



Revenue integrity budgets face challenges as hospitals confront ongoing pressures

Revenue integrity professionals are facing a mixed bag when it comes to salary as hospitals continue to struggle with the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, according to the results of NAHRI's 2021 Revenue Integrity Salary Survey. Revenue integrity departments haven't escaped the strain put on hospitals: In addition to losses in compensation, revenue integrity staffing is down, and some respondents reported that benefits and departmental budgets continue to be negatively impacted.

Planning next steps for your career, or revenue integrity department, is more of a challenge than ever. Most hospitals have been able to reverse the most

drastic actions taken to mitigate the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as cutting staff hours and salaries. Yet revenue integrity professionals may face new, tougher barriers to increasing their compensation or even getting approval for additional resources to improve the department.

Understanding industrywide trends and making data-informed decisions is critical to setting standards and expectations for staffing, compensation, and professional development budgets. With these insights, revenue integrity professionals and their organizations will be better equipped to choose options that make sense for them.

Revenue integrity program

Revenue integrity programs come in all shapes and sizes, and not all professionals who perform those functions have dedicated revenue integrity job titles. Almost half (46%) of respondents hold a revenue integrity-specific job title such as revenue integrity director, specialist, or analyst. That's up slightly from 2020 when 41% of respondents reported holding such a title.

Standardized job titles that are specific to revenue integrity can help managers and staff members better understand their roles and priorities. It may also allow organizations and revenue integrity

leaders to make smarter choices about compensation and staffing.

A majority (58%) of respondents are employed by an acute care hospital/health system, and of that group, 56% are employed by a facility with 500 or more licensed beds.

Larger organizations typically have more resources to devote to stand-alone revenue integrity departments with dedicated budgets and staff, but smaller organizations can reap the benefits of revenue integrity without allocating extra dollars (see the article on p. 28). Revenue integrity professionals can, and should, include their contributions to their organization's revenue integrity initiatives when discussing job duties, workloads, and compensation.

Even at large health systems, revenue integrity likely looks different than it did last year. Only 17% of this year's survey respondents said 20 or more full-time employees (FTE) support their revenue integrity department/program, compared to 23% in 2020. About one-quarter (23%) of this year's survey respondents reported their revenue integrity department/program is supported by five to seven FTEs. The past year has seen organizations under enormous pressure—and that may have reshaped some revenue integrity departments.

However, there's some good news for revenue integrity

Figure 1. How many FTEs support your revenue integrity department/program?

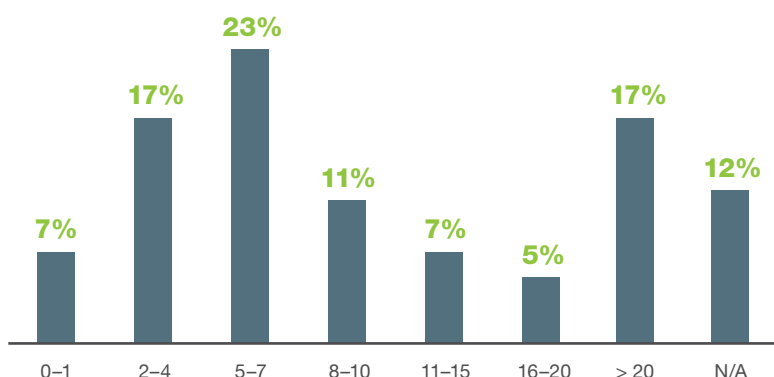


Figure 2. Does your organization plan to hire additional revenue integrity staff in the next 12 months?

