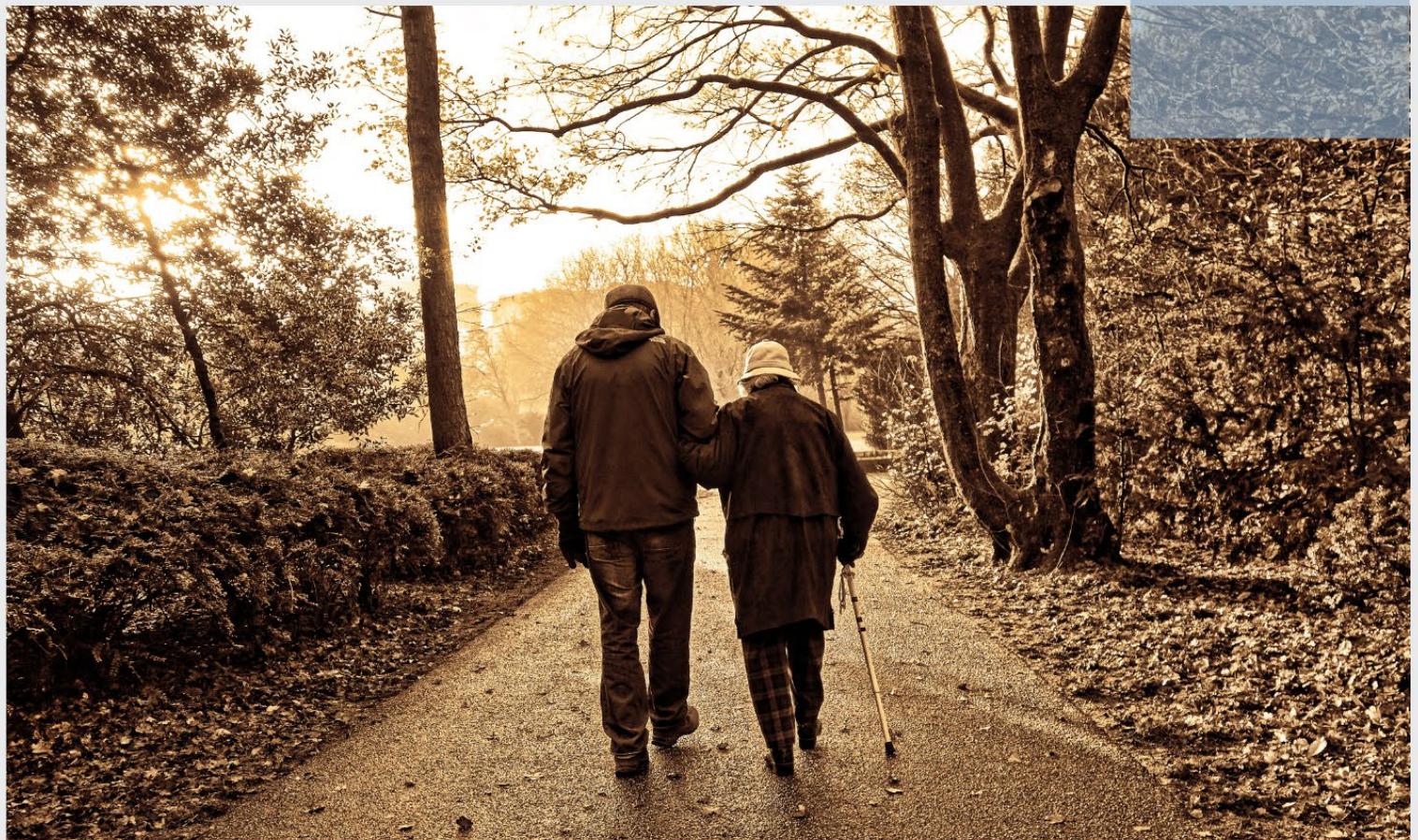


AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE COORDINATORS



**High Service Coordinator Turnover Rates,
Difficulty Filling Positions Negatively Impact Older
Adult Residents Living in HUD Affordable Housing**

OCTOBER 2022

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Residents Living in HUD Affordable Housing**

October 2022 | American Association of Service Coordinators

Executive Summary

Service coordinators are a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of low-income older adults living in affordable housing funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). By making connections to benefits and resources, building community partnerships, and facilitating property programs, service coordinators are making a difference in the health and wellbeing of the residents they serve. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were especially important to the safety and security of their residents and properties.¹ As such, service coordinators are a vital component of Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly, HUD's flagship housing program for older adults.²

Most of the nation's service coordinators are employed by HUD Section 202 properties and their salaries are funded through property operating budgets or HUD-awarded grants. Historically, the Section 202 service coordinator grant portfolio has suffered from turnover, which is reflected in annual carryover amounts. In the last two years, the American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) has recorded a three-fold increase in membership transfers associated with service coordinator turnover. This coupled with the current economic landscape led AASC to survey members on this topic.

