

Report to the Legislature

Home Care Aides Final Report

DECEMBER 2024

E2SSB 5278



Prepared by
Home Care Aides Program
Health Systems & Quality
Assurance (HSQA) Division



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Contents

- Executive Summary 1
- Background 1
- Improvements.....3
 - System to Reduce Delays.....3
 - Location3
- Chart 1: Survey responses (cumulative)4
 - Remote testing5
 - HCA program authorization.....6
- Testing Site Expansions.....6
 - Examination of testing site challenges.....6
- Chart 2: Applications received 2015-20237
- Table 1: Number of pending applications by county, September 30, 20248
 - Testing site expansion plan 10
 - Survey 11
- Chart 3: Survey question 1..... 12
- Chart 4: Survey question 2..... 12
- Chart 5: Survey question 3..... 13
- Chart 6: Survey question 4..... 13
- Chart 7: Survey question 5..... 14
- Chart 8: Testing per month 15
 - Comparable professions 15
 - Test sites 16
- Map 1: Certification test & training sites 17
 - Test site availability..... 17
 - Stipends 18
- Performance Measures and Data Collection 18
- Accountability Mechanisms 19
- Performance-Based Contracts 19
 - Performance measures and “sufficient access” 19

Detailed vendor costs.....	19
Testing Data	20
Chart 9: Knowledge test attempts	20
Chart 10: Knowledge test passage rates.....	21
Chart 12: Skills tests attempts	21
Chart 13: Skills test passage rates.....	22
.....	22
Conclusion	23
Purpose of the report.....	23
Impact	23
Key Findings	24
Authorization to test.....	24
Remote testing	24
Incorporate testing into training.....	24
Expanding testing sites	24
Recommendations.....	25

Executive Summary

[Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill \(E2SSB\) 5278](#) requires the Department of Health (department), in consultation with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and other relevant participants, to submit a report by December 31, 2024, on the following work, including any recommendations for improvement:

1. Devise a system that reduces delays between training and testing for home care aides (HCA).
2. Examine testing challenges related to a lack of testing sites and develop a plan, including an estimation of costs, to expand testing sites.
3. Establish performance measures and data collection criteria to monitor the overall length of time between training and testing and the number of available test sites.
4. Establish accountability measures for the overall training to testing process.
5. Establish performance-based contracts for vendors who administer tests.

The department worked with the exam company, Prometric, to improve the HCA exam scheduling and payment process. Applicants now schedule and pay for exams directly with the exam company, saving steps and time for both the applicants and the department. However, a significant backlog of pending applications still exists.

A study mapping the residences of HCA licensees and applicants relative to existing testing sites pinpointed the areas most in need of additional testing facilities. Four new sites were opened in 2023, and a minimum of eight additional sites are still needed to better serve rural and high population regions.

A survey conducted among existing testing facilities assessed their current and potential capacity for administering exams. The results indicated that, with adequate resources to expand, these facilities could potentially offer over eight times the current number of testing opportunities, a figure totaling over 3,000 tests per month.

The department's contract with Prometric now includes performance measures for the efficiency of developing new test sites, exam pass/fail rates by language, applicant satisfaction survey results, and more. The home care aide program has also adopted accountability mechanisms, such as customer service and credentialing goals and performance metrics reviews. Additionally, the department created a quality assurance team to monitor performance, establish improvement and efficiency measures, and develop and maintain plans for ongoing improvement and innovation.

The report concludes that, based on the research and collaborative stakeholder input, the best solution to address delays between training and exams is to incorporate testing into the training programs. By doing so, all trainers could become exam proctors. Consequently, when an applicant's certificate of completion is submitted by a training program, the department can be assured that the applicant has fulfilled all training and examination requirements.

Survey responses show this approach is widely supported. For this approach to work, funding would be needed to assist non-facility training programs in becoming exam sites.

The investment will be significant but will benefit the thousands of applicants seeking a home care aide certification, as well as the many Washingtonians who rely on their care.

Background

Home care aides are long-term care workers who provide personal care services for persons with disabilities. They help people preserve their independence, avoid institutional care, remain at home and within their own communities, and experience higher levels of well-being.

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis shows the nationwide demand for home care aides is projected to increase by 38% between 2020 and 2036.¹ A University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies projects that more than 88,000 Washingtonians insured by Medicaid will need in-home care by 2030, requiring the service of nearly 77,000 home care aides.² This number does not include Washingtonians who are not insured by Medicaid. As of August 2024, the number of active certified home care aides is approximately 32,225. There are also many who provide care but have not yet completed the certification process.

The home care aide profession was created in January 2012 after voters approved an initiative put forward by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU 775). The union represented individual home care service employees prior to the 2012 establishment of certification and still represents many home care aides. The 2012 legislation included individual workers as well as all home care agency, assisted living, and adult family home employees who do not hold the following credentials/licenses: nursing assistant-certified (NAC), registered nurse (RN), licensed practical nurse (LPN), or advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP).

DSHS regulates care facilities and training programs for this profession, while the department manages certification applications and examinations.

Most long-term care workers must become certified as home care aides within 200 days of beginning employment unless an exemption applies. To become certified as a home care aide, a long-term care worker must complete 75 hours of training, pass the certification examinations, and pass state and federal background checks.

The program currently carries an accumulated \$6 million deficit. Factors contributing to this deficit include:

- No profession startup costs,

¹ National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. (2023) Long-Term Services and Support: Demand Projections, 2021-2036. Health Resources Services Administration, United State Department of Health & Human Services. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/ltss-projections-factsheet-10-23.pdf>.

² Skillman, S. & Bayse, E. (2011). *Home care aides in Washington State: Current supply and future demand*. Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington School of Medicine. https://depts.washington.edu/uwrhrc/uploads/Home_Care_Aides_Brief.pdf.

- The profession requires a high number of dedicated customer service staff,
- The cost of contracting with the examination vendor,
- The high number of complaints and discipline cases,
- The cost of providing language access services, and
- It is a low-paying profession restricting the ability to raise fees without impacting certification affordability.

Washington state has struggled to build and maintain an adequate home care aide workforce.

Initiative 1163, approved in November 2011, requires the Office of the Washington State Auditor (SAO) to conduct performance audits of the program on a biennial basis. The department, DSHS, and the SEIU 775 Benefits Group have worked together to resolve issues identified in the SAO audits. The department revised the certification knowledge exam to address pass-rate disparities with translated languages per the recommendation of the 2016 audit. The 2018 audit looked for barriers to home care aide certification and directed the department to: (1) continue monitoring language requests, (2) update its website and the test authorization notifications to include an emphasis on the importance of taking exams on the scheduled dates, and (3) to work with Prometric to add test sites.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the progress of improvements to home care aide certification. Concern about spreading the disease resulted in fewer people submitting applications, training and testing opportunities were delayed or canceled, and some training and test sites shut down entirely. In March 2020, the Governor suspended the requirement that most home care aides must be certified within 200 days from date of hire, and the legislature extended the suspension through the end of the emergency declaration. Despite that mitigating effort, the pandemic reduced the number of available home care aides and the number of training and testing sites.