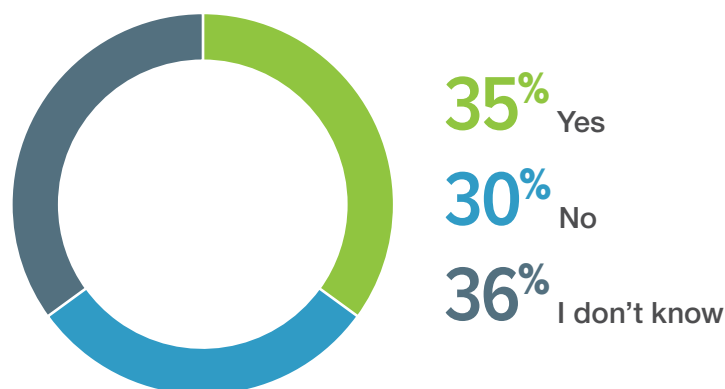
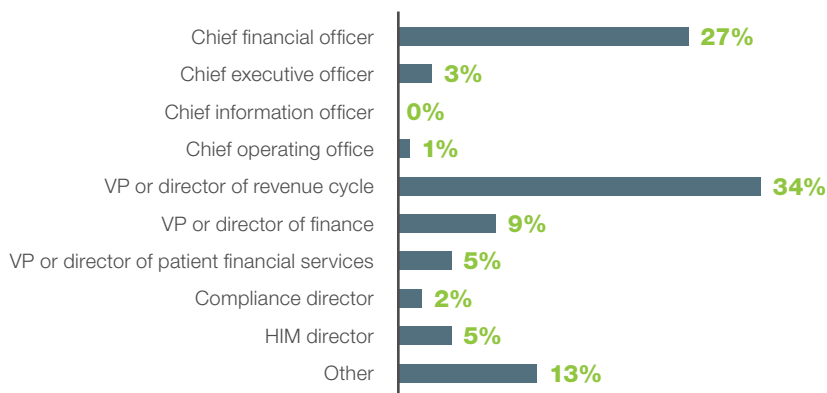


Figure 3. Who does revenue integrity report to at your organization?



Sources: NAHRI's 2021 Revenue Integrity Salary Survey

staffing: 35% of respondents reported their organization plans to hire additional revenue integrity staff in the next 12 months. As organizations regain their financial footing, professional opportunities and resources will be set to rebound.

Although there's no one standard revenue integrity model that suits every organization, revenue integrity's position in the organizational structure is clearly defined, based on survey responses. According to respondents, revenue integrity reports up through the vice president or director of revenue cycle (34%) or the chief financial officer (27%).

Salary and benefits

Overall, revenue integrity salaries have remained about the same as the previous year, according to survey respondents. Most (66%) reported earning more than \$69,999 annually, compared to 77% in 2020 (71% in 2019 and 65% in 2018). As in previous years, annual salaries were spread over a range, with 44% making \$60,000–\$89,999 (compared to 37% in 2020).

So, what gives? Notably, in 2021 fewer respondents reported earning more than \$129,999 (18% in 2021 compared to 27% in 2020). Meanwhile, more respondents shifted into the \$70,000–\$79,999 bracket (13% in 2021 compared to 9% in 2020). A drop-off in representation at the higher levels

Figure 4. Annual salaries for Revenue Integrity professionals

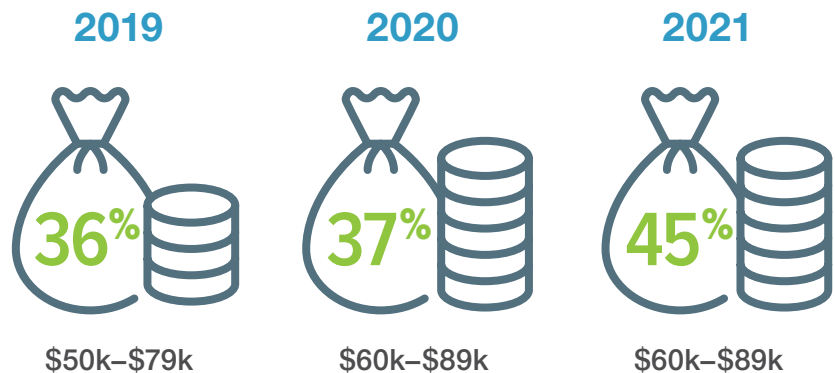


Figure 5. Revenue Integrity professionals who received a raise within the last year

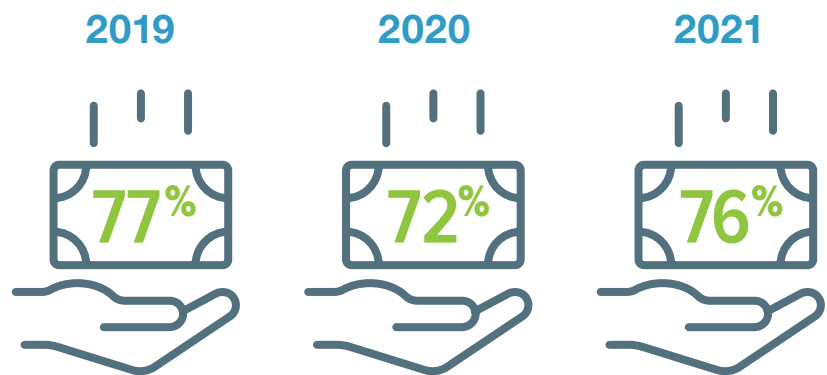
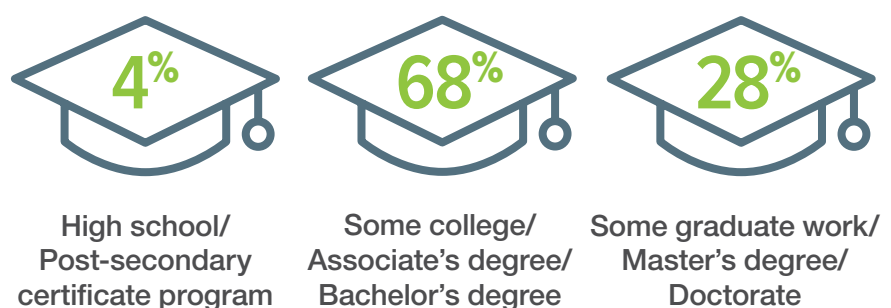