This report presents results from a survey conducted between June 29 and July 22, 2022 to explore the experiences of organizations that employ service coordinators. At the time of the survey, nearly all respondents had experienced turnover of a service coordinator position in the last year and more than half were currently seeking to fill open positions. Turnover rates within some companies employing service coordinators reached as high as 70% since March 2020.

Key Survey Findings

- Salary plays a major role in ability to retain and attract qualified service coordinators
- Delays in HUD funding for grant-based service coordinator positions lead to layoffs and job security concerns
- Mental burnout among service coordinator workforce is prohibitive to long-term job satisfaction
- Residents' health and wellbeing is negatively impacted when there is a gap in service coordination resulting from turnover
- Employers seek funding flexibility to address high turnover rates
- Training and tuition support provide opportunities to retain and attract qualified workers



**Respondents Employ
2,000+ Service
Coordinators at 86
organizations**

**57% had open Service
Coordinator positions at
the time of the survey,
with 3-6 months being
the average time it takes
to fill openings**

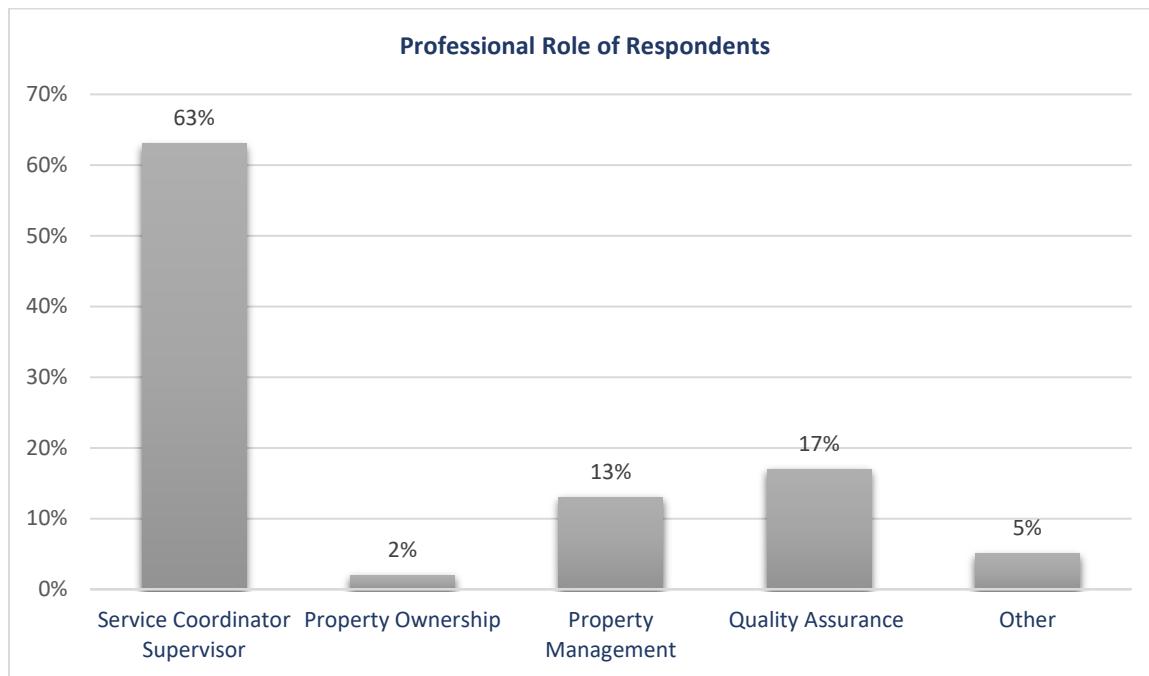


**90% say residents
are negatively
impacted by service
coordinator turnover**

Survey Implementation and Responses

AASC developed the survey and disseminated it by email to approximately 165 service coordinator supervisors, affordable housing owners, quality assurance specialists, and property managers among its membership. Respondents completed the survey online between June 29, 2022 to July 22, 2022. A total of 86 surveys were completed, representing a 52% response rate. Respondents reported representing 2,000 service coordinators. This represents roughly half the number of service coordinators working in HUD-funded affordable housing for older adults. Most respondents were service coordinator supervisors (63%) (FIGURE 1) and the number of service coordinators their company employs varied greatly from one to more than 500, with the average being 34.

