



# **A NEW ERA FOR HOSPITAL SAFETY**

What We've Learned from  
the Pandemic and What  
Still Needs to Change

**HOSPITAL PATIENT SAFETY REPORT 2022**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Two years after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, how is the patient, staff, and visitor safety landscape changing, and what might the future bring? This report, based on a survey of 100 hospital executives and clinical leaders, has answers.**

The Hospital Patient Safety Report, released each year since 2019, serves as a barometer of safety performance within U.S. hospitals. Based on an annual survey of hospital executives and clinical leaders, the report reveals how safety challenges, initiatives, and priorities are evolving.

This year's report also explores both how and how much the hospital safety landscape has changed two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. The short answer? A great deal, according to respondents. Nearly one out of three say their organization is not doing enough to address pandemic-exposed vulnerabilities, and nearly one out of five say key challenges such as staff burnout and shortages are putting patients' lives in jeopardy.

While patient, staff, and visitor safety have all taken a significant hit over the past two years, the survey reveals that hospital executives and clinical leaders remain committed to advancing safety improvements within their organizations, with about three-quarters saying the pandemic has made improving patient, staff, and visitor safety a higher priority. In addition, about the same percentage of respondents say the crisis has spurred critical improvement initiatives in all three of these areas.

Read on to learn more about these and other survey findings, including how the pandemic is impacting how hospitals approach safety within key departments such as infection prevention, pharmacy, and antimicrobial stewardship.

**As an October 2021 [Becker's Hospital Review](#) article noted, lags in data safety and quality reporting from safety organizations, such as from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, have made it difficult to gain clear insights into the pandemic's impact thus far. The 2022 Hospital Patient Safety Report provides a unique opportunity for the industry to begin measuring how the pandemic has impacted national hospital safety trends.**

## KEY FINDINGS

### CAUSE FOR CONCERN

**33%**

of hospital executives and clinical leaders say their organization hasn't done enough to address pandemic-exposed safety problems

**86%**

say staff burnout has led to a decline in patient safety, and 21% say it has caused patient deaths

**42%**

say their rate of hospital-acquired infections has increased over the past 12 months

### REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

**78%**

say the pandemic has led to patient safety improvement initiatives

**80%**

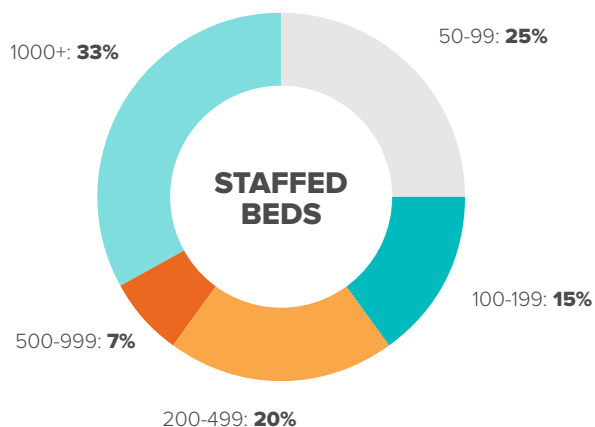
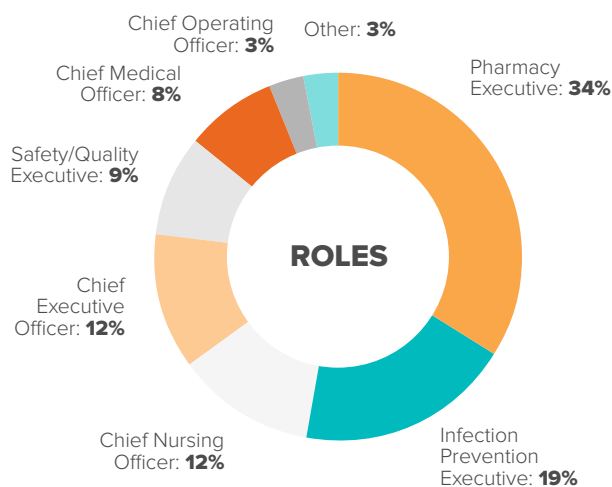
say the pandemic has made improving visitor safety a higher priority

**64%**

say the pandemic has resulted in a higher budget for staff safety improvements

## METHODOLOGY

The annual Hospital Patient Safety Survey took place in January 2022—exactly two years after the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the United States. The 100 respondents hailed from hospitals and health systems of various sizes across the country, with most employed by short- and long-term acute care hospitals and critical access hospitals. Healthcare consultancy Sage Growth Partners conducted the survey independently on behalf of Vigilanz.