Figure 6. Education levels of Revenue Integrity professionals



Sources: NAHRI's 2019, 2020, 2021 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey

could be related to what's been dubbed The Great Resignation. As the pandemic continues to reshape work and priorities, many professionals have taken a hard look at their goals and needs, with some opting to change careers, strike out on their own, or step into retirement sooner than expected (stream the July 15 episode of *The Revenue Integrity Show: A NAHRI Podcast* for more on this topic).

On the bright side, the majority (76%) of respondents received a raise within the last year. Of that group, 38% reported receiving a 3% raise, and for 89% the raise was not part of a promotion.

Benefits, such as vacation time, retirement plan match, and health coverage, have remained largely unchanged over the past year. Some respondents reported reductions in their travel budget (19%) and their budget for meals and entertainment (e.g., holiday parties, department lunches) (27%). Those cuts track with continued travel restrictions and remote work policies that have been in place at many organizations this year.

However, whether salary and benefits add up to a satisfactory compensation package may depend on other factors such as local cost of living and even work environment.

"It is challenging to get our HR/compensation to grade out fairly

Figure 7. Over the past year, did you and/or your revenue integrity department experience a reduction in staffing, education budget, or other resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (Top 5)

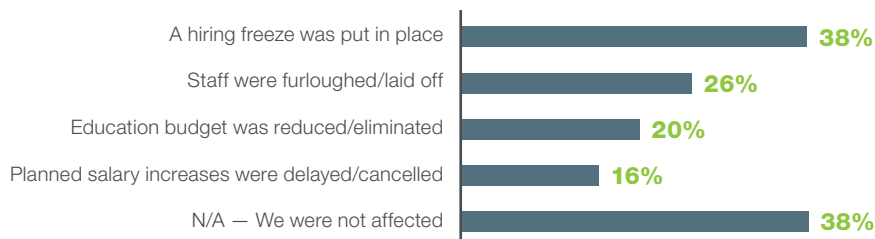
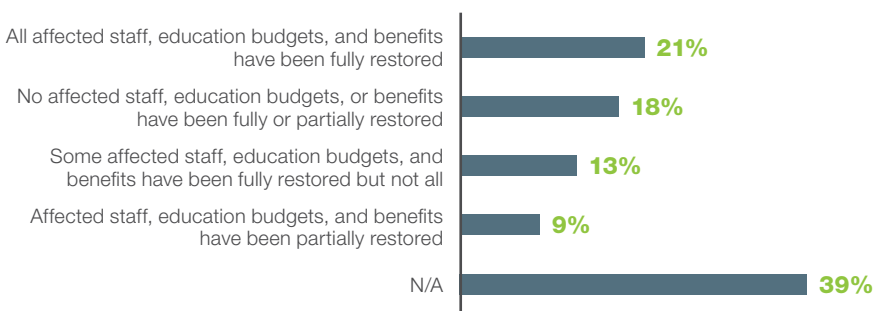


Figure 8. If you and/or your revenue integrity department experienced a reduction in staffing, education budget, or other resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have the affected individuals and/or budgets been restored?



Sources: NAHRI's 2021 Revenue Integrity Salary Survey

for the degree of difficulty that revenue integrity professionals deal with on a daily basis," a respondent wrote.

Another respondent echoed these sentiments and added that compensation for their position is not competitive based on region.

"I feel that revenue integrity analyst salaries are underpaid for our organization for the amount of

work and research that we provide for our northeast region," the respondent wrote.

However, some respondents reported that they receive above-average compensation in their region.

"Salary in New Jersey far excels in comparison to other states," one respondent wrote.

