

# **The Impact of Labor Unions in Nursing Homes: A Scoping Review Protocol**

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## **Abstract**

**Objective:** The objective of this scoping review is to map evidence on the impact of unions in nursing homes on employee, resident, and facility outcomes.

**Introduction:** Fifty-two percent of nursing home staff turnover annually; however, turnover rates decrease by 9% in counties with predominately unionized nursing homes. Labor unions may provide structural, organizational, and policy-related solutions to foster a sustainable healthcare workforce. Healthcare labor unions are associated with improved financial and employment outcomes for workers, and improved health-related outcomes for both workers and patients. Previous reviews have examined labor unions across healthcare settings representing specific job types (i.e., nurses and direct-care workers), the current state of evidence regarding the impact of labor unions representing any job type in nursing homes remains unclear.

**Inclusion criteria:** This review will include studies on labor unions in United States nursing homes that represent any job type. We will focus on studies that report outcomes for employees, residents, and/or facilities.

**Methods:** Relevant sources will be identified using PubMed.gov, Embase.com and CINAHL complete (EBSCO), Business Source Complete (EBSCO), Health Policy Reference Center (EBSCO), ABI/INFORM Collection (ProQuest), Scopus.com, and Web of Science. The search will be limited to peer-reviewed empirical studies published in English and focused on labor unions in nursing home settings; grey literature will not be included. Covidence will be used to screen studies for inclusion criteria. Study characteristics will be extracted from each article based on prespecified domains. Two authors will independently screen and review selected articles, with any disagreements resolved by an additional reviewer. The review will follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist for reporting scoping reviews.

**Keywords:** collective bargaining, labor, healthcare workforce, skilled nursing, workplace dynamics, labor relations

## **Introduction**

Over 1.2 million individuals in the United States reside in a nursing home;<sup>1</sup> this number is expected to rise as the population of older adults continues to grow.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the demand for comprehensive care and support services in nursing homes is also increasing. However, meeting these care needs is challenging due to high turnover rates among nursing home staff, which are predicted to range from 30% to over 100%, depending on the job.<sup>3-6</sup> These exceptionally high turnover rates likely lead to disruptions in continuity and quality of care and a less experienced workforce.<sup>7-9</sup> Notably, nursing homes with unionized workers have been associated with lower turnover rates.<sup>10</sup>

The presence of labor unions in healthcare is linked to improved financial and employment outcomes for workers, as well as improved health-related outcomes for both workers and the individuals they serve.<sup>11, 12</sup> As such, healthcare labor unions may provide structural, organizational, and policy-related solutions to foster a sustainable healthcare workforce, ensuring stability, support, and high-quality care over the long term. While previous reviews have examined labor unions representing *specific* job types (i.e., nurses and direct-care workers) in various healthcare settings,<sup>13, 14</sup> the current state of evidence regarding the impact of labor unions representing *any* job type in nursing homes remains unclear.

Mapping the existing literature is important to clarifying the evidence and identifying gaps to inform future research and policy development. To that end, we will conduct a scoping review to assess the extent of the literature on unionization among nursing home workers of any job type and its associated effects on employees, residents, and facility operations.

## **Objective**

The primary goal of this scoping review is to answer the research question, “*What is the available evidence on the impact of labor unions in nursing homes on employee, resident, and facility outcomes?*”

## **Inclusion Criteria**

### ***Participants***

This scoping review will consider studies that focus on union workers of any job type (e.g., registered nurse, nurse aide, occupational therapist, environmental services) working in a nursing home.

### ***Concept***

For papers to be included in this scoping review, they must provide empirical evidence on the relationship between unionized workers and employee, resident, and/or facility outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, wages, mortality, turnover).

### ***Context***

This scoping review will only consider papers examining workers within a nursing home facility in the United States will be eligible. Papers examining unionized workers within other

healthcare settings will be excluded (e.g., acute care, outpatient, assisted living). Papers that mention long-term care setting and do not specify whether the facility is a nursing home will be included.

### ***Types of sources***

This scoping review will consider both experimental and quasi-experimental study designs (e.g., randomised control trials, cross-sectional studies) and analytical and descriptive observational studies (e.g., prospective and retrospective cohort studies). Qualitative studies will also be considered. Articles must be full-text and written in English. Reviews, editorial articles, commentaries, abstracts or posters, articles for which we cannot obtain the full text or are not written in English, as well as dissertations and grey literature will not be included.