## KEY TAKEAWAY #1

### Many hospital executives and clinical leaders say their organization is not doing enough to improve patient, staff, and visitor safety.

The survey reveals troubling findings related to respondents' satisfaction with their hospital's overall safety performance, as well as their performance related to addressing pandemic-exposed safety vulnerabilities.

More than half of survey respondents (51%) say their hospital's rates of patient, staff, and visitor safety-related events have increased over the last two years due to the pandemic, and nearly 90% say the pandemic has highlighted safety problems within their organizations. While two-thirds report their organization has adequately addressed these problems, one-third say more work must be done.

#### Did the pandemic expose safety vulnerabilities within your hospital?



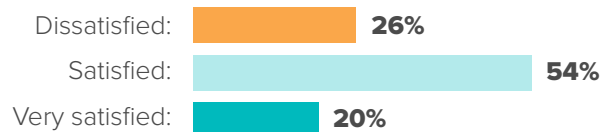
Common vulnerabilities cited include: PPE and other inventory shortages; problems with protocols for regular medical procedures; poor isolation practices; and lack of adequate patient, staff, and visitor safety policies.

#### Do you believe your hospital has done enough to address these vulnerabilities?



Overall, more than one-quarter of respondents (26%) say they are dissatisfied with their hospital's safety performance in 2021. This is nearly double of last year, when only 14% of respondents said they were dissatisfied with their previous year's performance. The percentage who attribute that dissatisfaction to the pandemic has also grown, from 36% in 2020 to 54% in 2021.

#### How do you feel about your hospital's overall safety performance in 2021?



## KEY TAKEAWAY #2

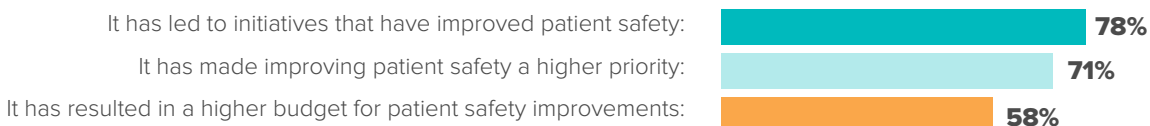
**While many hospital executives and clinical leaders say their organizations should be doing more to improve safety, the good news is that the problem isn't being ignored. Most say they are advancing key safety improvement initiatives and are making safety a higher priority within their organizations.**

About three-quarters of survey respondents say they have made patient, staff, and visitor safety improvements over the past year, and about the same percentage of respondents say that improving patient, staff, and visitor safety has become a higher priority at their organization.

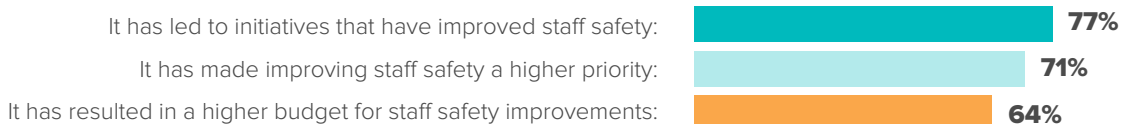
The budget for patient, staff, and visitor safety has also increased at most organizations. Staff safety is the most common area in which budget has increased, with nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) saying it has grown due to the pandemic.