Other respondents pointed out that as the revenue integrity

profession evolves with the industry, salaries may increase.

“Things are evolving, especially with purchased hospitals and systemization,” a respondent wrote. “Roles are changing and I expect this to increase salaries.”

Making time

Obtaining a post-secondary degree is associated with higher earnings and lower unemployment, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). How does that play out for revenue integrity professionals?

The majority of respondents (80%) indicated they hold some type of post-secondary degree. About one-third of respondents (34%) hold a bachelor’s degree.

Of those respondents who hold a bachelor’s degree, 44% earn \$60,000–\$89,999 annually, or about the same as all respondents overall, while 57% of those who do

not hold a post-secondary degree earn less than \$50,000 annually.

Obtaining a post-secondary degree or a more advanced degree offers a clear return on investment. Although some organizations have reduced their education budgets, revenue integrity professionals can look into scholarships and other financial aid opportunities. Sharing your educational goals and plans with your manager can also help demonstrate your commitment to professional development and may count in your favor during annual reviews and raises.

Practical knowledge gained from experience is an invaluable asset. How does that factor into revenue integrity compensation?

Half of respondents (50%) have at least 11 years of experience as a revenue integrity professional, and of that group, 30% earn \$80,000–\$99,999 annually. Those with less

experience have lower earning power, according to respondents: 21% of respondents with 10 or fewer years of experience earn \$60,000–\$69,999 annually.

Revenue integrity professionals work hard: 49% work 42–50 hours per week. Salaried revenue integrity professionals typically aren’t paid for overtime. If you find yourself routinely clocking in longer hours without being eligible for overtime or another benefit, consider whether your current compensation package—or your workload—is fair. Operating with reduced budgets and staffing shortages became routine for organizations over the past year, but while that was necessary in the short term, it’s not feasible in the long term. Staff members in overworked, overextended revenue integrity departments will begin to suffer from burnout and the department’s performance will inevitably slip.

Impact of COVID-19

In 2020, workplaces were turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most organizations opted to have nonclinical staff work remotely. Established routines were disrupted and revenue integrity professionals faced a variety of tech challenges on top of cobbling together workspaces in their homes.

When hospital revenues plummeted and the expense of caring for seriously ill COVID-19 patients



rose, many organizations were left with no choice but to take drastic cost-cutting measures, including laying off staff, slashing salaries, and implementing hiring freezes. As organizations slowly found their footing, some of these measures were rolled back. More than a year later, how have revenue integrity professionals adapted, what changes have stuck around, and how much ground has been regained?

Revenue integrity directors and managers should keep an eye out for how COVID-19 has changed employees' expectations and needs. On the [July 15 episode](#) of *The Revenue Integrity Show: A NAHRI Podcast*, **Stacey McCreery, MBA**, and **Julie Teixeira** of ROI Search Group discussed how the expansion of remote work during the pandemic has fundamentally changed employees' wants.

"It appears that applicants are either requesting a higher pay rate as well as demanding stipulations on working remotely, even though this is not a normal benefit we offer," one respondent wrote.

Looking forward

Revenue integrity professionals looking to grow their earning power or expand their departments may still face challenges over the next year. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to put strain on organizations, and full financial recovery will likely come well after the pandemic officially ends.

But that doesn't mean you need to put your career goals on hold. Now may be the perfect time to start or complete a degree, earn a certification, or complete other professional development training. Focus on skills core to revenue integrity and your organization. Don't wait for annual reviews to roll out—be proactive and discuss your goals with your manager, then use that feedback to create a professional development plan. Combined with the data from this report, demonstrating your commitment to your career and organization through a professional development plan can give you an edge when requesting a raise or lobbying for additional resources for your department. [NJ](#)

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Most respondents (62%) experienced a reduction in staffing, education budget, or other resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of that group, 61% reported a hiring freeze was put in place and 41% reported staff were furloughed/laid off.

But the good news is that among respondents who reported their organization did cut staff and other resources, 65% have partially or fully restored affected staff, education budgets, and benefits.

"Furlough was only two weeks, hiring freeze lifted, all team members back to revenue integrity positions," one respondent wrote.

Although many struggled with technology issues and adjusting to a new workspace and routine, most employees found themselves quickly settling into remote work, McCreery and Teixeira said. Some organizations also found that moving nonclinical departments off-site was a win, freeing up valuable real estate and reducing some costs.

Organizations that expect to have all staff return to working on-site may face an uphill battle, particularly when trying to fill vacant positions, McCreery and Teixeira cautioned. That's borne out by the experience of some survey respondents.