

Evolution of IPC Policies and Processes in U.S. Home Health Care Agencies: An Analysis of National Surveys in 2019 and 2023

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ANNUAL RESEARCH MEETING

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable populations.
- Home healthcare agencies (HHAs) provide essential skilled nursing care, often to vulnerable patient populations, in their own homes.

We conducted two national surveys of HHAs, in 2019 and 2023, to describe the evolution of infection prevention and control (IPC) policies and processes in response to the pandemic, and any differences by ownership or geographic location.

POPULATION STUDIED

Medicare-certified HHAs located in the 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico with a minimum of ≥20 complete episodes per year; rural HHAs were oversampled.

STUDY DESIGN

- **1,506** and **1,501** U.S. HHAs (including Puerto Rico) were included in the 2019 and 2023 samples, respectively.
- We stratified by key characteristics for national representativeness and oversampled rural agencies.
- Agency administrators or clinical managers were asked to complete the survey online or on paper.
- Questions covered topics like: IPC staffing, IPC compliance and training, current IPC policies/processes, and IPC challenges.
- Descriptive statistics comparing 2019 and 2023 weighted responses (allowing for national representativeness) were calculated using Stata 17.

RESULTS

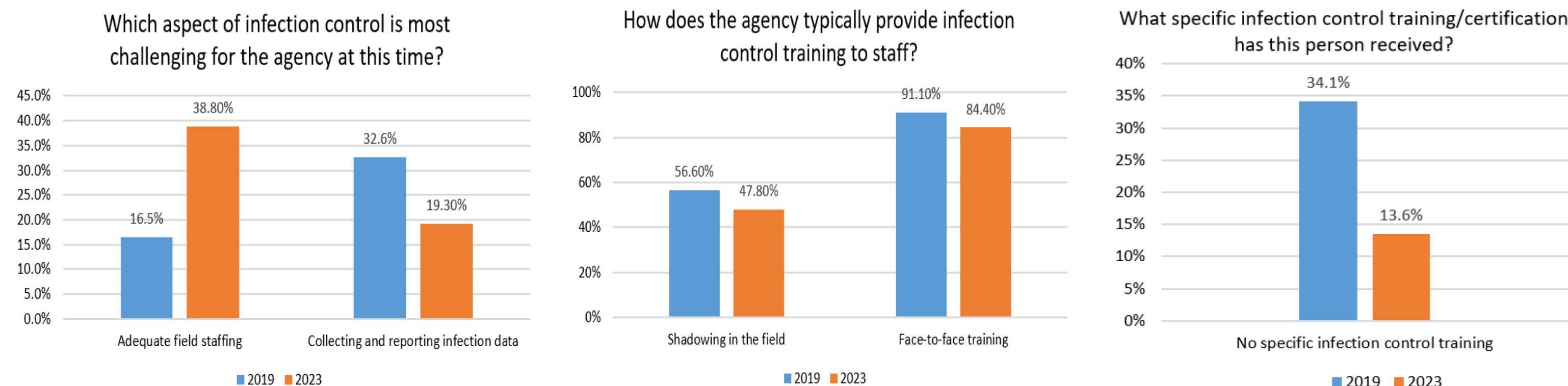
- We achieved a response rate of **35.6%** for the 2019 survey and **30.5%** in 2023.
- In 2023, **76% of respondents completed the survey online** (compared to 56% in 2019), while 24% opted for the paper version (compared to 44% in 2019), **possibly due to greater technology comfortability**.