The 2022 audit explored barriers to testing and focused on the need to reduce delays between training and testing. Recommendations included allowing training programs to authorize applicants to take the tests, implementing a plan to integrate testing into training locations, and allowing online testing within training programs. It also recommended the department work with Prometric to allow applicants to schedule tests during training so testing could happen as soon after training as possible. And, if the department determines that in-person skills testing is necessary, the 2022 audit made the following recommendations to the department to address the shortages of test sites:

- Determining how many test sites are needed and where they should be located,
- How often test sites should be available,
- The costs of establishing and supplying additional test sites, and
- When it would be beneficial to provide travel expense stipends to applicants.

The audit recommendations were included in E2SSB 5278.

Improvements

System to Reduce Delays

To reduce delays, the department worked with Prometric to create a new system for exam scheduling and payment. The previous system required an applicant to complete their training before the department authorized them to take the exams.

In the new system, applicants are not required to complete training before being authorized to schedule exams. Instead, the department notifies Prometric of an applicant's eligibility once their application is received and initially processed. The applicant then estimates a date for completing their training and proceeds to self-schedule and pay (if applicable) for their exams directly with Prometric. This new system began February 14, 2024.

The department also requested that Prometric remove the requirement for proctors to be registered nurses (RNs) and allow home care aides to proctor applicants. Prometric agreed and have increased their number of proctors. This, along with Prometric's additional hiring and other procedural changes, lowered the testing wait list from approximately 800 applicants in early 2023 to approximately 50 applicants in December 2023. Now, with Prometric's new online self-scheduling process, applicants no longer experience significant waiting times.

Location

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to develop and implement a plan to integrate testing into training that allows applicants to test at the same location where they train.

The department, in consultation with DSHS, identified four approaches to integrate testing into training programs. The department conducted a survey to invite input from interested parties. The department surveyed those in home care aide Facility Training Programs (FTP), Community Training Programs (CTP), and the SEIU 775 Benefits Group Training Partnership (BGTP).

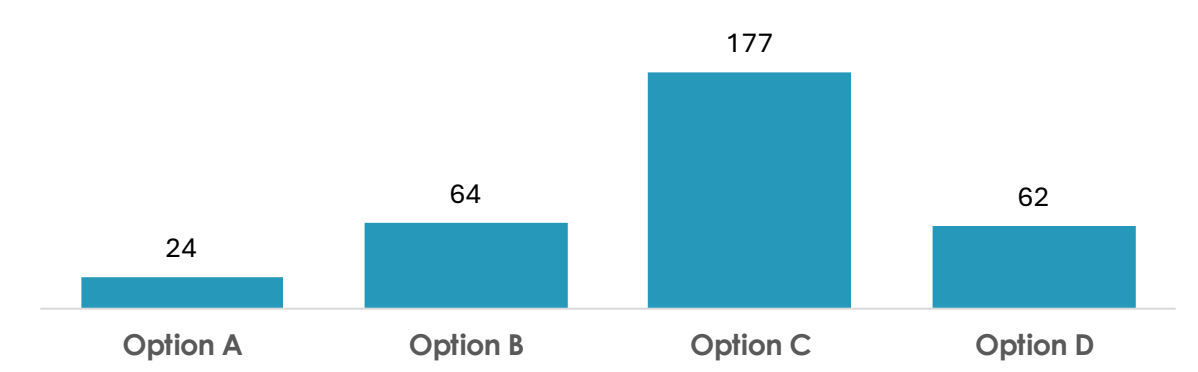
The department invited each of the interested groups to virtual meetings to gather information and provide opportunities to respond to the survey questions. A meeting with CTP was held on August 8, 2023, FTP on August 17, 2023, and BGTP on August 29, 2023. To reach a broader audience, the survey was distributed through GovDelivery to the subscriber lists for all three interested groups.

The 2023 survey asked which of the following four options, summarized below, respondents believed would be the best way to incorporate the exam into the training programs:

- Option A: Legislature provides \$40,000 in grant funding for start-up costs for 10-15 training programs to also become Prometric test sites.

- Option B: Legislative funding to incorporate skills testing into training programs, either during or at the end of the program. Prometric continues to provide the knowledge exam.
- Option C: Legislative funding to incorporate skills testing and knowledge testing into training, either during or at the end of the program.
- Option D: Allow trainers to be hired by Prometric to become Prometric proctors so they would proctor exams at the training programs.

Chart 1: Survey responses (cumulative)



Survey Results and Concerns

Survey respondents supported option C, incorporating both the knowledge and the skills exams into the training program. Training programs would administer the skills and knowledge exams during or at the end of the training program. This means that passing the knowledge and skills tests would become a requirement for completion of a training program.

While option C was the clear preference, interested parties also shared concerns and considerations, including:

- Needing at least most of the training programs to adopt the integration of exams;
- Guaranteed availability of exam sites for students from training programs that do not incorporate exams;
- Providing exam language interpreters when training programs are not able to provide them;
- Augmented recordkeeping requirements for training programs to track and report student exam data;
- A way to collect pass/fail rate demographic information;
- Ensuring ethical, unbiased testing by training programs;
- Maintaining quality assurance and consistency of exams and procedures;

- A process for students to appeal exam results;
- Beginning with a pilot program before making a comprehensive process renovation; and
- Mitigating the added cost of administering exams to training programs, including facilities, equipment, services, time, and personnel.

Pilot Programs

On August 9, 2024, Brookdale Senior Living, under the department’s oversight and in collaboration with sever stakeholders, launched a pilot program across five of their training programs. The department tracks data on attempts, pass rates, student performance, and proctors’ experiences. Two months into the pilot, over 60 students have participated, achieving an impressive 88% pass rate, well above the 70% average. Proctors have shown great enthusiasm, organizing self-initiated meetings to share feedback and discuss improvements. Positive testimonials have been received from both training staff and students.

The SEIU 775 Benefits Group training program was interested in piloting an exam within their training programs, as well. Their training programs provide training modules that may be taken by students in any order. As such, they do not have a linear training program that would allow students to move through the program as a group and take an exam at the end of training. SEIU 775 Benefits Group also indicated that it would not be possible to incorporate tests at the end of each training module. Testing could only be performed as the concluding component for each student that completes all of the training modules. The SEIU 775 Benefits Group stated that it would take significant investment and time to redesign the training program to integrate testing into training.

Remote testing

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to devise a system that will allow remote testing within HCA training programs immediately or shortly after completion of the program.

The new system moves applying for, scheduling of, and payment of exams to Prometric. This feature launched in the spring of 2024. Prometric is also adding the option of an online knowledge exam that allows for remote testing with a proctor. This feature launched fall of 2024.

Remote testing with a proctor is available for the knowledge exam only. Prometric is not able to administer remote proctored skills tests. The department also determined that it is not practical or safe for skills testing to be administered remotely. Proctors need to provide in-person orientation, direction, and observation. They also need to be present to make and assist in an immediate Safe Stop at any moment that an applicant is causing harm to the test client.

HCA program authorization

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to determine the benefits and costs of having HCA training programs authorize applicants to test instead of the department.

The department facilitated workgroups with DSHS, BGTP, and Prometric to determine if home care aide training programs could notify Prometric directly of an applicant's authorization to be tested, rather than require the department's involvement in this step. Prometric does not have the system capability for this option and will only contract with state agencies.

