to solve life conflicts early.
- Promote “every other weekend off” where feasible.

Ad headline to test:

“Every other weekend off and built-in shift swap options.”

Poll 1

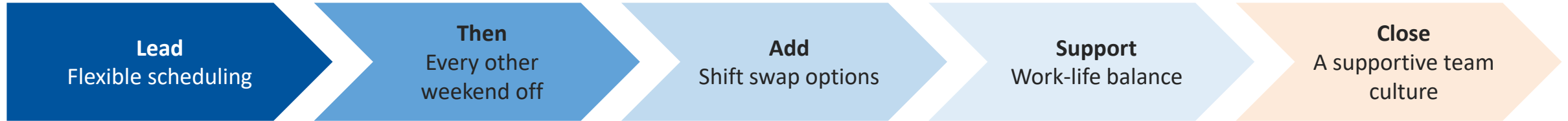


Where does your hiring process lose momentum?

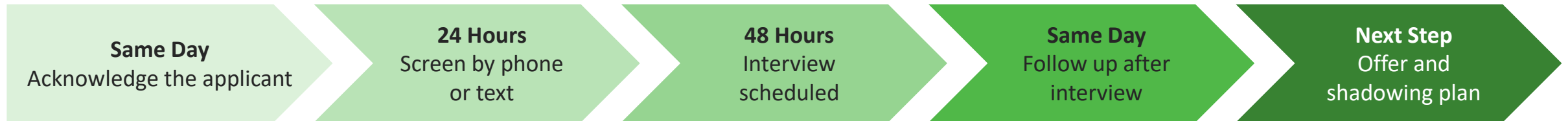
- A. First response
- B. Interview booking
- C. Offer decision
- D. Arrival on day 1

Recruitment: Say It Well, Then Move Fast

The message stack: Lead the job ad with what candidates want most.



The conversion system: Delay is when candidates start looking elsewhere.



Operational rule: 1 recruitment champion, 1 tracking board, templated texts, and daily applicant review.

No candidate waits unattended. Speed-to-hire is a competitive advantage you control.

Recruitment: Source Where Talent Already Is

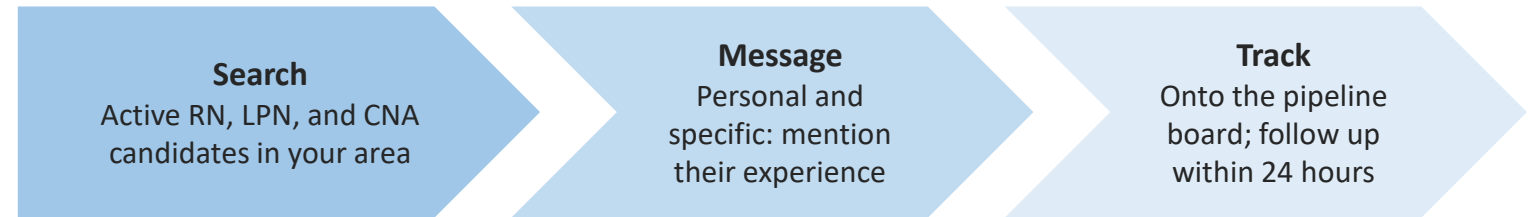
Do not wait for the perfect applicants to find you. Build visibility, then go get them.

Social platforms

- Use short team stories, told by staff.
- Schedule advantages up front.
- Adopt training paths and the career ladder.
- Ensure a visible community presence.

Reverse sourcing: search for them

Most employers post and wait. Go to the résumé databases and other job boards instead.



Give it a rhythm: your recruitment champion runs a 30-minute sourcing block daily, using the same tracking board as applicants.

Personalized outreach beats a mass blast every time.

Recruitment: Turn Staff Experience Into Momentum

The most credible employer brand is carried by employees who already choose to stay.



Recruitment: Make the Offer Hard to Ignore

Candidates compare total value: pay, benefits, development, and how easy you make it to say yes.