FIGURE 1: Most Respondents Identified as Service Coordinator Supervisors



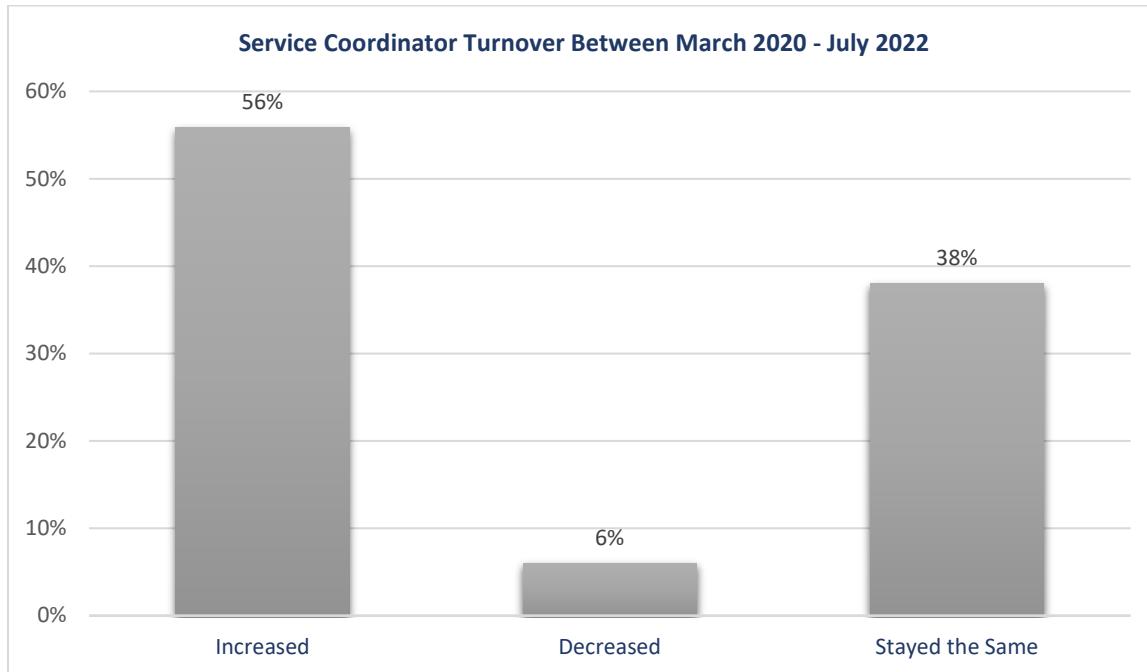
Introduction

At the time of the survey, 57% of respondents had vacancies at their properties. A handful had as many as 10-12 open positions, with the average falling between 2-5.

The majority reported that staff turnover has increased since March 2020 (FIGURE 2). “I have never had such a difficult time recruiting until the past year. I have had open positions for 6 months and cannot seem to get any qualified candidates or people who want to work in the field,” one said.

Meanwhile, one-third said that turnover has remained the same, with respondents writing that the churn rate of service coordinator positions has been a longstanding issue that predated COVID-19 and the post-pandemic economy.

FIGURE 2: Service Coordinator Staff Turnover Increased Since March 2020



Since March 2020, some respondents have seen remarkably high turnover in service coordinator staff with one reporting that as many as 70% of staff had resigned and needed to be replaced. Several others reported turnover rates of 35-60% of service coordinators in that time, which is putting a strain on property staff and residents, according to respondents.

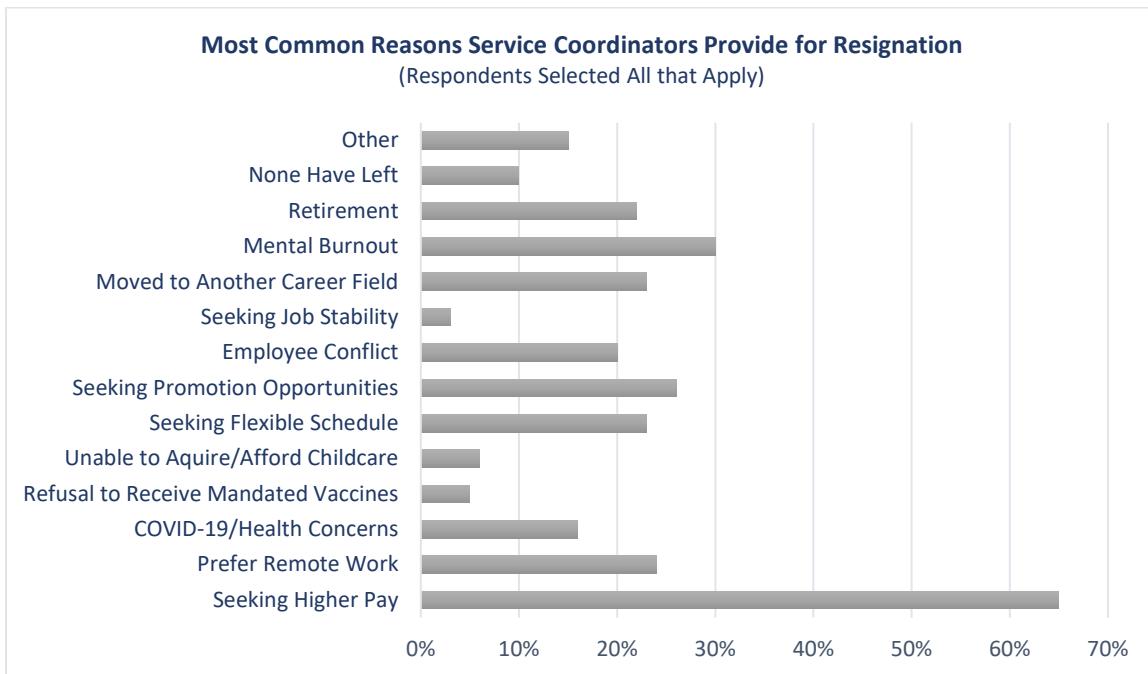
"SC turnover has had a significant impact on our team and work. I have had to orient and train a number of new [Resident Service Coordinators (RSCs)] and the time this is taking is making it difficult to engage in other activities that would further our dept. Having seasoned longer term RSCs is most beneficial to a property and also provides opportunities for them to support newer RSCs with their experience and wisdom," another said.

