



## State Health Care Staffing Contracts

*Contract Workers Are a Small but Growing  
Proportion of Three State Facilities' Workforces*

### Background

State and federal laws require the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and the Department of State Hospitals (DSH) and the three facilities we reviewed—Atascadero State Hospital (Atascadero), Porterville Developmental Center (Porterville), and Salinas Valley State Prison (Salinas Valley)—to provide adequate medical and mental health care to individuals who are incarcerated or committed to their facilities. For decades, the State and each of these departments have been involved in lawsuits regarding their failure to provide such care, including having insufficient medical and mental health care staff. Each department uses contract workers to provide medical and mental health care due to ongoing staff vacancy rate challenges.

### Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should require the California Department of Human Resources to assemble and coordinate a cross-agency collaborative recruiting campaign, including a comprehensive salary study, candidate assistance, marketing materials, and effectiveness measures to maximize the State's recruiting of medical and mental health care staff.
- The departments and facilities should measure the effectiveness of their recruiting strategies and the associated costs.
- The departments and facilities should evaluate opportunities to improve their recruiting efforts, including whether it is feasible to offer expanded flexible shifts or affordable housing options to staff.
- The departments should require their facilities to track, tabulate, and report, or develop a system to monitor, the number of times their facilities fall short of the required staff-to-patient ratios.

### Key Findings

- From fiscal years 2019–20 through 2023–24, vacancy rates for medical and mental health care staff increased to between 30 percent and 52 percent at the three facilities we reviewed.
  - » During fiscal year 2023–24, each of the facilities generally had high vacancy rates in psychiatry and other mental health positions, with Porterville also experiencing high vacancies in primary care positions.
- Although each of the facilities has made efforts to recruit medical and mental health care staff, the departments, facilities, and the State could do more to effectively recruit potential candidates and reduce cross-agency competition.
  - » Statewide and nationwide shortages of medical and mental health professionals, the facilities' potentially dangerous working environments, and the high cost of living contribute to facilities' inability to recruit staff.
  - » Despite making reasonable efforts to recruit new health care professionals, the facilities and their respective departments have not comprehensively evaluated the effectiveness of their efforts or thoroughly explored additional recruitment opportunities.
- All three facilities have increased their use of contract workers—primarily in nursing classifications—in recent years; however, contract workers only comprise between 4 percent and 10 percent of overall staffing levels at each facility.
  - » The facilities incur higher hourly costs for contract workers than their state counterparts in most job classifications, even after accounting for the State's overhead and benefits costs.
  - » We found that contract workers possessed the necessary qualifications, but their short-term nature requires facilities to devote time and resources to training them and may interrupt the continuity of patient care for these facilities' specialized populations.
- The three departments have not taken sufficient steps to ensure that they staff their facilities appropriately.
  - » DDS and DSH lack comprehensive policies and procedures to ensure their facilities have sufficient medical and mental health care staff to meet operational needs, while not retaining excess positions.
  - » The three departments realized significant vacancy savings from unfilled positions at the three facilities we reviewed, which they generally asserted they spent to compensate overtime and contract workers, and each department reverted some funds during our audit period.
  - » Despite various lawsuits regarding their failures to provide adequate medical and mental health care, we found that none of the departments has a process to monitor whether their facilities meet required staff-to-patient ratios and none of the facilities could demonstrate full compliance with those requirements.