1

Salary benchmark

Benchmark every direct-care role against local competitors, including hospitals, at least annually.

2

Benefits

Comprehensive benefits, explained plainly in recruiting materials, not buried in human resources (HR) paperwork.

3

Relocation, commuting

Relocation support for hard-to-fill licensed roles; consider mileage reimbursement for good people who live far away.

4

Tuition, advancement

Tuition reimbursement for CNA-to-LPN-to-RN ladders. Publish the career ladder in every job ad.

Leadership check: If you cannot name your compensation position in the market, candidates will define it for you.

Recruitment: Build Pipelines Before You Need Them

Grow-your-own CNA pathway



Licensed nurse pathway (LPN + RN)



Goal: Move from “post and hope” to teach, expose, train, and convert.

Name 1 college liaison who owns these relationships, and reserve semester rounding slots each term.

Recruitment: Shadowing as the Final Fit Check

Both sides check alignment before a licensed nurse commits, without creating an unpaid work trial.

For the nursing candidate

- Sees unit culture and team dynamics firsthand.
- Watches real nursing workflow on a real shift.
- Learns documentation expectations before day 1.

What the candidate learns: *“Can I see myself practicing here?”*

For the employer

- Gauges genuine interest and professionalism.
- Observes communication style with the team.
- Checks comfort with the care environment.

What you learn: *“Will this nurse align with our team?”*

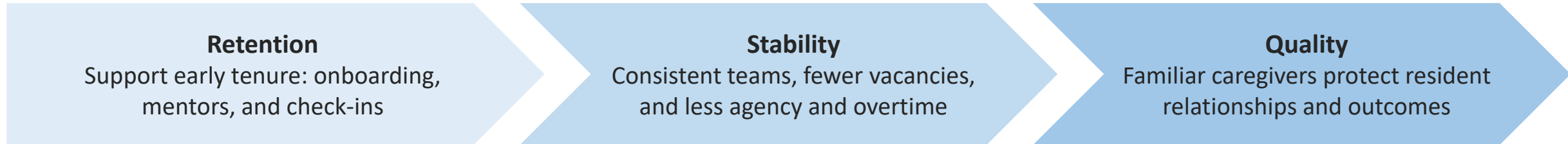
Guardrails: Observation only, no patient care, no door codes, limited computer access, limited interaction, and a few hours to day 1.

Structure it as part of the interview process, never as an unpaid working trial.

Retention Strategies That Protect Your Investment

Retention: Keep Caregivers Supported

Every hire you fought for becomes a retention case on day 1, and early tenure matters most.



Evidence signals: what the research and field experience keep showing

Mentoring

Mentors help new staff stay and build confidence faster.

Preceptor support

Strong, trained preceptors improve early retention.

Regular check-ins

Routine check-ins reduce avoidable exits.

Retention is the cheapest recruitment strategy you have.

Poll 2



What early experience pushes people away?

- A. Role confusion
- B. Inconsistent coaching
- C. Excessive workload
- D. Unresolved concerns

Retention: Engineer a Strong Start

DAYS 0–30

- Standardized, welcoming orientation
- Getting-to-know-you form with every hire
- Trained mentor assigned and prepared
- 1st-week check-in on the form together

DAYS 31–60

- Mentors and preceptors coach in real time
- 1:1 mentoring relationship in place
- Peer huddles build team connection
- 30- and 60-day check-ins: ask, listen, and adjust

DAYS 61–90

- 90-day check-in and stay conversation
- Track 30-, 60-, 90-day retention by cohort
- Recognize growth and early wins
- Plan the next step: skills, shifts, and goals

Most avoidable exits happen in the 1st year. Early tenure is where retention is won or lost.

The anchor for every check-in is the getting-to-know-you form.

The Getting-to-Know-You Form: Ask, Then Use It

Completed during orientation and reviewed together in week 1, so managers and preceptors know how each new team member wants to be supported.



