



Revenue integrity salaries up, but staffing and departmental budgets take a hit

To say the least, 2020 has been a challenging year, but revenue integrity professionals can feel cautiously optimistic about their profession's salary trends. According to the results of NAHRI's 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey, salaries are up compared to 2019. However, the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is making itself known, and some respondents reported that their departments have taken drastic steps, including reducing hours, to avoid pay cuts or layoffs. There are few answers about what the next several months hold, but it's likely that healthcare organizations will

continue to feel the financial impact of the pandemic into next year.

Revenue integrity professionals play an instrumental role in supporting their organizations by ensuring that revenue is accurate, timely, and compliant. But to set realistic goals and expectations for themselves and their departments, these professionals need to know where the industry and their profession stand. As organizations look ahead and set staffing, compensation, and education budgets, NAHRI's 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey will provide an invaluable benchmark.

Making a name

Revenue integrity functions exist at all hospitals, but not all hospitals have dedicated revenue integrity teams or job titles. More than half (68%) of respondents reported that their organization has dedicated revenue integrity staff members, and 53% indicated that their organization has a revenue integrity department (respondents were asked to select all options that applied to their organization's revenue integrity program). Other responses included:

- We have a budget for revenue integrity education, etc. (29%)

- We have a revenue integrity program (27%)
- We have a revenue integrity committee (13%)

Some respondents selected “other,” and many of those wrote that their organization is looking into developing a revenue integrity department.

In 2019, 63% of respondents said their organization has dedicated revenue integrity staff members. So, while revenue integrity is gaining some ground as a recognized and established discipline, there’s still room to grow.

That also means that some individuals working in revenue integrity may have other job titles—such as CDI specialist or coding manager—and have additional primary responsibilities.

Respondents were asked to select the job title that most closely matched their own from a list. This year, responses were spread out over a range of job titles, and there was a tie for the top spot: 15% reported their title is revenue integrity director, and 15% indicated they are a CDI specialist.

As the revenue integrity profession matures, leaders should advocate for standardized job titles and clear, unified revenue integrity job descriptions. Part of that work may involve developing more precise definitions of revenue integrity functions and scope at an organization. Well-defined job titles and

Figure 1. Organizations with dedicated Revenue Integrity staff members

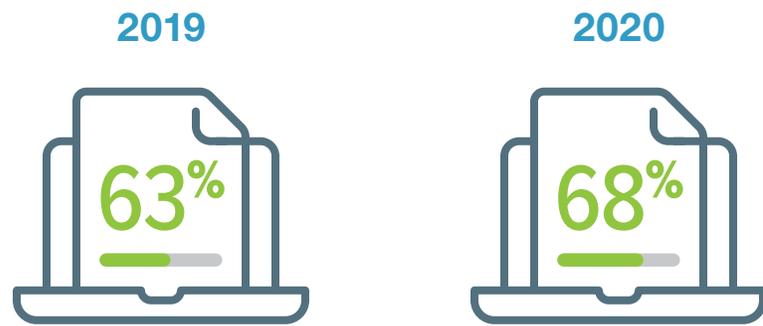


Figure 2. Annual salaries for Revenue Integrity professionals

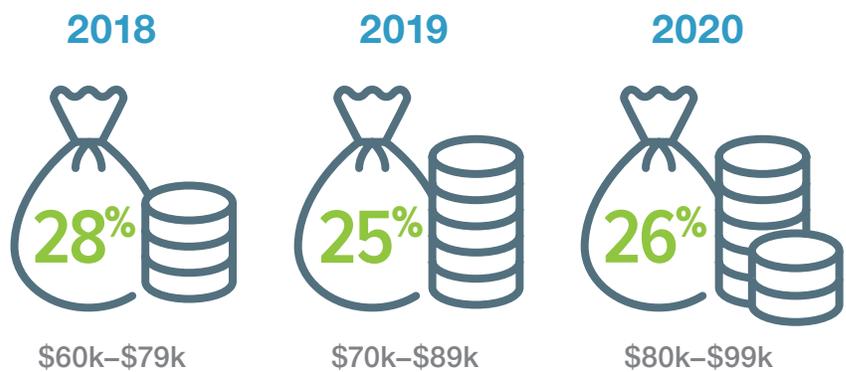


Figure 3. Revenue Integrity professionals who received a raise within the last year



Sources: NAHRI's 2018, 2019, and 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Surveys

functions will allow revenue integrity professionals, managers, and HR to make smarter decisions about compensation and staffing. They will also provide a framework to develop expectations for continuing education and basic requirements for those looking to enter the field.