Once service coordinator positions become vacant, they can be difficult to fill, creating a gap that leaves residents without access to services and supports in the meantime.

Low Salary, Mental Burnout, Delayed Funding Increase Turnover Rates

Overwhelmingly, respondents said the most common reason service coordinators provide for vacating their positions is that they are seeking higher pay. Two-thirds said service coordinators have given this reason when resigning (FIGURE 3). One respondent said "Cost of living is choking the service coordinators, they just can't live off the pay. They have [to] seek other jobs. It is going to get worse [in the] next couple of months if something is not done."

FIGURE 3: Service Coordinators Sought Increased Salaries



Respondents reported annual full-time service coordinator salaries ranging from \$25,000 to \$72,800 with the average being \$44,255. This aligns with the results from a 2019 AASC salary survey showing the average full-time service coordinator salary was \$40,500.³ At that time, service coordinators working in nearly half of U.S. states were not earning enough to reasonably afford a two-bedroom apartment.⁴

The affordable housing properties that employ service coordinators are not entirely responsible for determining salaries. While they submit annual budgets to HUD for approval, it's ultimately up to HUD regional staff to approve the budget totals. Currently there is not a standard method for setting service coordinator salaries or approving pay increases across HUD regional offices. In recent years, HUD has provided a blanket cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to all service coordinator budgets but does not mandate that those funds go solely toward the service coordinator salary.

Several respondents said they've attempted to increase salary line items through requests to HUD regional staff but have not been successful. "We're being told budgets can't support pay increases," a respondent reported. Another respondent said: "There needs to be improved salary opportunities within the grant budget. I have been in this industry for 10 years and in that time we have had very little COLA increases. This past year was the largest I've seen in a long time, but still wasn't enough to provide the necessary wages to attract qualified candidates and maintain existing SCs. This program cannot be successful at the property level when there is constant turnover. Residents will fall through the cracks and this will cause issues that would be very concerning for all stakeholders involved."

The second most common reason provided for service coordinators leaving their positions is mental burnout. As trusted leaders in their communities, service coordinators are the front line of support for residents who have complex needs or are experiencing crises. The profession requires exceptional caring and a commitment to residents' wellbeing. During the pandemic, service coordinators were essential workers whose time and attention were more in demand than ever as they sought to ensure basic

needs were met and reliable information was provided at a time of fear and chaos. The last few years have likely taken a greater toll on service coordinators than prior years.

Some respondents tied mental burnout to large caseloads. HUD recommends a caseload of no more than 50-100 residents per service coordinator, however service coordinators and their employers report serving much high numbers of residents in some cases. In some instances, HUD approves only enough funding for part-time service coordinators. This may result in a larger caseload for the employee and an additional barrier to finding a qualified applicant when a position opens.

“Burnout is a concern. We don't have the funding to hire as many staff as we need to serve our residents, so the burden falls on a small and hardworking staff. We believe the impact of resident services is measurable and impactful in our community, but we need access to more funding so that we can serve all our residents who want services and support,” a respondent said.

A significant proportion of respondents also said service coordinators are seeking more flexible schedules and the option to work remotely. Many industries have provided such opportunities to workers since March 2020. However, the work of a service coordinator relies on their ability to interact with residents and observe them in the community. This makes remote work difficult if not impossible.

