
Retirement Intentions: Licensed Clinical Social Workers

Healthcare Workforce Data Center

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to examine whether licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs) actually retire when they intended to retire. The impetus for the study is the high retirement intentions reported by LCSWs in past surveys administered by the Healthcare Workforce Data Center (HWDC) and the high median age of the workforce in those surveys. For instance, the median age for LCSWs licensed in Virginia was 53 years in 2013 and 54 in 2014¹, some of the highest among all healthcare professions that HWDC surveys. The LCSW workforce seems to be one of the healthcare workforce professions impacted by the aging of baby boomers, that is those born between 1946 and 1964. For instance, 46% and 47% of Virginia's LCSW workforce were age 55 and over¹ in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Most of these baby boomers are expected to retire within the next decade. Aging, coupled with high reported retirement intentions, allows this study to ask whether retirement intentions become reality for LCSWs or how closely do retirement intentions and plans correlate with behavior. The three sections in this study address this question for LCSWs licensed in Virginia.

METHODS

Data

The data for this study come from the Virginia Licensed Clinical Social Worker Workforce Survey. Between 2013 and 2017, the Virginia Department of Health Professions Healthcare Workforce Data Center administered the Survey to LCSWs biennially as they renewed their license. From 2018 to 2020, the survey was administered annually. In the first survey in 2013, LCSWs were asked at what age they intend to retire. Their current age was subtracted from their intended retirement age to obtain the expected number of years to their retirement. The expected years to retirement was used to create the samples in this study. This study created three samples from the 2013 survey data.

The first sample includes LCSWs who intended to retire within two years of the 2013 survey, the base survey. A second question asked LCSW survey respondents what they planned to do in the next two years, with options including retire, leave the profession, continue in the profession, decrease practice hours, increase practice hours, pursue additional education, decrease teaching time, and increase teaching time. The first sample included LCSWs who intended to retire within two years and who also indicated that they planned to retire in two years. It excluded those who were already retired. This study also restricted the sample to LCSWs working only in LCSW-related positions. Using 2013 as the base survey year and 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 as follow up years, this study examined how many of these LCSWs retired by 2020.

As shown in the following table, there were 5,784 licensed LCSWs in Virginia in 2013. Of those, 4,490 completed the 2013 survey. However, only 3,639 respondents answered the retirement age question; 851 did not respond to the question. A total of 250 LCSWs indicated that they intended to retire within two years of the 2013 survey. Of the 250, 212 also reported that they planned to retire in two years. Further, of the remaining 212, 18 did not work in a LCSW-related position and 14 had retired; these 32 were excluded from subsequent analyses. Sample one included the remaining 180 LCSWs; these LCSWs were followed in subsequent surveys from 2015 to 2020 to see if they indeed retired.

¹ <http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/behsci/LCSW2013.pdf>

	LCSWs
Total licensees in 2013	5,784
Total respondents in 2013	4,490
Total who responded to retirement age question	3,639
Reported retiring within 2 years	250
Of those how many also reported 2-year retirement plan	212
% agreement between intentions and plan	85%
Number already retired	14
Number not employed as a LCSW in 2013	18
Sample 1: Number employed and intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	180
Reported retiring within 5 years	414
Number already retired	25
Number not employed as a LCSW in 2013	38
Sample 2: Number employed and intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	351
Reported not retiring within 5 years	3,224
Number already retired	11
Number not employed as a LCSW in 2013	210
Sample 3: Number employed and not intending/planning to retire after removing retirees	3,003

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

The second sample included 414 respondents who intended to retire within 5 year of the 2013 survey. Of these 414 respondents, 38 did not work in a LCSW-related position and 25 had retired; these 63 were excluded from subsequent analyses. Sample two included the remaining 351 LCSWs who were followed in subsequent surveys from the 2015 to 2020 surveys to see if they indeed retired.

The third sample included the 3,224 respondents who were not intending to retire within five years. Of the remaining 3,224 who responded to the retirement age question and who did not intend or plan to retire within five years, 11 indicated that they were already retired, 117 were not employed in a LCSW-related position, 2 were employed in unknown capacity, 10 were involuntarily unemployed and 81 were voluntarily unemployed. A total of 3,003 were employed in a LCSW-related capacity. This third sample was followed to see whether any of them retired between 2014 and 2020.