### How has the pandemic impacted your hospital from a safety standpoint?

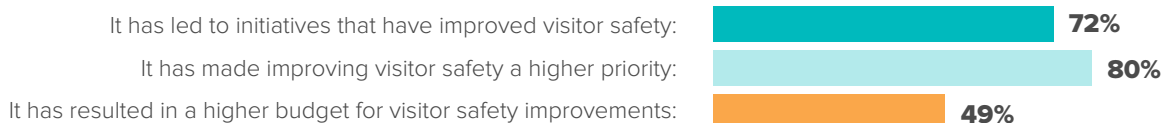
#### PATIENT SAFETY



#### STAFF SAFETY



#### VISITOR SAFETY



**Two-thirds of hospital executives and clinical leaders (66%) say restricted family and visitation policies have also contributed to an increase in safety events over the past two years. One reason? Extra monitoring of patients by visitors sometimes helps flag safety-related problems and errors.**

## KEY TAKEAWAY #3

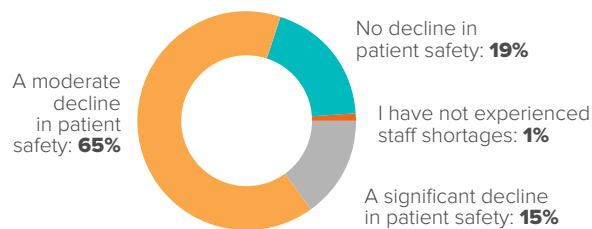
### Hospital executives and clinical leaders say staff shortages and burnout are a significant and growing threat to patient safety.

Increasing rates of staff burnout and shortages are directly correlated to a decrease in patient safety, according to survey respondents. Nearly all say burnout (86%) and staff shortages (80%) have led to a significant or moderate decline in patient safety.

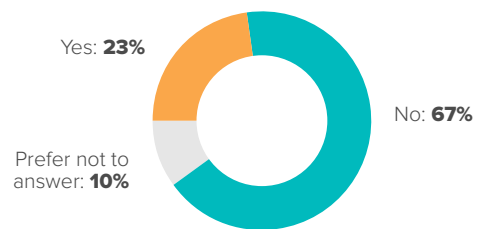
Slightly over one-in-five hospital executives and clinical leaders say patients have lost their lives as a result of staff burnout, and nearly one-quarter say patients have lost their lives as a result of shortages.

#### SHORTAGES

What impact have staffing shortages had on patient safety at your hospital?

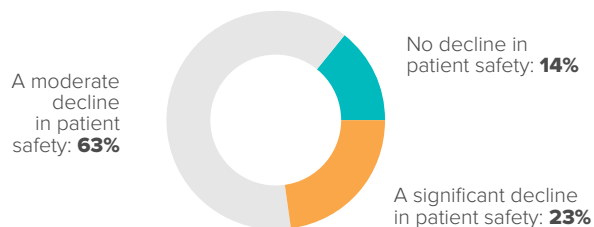


Have patient lives been lost due to staffing shortages?

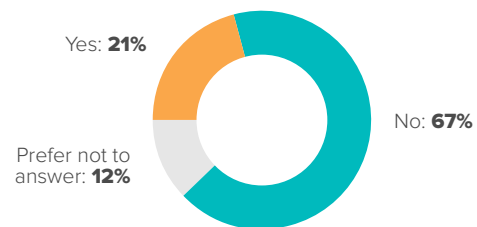


#### BURNOUT

What impact has staff burnout had on patient safety at your hospital?



Have patient lives been lost due to burnout?





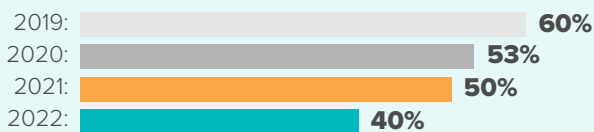
# HOW HOSPITAL SAFETY HAS CHANGED SINCE 2019: 3 TRENDS TO WATCH

**1. Improving patient safety is becoming increasingly important to hospital executives and clinical leaders.** Over the past four years, the percentage of survey respondents who rank improving patient safety as a top three strategic priority has steadily increased, while the percentage who rank increasing efficiency and reducing costs has steadily decreased.