### **Methods**

The proposed scoping review will follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist for reporting scoping reviews and will be deposited in Deep Blue (DOI: 10.7302/25243).<sup>15</sup>

### ***Search strategy***

The search strategy will aim to locate peer-reviewed, empirical studies. In collaboration with a university informationist, a three-step search strategy will be utilized in this review. First an initial limited search of PubMed.gov will be undertaken to identify articles on the topic. The text words contained in the titles and abstracts of relevant articles, and the index terms used to describe the articles will be used to develop a full search strategy for PubMed.gov, Embase.com and CINAHL complete (EBSCO), Business Source Complete (EBSCO), Health Policy Reference Center (EBSCO), ABI/INFORM Collection (ProQuest), Scopus.com, and Web of Science (see Appendix 1 for search strategy template and PubMed.com search strategy). We will use citationchaser, an R package and Shiny app, for forward and backward citation chasing of all included articles and literature reviews on a similar topic (i.e. unions in healthcare settings).<sup>14</sup>

### ***Source of evidence selection***

Following the search, all identified studies will be gathered and uploaded into Covidence, a software tool designed for systematic reviews, which facilitates the screening, data extraction, and management of studies.<sup>15</sup> Once duplicate studies are removed, two authors will independently review the search yield and complete a title and abstract screen. Pilot testing using the inclusion criteria will be used by the two reviewers to assess clarity of the inclusion criteria and edited, if needed. After screening the identified studies and upon agreement between the two reviewers, the full text of selected citations will be assessed. Reasons for exclusion of articles at full text will be recorded and reported in the scoping review. Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process will be resolved with an additional reviewer. The results of the search and the study inclusion process will be reported in full in the final scoping review and presented in a PRISMA-ScR flow diagram.

### ***Data extraction***

Data will be extracted from studies included in the scoping review by two independent reviewers using a data extraction survey tool (developed by Covidence, revised by HR and reviewed by the research team). The extracted data will include the study title, publishing journal, publication year, lead author, location of study, methods and population. A draft extraction form is provided (see Appendix 2). This form will be piloted on a minimum of ten studies and modified as necessary to reflect consensus among reviewers on important data elements and to ensure consistency. Any modifications will be detailed in the scoping review. Disagreements between reviewers will be resolved through the involvement of an additional reviewer.

### **Data analysis and presentation**

Once the data has been collected using the data extraction tool, it will be exported and displayed in tubular and visual formats followed by a narrative summary. We will describe the type of workers represented in the study unions, the independent and dependent variables of interest and compare the employee, resident and facility outcomes across studies. Emerging trends—such as similarities in study design, type of workforce and outcomes—will be presented quantitatively and qualitatively. We will follow the PRISMA-ScR checklist for reporting, which includes presenting a flow diagram to display the number of included studies.

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## Appendix I: Search strategy template

Informationist searcher:

Secondary searcher:

Date of completed search:

Date of updated search (if applicable):

Total number of articles (before de-duplication):

Total number of articles (after de-duplication):

Database (platform)	Search terms and full search strategy	Results (# articles)
PubMed.gov	"Labor Unions"[Mesh] OR union*[tiab] OR "Employee Strike"[tiab] OR "Collective Bargaining"[tiab] OR "Non-union"[tiab] OR Nonunion[tiab]	96261
	"Homes for the Aged"[Mesh] OR "Nursing Homes"[Mesh] OR "Nursing Home*"[tiab] OR "Intermediate Care Facilit*"[tiab] OR "Skilled Nursing Facilit*"[tiab] OR "Extended Care Facilit*"[tiab]	67623
	1 AND 2	248
Embase.com		
CINAHL complete (EBSCO)		
Business Source Complete (EBSCO)		
Health Policy Reference Center (EBSCO)		
ABI/INFORM Collection (ProQuest)		
Scopus.com		
Web of Science		

## Appendix II: Data extraction

Reviewer:

Study ID:

Title:

Lead author:

Country (state):

Notes (year):

Domain	Extraction
Methods	Aim of study Study design Start date End date Setting
Participants	Workforce Inclusion Exclusion Total number in sample Population characteristics Outcome table
Union	Defined Measured