Analyses

The first analysis in this study examined how many of the respondents who intended and planned to retire within two years of 2013 were retired at the end of the review period in 2020. The work and retirement status of each of the LCSWs in sample one was reported. Using logistics regression, this analysis also examined which workforce factors were associated with the likelihood of the LCSWs in sample one to retire. The second analysis examined how many respondents who intended to retire within five years of 2013 were retired by 2020 and conducted a logistic regression examining which workforce factors were associated with the likelihood of the LCSWs in sample two to retire. Finally, the third analysis examined how many respondents who did not intend to retire within five years of 2013 were retired by 2020.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Respondents were asked what their working status was in subsequent surveys after 2013. The options included: employed in a LCSW-related capacity; employed capacity unknown; employed not in a LCSW-related capacity; not working, reasons unknown; voluntarily unemployed (including for medical reasons); involuntarily

unemployed; or retired. A binary variable indicating whether a respondent had selected retired or not (1=Yes, 0=No) was created from the response to this question. The frequency of respondents indicating they had retired was obtained from this variable and was used for the analyses. Further, this binary variable was used as the dependent variable in the logistic regressions using samples one and two to investigate what factors increased or decreased the likelihood of LCSWs retiring within seven years of their indicating an intention and/or plan to retire.

Independent Variables

Initial logistics regression models included the following independent variables: a continuous measure of age; dummy variables for female, White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian (Others was the reference); dummy variables for work establishment such as group practice, solo practice, and others; a dummy variable for working more than two full time positions, dummy job length variables including one for working between three and ten year, and another for working at least ten years (working for less than two years was the reference); dummy variables for working 30 to 49 hours, 50 to 60 hours, and over 60 hours (works less than 30 hours is the reference), and dummy variables for job satisfaction, has education debt, licensed out of state, and access to employer-provided retirement and health insurance benefits. Dummy variables of different income categories were also included in initial models. The final logistic regression model included any of these variables that contributed significantly to the fit of the model of the likelihood of retirement.

RESULTS

Using the 2013 survey data, the following table compares the summary statistics of samples one, two, and three. The mean age of LCSWs who intended to retire within five years of 2013 was higher than that of sample one but sample three had the lowest mean age. Females were most represented in sample three and least represented in sample one. The intended retirees in samples one and two had a higher proportion of Whites than sample three but sample three included the highest percent of Hispanics. LCSWs in samples two and three were slightly more likely to have a doctorate degree.

	Sample One	Sample Two	Sample Three
Mean age	63 yrs.	64 yrs.	60 yrs.
Female	79%	80%	84%
White	86%	87%	84%
Black	10%	9%	11%
Hispanic	1%	1%	3%
Asian	1%	0%	1%
Others	2%	3%	1%
Master's degree	95%	94%	94%
Doctorate	5%	6%	6%
Mental health facility – outpatient	15%	15%	16%
Community service board	13%	10%	10%
Private practice – solo	14%	16%	15%
Private practice - group	8%	11%	11%
Works one part time position	28%	28%	17%
Works full time/2 part time	66%	63%	65%
Works 2 or more full time	7%	9%	18%
Job length between 3 and 10 years	32%	29%	42%

	Sample One	Sample Two	Sample Three
Job length more than 10 years	55%	51%	30%
Works <30 hrs.	29%	29%	18%
Works 30-49 hrs.	57%	58%	65%
Works 50-59 hrs.	9%	9%	13%
Works 60+ hrs.	5%	5%	4%
% Satisfied with job	95%	94%	95%
Median income	\$60,000-\$65,000	\$55,000-\$60,000	\$50,000-\$60,000
% Licensed outside state	19%	18%	24%
% in VA workforce	92%	90%	89%
% Employer-provided health insurance	62%	48%	54%
% Employer-provided retirement benefits	51%	43%	45%