Percentage of respondents who rank improving patient safety among their top three strategic priorities:

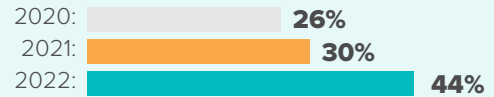


Percentage of respondents who rank improving efficiency and reducing costs among their top three strategic priorities:



**2. Preventing and containing hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) and hospital acquired conditions (HACs) is a rapidly growing problem for hospitals.** Over the past three years, the percentage of respondents who say HAIs and HACs are a top safety problem has rapidly increased.

Percentage of respondents who rank HAIs and HACs as their top safety problem:



Other answer options included medication errors, failure to report safety events, falls, and medication errors.

**3. Hospital executives and clinical leaders are losing confidence in their organization's ability to respond to an infectious disease or viral outbreak.** Since 2021, the percentage of respondents who believe they can respond quickly to an infectious disease or viral outbreak has rapidly declined, perhaps due to challenges raised by new strains of COVID-19.

Percentage of respondents that are extremely confident that their hospital can respond to an infectious disease or viral outbreak as soon as a patient presents with symptoms:



## KEY TAKEAWAY #4

### When asked to identify specific patient safety challenges, hospital executives and clinical leaders overwhelmingly agree that infection prevention tops the list.

While 90% of respondents say the pandemic has made infection prevention a higher priority at their organization and 68% say it has resulted in long-term infection prevention improvements, hospitals still face significant infection prevention challenges. Nearly half of respondents (42%) say the rate of hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) has increased at their organization over the past 12 months.

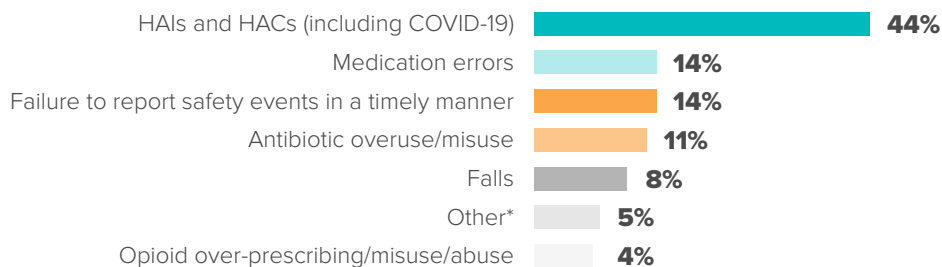
#### How has the rate of HAIs changed at your hospital over the past 12 months?



**Only 58% of hospital executives and clinical leaders say most hospitals have made meaningful, long-term improvement to address pandemic exposed infection prevention vulnerabilities.**

Overall, the number of respondents who rank HAIs and HACs as their top safety challenge has markedly increased since the pandemic began—from 26% in January 2020 (pre-pandemic), to 31% in January 2021, to 44% in 2022.

#### What is the biggest safety problem in hospitals?



\*Responses included communication gaps and staffing challenges

A CDC report, published in September 2021, mirrors these study findings. The report found that, after years of steady decline within hospitals, HAIs increased 40% or more in four of six regularly tracked infections, such as central line-associated bloodstream infections (47% increase) and ventilator-associated events (45% increase).



## KEY TAKEAWAY #5

### Top pharmacy-related safety challenges include medication errors, drug shortages, and antimicrobial stewardship.

Within the pharmacy department specifically, hospitals continue to struggle in key safety areas. While many hospital executives and clinical leaders say the rate of medication errors at their organization has not increased over the past year, 17% report it has increased. This represents a 5% increase over the 2021 survey.

#### Over the past year, how have medication error rates changed at your hospital?

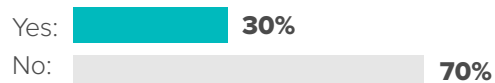


Many pharmacy-related challenges are attributed to the pandemic, according to the survey findings. For example, 93% of hospital executives and clinical leaders say their hospital has experienced drug shortages as a result of the pandemic, and 30% say the pandemic has contributed to an increase in medication errors.