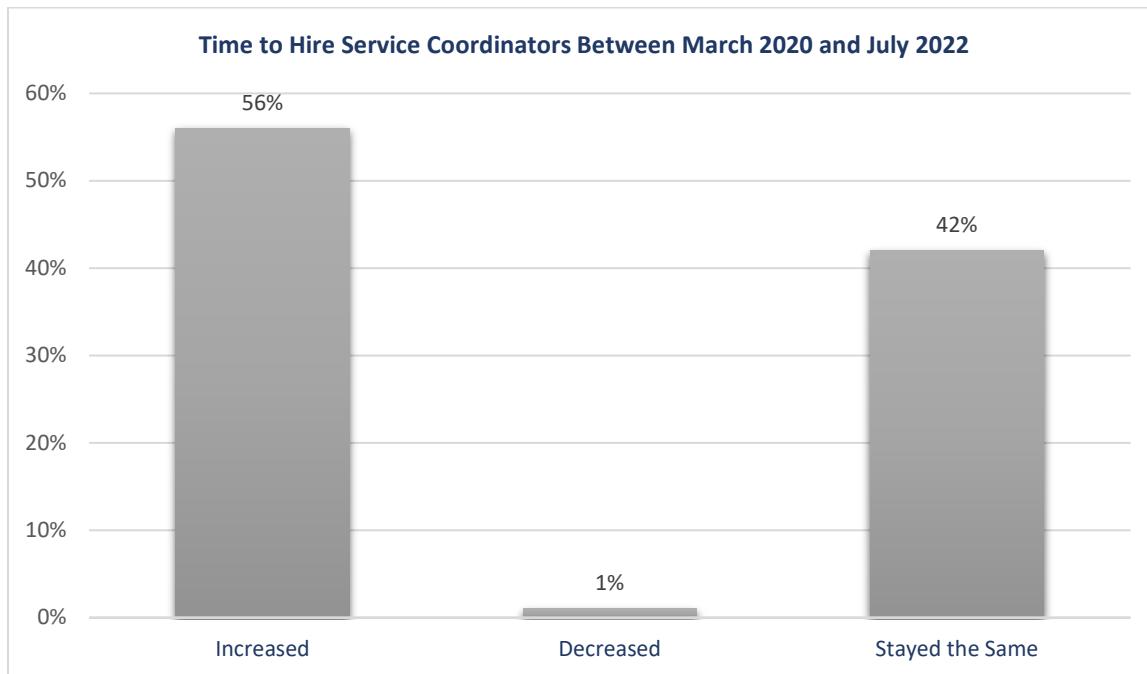
Respondents suggested that higher salaries could offset the challenges tied to the profession, such as mental burnout and inability to work from home. “Higher pay would bring in more competent employees, even if the benefits were the same,” one said.

Notably, various respondents also referred to HUD grant funding delays as a cause for service coordinator turnover. This is because of forced layoffs and, in some cases, the job uncertainty that service coordinators feel as a result of annual funding delays. “Delayed funding causes owners and managers to ask for layoffs. Funding is critical to make sure there is no disruption of services for residents,” a respondent said. Another said: “The delay in allocation of service coordination funds made it difficult for agencies/organizations to continue paying salaries. Unfortunately, residents also are greatly impacted by this.”

Salary Inflexibilities Impact Hiring

Staff turnover can be costly and cause disruptions. Employers of service coordinators also must contend with difficulty filling positions once they become vacant. More than half of respondents said the time it takes to fill an open service coordinator position has increased since March 2020 (FIGURE 4). Meanwhile, 40 percent said the amount of time a position is open has remained the same. Much like turnover rates, respondents said filling vacant positions has long been a challenge even before the pandemic and its impacts on the nation’s workforce at large.

FIGURE 4: Time to Hire Service Coordinators Increased Since March 2020

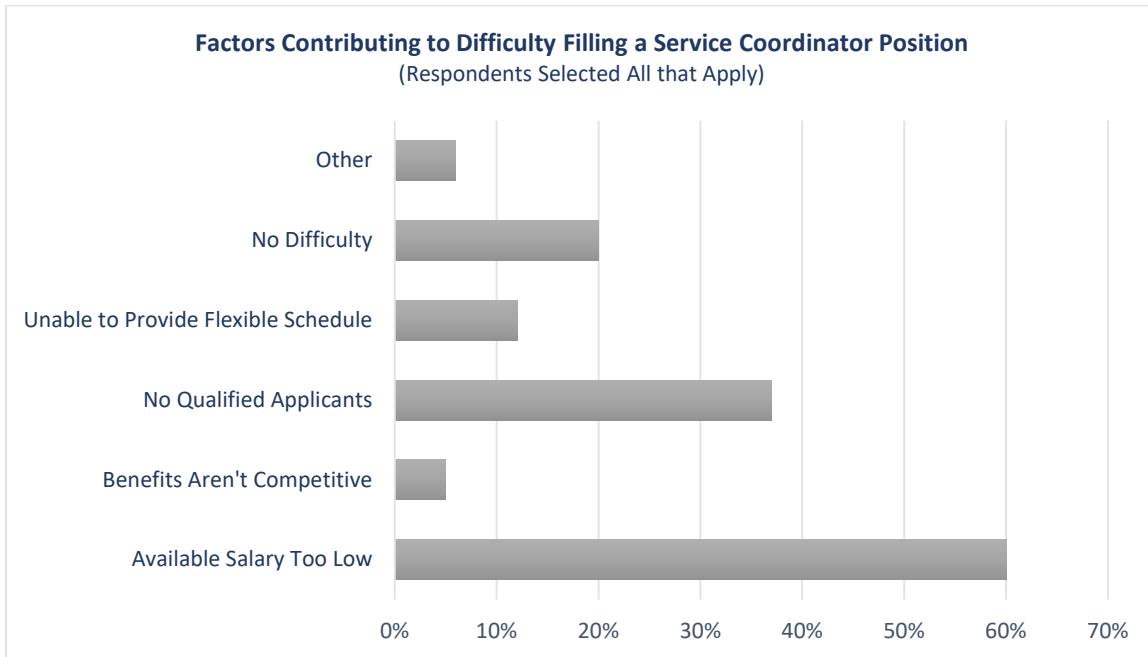


Sixty percent of respondents reported low salary plays a role in difficulty finding quality service coordinator candidates to quickly replace lost staff (FIGURE 5). They suggest that HUD recommendations to hire a service coordinator with a bachelor's degree and experience in aging services are out of line with the available salary. "Those that are qualified are looking for higher salaries and do not consider the position once educated on the pay," one respondent said. Another said: "I believe that the education level of SCs should be minimally a bachelor's degree and then compensation should competitively match that requirement. Without competitive salary, we will never be able to recruit quality staff."