The workgroups concluded that, at this time, training programs authorizing applicants for testing are not available through the current contracted testing agency. Consequently, the workgroups did not identify the benefits and costs.

However, the department has made a significant improvement to the process through this work. Rather than having a training program send an applicant's certificate of completion to the department and the department, then, notifying Prometric of the applicant's authorization to be tested, the applicant is now authorized to be tested as soon as the department receives their initial application. Prometric has designed an online process in which the applicant schedules and pays Prometric directly for testing. This new system has streamlined the process by eliminating several steps.

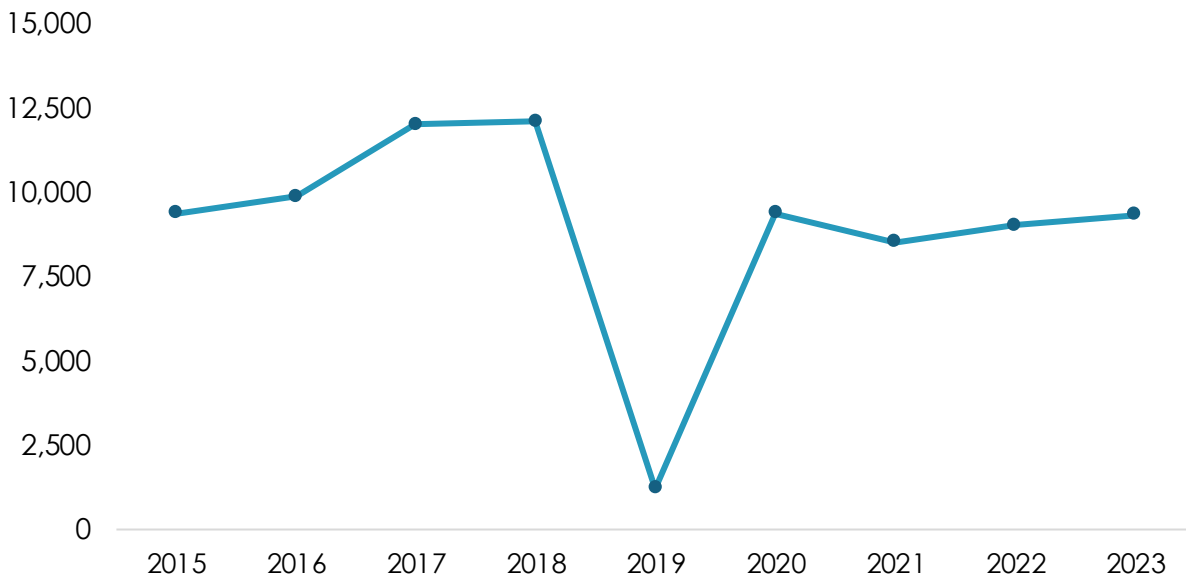
Testing Site Expansions

Examination of testing site challenges

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to examine existing challenges related to the lack of testing sites.

To understand the challenges related to the lack of testing sites, the department looked at the volume of applications received, the current number of applicants pending initial certification, and the location of applicants in relation to the number and location of existing testing sites.

Chart 2: Applications received 2015-2023



In 2023 alone, an average of 778 applications were received every month.

Prometric reported that in the first five months of 2023, it administered 378 knowledge and 460 skills exams per month. The higher number of skills exams reflects the number of those needing to retest due to failure.

There is a significant number of applicants who leave the process for a variety of reasons. DSHS data tracking prior to the pandemic showed that the largest number of applicants leave after training completion but before ever taking the first test. During training they may decide that the profession is not for them, they are not able to pass the exams, that certification is taking too long, and/or they find other employment.

Even with attrition, the home care aide profession is very large with more people seeking certification every day. There are currently 30,624 applicants with pending certification statuses. This number may include those who have decided not to pursue certification after submitting their application. The process for credentialing home care aides is complicated and requires applicants to submit their application prior to training and testing, so it is expected that there will always be a relatively large number of pending applications. The department receives approximately 1,000 applications per month and each application remains open for approximately six months. Therefore, if the credentialing system was optimal, the department would expect to see a pending list of up to 6,000 applicants at any given time.

The chart below shows the number of applicants with pending status in each county, along with the number and type of training and test sites in their county. Note that there are applicants located in every county in Washington state.

Table 1: Number of pending applications by county, September 30, 2024

County	Total Test Sites	In-Facility Test Site (IFT)/ Regional Test Site (RTS)	Number of Pending Applications
Adams	0		87
Asotin	0		129
Benton	1	1 RTS	1,550
Chelan	1	1 RTS	286
Clallam	2	1 IFTS/ 1 RTS	387
Clark	5	3 IFTS/ 2 RTS	1,749
Columbia	0		36
Cowlitz	0		797
Douglas	0		184
Ferry	0		40
Franklin	0		699
Garfield	0		14
Grant	0		431
Grays Harbor	0		441
Island	0		340
Jefferson	0		106
King	5	2 IFTS/ 3 RTS	5,869
Kitsap	2	2 RTS	931
Kititas	0		233

Klickitat	0		51
Lewis	0		406
Lincoln	0		31
Mason	0		274
Okanogan	1	1 RTS	239
Pacific	0		105
Pend Oreille	0		63
Pierce	5	4 IFTS/ 1 RTS	3,670
San Juan	0		28
Skagit	2	1 IFTS/ 1 RTS	470
Skamania	0		27
Snohomish	2	1 IFTS/ 1 RTS	2,847
Spokane	1	1 RTS	3,318
Stevens	0		345
Thurston	1	1 RTS	1,071
Wahkiakum	0		25
Walla Walla	0		475
Whatcom	1	1 RTS	979
Whitman	0		294
Yakima	1	1 RTS	1,600
TOTALS	30	12 IFTS/ 18 RTS	30,624

The consistently high volume of applications creates a challenging workload for the department, and the large number of applicants in training strains the capacity of the relatively few testing sites that currently exist.

A greater number of testing sites is needed to serve the regular demand, and the test sites need to be in areas that are accessible. Having more testing sites will address the challenges of limited frequency of exams that extend wait times, and the long travel distances to scheduled exam sites, particularly for applicants in remote and rural areas.

Testing site expansion plan

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to develop a plan, including estimation of costs, to expand testing sites.

Working together, representatives from the department, DSHS, the SEIU 775 Benefits Group, Consumer Direct Care of Washington (CDWA), and the Washington Health Care Association (WHCA), roughly estimated that \$40,000 would be needed to set up a testing component within a training program. The representatives noted that a pilot program would provide a more accurate figure, which could be significantly higher.

Basic set-up expenses involve:

- Computers
- Testing supplies
- Test bedroom equipment
- Medical training mannequin
- Initial staff time and training
- Initial facility rental
- General goods and services

Some training programs rent space in hotels or other locations for short periods of time to provide training. These programs would also require ongoing funding to cover staff hours and rental space for the additional days required to provide exams.

Statewide, there are currently 429 training facilities – 260 facility training programs, 140 community training programs, and 29 SEIU 775 Benefits Group training programs.

Not all the current facility training programs would require the same funding package, as some are more closely aligned with testing requirements than others. Adult family home facility programs would require more startup funding than assisted living facility programs. Community training programs would likely require maximum funding. The SEIU 775 Benefits Group reports their training programs would also need maximum funding.