#### Did your hospital experience drug shortages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



#### Has the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to an increase in medication errors at your hospital?



Hospitals also report growing challenges related to antimicrobial stewardship, with 56% of respondents saying the pandemic has contributed to an increase in antibiotic prescribing.

#### How has antibiotic use changed at your hospital over the last 12 months?



#### Has the pandemic contributed to an increase in antibiotic prescribing at your hospital?





## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Hospital leaders are clearly facing several safety-related challenges, but the good news is they are embracing new initiatives—and allocating more monetary resources—to meet them. As they consider various safety improvement initiatives, implementing clinical surveillance technology should be at the top of the list.

**Clinical surveillance continuously monitors data from the EHR and ancillary clinical systems to improve efficiencies, standardize best practices, prevent errors, and alert clinicians to potential safety events and problems in real time, such as:**

- When a patient with infectious disease symptoms is admitted or tests positive
- When an HAI, multidrug-resistant organism infection, or outbreak is likely to occur or has already occurred
- When a drug-bug mismatch occurs
- When unnecessary antibiotic therapy may have been prescribed
- When an antibiotic “time-out” should occur
- When a medication is prescribed that may cause an adverse drug reaction or adverse drug event
- When a medication in short supply is prescribed

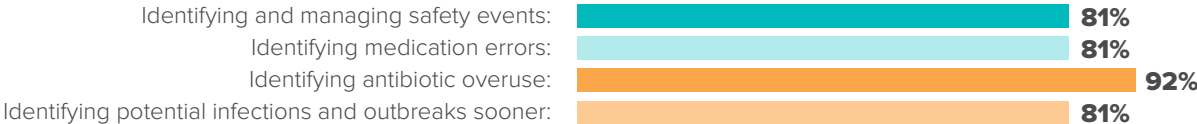
The most effective clinical surveillance partners offer safety-enhancing modules that span departments such as pharmacy, infection prevention, antimicrobial stewardship, and safety event reporting.

Clinical surveillance technology can also alleviate the crises hospitals are facing related to staff burnout and shortages. For example, in pharmacy and infection prevention departments, clinical surveillance can make it easier for clinical leaders to monitor for best practices, track and trend data, and flag and report problems. The best clinical surveillance technology also streamlines staff workflows—for example, effective technologies can auto-populate NHSN and state reporting forms and enable NHSN reporting direct to the CDC, helping clinicians spend less time on paperwork and more time caring for patients.

Overall, all survey respondents agree that clinical surveillance technology can positively impact hospital safety, regardless of whether they are currently using it. Among survey respondents who already use the technology, there is widespread agreement about the benefits it brings their organizations. These span from increased ability to identify and manage safety events to identifying infections and outbreaks sooner.

In addition, 92% of hospital executives and clinical leaders whose organizations already use the technology say it is supporting their hospital's efforts to respond to the pandemic.

**In what instances is a clinical surveillance solution most helpful (select all that apply)?**



**How helpful was your clinical surveillance solution in enhancing your hospital's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**



While only about one-quarter of hospital executives (26%) say their organization already uses clinical surveillance technology, 50% of those who don't currently use it plan to implement it in the next two years. As hospitals continue to prioritize patient, staff, and visitor safety improvements for the rest of the pandemic and beyond, clinical surveillance technology will be a critical lever used by the most successful hospitals.



# VigiLanz®

Founded in 2001, VigiLanz ([www.vigilanzcorp.com](http://www.vigilanzcorp.com)) is a privately held, rapidly growing provider of SaaS-based clinical surveillance, safety, quality, and risk solutions. The firm is focused on transforming the delivery of quality care by aggregating disparate EHR transactional workflow and documentation data across health systems to identify real-time clinical issues that avoid or minimize harm, optimize clinical outcomes, and support preventive care. VigiLanz is a clinical partner to a large and growing community of hospital CMOs, CMIOs, CIOs, quality and safety teams, infectious disease and control specialists, pharmacists, and other clinicians dedicated to innovative, real-time inpatient care.



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