There is a process that employers can follow to request HUD budget adjustments in the middle of a budget cycle. However, respondents report that this process is not standard across all HUD regions and they've seen little success in seeking mid-year adjustments to salary, benefits and training line items to allow hiring of new staff that requires additional funds. "We need a better mechanism to raise salaries, not what's currently in place for HUD, which takes over a year to navigate," a respondent said.

Further, some respondents said they purposefully hold off on hiring staff when a vacancy occurs if the position is funded through a HUD grant. This is because funding is often delayed and in recent years the delays have been severe enough to lead to layoffs. "It is unsettling to pursue filling a vacant SC position when HUD cannot award grant funds in a timely manner. Property budgets are expected to indefinitely support the SC position during funding delays. When these SC positions are vacant, undertaking the costly hiring and training process is delayed in the potential event that funds may not be awarded," one respondent said.

FIGURE 5: Low Salary Complicated Hiring Process

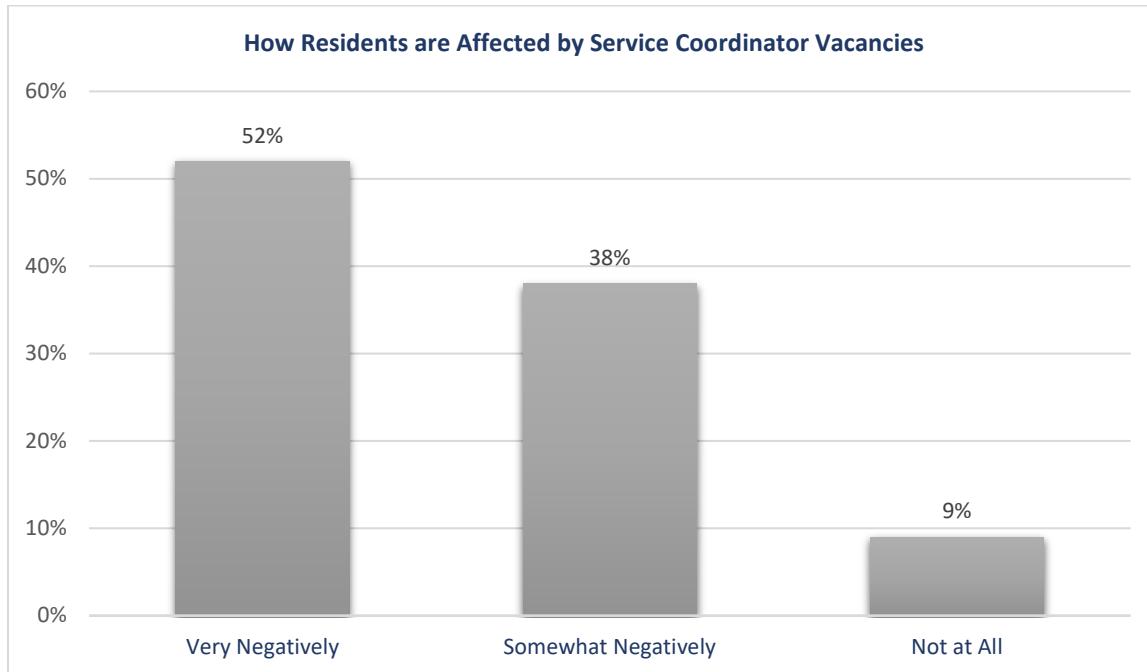


Turnover and Hiring Difficulties Harm Residents

The average range of time it takes to fill an open service coordinator position is three to six months, with some reporting that they spend upwards of nine months searching for qualified candidates. These gaps in employment can impact the integrity of HUD's portfolio and result in large carryover amounts from year to year. Not knowing the true cost of the service coordinator program when it's fully staffed can impede HUD's decision making going into the next budget year. Moreover, a pause in service coordination can be devastating for residents living in HUD affordable housing.

Ninety percent of respondents said that residents are negatively impacted when there is a break in service coordinator support because of difficulty replacing a former employee. (FIGURE 6) Several said in comments that programming halts entirely, including food and health programs that residents rely on to remain living independently in the community. Additionally, respondents said residents who need assistance with annual benefits renewals are more likely to miss deadlines and ultimately lose food, medical, cash assistance and other benefits in the midst of a turnover. One respondent said their company experienced increased resident lease violation notices during a gap in service coordination and another said tensions run high between residents and property management when a service coordinator isn't in place.