Contact Information

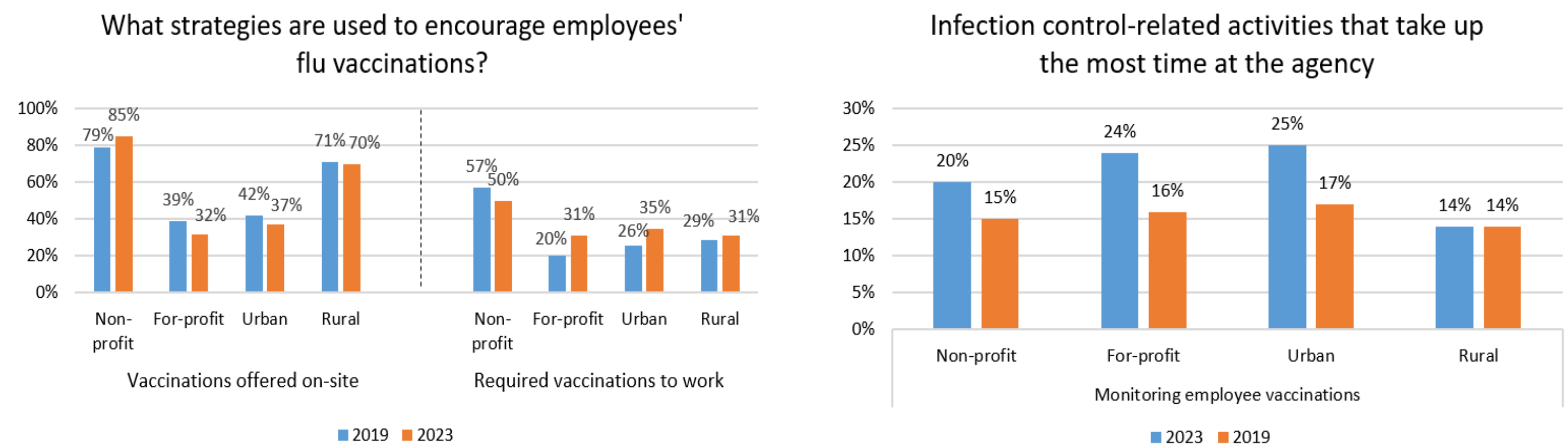
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RESULTS



- In 2023, more agencies reported that **ensuring adequate field staffing became their top infection prevention & control priority**, overtaking infection data collection and reporting, which was their primary concern in 2019.
- **Fewer HHAs reported using shadowing and face-to-face training methods** in 2023.
- The number of **HHA infection prevention personnel who had received specific infection prevention & control training increased** in 2023.



- Currently, **more for-profit HHAs mandate influenza vaccinations** for their employees, while fewer non-profit HHAs require employee flu vaccinations, compared to 2019.
- **Rural HHAs have consistently offered on-site employee flu vaccinations.** For-profit and urban HHAs saw a decrease in offering flu vaccinations to employees, while non-profit HHAs increased their offerings.
- While **fewer urban HHAs reported spending less time monitoring employee vaccinations**, rural HHAs saw no change.

DISCUSSION

- Agencies faced staffing shortages, which can be addressed through cross-training and flexible scheduling.
- There was an increase in requiring employee flu vaccinations, with the exception of non-profit HHAs.
 - However, non-profits increased their encouragement of vaccinations in other ways, like offering free vaccinations on-site.
- Rurality and profit status matter with respect to agency encouragement of employee flu vaccinations.
 - Profit status is often associated with quality of care, where for-profit HHAs score lower on quality metrics than non-profit HHAs.¹

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of robust infection prevention & control policies at HHAs.
- While many IPC policies and processes remained stable or improved since 2019, gaps remain, particularly with on-site vaccinations and staffing.
- Our findings suggest the need for targeted policy interventions to mitigate staffing shortages and enhance vaccination policies, helping to protect patients and improve clinical outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

- Prior to the pandemic, the state of IPC at HHAs was suboptimal.
- Our 2023 survey shows significant evolution of infection prevention & control policies during the pandemic.
- There were noticeable improvements in staff training and vaccination policies, highlighting the adaptability of HHAs and importance of continuous improvement regarding IPC practices in response to emerging health crises.
- However, over a third of HHAs still face staffing challenges, indicating that other mitigation strategies are needed.

REFERENCES

1. Shang, J., Harrison, J. M., Chastain, A. M., Stone, P. W., Perera, U. G. E., Madigan, E. A., Pogorzelska-Maziarz, M., & Dick, A. W. (2022). Influenza vaccination of home health care staff and the impact on patient hospitalizations. *American journal of infection control*, 50(4), 369–374.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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