Salary tracker

Overall, salaries for revenue integrity professionals are looking up, according to survey respondents. The majority (90%) reported earning more than \$69,999 annually (compared to 71% in 2019 and 65% in 2018). Although annual salaries were spread out over a range, the single most commonly reported was \$80,000–\$89,999 (15%), compared to \$70,000–\$79,999 in 2019 (14%) and \$69,999–\$69,999 in 2018 (14%). See Figure 2 for more details and a year-over-year comparison.

Because many revenue integrity professionals hail from a wide range of backgrounds, from clinical

staff to patient financial services, salaries can vary significantly by job title and are sometimes influenced by how the revenue integrity program developed.

staff that should be reflected in the salary rates,” another respondent wrote.

One issue that may complicate determining appropriate revenue

THERE IS A NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE AND ONGOING TRAINING/ EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF REVENUE INTEGRITY STAFF THAT SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN THE SALARY RATES.”

“As an RN and manager, my salary is adequate for our geographical area, but my staff who are not clinical are not appropriately compensated for the level of responsibility they have, in my opinion,” one respondent wrote.

“There is a need to recognize the specialized knowledge and ongoing training/educational requirements of revenue integrity

integrity salaries is that many organizations don’t have a standard of revenue integrity responsibilities, says **Lisa Kanivetsky, BA, CPC, CHRI**, operations director with Guidehouse and a NAHRI Advisory Board member. Revenue integrity professionals need to have a broad range of knowledge and experience, including a sophisticated understanding of EHR systems, she says. That might not

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Do revenue integrity-specific job titles affect salary? **NAHRI** looked at the data to find out in its 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey.

Of respondents who identified as a revenue integrity director or manager, 71% reported earning at least \$110,000 annually. Of respondents who identified as a revenue cycle director or manager, an HIM director or manager, a compliance manager or director, a coding manager or director, or a

CDI manager or director, 46% reported earning at least \$110,000 annually.

For non-managerial positions, among revenue integrity analysts, specialists, and coordinators, 46% reported earning \$60,000–\$79,999 annually. Among revenue cycle analysts or specialists, chargemaster coordinators or analysts, compliance auditors or specialists, and CDI specialists, 63% reported earning \$70,000–\$109,999 annually. **NJ**

be appropriately recognized in salaries, especially for those not in managerial or directorial roles.

The relative newness of revenue integrity as an officially recognized field can also affect salary. If an organization doesn't have a benchmark as comparison, it may not be able to set salaries that appropriately reflect revenue integrity professionals' duties and skills.

"When they put my position together, they did not have surrounding area salaries to compare to. They weren't sure what dollar amount to start me off at, so they kept everything the same," one respondent wrote.

Revenue integrity professionals can use this report, as well as the [2019](#) and [2018](#) Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey reports, to set standards and expectations and advocate for their profession. Revenue integrity directors and managers need to ensure that they are able to offer a fair salary to attract and retain the best candidates. Although many organizations have implemented hiring freezes or reduced hours due to the financial impact of COVID-19 (more on that later in this article), revenue integrity must still work with their organizations to ensure that they will be able to offer fair compensation. Revenue integrity professionals can advocate within their organizations, and the industry as a whole, to raise their profile.

"I think leadership must understand the complexity of the work and the type of education and experience an individual must have to be successful in this role," Kanivetsky says. "In revenue integrity you're—or at least I'm—looking for a well-rounded individual who has a CDM background (which includes coding), clinical/clinical operations, and EHR build/implementation experience. Patient financial services experience is also helpful."

Most (72%) respondents reported that they received a raise within the last year. Almost half (42%) received a 2% raise, and for the majority (71%) the raise wasn't part of a promotion.

Almost half (48%) of respondents indicated they work 42–50 hours per week, compared to 51% in

Figure 4. Revenue Integrity professionals currently working from home due to Covid-19 and did not prior



Figure 5. Revenue Integrity staff furloughed and/or laid off due to Covid-19

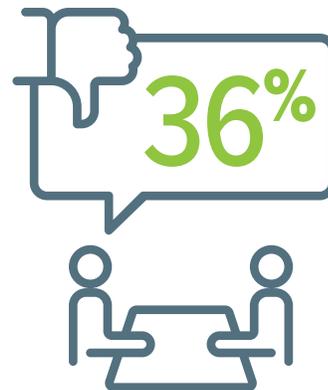


Figure 6. Organizations located in urban areas



Source: NAHRI's 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey

2019. Although that's approximately the same as last year, the slight difference could be chalked up to the effects of COVID-19. Some organizations reduced staff members' hours in response to falling revenue and lower patient volumes. Regardless, revenue integrity managers and directors should consider tracking their staff members' hours. If a revenue integrity manager is looking to make the case for more staff, for example, it will be critical to be able to demonstrate the department is facing more work than it can get done with its current staff. On the other hand, if an organization has reduced hours for revenue integrity staff, tracking reduced hours and a return to normal hours will be equally valuable to determine

the impact of reduced hours on quality, productivity, and revenue, as well as when reviewing staffing and budgets for the coming year.