FIGURE 6: Service Coordinator Vacancies Impact Residents



A respondent said: "Continuity of care is disrupted, cases are not monitored and followed up on appropriately and benefits/entitlements can fall through the cracks. Residents with hoarding issues, mental health issues, protective cases and lease compliance issues (poor housekeeping, noncompliance) suffer the most because they are not being supported appropriately and as often as they need to."

"Lease violations can go unsupported and become worse, community partnerships can fall apart without a contact to keep them going, resident engagement in the community and with each other can decrease without the encouragement of the SC, residents can lose vital money-saving benefits without support to complete needed paperwork," another said.

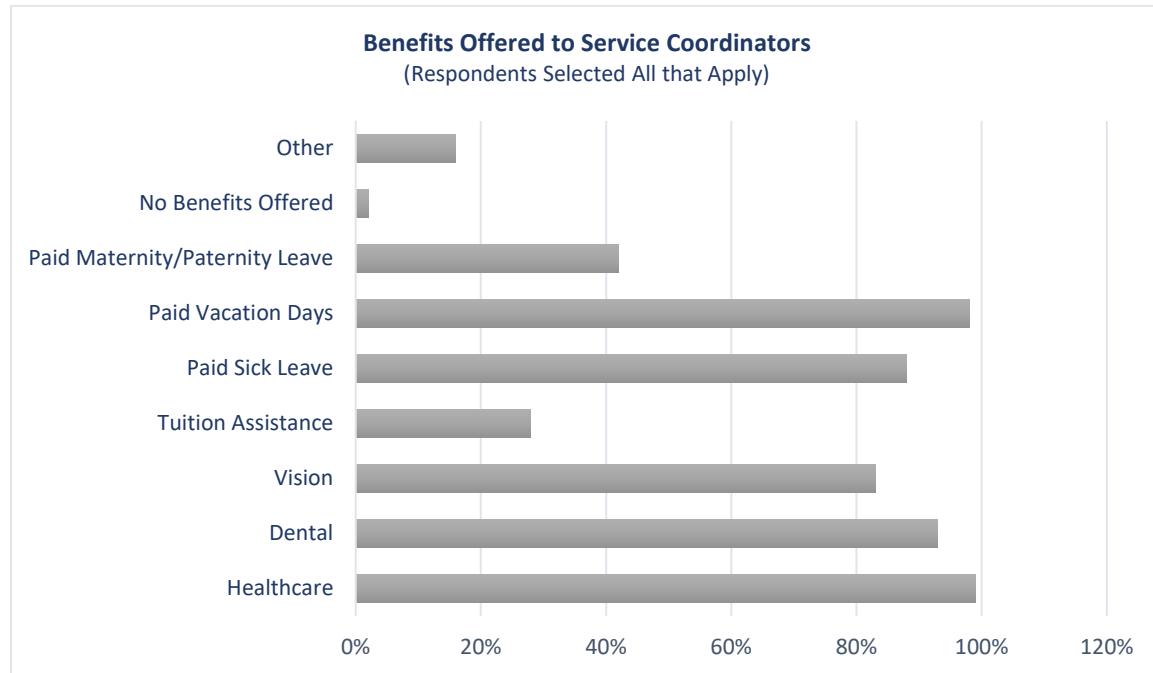
Many respondents noted that it takes time for a service coordinator to build trusting relationships with residents and be in a position to best support them. As a result, any delay in finding a qualified replacement is exacerbated by the time it takes for a new service coordinator to begin doing meaningful work once they're employed. "Service Coordinator turnover creates a huge disruption of services. Residents need time to earn and build trust with service coordinators and some residents lose faith in the program," one said. "It puts a strain on existing staff and residents feel like they are being abandoned," another commented.

Several respondents said their company has a backup staffing structure in place to support residents during a service coordinator program vacancy. However, almost all observed that these arrangements are not ideal because some residents go unserved and others are confused by the change in staff roles. "While we are able to utilize other service coordinators to provide support/minimal coverage while filling a vacancy, we do see a decline in residents reaching out for services. Having a consistent person onsite with predictable hours creates a more supportive environment inviting residents to seek, ask, share. We do not know what we do not know which means some residents may be experiencing challenges that if we were fully staffed would be identified and resolved," one respondent said.

Best Practices to Retain Service Coordinators

Nearly all employers provide health care benefits and paid personal time off to service coordinators. A majority also provide dental and vision benefits as well as paid sick leave. A portion also offer paid maternity/paternity leave and tuition assistance (FIGURE 7).

FIGURE 7: Employers Offer Benefits to Service Coordinators



Respondents said they've found some success in retaining and attracting service coordinator professionals by offering referral bonuses, providing training and professional support, and cultivating an inclusive culture. Scheduling regular meetings with employees to proactively address any concerns is also a reported best practice.

One respondent said: "Word-of-mouth has worked best for hiring. We have 2% unemployment in our community, so finding someone who is qualified and willing to accept the salary we can offer is a challenge. Creating a workplace atmosphere of support and loyalty has helped us retain staff. Also, a strong benefit package is important to our employees and helps with the recruiting process."