SEIU 775 Benefits Group has shared their interest and concerns, citing that BGTP will need to perform a pilot program feasibility study. The study will help determine the costs of adding testing to training programs, which, they maintain, would need to be covered by legislative funding.

The SEIU 775 Benefits Group provided its concerns and requirements on each aspect of incorporating tests into training:

- Program operators must determine the requirements, additional costs, and feasibility for administering tests in temporary venues, such as hotels, where some basic training classes are held. The costs of these temporary location facilities would increase to cover additional time and space.
- Instructors will need to be trained and compensated if testing is incorporated into training. There would be ramp up time and related costs to recruit and train.
- Home care aides are currently compensated for training time. If testing is included in training, employers would need to pay them accordingly.
- Training programs will need to provide interpreters for exams when the program itself cannot provide the interpretation.

DSHS would also need additional FTEs to manage the increased workload and administrative costs. Other trainers and employers who are not included in the SEIU 775 Benefits Group may also need additional funding to manage the increased workload and administrative costs.

Survey

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to conduct a survey of all approved testing locations to determine current and potential capacity for offering tests.

A survey was sent to 14 approved testing locations of which 11 completed responses were received. The survey was comprised of five questions to determine current and potential capacity of testing dates and seats. It also asked how many exam dates had been canceled by Prometric over the past year.

Chart 3: Survey question 1

What is your current capacity for offering test dates?
(relative frequency of test days per month)

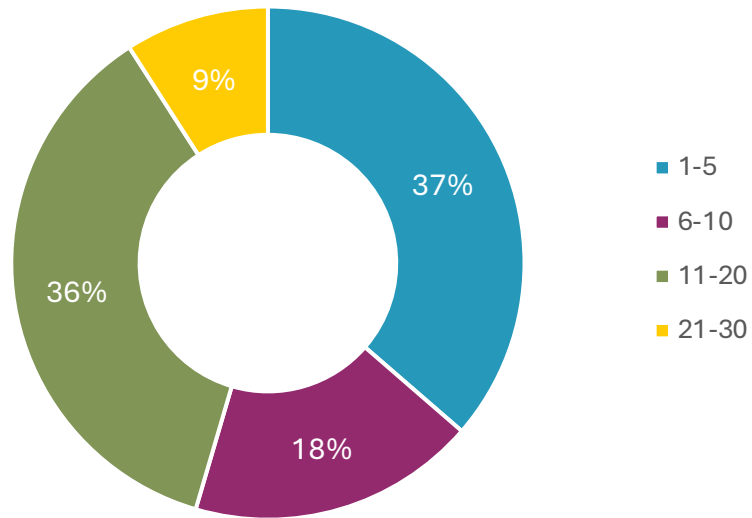


Chart 4: Survey question 2

How many testing seats do you offer on each test date?

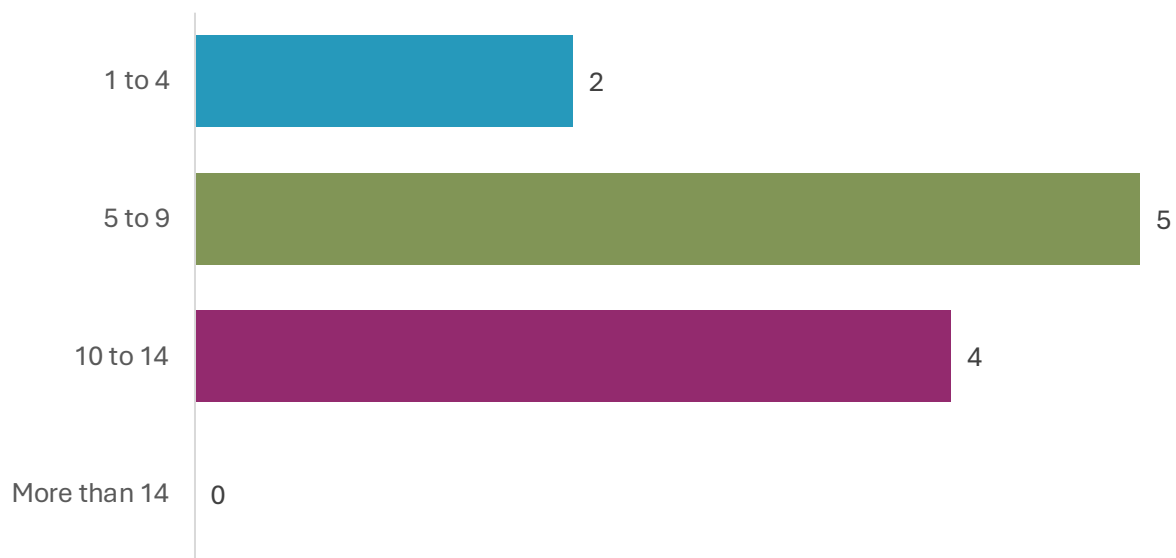


Chart 5: Survey question 3

If you had the resources to expand testing at your site, how many additional test dates could you offer per month?

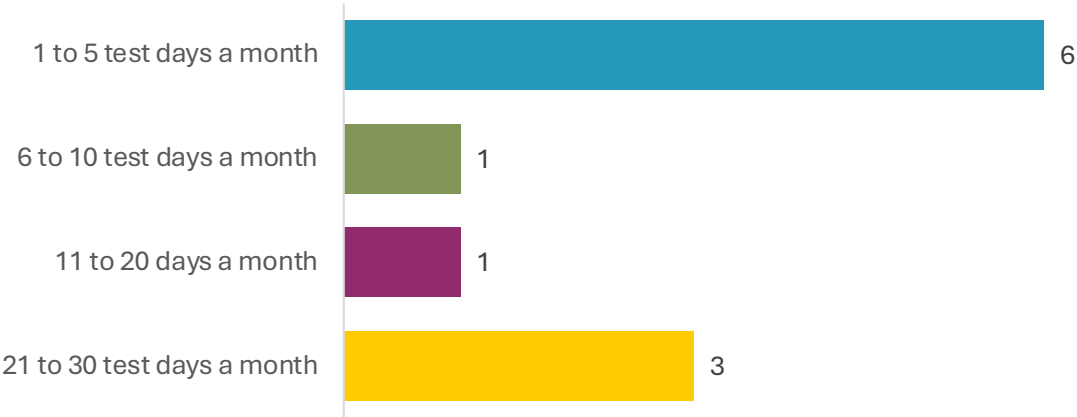


Chart 6: Survey question 4

Approximately how many exam dates have been cancelled by Prometric in the past year?