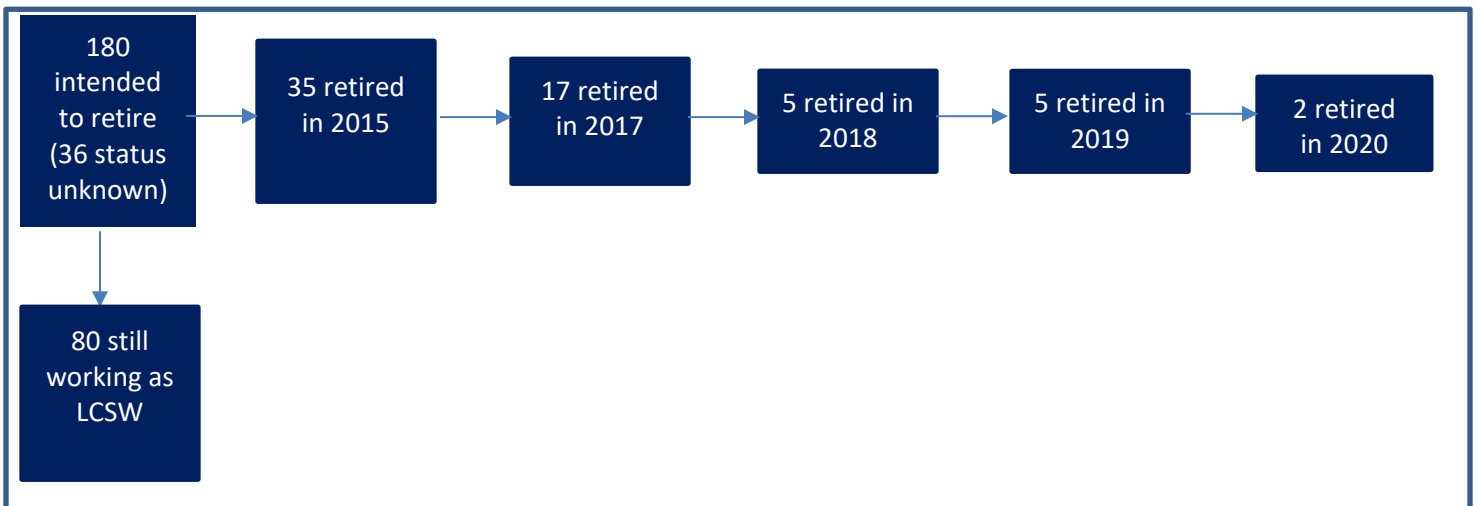
Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Compared to samples two and three, those in sample one were more likely to be working in community service boards in 2013. Sample two had the highest percent working in private practice solo. Sample two had the highest proportion of LCSWs who worked at more than one full time or two part time positions. Over half of samples one and two had been at their position for more than a decade compared to 30% in sample three. LCSWs in sample three were least likely to be working less than 30 hours per week in 2013. Median income was higher for sample one but the same for the other two groups. LCSWs in samples one and two were slightly more likely to be in Virginia’s workforce but less likely to have held a license outside Virginia compared to sample three. Report of employer-provided health insurance and retirement benefit was highest among LCSWs in sample one.

Analysis One

The following figure presents the retirement status of the 180 LCSWs in sample one from 2013 to 2020. It also demonstrates some attrition, as thirty-six of the LCSWs followed were lost to follow up either because their licenses expired or they became inactive. Inactive licensees may have requested for their license to be made inactive because they are working out of state or they have stopped working, among other reasons. Further, one licensee had an active license but did not respond to the retirement status question in subsequent surveys.

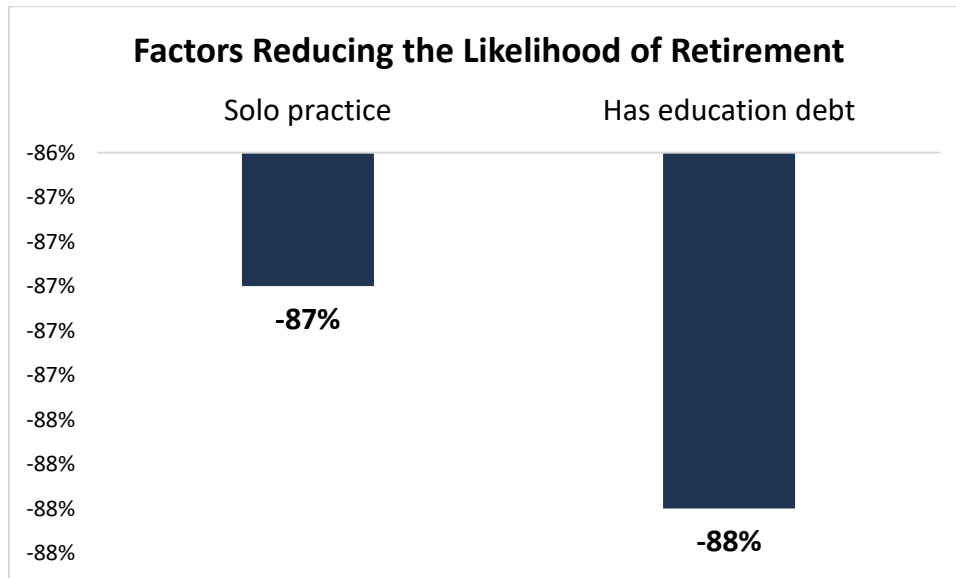
Of the 180 LCSWs, the retirement status of 144 was known. Sixty-four (44%) of the 144 had retired by 2020. However, four of the 64 LCSWs went back to work in a LCSW-related capacity by 2020.