Quality Improvement Organizations
Partners Promoting Transformational Care
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Getting to Know You

Welcome to the team! Please fill this out on your first day. There are no right or wrong answers, and you may skip any question you would rather not answer. Your answers help your manager support you. Your manager will go over it with you during your first week.

About Me			
My name:		The date I started:	
What I like to be called:		My birthday (month and day):	
My job title:		My unit or department:	

How I Work Best	
I learn a new task best when I:	
☐ Try it while someone coaches me ☐ Watch someone do it first ☐ Follow written steps ☐ Talk it through ☐ Other: _____	
The best way to check in with me is:	
☐ In person during my shift ☐ A planned one-on-one meeting off shift ☐ A quick talk after my shift ☐ Other: _____	
When I do a good job, I like (Check all that apply):	
☐ A thank you note ☐ A thank you in person ☐ Praise in front of my team ☐ Praise in private ☐ A small treat or token ☐ Other: _____	
What helps me feel supported at work? <i>(For example: Teamwork, respect, patience, clear directions)</i>	One goal I have for my first 90 days: <i>(Your manager can help you with this one)</i>

A Little About Me	
My favorite snack, treat, or drink:	Food notes: ☐ None ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten-free ☐ Allergies: _____
Something else I would like my team to know about me:	

For office use: Completed by the manager			
Date reviewed with employee:		☐ Original sent to HR. Date: _____	
Manager name:		Manager signature:	

About Me			
My name:		The date I started:	
What I like to be called:		My birthday (month and day):	
My job title:		My unit or department:	

How I Work Best	
I learn a new task best when I:	
☐ Try it while someone coaches me ☐ Watch someone do it first ☐ Follow written steps ☐ Talk it through ☐ Other: _____	
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What helps me feel supported at work? <i>(For example: Teamwork, respect, patience, clear directions)</i>	One goal I have for my first 90 days: <i>(Your manager can help you with this one)</i>

Follow-up: Review together during the 1st week, then revisit at 30-, 60-, and 90-days.

Retention: Make Well-Being Standard Work

Round and listen

Every department head manages by walking around: greet staff, ask what they need, surface small fixes early, and then close the loop.

Protect breaks

Find when breaks are missed, fix coverage gaps with a trained relief or circulator role, and track break completion weekly.

Create support spaces

Quiet rooms, time to mourn, grief support, EAP and counselors, peer and buddy systems, all voluntary and visible.

Huddle with purpose

Short start- or end-of-shift huddles: hear concerns, celebrate positives, and normalize asking for help.

Breaks are a retention strategy, and trust grows when concerns lead to visible action.

Retention: An Operating Rhythm That Sticks

Cadence	Who	Focus	Output
Weekly	All department heads	Walking rounds and check-ins	Open-door issues and actions
Biweekly	Unit managers and HR	Stay interviews and stress pulse	Fix list with owners and dates
Monthly	Leadership and QAPI committee	Dashboard and pilot results	Scale, stop, or adjust

Immediate next step: Put weekly walking rounds and open-door hours on every department head's calendar.

Non-negotiables for every department head

- Round weekly with staff on all shifts.
- Keep open-door access and close the loop.
- Protect breaks and fix coverage barriers.
- Do not make required extra shifts the norm.
- Respond fast to bullying or toxic behavior.

Plan, Implement, and Monitor

Turning Priorities Into a Workforce Improvement Plan
Your QAPI Process Owns

Poll 3



Which commitment would you prioritize first?

- A. Faster applicant follow-up
- B. A personalized onboarding conversation
- C. Weekly leadership rounds
- D. Reliable break relief

Track 5 Measures Every Month

CNA core-staff turnover

▼ *lower is better*

Core staff only;
count agency
separately

90-day, new-hire retention

▲ *higher is better*

New hires still on
the team after
onboarding

Open direct-care positions

▼ *lower is better*

All direct-care roles,
tracked monthly

Exit interviews completed

▲ *higher is better*

Percent of
departures; act on
the themes

*Note: As retention
improves, exit numbers
will drop and so will exit
interviews.*

Resident satisfaction

▲ *higher is better*

Your balancing
measure; care stays
first

QAPI trigger rule: If any measure worsens for 2 consecutive review periods, open a root cause review.