For those looking into establishing a dedicated revenue integrity department, it could be particularly useful to track how much time staff spend on designated revenue integrity activities. For example, if certain staff members are assigned to revenue integrity functions and spend the majority of their time on these tasks, that can support the need for dedicated revenue integrity staff.

Among those respondents who reported that their organization has a revenue integrity department, 30% indicated that it's supported by more than 20 staff

members. However, less than half (41%) of respondents said their organization plans to hire additional revenue integrity staff in the next 12 months.

Remote work and other pandemic responses

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in March, organizations moved quickly to mitigate the spread and reduce the financial impact. Nonemergent patient volumes plummeted as procedures were canceled; at the same time, the cost of caring for COVID-19 patients soared at organizations struggling with surges of the virus. New billing and coding rules came at a dizzying pace. Although the

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Obtaining a post-secondary degree is typically associated with higher earnings, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many employers also require a post-secondary degree for certain jobs. Often, having a four-year degree is a must, says **Lisa Kanivetsky, BA, CPC, CHRI**, operations director with Guidehouse and a NAHRI Advisory Board member.

Overall, revenue integrity professionals have some post-secondary education under their belt, according to the result of NAHRI's 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey. The majority (86%) have some type of post-secondary degree, ranging from an associate's degree to a PhD. Less than half (40%) have a bachelor's degree, 19%

have a master's degree, and 17% have an associate's degree.

Although many organizations have tightened their education budgets to cope with the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, revenue integrity professionals interested in earning a higher degree can explore scholarships and other financial aid. It may be worth considering tuition costs as an investment.

Experience also plays a role in determining salary. About a quarter (26%) indicated they have 20 or more years' experience as a revenue integrity professional. But revenue integrity professionals are a mobile group and aren't afraid to jump on a new opportunity: 34% of respondents reported that they have been in their current position for three to five years. **NJ**

pandemic continues, some organizations have managed to find their footing.

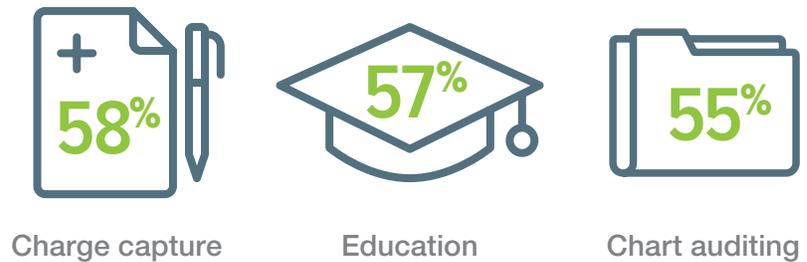
To learn how revenue integrity professionals' work and compensation have been affected, NAHRI added a series of new questions to our annual salary survey.

One common way organizations helped mitigate the spread of COVID-19 was by asking staff to work from home. Overall, 86% of respondents reported that some or all staff are currently working from home or have been asked to work from home due to COVID-19. Almost half (42%) did not work from home prior to the pandemic. These staff members may have faced additional obstacles getting set up to work from home or settling into a routine. But even work-from-home veterans might have faced challenges if they had school-aged children at home or were suddenly sharing office space with a family member or roommate who didn't previously work from home. For those still working from home, NAHRI has [several tips](#) for staying productive and connected.

"Try to keep [a] schedule similar to working in the office," one respondent wrote. "Take your lunch break and go outside if you can. Have a consistent time of day to stop working."

Technology was, and in some cases continues to be, a top concern for staff working from home.

Figure 7. Top functions for which Revenue Integrity staff are responsible



Source: NAHRI's 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey

Another respondent wrote that they were responsible for ensuring staff had the devices and software necessary for them to work from home, including arranging for some staff members to borrow company laptops. "It was vital that the things utilized in person in the office were converted to online for ease of accessibility," the respondent wrote.

