

CASE STUDY



Focus on Improving Clinician Well-Being Reduces APP Turnover 30% for Centra Health



Executive Summary

Centra Health is a regional nonprofit healthcare system serving more than 500,000 people across central and southern Virginia. With approximately 275 advanced practice providers (APPs) and about 250 physicians employed by the Centra Medical Group, the organization is committed to providing exceptional patient care while supporting the well-being of its healthcare providers.

In recent years, Centra Health recognized the impact of burnout among its APP population, with turnover rates reaching 19.7% — nearly double the national average. To address this challenge, the health system was the first in the nation to implement VITAL WorkLife's SafeHaven Clinician Well-Being Resources. This comprehensive support program, specific to the state of Virginia, focuses on improving provider wellness, reducing burnout, and enhancing retention.



Case Study Highlights:

- Centra reduced APP turnover from 19.7% to 13.8% after implementing SafeHaven Clinician Well-Being Resources
- APP utilization of VITAL WorkLife peer coaching and counseling increased 2x in one year
- Leadership commitment to provider well-being has created a culture where providers feel valued as individuals, not just for their productivity

Challenge: High APP Turnover and Stigma for Seeking Help

When Morgan McDowell, Director of APP Education, and Robbie Price, Director of APP Operations, stepped into their respective leadership roles about three years ago, they quickly identified a concerning trend among Centra's advanced practice providers.

"Our turnover rate for APPs was around 20%, while the national benchmark is somewhere around 10%," said Price.

To help them better understand the struggles of APPs at Centra, McDowell and Price committed to regular rounding. In speaking with providers face-to-face, they recognized this high turnover was a symptom of a much larger problem.

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Concerns surrounding burnout and work-life balance became a common theme — both behind closed doors and during exit interviews. McDowell added that organizational assessments confirmed these observations: "We've got the data, too. We did the Clarity Survey to measure provider wellness, and our scores were not great."

Centra partnered with VITAL WorkLife during the COVID-19 pandemic to offer mental health and well-being resources to its providers. However, Price and McDowell would come to realize those resources weren't being fully utilized.

As they connected with providers, two patterns emerged: Awareness of the available support services was inconsistent throughout the organization, and even when APPs did know about them, many feared a stigma associated with using services like peer coaching and counseling.

"We realized VITAL WorkLife would be a good tool to meet the needs of our providers who are struggling with burnout or imposter syndrome," said Price. "But I think historically, many people saw offers for coaching and counseling as a way of saying 'you're not performing well, we're going to get you a professional coach.' There was still a strong stigma around mental health and getting a counselor."

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Solution: Building a Culture of Support Through Leadership and Communication

To address provider burnout and improve retention, Centra's leadership team committed to revitalizing their partnership with VITAL WorkLife as well as highlighting Virginia's SafeHaven legislation to assist with overcoming stigma concerns. Rather than creating a new program, McDowell and Price recognized the value of the existing VITAL WorkLife resources that weren't fully utilized.

"Part of our focus in these new leadership roles was APP retention and engagement, and burnout was a common theme," explained Price. "Morgan really picked up on the fact that we had this great partner in VITAL WorkLife, but there really hadn't been a lot of internal communication to the providers around the resources."

Additionally, using an external resource like VITAL WorkLife could help Centra

address APP concerns related to mental health stigma.

"Our local EAP is not the same. There is no real confidentiality in a small town where you go to a physical location during normal business hours," said McDowell. "We have to have something that offers protected, confidential communication."

To help improve APP well-being, McDowell and Price took a multi-faceted approach to increasing awareness and utilization of VITAL WorkLife's SafeHaven Clinician Well-Being Resources program: enhanced communication strategy, personalized leadership approach, provider video testimonials, and integrated benefits communications.



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Enhanced Communication Strategy

The team implemented a comprehensive internal communication plan to raise awareness, including:

- Email communication campaigns
- Inclusion of VITAL WorkLife peer coaching sessions as an expectation for PA fellows
- Required participation for APPs in leadership consultations
- Home postcard mailers
- Distribution of co-branded wallet cards

Personalized Leadership Approach

A key aspect of their strategy was demonstrating personal commitment by using the services themselves. “Morgan and I have both been very transparent about our experiences because we felt like we couldn’t talk about the program without going through it. So, we’ve both used VITAL WorkLife resources ourselves at different times,” Price shared.

Provider Video Testimonials

To combat stigma and increase engagement, the team also created video testimonials featuring Centra providers who have benefited from VITAL WorkLife services.

“I don’t think it really helps to hear from strangers. It’s better to see someone that you know in your community say, ‘Hey, I did this. It was really helpful for these reasons,’” McDowell explained. “We felt like that gave it more validity to showcase our folks who are actually using the resource.”

Price added that this approach helps reduce stigma: “It takes the stigma away a little bit. If it’s a provider who you know, you wouldn’t have caught a whiff that they were having an issue... We internalize it and try to put on a happy face when we come to work. And those are ultimately the ones that tend to self-destruct in the end.”

Integrated Benefits Communications

When Centra changed health insurance providers, McDowell’s team took steps to ensure providers understood VITAL WorkLife as a valuable benefit — especially when many community counselors were no longer in-network.

“We’re getting feedback that a lot of our community counselors and mental health providers are no longer preferred with our new insurance. It’s changing co-pays from what we previously had to a larger out-of-pocket sum, so we’re also trying to share that VITAL WorkLife is a great [no cost] resource,” said McDowell.

Results: 30% Reduction in APP Turnover, Tangible ROI

Since kicking off their renewed focus on APP well-being with VITAL WorkLife, Centra has seen significant improvements in several key metrics:

- **Reduced Turnover.** Following Centra's renewed focus on improving the mental health and well-being of APPs, year-over-year turnover has continued to decrease. Prior to the initiative, APP turnover was at 19%. Today, it has been reduced to 13.8% — a 30% decrease.
- **Increased Utilization.** Utilization of VITAL WorkLife's SafeHaven Clinician Well-Being Resources, including peer coaching and counseling, dramatically increased — doubling in 2024 alone.
- **Higher APP Engagement.** The team at Centra has also observed that their focus on provider wellness has contributed to higher engagement scores among APPs (compared to physicians) in the organization's Clarity Survey, which focuses on burnout, engagement, and change management.

Conclusion

Centra Health's partnership with VITAL WorkLife demonstrates how healthcare organizations can proactively address provider burnout with a dedicated focus on mental health and well-being. By fostering a culture of support where asking for help is destigmatized, Centra is not only enhancing the experiences of its APPs and physicians but also reinforcing its commitment to delivering high-quality patient care.

This investment was not just good for Centra's providers. By helping reduce APP turnover rates by 30%, it also offered a tangible ROI for the organization, while elevating Centra as a destination employer for healthcare professionals in central Virginia.

Strengthen your workplace culture and drive organizational change. Discover how the Physician Well-Being Resources program from VITAL WorkLife can help transform your people and your organization. Visit VITALWorkLife.com to learn more.

About VITAL WorkLife

VITAL WorkLife delivers positive outcomes and financial results for healthcare employers by integrating mental health and well-being into the employee experience. Our solutions — including customized programs, peer support, counseling, and digital tools across the Six Dimensions of Well-Being — empower employees and clinicians at work and home.