*Boxes are proportional to group size

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

The second part of analysis one used logistic regression to examine the factors that increased or reduced the likelihood of retirement for LCSWs in sample one. The final logistic regression for LCSWs examined the factors that predicted the likelihood of retiring in a seven-year period after a LCSW had stated an intention and plan to retire within two years. This final model included work establishments, job length, age, and having education debt as independent variables. The following figure presents the findings from the model.

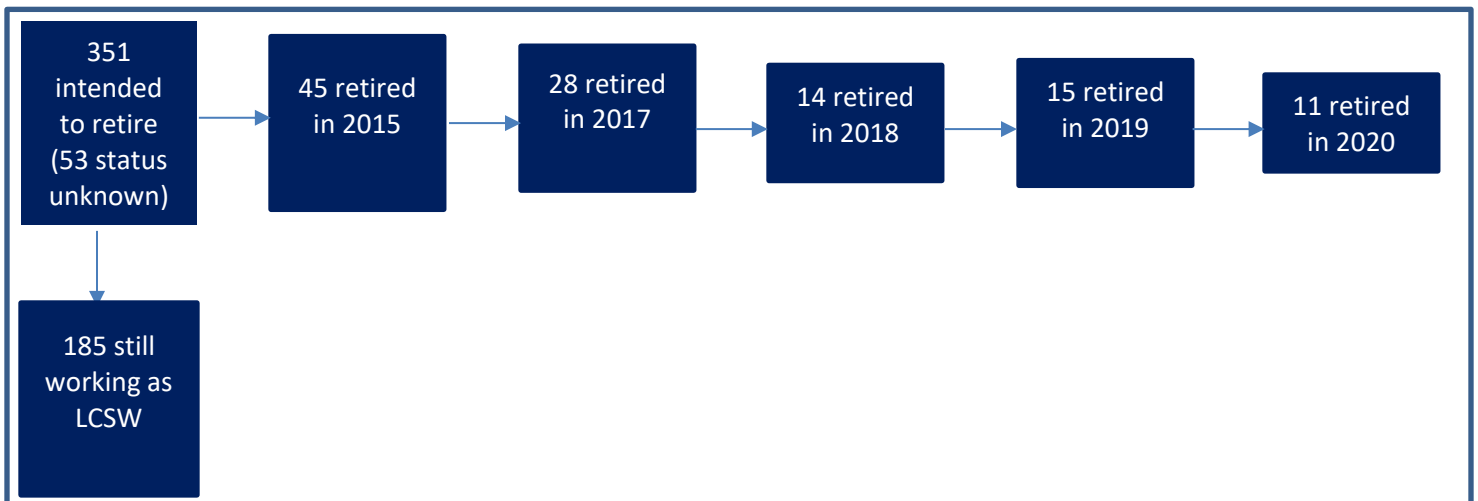


Source: VA. Healthcare Workforce Data Center
 Nagelkerke R Square=0.19
 $\chi^2(n, d.f) = 19.88(134, 4)$
 * $p < .08$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

As seen in the figure above, only working in solo private practice and having education debt were associated with the likelihood of retirement for LCSWs in sample one. Both decreased the likelihood that a LCSW who had intentions and plans to retire within two years would do so within seven years. Both reduced the likelihood of retiring by over 80% compared to LCSWs who are not in solo private practice or who do not owe education debt. However, age and job length were not significantly associated with the likelihood of retiring for LCSWs in sample one.