Others said having a company culture that understands and supports service coordinators is key. Often, respondents said employing strong quality assurance professionals and service coordinator supervisors who provide oversight and guidance has improved career satisfaction among service coordinators. Several suggested that mandating federally assisted housing properties to employ service coordinators ensure they are a respected and necessary member of the management team.

To address the desire of some service coordinators to have more flexible work hours or to work remotely during the pandemic, a handful of respondents said they permit employees to set their own hours or to work from home one day per week. During the pandemic, some companies offered scheduling flexibility as necessary to accommodate altered circumstances.

“During the pandemic, the service coordinators have been expected to work on-site and not remotely. We have made a few exceptions to that when the service coordinators have had family issues, children needing to be at home for remote learning.”

Despite the reported importance of benefits, training, and team building to staff retention, a number of respondents said their companies don’t have the resources to provide additional extensive support to service coordinators. For example, respondents said quality continuing education with a peer networking component leads to career fulfillment and prevents staff terminations for poor performance. While HUD requires annual continuing education for all service coordinators, there is no standard funding set aside, which results in a wide range of training budgets and training opportunities.

Conclusions

These results point to an even more dire employment and retention landscape for service coordinators in affordable housing than the overall job market, which has seen a historically high employee quit rate and a 30% annual turnover in workers in the past two years.⁵ As a result of the so-called Great Resignation that is driving labor market shifts, employers in many sectors have been forced to increase wages and expand benefit offerings – responsive measures that HUD-funded affordable housing properties are not in a position to take.

Aging workforce professions similar or adjacent to service coordinators are also feeling acute strain from the tightening of the labor market. This includes case managers and social workers of all types including those employed by area agencies on aging, community based organizations, and adult protective services agencies.⁶ Like service coordinators, these professionals are often working in relatively low-wage, high-stress positions that already had a high turnover rate prior to the post-pandemic economy. That turnover has been exacerbated by a recent increase in the number of available jobs and wages.

As a growing number of service coordinators and their community partners leave the aging services profession to seek higher wages and employee benefits, the older adults they serve in HUD affordable housing are being negatively impacted. The survey results show that the impacts of losing a service coordinator can be devastating for residents, contradicting the goal of HUD Section 202 housing to keep low-income older adults aging in their communities instead of moving to more costly facilities that provide higher levels of care.

Recommendations

Expanded Funding

Increased funding availability for service coordinator salaries and benefits could result in longer job tenancy for existing service coordinators and an increased number of qualified applicants to choose from when positions come open. HUD should examine opportunities to provide additional funding to budget-based and grant-funded service coordinator programs. Expanding resources could also result in more properties offering service coordination to the benefit of low-income older adults living in HUD-assisted affordable housing.

Budget Flexibility

Flexibility to meet labor market demands and HUD-recommended job qualifications is necessary to ensure that service coordinator employers can attract and retain essential staff. Employers must be able

to follow a simple and quick standardized process to make changes to the salary and benefits line items in their annual HUD budgets, particularly when hiring new service coordinators to fill open positions.

Training Access

Access to relevant and robust ongoing training is necessary for career growth and positive job performance. While annual service coordinator training is mandated by HUD, there is no standard funding level in place to support this important requirement. A standardized minimum funding level for training should be implemented to ensure all service coordinators can participate in valuable learning and networking opportunities.

Loan Forgiveness

Service coordinators are a key component of federally assisted affordable housing and help to address federal goals such as improving health outcomes, reducing health care costs, and keeping older adults living in their communities. To do this work, HUD recommends that service coordinators have at least a bachelor's degree. Making service coordinators eligible for the Federal Student Loan Forgiveness program would recognize their important work and attract qualified candidates to the profession.

Program Oversight

Oversight of the HUD Multifamily Service Coordinator Program is lacking and there is no standardization of practices from region-to-region. As a result, budgeting processes are inefficient and can be a source of frustration for service coordinator employers. Establishing a leadership structure that is solely dedicated to overseeing the service coordinator program and administration throughout the HUD regional offices could drive best practices, create funding efficiencies and set goals for the program.

Data Collection

Data collection is integral to understanding the service coordinator program and how to best support it. HUD should prioritize efforts to determine where service coordinators work and how their positions are funded as well as which properties are eligible for service coordinators, but do not currently employ them. This information will help identify the availability of and gaps in service coordination and will improve the accuracy of annual HUD funding requests to Congress.

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About AASC

The American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) is a professional membership association and a national resource for service-enriched housing professionals. AASC's more than 4,000 members assist elderly and disabled residents and families living in affordable housing communities to identify, locate, and acquire the services and supports necessary to become and remain self-sufficient. Established in 1999, AASC provides education, advocacy, best practices, leadership, and networking opportunities for its members.



*American Association of
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659 High Street | PO Box 1090 | Worthington, Ohio 43085

(614) 848-5958 | www.servicecoordinator.org | info@servicecoordinator.org

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