Some revenue integrity professionals are in their element. Although many reports focus on the challenges of missing face-to-face interaction, some staffers may find that their home office is their happy place.

"Love working from home," a respondent wrote. "Communicate with your coworkers at least twice a day. Have a way to contact providers so that you can discuss queries by phone if needed."

The pandemic has seen many organizations' revenue fall drastically. In May, the American Hospital Association (AHA) *estimated* that over a four-month period from March to June, hospitals lost \$202.6 billion or an average of \$50.7 billion per month. Many organizations were forced to make tough choices, including reducing hours or even laying off staff.

The majority (74%) of survey respondents reported that revenue integrity staffing has been affected by furloughs, hiring freezes, or other reductions in benefits. Specifically, more than a third (36%) said that staff were furloughed or laid off, and 35% reported that a hiring freeze was put in place. More than a quarter (28%) indicated that planned salary increases were delayed/canceled, and 18% indicated that their organization suspended or terminated its retirement plan

match. Other respondents mentioned additional steps their organizations took, such as requiring staff to take a specified amount of paid time off per pay period. Other respondents described collaborative approaches to reducing expenses while ensuring that hours and salaries were protected.

“We voluntarily flexed and/or took on other duties, but our faculty actually gave planned merit increases and bonuses and did not lay off or furlough anyone despite the budget shortfall. We voluntarily gave back all education dollars in the budget to improve the bottom line,” one respondent wrote.

On the map

Location can play a big part in salary, as well as in the relative value of a given salary. Although salaries are typically higher in urban areas, so is the cost of living. On the other hand, while the cost of living may be lower in rural areas, there may be fewer jobs, and some amenities, such as high-speed internet, may be more difficult to come by or more expensive.

About half (51%) of respondents reported their organization is located in an urban area. A little less than half (44%) indicated they work for an acute care hospital, and 36% reported they work for a multifacility health system. Of

respondents who work for organizations in urban areas, 69% earn \$80,000–\$120,000 or more annually. However, among respondents in rural areas, 62% earn \$40,000–\$80,000 annually. For respondents in suburban areas, 47% earn \$80,000–\$119,999 annually.



REVENUE INTEGRITY PROFESSIONALS LOOKING TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREERS AND MOVE INTO A HIGHER SALARY BRACKET SHOULD REMAIN ALERT FOR OPPORTUNITIES AND FOCUS ON EXPANDING AND STRENGTHENING THEIR SKILLS.

Knowing your worth

Making the case for a raise, hiring new staff, or launching a brand-new revenue integrity department may be more challenging over the next 12 months than ever before. Revenue integrity professionals should be prepared to set realistic expectations and goals, but they should also know their own worth and the value they bring to their organizations.

Revenue integrity professionals looking to advance their careers and move into a higher salary bracket should remain alert for opportunities and focus on expanding and strengthening their skills. For areas to focus on, see Figure 7. To learn how your

education and experience compare with your peers’, see the sidebar on p. 44.

It could also be beneficial to become your organization’s revenue integrity champion. Raising the profession’s profile and helping others, especially senior lead-

ership, understand the value of revenue integrity can bolster support for the department and staff.

“From my perspective, education and experience is key,” Kanivetsky says. “I also think that a leader who values revenue integrity is important. I once had a leader who told me that he didn’t really like the revenue integrity department or our work; it was too complex, so we were not important to him. I’ve also had leaders who fully embrace the revenue integrity department and feel that it’s pivotal in the financial success of the organization, which it is. My advice is to find an organization and leader who understand the value of revenue integrity.” **NJ**

PERKS AND PITFALLS OF WORKING FROM HOME

Working from home full time wouldn't have been considered practical for most staffers less than a year ago. Now, however, keeping as many staff working from home as possible has emerged as a key strategy in slowing the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). While some organizations were able to make the change relatively easily, others may have hit technical snags or struggled to determine which staff were truly needed on-site.

STAYING CONNECTED TO COLLEAGUES AND THE ORGANIZATION IS A COMMON CHALLENGE WHEN WORKING FROM HOME, ONE THAT'S BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE STRAIN OF SOCIAL DISTANCING AND CONCERNS ABOUT HEALTH AND SAFETY.

Once staff began working at home, a new set of challenges emerged. With schools also moving to a remote environment, many parents found themselves with a second job as a teaching assistant. Other new "coworkers" may have included family members or roommates who had also switched to working from home and needed to claim their own workspace.