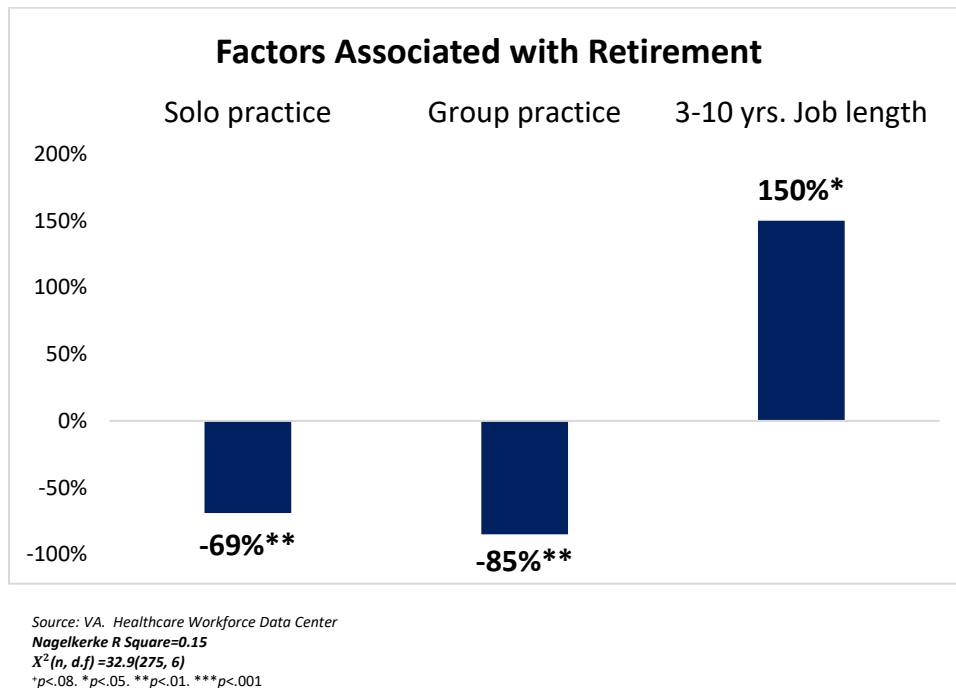
Analysis Two

The following figure presents the retirement status of the 351 LCSWs in sample two from 2013 to 2020. It also demonstrates some attrition, as fifty-three of the LCSWs followed were lost to follow up either because their licenses expired or they became inactive. Further, some licensees had active licenses but did not respond to the retirement status question in subsequent surveys.



Of the 351 LCSWs, the retirement status of 298 was known. One hundred and thirteen (38%) of the 298 had retired by 2020. However, seven of the 113 LCSWs eventually went back to work in a LCSW-related capacity by 2020.

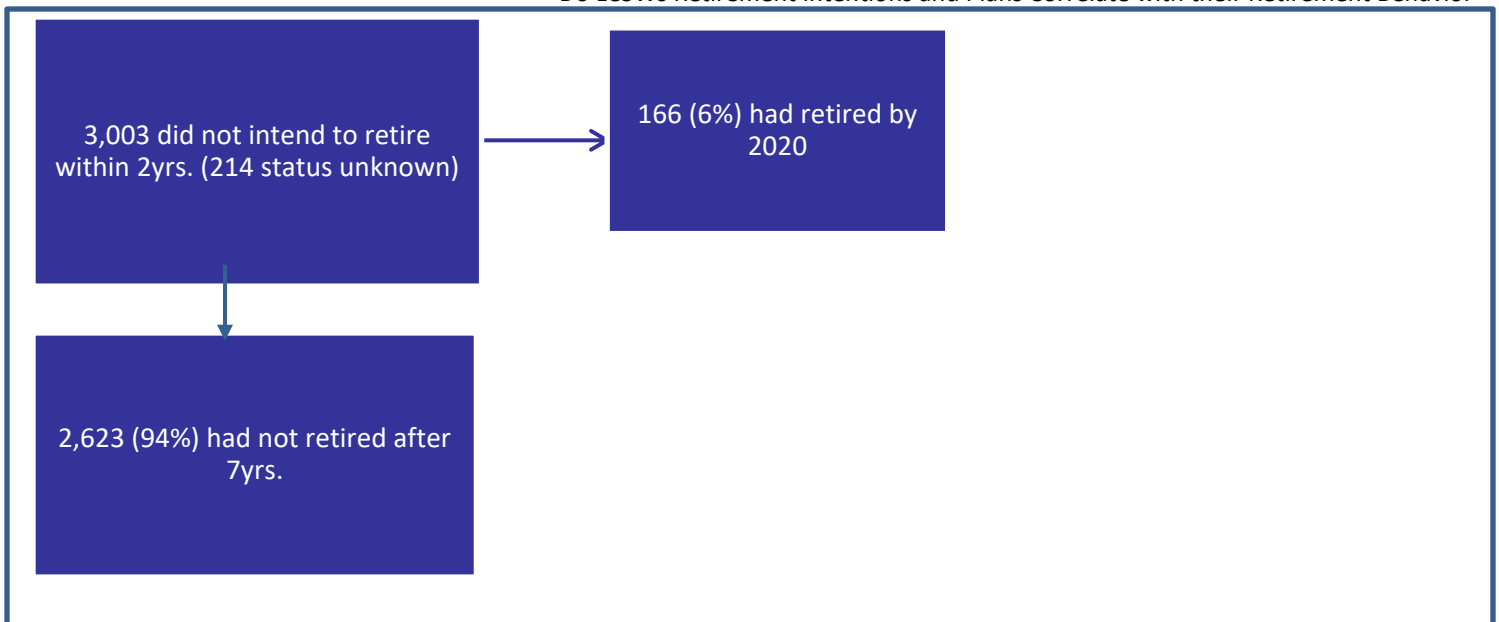
The second part of analysis two used logistic regression to examine the factors that were associated with the likelihood of retirement for LCSWs in sample two. The final logistic regression for LCSWs examined the factors that predicted the likelihood of retiring in a seven-year period after a LCSW had stated an intention to retire within five years. This final model included work establishments, job length, age, and having education debt as independent variables. The following figure presents the findings from the model.