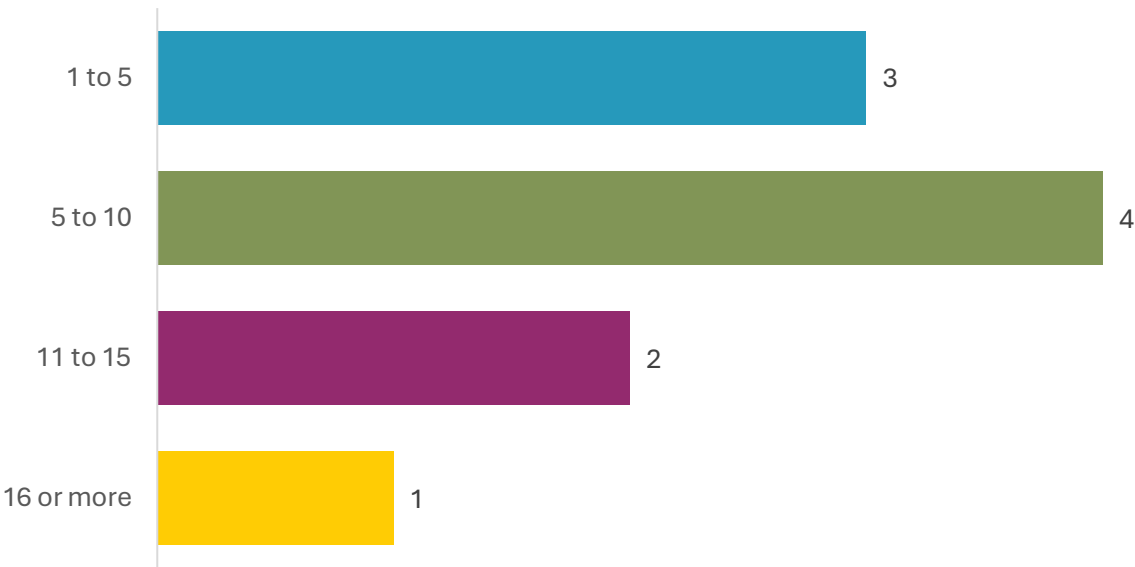
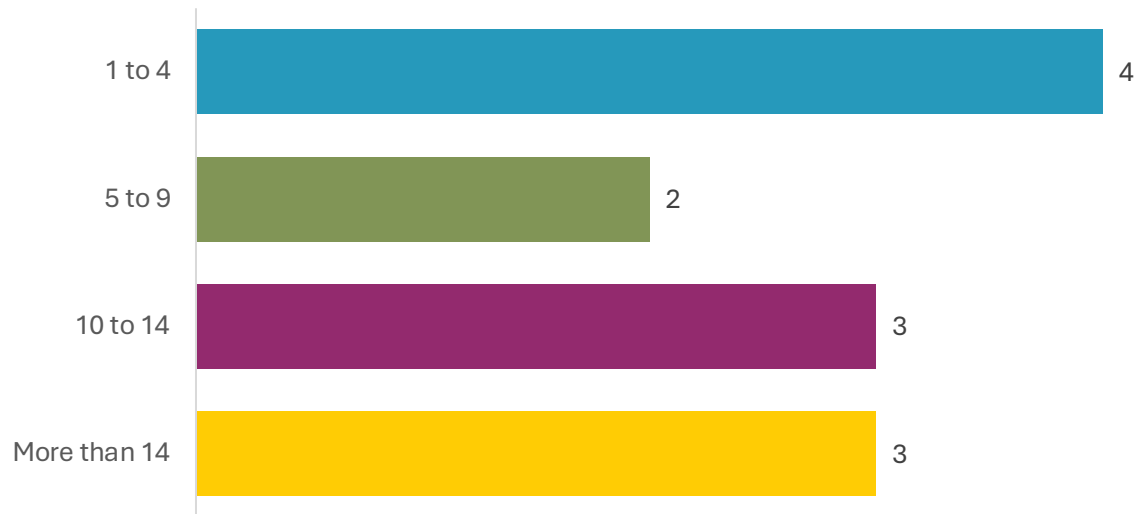


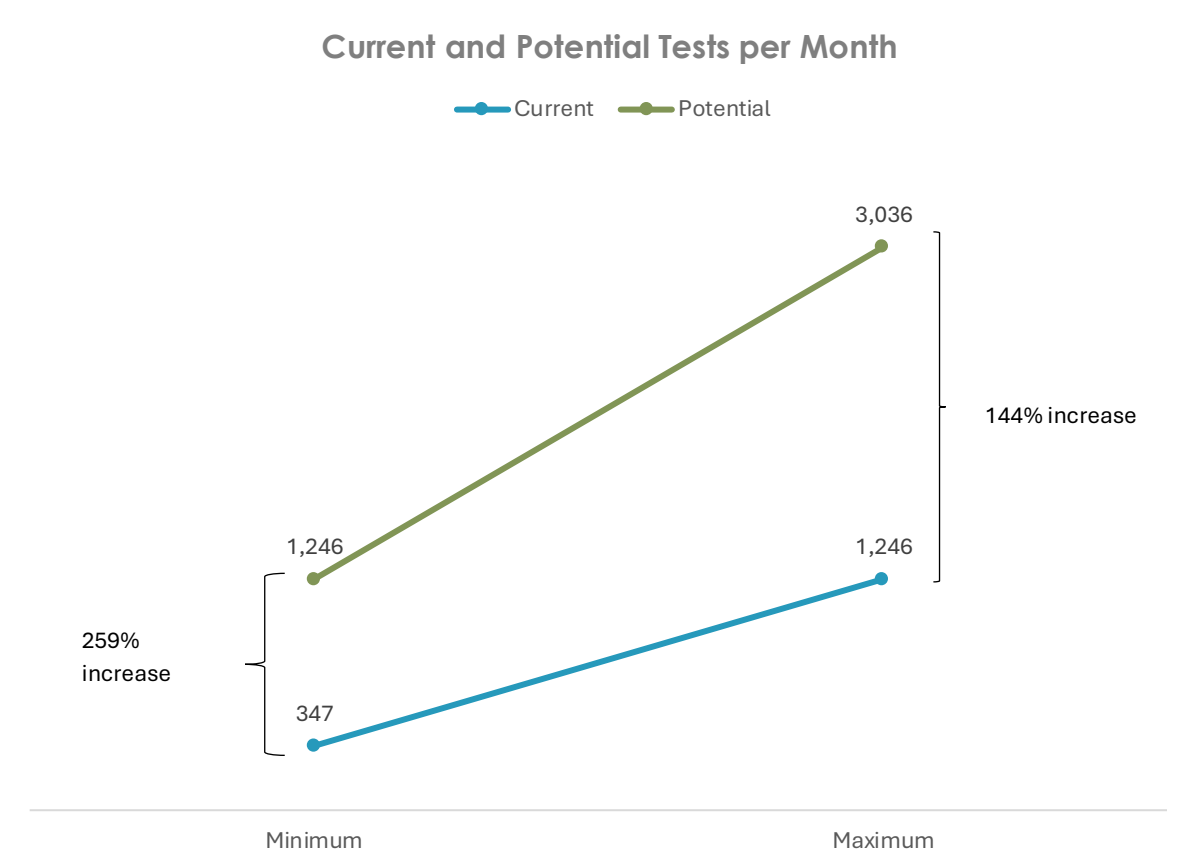
Chart 7: Survey question 5

If you had the resources to expand testing at your site, how many additional test seats could you offer per month?



If provided the resources to expand their current capacity, respondents indicated they could add between 899 to 1,760 tests per month. Potentially, there could be over eight times the number of testing opportunities available each month if the current testing facilities were provided with the necessary resources to expand.

Chart 8: Testing per month



Comparable professions

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to examine applicant travel time and availability of testing for comparable positions.