Staying connected to colleagues and the organization is a common challenge when working from home, one that's been exacerbated by the strain of social distancing and concerns about health and safety. Revenue integrity professionals are also tasked with staying current with a daily stream of new and revised regulations and payer guidance.

All these factors created a challenging environment. But as revenue integrity professionals have

found their footing, solutions and best practices have emerged, as well as some persistent pain points. To find out more, NAHRI asked respondents to the 2020 Revenue Integrity Professional Salary Survey to share their tips and challenges on working from home. See the following to learn what survey respondents told us.

The good

Some revenue integrity professionals smoothly transitioned to remote work, and some even found working from home was beneficial.

- "No challenges faced other than needing to gather some physical resources that are still in my work area. Productivity is higher and happier here as the work environment is much quieter."
- "Working from home has been a wonderful experience. No challenges. Working from home has made a significant positive difference in my mental health and well-being."
- "Our team was very prepared to work remotely and we have picked up just as if we were in the office. We are able to remote into our applications and network as if we are physically in the office. Constant communication and check ins with staff have been key to staying on top of deadlines."
- "Working remote has been successful for my team. The key is communication and being transparent as changes approach."

Communication and technology

Replacing face-to-face communication with virtual options isn't always easy. Everyone agrees that staying in touch is a priority—but virtual meeting fatigue drains productivity. For many, their home

internet isn't as reliable as in the office, and they might not have the same access to printers, scanners, and other equipment.

- “Initiating a new project is tricky as there are misunderstandings and miscommunication that happen even with virtual meetings. Not having that immediate face-to-face conversation when issues arise can be problematic. I encourage meetings with the camera/video on so staff feel a sense of team unity and are able to see each other.”
- “Working on a laptop slowed down productivity. Also, no printer, fax, copier, large monitor, keyboard and having to use personal cell for calls.”
- “Managing my team [of 15] remotely can be challenging. Meetings were held via Zoom or Skype. [We] implemented Excel documents to track/trend since we all couldn't see our white board in the office.”
- “Due to the quick transition to work from home, my team only has mobile phones as primary source of phone line. The microphones on our laptops are not the best. Ideally, we would be issued allowances for landlines and phones so clarity and quality of dialing in through phones to attend meetings would be better.”
- “Easier transition than I expected. Mostly were technological issues, such as scanning, phone calls, etc. Now that it appears we will be working from home indefinitely, I have requested tools to make this easier. Another issue is isolation from my team.”
- “Having equipment set up in my home that function as well as my office onsite is nearly impossible at times.”

- “A lot of my work still requires real paper. Receiving mail, printing charts to send for audits, etc., is a challenge.”
- “The biggest challenge was with both my husband and myself working from home and our rural location, our internet needed to be upgraded. I still have issues with my company's bandwidth abilities. They seem to drop us or freeze us very easily.”

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- “Communication is critical. However, too many meetings can also drain everyone's time and resources. Our team meets for a quick weekly huddle, and we touch base again at the end of the week to review project status. Microsoft Teams and our internal SharePoint site have helped keep us on track and remain collaborative.”
- “Not being able to print/fax is a major challenge to completing appeals, etc. Tip: When going to the office, scan as much as you can to yourself until the next time you get to go to the office.”
- “The challenge for me [was] that was it frustrating constantly getting kicked out of our hospital server. It was about every 20 minutes all day long. It made for a frustrating day.”
- “Missing phone calls and having to leave voicemails instead of communicating on the phone has been a challenge. I eventually was able to forward my work phone to my cell

phone and I arranged specific times for people to call me through email.”

Finding balance

When your office is also your home, it can be difficult to truly stop working and relax. Setting and sticking to boundaries and personal care routines has helped some revenue integrity professionals strike the right balance.

- “Set clear start/stop times or you will work at all hours of the day/night. Close the office door and turn off the computer when done for the day.”
- “One of the biggest challenges was setting up time boundaries. When we started with 100% remote, I was working an average of 12 hours/day. I had to improve on work start/stop times and keeping a better balance of work/home life.”
- “Practice mindfulness moments, whether breathing techniques or stretching to keep you balanced and focused.”
- “Keep a schedule and make sure to have some separation from work.”
- “Challenges: Interruptions from children/pets; connectivity from internet company; separation of work/home life. Tips: Take your breaks/lunches to recharge and refuel. Designate time with family during the day so they know when you are available (I currently take an hour long lunch so I have time to check in with my kids at a time when I could help them with their school work).”
- “Stay focused. Develop a daily routine and do not stray from your routine.” **NJ**

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