As seen in the preceding figure, working in solo and group private practices and job length were associated with the likelihood of retirement of LCSWs in sample two. Working in solo and group private practices reduced the likelihood of retiring by 69% and 85%, respectively, compared to LCSWs who are not in solo or group private practice. Having a job length of three to ten years was associated with a 150% higher likelihood of retiring. Having job length of more than ten years was not significant at 0.05 significance level. Further, having education debt and age were also not significantly associated with the likelihood of retirement for LCSWs in sample two.

Analysis Three

Of the 3,003 licensees who did not intend to retire within five years of the 2013 survey, the retirement status of 2,789 (93%) was known in 2020. The 214 licensees with unknown retirement status mostly had let their licenses expire as they were no longer active in the LCSW licensing system. However, a few of the licenses were suspended and one licensee was deceased. Of the 2,789 with known retirement status, only 166 (6%) had retired by 2020. Only 2,093 of the remaining 2,623 responded to the working status question in 2020. Of these, 1,964 were working in a LCSW-related capacity in 2020; 76 were working in other fields and 9 were voluntarily unemployed and 44 were involuntarily unemployed.



CONCLUSION

The findings from this study are very informative; LCSWs who intend and plan to retire within two years were most likely to retire compared to the other two groups. Reporting both an intention and plan for retirement may indicate its salience in the thoughts and preparation of those respondents. Further, those who mention an intention to retire within 5 years of 2013 were more likely to retire within the 7-year period of observation compared to those who did not. Thus, intentions and plans of retirement do function as an indicator of retirement even though they are not perfect. In sample one, 44% of those with known retirement status had retired within seven years. In sample two, 38% of those with known retirement status had retired. These two statistics can be compared to sample three in which only 6% of those with known status retired.

A concerning finding in this study is the number of LCSWs who leave Virginia's workforce by letting their licenses expire. For example, 20% of sample one respondents had unknown status and many of these were due to expired licenses. It is unknown whether these LCSWs leave for another state's LCSW workforce, work in another capacity in Virginia, or let their license expire because they have retired. These unknowns need further investigation and finding ways to keep them licensed and working in Virginia is important at this time.

However, based on the known working status of the LCSWs followed, there are some encouraging findings that suggest that any impact of the aging LCSW workforce may not be as severe as anticipated in Virginia. Of those with known status, less than half had retired in 2020 even among sample one which is made up of respondents who intended and planned to retire within two years of 2013. Thus, it is reassuring that, even though a lot of baby boomer LCSWs will be exiting the workforce, several remain past their intended and planned exit. Further, individuals often retire in stages so some of the retired LCSWs may return to work fewer hours but may still help respond to LCSW demand. A more pressing concern might be recruiting younger workforce urgently so there is transfer of knowledge before the older workforce leave due to retirement or mortality. The condition of the economy will likely also play a critical role in how closely LCSWs retirement intentions and plans match their behavior.