NAs are the only profession comparable to Home Care Aides. In 2023, testing for NAs was integrated into training programs, practically eliminating additional travel time and testing availability challenges.

Before this change, the testing agency reported the average travel to remote test sites was 30 to 40 miles. The Washington State Board of Nursing, however, received customer grievances reporting much greater distances. Since testing became incorporated into training programs, those complaints have stopped.

For home care aide test takers, the most common complaints the department receives is from non-English speaking applicants who, after they had traveled a long distance, were informed their exam was canceled because an interpreter was not available. Incorporating testing into the training programs would minimize if not eliminate the problem, provided

that trainers are able to communicate with their trainees during training and, therefore, during exam administration.

Other comments reported by employers related to testing included:

- It would be beneficial to have more exam dates, so programs are not competing with other agencies for the limited number of open exams.
- It is easier for home care aide applicants when their employers can call and schedule their exams.
- Prometric’s cancellation policies, regardless of distance travelled, are troubling and frustrating.

Test sites

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to examine how many test sites are needed, where these sites should be located, and the best way to establish appropriate partnerships that can lead to new testing sites.

Good communication and working relationships exist between the department, DSHS, and the SEIU 775 Benefits Group Training Partnership, the key stakeholders involved in establishing the efficient training, testing, and credentialing of home care aides. These established partnerships will also help lead the path to new test sites.

Following the 2022 audit, the department conducted work sessions with Prometric, DSHS, SEIU 775 Training Partnership, community trainers, and other interested parties on developing criteria for how many test sites are needed and where they should be located.

The workgroup looked at current testing site locations and the population density and geographical distribution of home care aides and applicants by county and zip code. The group also considered input from interested party listening sessions to help identify where additional test sites may be needed. Five counties (Clark, Cowlitz, Grant, Skagit, and Walla Walla) were initially considered. Attendees were asked in a meeting poll whether exam sites should be added to any of the listed counties. Clark county received the highest response.

Since the beginning of this study, four new test sites have opened, three in Clark County and one in King County. Based on the home care aide population distribution and current location of test sites, the workgroup determined that a minimum of eight additional test sites are needed in the following counties (noted by checkmarks in the map below):

- Jefferson
- King
- Pierce
- Cowlitz
- Grant

- Lincoln
- Spokane
- Benton

Map 1: Certification test & training sites



Test site availability

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to examine how often test sites should be available to applicants.

Testing opportunities must be available to applicants as close to their training experience time as possible. To address this, most stakeholders supported incorporating testing into training programs. This allows program operators to administer tests throughout the training, not only when the training is complete.

Integrating testing into the training program has several benefits. Tests administered by trainers, whether given after each training module or at the end of the course, allow for

timely feedback to applicants and trainers. This helps applicants see where they need to improve, and trainers to adjust their methods. Testing, as an immediate element in a training program, improves knowledge and skills retention, and reinforces overall education. It also reduces test anxiety, which increases as more time between training and testing occurs.

Including testing within training programs helps remove barriers, including the lack of accessible testing site locations and language services, delays between training and testing, and the need for additional travel to reach potentially remote testing sites.

Stipends

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to examine whether there are areas of the state where a stipend for travel expenses would be beneficial, as well as the appropriate protocols for travel stipends.

Considering the distribution of applicants across the state and the testing site locations, many applicants need to travel considerable distances to meet testing requirements. There are far fewer testing facilities in the rural areas of the state, requiring applicants in rural areas to travel further to available testing sites. For example, applicants in Moses Lake might need to travel 136 round trip miles to Wenatchee or 208 round trip miles to Spokane depending on test site schedule availability.

With 429 training facilities located throughout the state, including rural areas, incorporating testing into training programs would make testing sites much more accessible to all applicants and significantly cut their travel times and distances.

Performance Measures and Data Collection

The department is currently negotiating a new contract with Prometric to include the following performance measures:

- Reports providing number of days between completion of a new test site application and launch of the new test site. Reports of satisfaction surveys provided to directors of each new test site regarding the transition experience.
- Monthly report of the number of canceled exams with reasons for cancellation.
- Monthly report on the number of applicant pass/fail rate percentages by language and test site location.
- Bi-annual report of applicant customer satisfaction survey results.

Accountability Mechanisms

To ensure home care aide competence and credentialing process credibility, the department is incorporating these accountability mechanisms:

- Scheduled reviews of performance metrics and outcomes.
- Regular reports of key performance measures and other relevant data.
- Establishing a quality assurance team to monitor performance, identify improvement and efficiency measures, and develop and maintain plans for ongoing improvement and innovation.

Performance-Based Contracts

Performance measures and “sufficient access”

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to include all key performance measures expected in the performance-based contracts, as well as including a definition of what sufficient access to test sites entails.

The department is in contract negotiations with Prometric to include all key performance measures listed above in “Performance Measures and Data Collection.”

Home care aide applicants must have sufficient access to test sites to meet the examination requirements for credentialing. Sufficient access entails:

- Clear instructions and customer support for the online test scheduling portal.
- Availability of multiple options for scheduling times and locations to minimize travel distance, time, and cost.
- Timely and accurate communication of information and instruction for accessing tests, which may include time, location, voucher or user ID, and login password.
- Language interpretation for non-English speaking applicants.
- Clear communication of cancelation, reimbursement, and no-show policies and agreements.

Detailed vendor costs

E2SSB 5278 requires the department to include detailed vendor costs for the performance-based contracts.

The department is in active negotiations with Prometric as of the writing of this report. Detailed vendor costs will be included in the contract when it is finalized.

Testing Data

Test completion data informed the department's decisions on this work.