Set a goal for each measure. Consider monitoring additional measures when ready: LPN/RN turnover, agency share, 1st-year turnover, applicant response time, stay interviews, staff pulse, break completion, and rounding.

Prioritize: Pick 2 or 3 Actions

Impact ↑

Start Here: *High impact, low effort*

- Exit interviews for every departure
- Day-1 readiness checklist
- Speed-to-hire standard
- Job ads that lead with flexibility

Plan For: *High impact, more effort*

- Mentor/preceptor program
- Scheduling-flexibility pilot
- School and college pipelines

Quick Polish: *Lower impact, low effort*

- Ask happy staff for job board reviews
- Publish the career ladder in every ad

Hold: *Lower impact, high effort*

- Big-bang program overhauls
- Every idea at once

Effort →

How to choose

- Start with the the gaps your self-assessment flagged.
- Do the easy ones first; early wins build the habit.
- Give every action an owner and a target date.

**Pick 2–3 actions, not 10.
Run them for 90 days and
let the data support for scale.**

Build the Workforce Improvement Plan

Action (the pilot)	Owner	Target date	Resources	Measure
Getting-to-know-you form and trained mentor pairing on the highest-turnover unit	DON, unit manager	Days 0–30	Mentor training time; form template	90-day retention; check-ins done
Speed-to-hire standard: same-day acknowledgment, interview within 48 hours	HR lead	Days 0–60	Tracking board; templated texts	Time-to-interview; offer acceptance
Break-coverage relief role and weekly leadership rounding on evening shift	Administrator, scheduler	Days 31–90	Budgeted relief hours; rounding calendar	Break completion; support pulse

Keep your QAPI committee informed of progress and outcomes for your workforce plan.

Monitor Through QAPI: Small Tests, Real Data

Plan

Pick 1 pilot, 1 unit, 1 measure, and predict what should improve

Do

Run the small test for 2–4 weeks; note what actually happened

Study

Compare the monthly measures against your prediction

Act

Adopt, adapt, or abandon, then test the next cycle

The PDSA cycle: 1 small test at a time

Make workforce a permanent part of QAPI

- Add the workforce review to your monthly QAPI meeting agenda.
- Trigger rule: 2 consecutive worsening periods opens a root cause review.
- Treat a persistent gap as a formal performance improvement plan (PIP) with an interdisciplinary team.
- Feed results into your annual Facility Assessment (F838) update.
- Document tests, results, and decisions; surveyors will ask.

Set a Visible Leadership Standard

Make visibility, access, and fast response standard work for every department head.

Leadership Rounding

Round every week on every shift and maintain reliable access time.

Remove Barriers

Remove barriers to breaks and limit routine mandatory extra shifts.

Follow Through

Act quickly on toxic conduct, safety issues, and unclosed concerns.

The weekly commitment: 1 visible round, 1 open-door block, and 1 closed-loop staff concern.

Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Remember

- 1 Workforce is a quality issue. Run it through QAPI with an interdisciplinary team.
- 2 Culture and psychological safety are the engine; tactics fail without them.
- 3 Go through the workbook self-assessment as a team, then pick just a few actions to start with.
- 4 Track 5 measures monthly in QAPI; 2 worsening periods triggers a root cause review.

Start this week

- Pull 12 months of turnover by role, unit, and shift, keeping core staff separate from agency.

This month

- Complete the Self-Assessment as a team; choose a few actions with named owners and target dates.

This quarter

- Review the 5 workforce measures in your monthly QAPI meeting. Scale what works, adjust what does not.

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Thank you!

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