

Why a Strong Safety Net Depends on a Supported Workforce

Safety net organizations: Look internally. High-quality patient care begins with a workforce that feels supported, valued and empowered to do its best work. While today's healthcare environment brings real challenges, including increased costs, declining reimbursements and tighter margins, it also presents an opportunity to reaffirm what truly sustains care: the people who deliver it.

Across the industry, the pressure on care teams is undeniable. And for regional employers like CHA, this workforce strain has a ripple effect shaping the health and stability of the communities we serve. As health systems navigate increased costs, declining reimbursements and narrowing margins, team members are feeling the effects **every day**. [A recent survey](#) reports that 74% of registered nurses feel emotionally exhausted multiple times a week, with more than half considering leaving the nursing profession in the last 6 months. These realities do not just affect staffing. They directly shape patient experience, quality and continuity of care.

Our community depends on CHA not only as a safety-net provider, but as one of Cambridge's largest employers supporting economic stability, workforce opportunity and the overall well-being of local families. We don't take this responsibility lightly.

We at Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) must continue to be innovators and invest in our employees to remain a sustainable provider for years to come. At a time when engagement and retention [rates are stalling or declining](#) across many health systems, CHA has seen meaningful improvements, reinforcing a simple truth: when we take care of our people, they take better care of our communities.

What's in It for Your Employees?

With staffing shortages widespread in the healthcare industry, demonstrating respect and value for your employees is paramount. At CHA, we recognize the demanding work of patient care and have made the following investments in our team members:

- **Employee Wellbeing Program:** Our employee wellbeing benefits include on-site activities, stress reduction programs, discounted memberships and several more opportunities for our colleagues to feel supported.
- **High Reliability, Redefined:** CHA has deliberately evolved into a high-reliability organization built for the future, focused on the small, consistent actions that strengthen safety, access and trust for patients facing systemic barriers. This work has advanced our journey toward high reliability, strengthened leadership and DEI efforts

and improved financial sustainability. CHA remains deeply committed to creating a safe, supportive environment for employees and patients while delivering essential primary care and behavioral health services where the need is greatest.

- **Diverse and Inclusive Recruiting:** CHA is proud to offer a team that represents the patients we treat daily. With a significant amount of our patients being nonnative English speakers, we prioritize building a workforce that reflects the communities we serve.
- **Mission-Oriented (And We Mean It):** No matter the department, floor or desk, our teams feel connected to CHA's mission to take care of every single patient who comes through our doors. We are passionate about the consistent, reliable care our providers deliver to our patients, 55% of whom rely on Medicaid and other state low-income care plans for their healthcare needs. To support connection to this mission, we implemented CHA Cares, a program for peer recognition with high engagement that helps us acknowledge our strong care delivery internally and celebrate the wins.

What's in It for You?

These investments aren't just about recruitment or retention, they are about ensuring access to care, preserving trusted community jobs and sustaining a workforce that our patients know and trust. By creating a mission-oriented, community-focused environment, you can help mitigate burnout among your employees and focus on delivering consistent, quality care.

We've seen meaningful gains in our culture and safety survey scores in the past two years after increasing our employee investments, leading to fewer disruptions and higher trust. Additionally, our turnover rate remains less than half the industry average, a result of protecting our employees' emotional, mental and physical well-being.

As trusted pillars in our community, we've promised to be there when our patients need a safety net. At CHA, we're strengthening that safety net by supporting those who hold it—so our communities can count on us in 2026 and beyond.

Joy Curtis, Chief People Officer, Cambridge Health Alliance