Chart 9: Knowledge test attempts

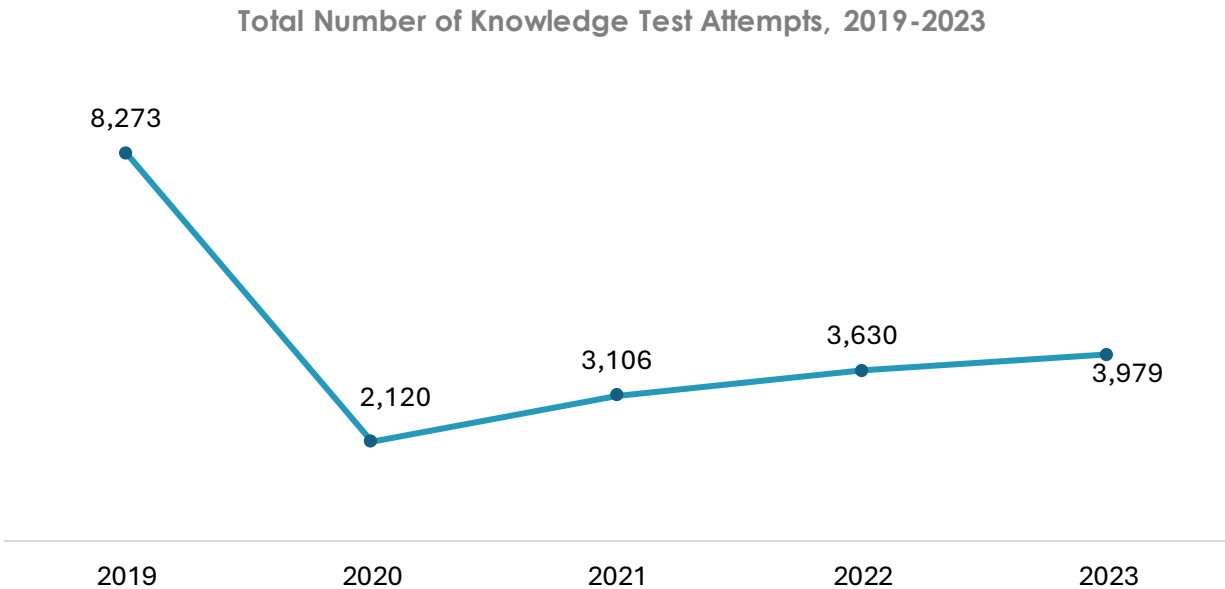


Chart 9 shows the total number of times the knowledge test was taken each year from 2019 through 2023. The severe drop in 2020, a drop from 8,273 to 2,120, identifies the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the number of applicants being able to enter the profession. The pandemic caused testing sites to reduce services or close, discouraged some applicants from pursuing the profession, but also created a very large backlog of applicants needing training and testing. Recovery to former testing levels has been slow.

Chart 10: Knowledge test passage rates

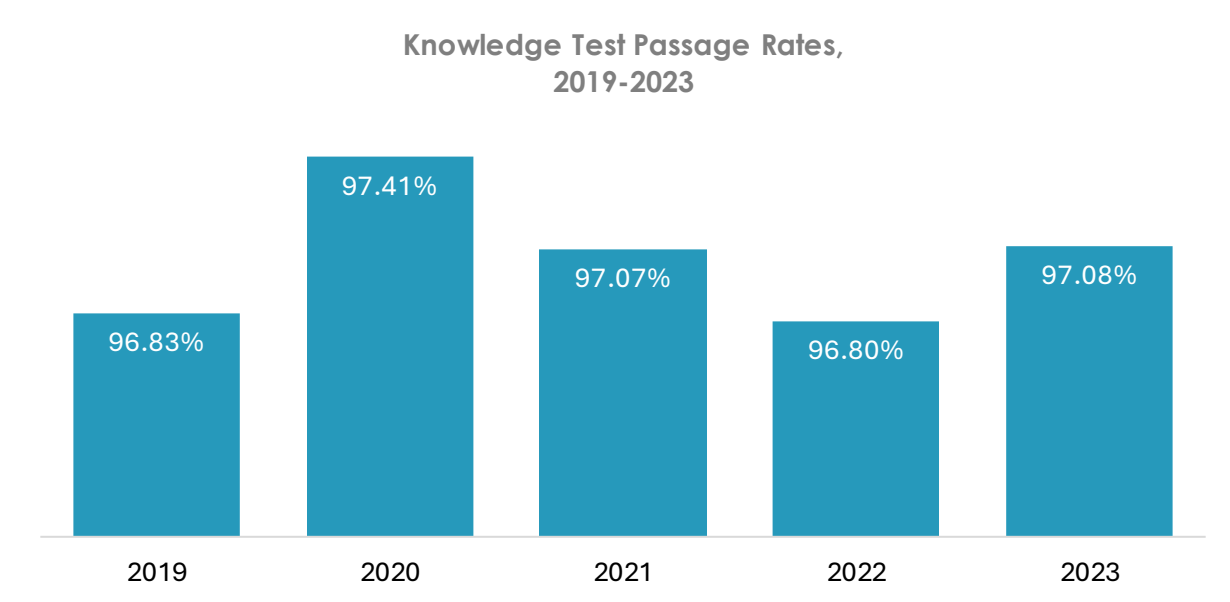


Chart 10 displays the pass rate of the knowledge test remaining consistently high over the past five years.

Chart 12: Skills tests attempts

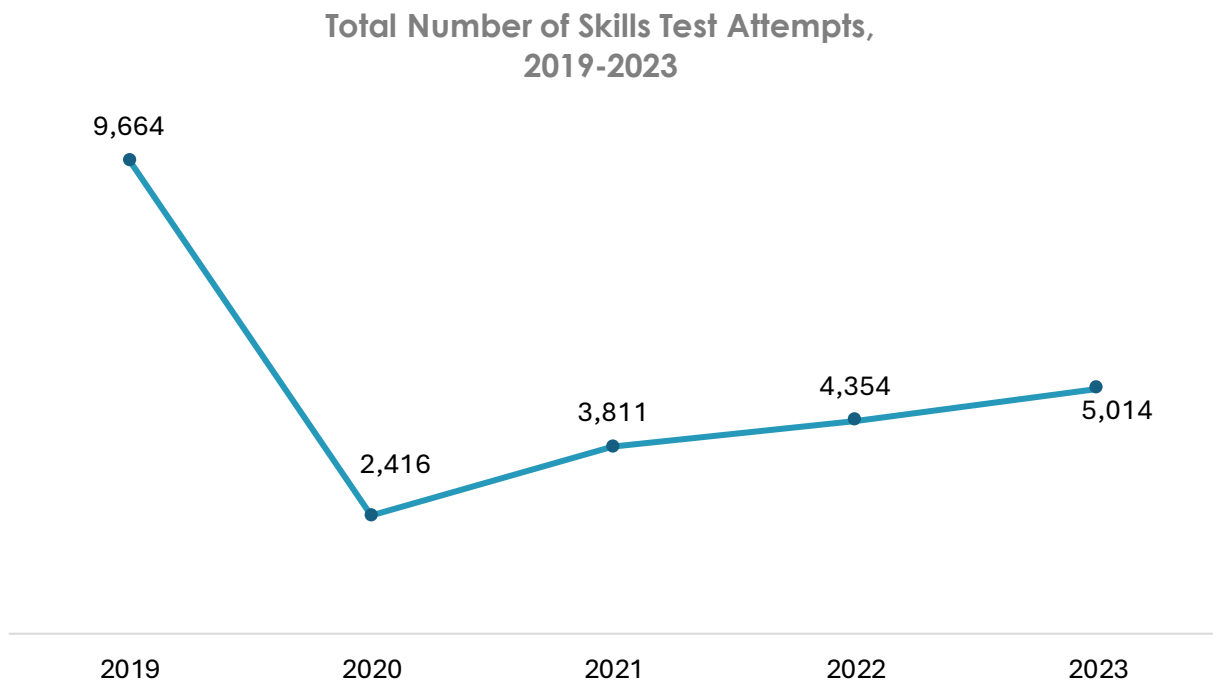


Chart 12 shows the total number of times the skills test was taken each year from 2019 through 2023.

Chart 13: Skills test passage rates

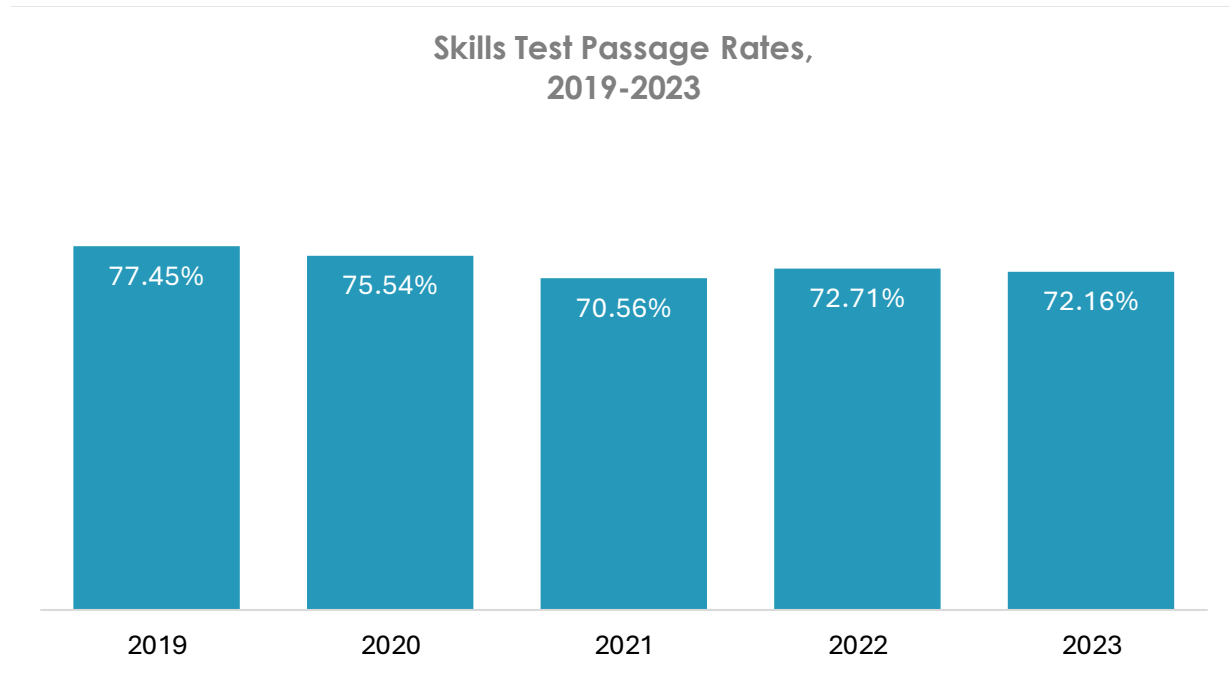


Chart 13 shows the consistent passage rates of the skills test over the last five years. While passage rates in the 70% range indicate that a majority of students are meeting the minimum requirements, there is still a notable portion who are not. Such failure rates in skills testing have been attributed to multiple factors. Incorporating testing into training programs in familiar settings with known staff can significantly reduce applicants' test anxiety. Additionally, applicants' performance provides valuable insights for staff to identify areas where training programs need improvement and where students require further reinforcement.

Conclusion

Purpose of the report

E2SSB 5278 assigns the department two primary tasks:

1. To devise a system that reduces delays between training and testing for home care aides by integrating testing into training programs, allowing training programs to authorize applicants for testing, and allowing for remote testing.
2. To develop a plan to expand testing sites.

The bill instructs the department to establish performance and accountability measures to monitor and ensure the progress of the training-to-testing process, and to establish performance-based contracts for vendors who administer tests.

The department worked closely with stakeholders to evaluate current conditions and statuses of the steps that a home care aide applicant must take toward certification. Together they worked to identify delaying factors, and to seek input and feedback on remedies through surveys and broader listening sessions.

Impact

Significant improvements have already been made in reducing the delays between training and testing.

- Applicants are now approved for testing immediately upon their application being received by the department, rather than having to wait until their training is completed.
- Testing dates are scheduled based on the anticipated date of training completion.
- Testing is scheduled and paid for by the applicant or their employer directly with Prometric.
- The knowledge test will soon have the option to be completed remotely. However, the skills test continues to be in-person.

The department has integrated the home care aide credentialing staff with the Office of Health Professions home care aide program staff for the purpose of providing more immediate service and watching applicant progress. A quality assurance team is monitoring team performance and effectiveness and recommending improvement measures.

The department is incorporating stronger performance measures into its contract with the testing agency. Regular performance reports will help inform where actions can be focused to effect continual improvement in the training, testing, and certification process.

Key Findings

Authorization to test

Previously, applicants had to complete training before the department would authorize them to take exams, which required several hand-offs and processing steps to schedule testing. Prometric, the testing agency, cannot accommodate a process where training sites could authorize applicants for testing. To reduce unnecessary steps and delays, Prometric, in coordination with the department, now provides a system where the applicant is authorized to take the exams once the department receives their initial application. The applicant or their employer schedules and pays Prometric directly for testing dates available after an anticipated date of training completion.

Remote testing

Because remote, online testing saves time, Prometric will be providing remote proctored testing for the knowledge test only. As skills tests involve immediate, hands-on demonstration of ability, Prometric determined that offering an effective remote-proctored skills test is not practical.

Incorporate testing into training

Since remote testing is limited to the knowledge exam only, the comprehensive solution is to integrate both knowledge and skills testing into the training programs. This approach would greatly shorten the time between testing and training. It also prevents additional travel for applicants. Results of the August 2023 survey showed overwhelming support for incorporating knowledge and skills testing into training programs, with an understanding that legislative funding may be needed to make that possible.

The department is currently contracted with Prometric for the home care aide exam. The department is concerned about the potential need to either transfer all exams into training programs or retain Prometric for all exams. Moving only some exams could jeopardize the vendor contract, as Prometric is the only company that has bid on the contract after two attempts. If the department loses Prometric without fully transitioning exams into training, many caregivers may be unable to take their certification exams.

Expanding testing sites

Integrating testing into training programs is the most desired option for increasing the number of testing sites and expanding their geographical distribution. Responses to the November 2023 survey indicated that the agencies administering training sites have strong interest in incorporating testing into training programs.

If testing is not integrated into training, at least eight additional testing sites are needed to meet the demand of the geographically distributed applicant pool. Scheduling dates, proctors, and interpreters would still be required. Due to the low number of test takers in

rural and remote locations, Prometric has refused to set up test sites in these areas, as there are often too few applicants to make the sites profitable. The department has put out a request for bids to other testing vendors but have not had any other vendors bid on our home care aide testing contract.

Recommendations

The department recommends that testing be incorporated into all home care aide training programs eliminating the need for a separate exam vendor. This approach is supported by interested parties and returns the greatest benefits. Having tests built into training programs:

- Improves the home care aide's knowledge and skills retention, consequently increasing pass rates.
- Provides immediate feedback to trainers on the effectiveness of their program enabling them to make improvements.
- Eliminates the need for applicants to schedule exams and having to travel to separate testing sites.
- Removes the extra steps involved in scheduling exams and the inherent delays of coordinating facilities, proctors, and interpreters.
- Guarantees that tests would be accessible and immediately available to applicants.

Incorporating testing into training programs streamlines the process of certification.

Survey responses show this solution to be widely supported with the necessary funding to give training facilities the resources to also become and sustain as testing sites.

Investments will be needed to solve the home care aide workforce crisis, positively impacting the lives of thousands of applicants seeking to enter this profession and many thousands of clients in urgent need of their professional and personalized services. Supporting and increasing home care aide training opportunities will help keep senior and disabled citizens out of more expensive nursing facilities and hospitals and reduce the costly strain on other state-funded services. There are indirect benefits of improving this program which cannot be measured in the parameters of this report.

