

# Examining Trends in COVID-19 and the Health Workforce Through Collecting Media Resources and Conducting Key Informant Interviews

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## ABSTRACT

**Research Objective:** To examine trends in the content of articles, reports, blogs, and key informant interviews about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the US health workforce.

**Study Design:** Publications on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce were gathered from a variety of sources, beginning in March 2020. Ten websites noted for their health care sector-focused reporting were utilized daily, including *Health Affairs*, *Becker's Hospital Review*, and *Kaiser Health News*.

Google News and Google Scholar searchers were also utilized to collect other reporting and scientific journal articles, with ten key search terms used, including "health workforce COVID-19" and "health care worker safety COVID-19," among other variants. The content of the publications was reviewed and classified into different themes including "Telehealth," "Vaccine Information," and "Health Workforce Safety." Themes were reviewed periodically and expanded when necessary to meet changes and capture emerging trends.

Key informant interviews with experts on the health workforce from 23 states were conducted during the same timeframe, with the information gathered used to confirm and inform the direction of collected resources.

**Population Studied:** Publications collected focused on the COVID-19 pandemic impact on the health workforce in the United States.

**Principal Findings:** The focus of the discussion around COVID-19 and the health workforce changed over time. In the early pandemic period, there was rapid expansion of articles on telehealth and related services matching policy changes at state and national levels. Health workforce safety (eg, difficulties in personal protective equipment acquisition) followed a similar pattern with a great deal of discussion in the early pandemic period (April through June). Unlike telehealth, the discussion of health workforce safety peaked with the resurgence of the pandemic in fall/winter months. Key informant interviews corroborated these trends.

**Conclusions:** While ongoing, the resources compiled over time enable analysis of trends and better understanding of the changing narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce in the United States.

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## INTRODUCTION

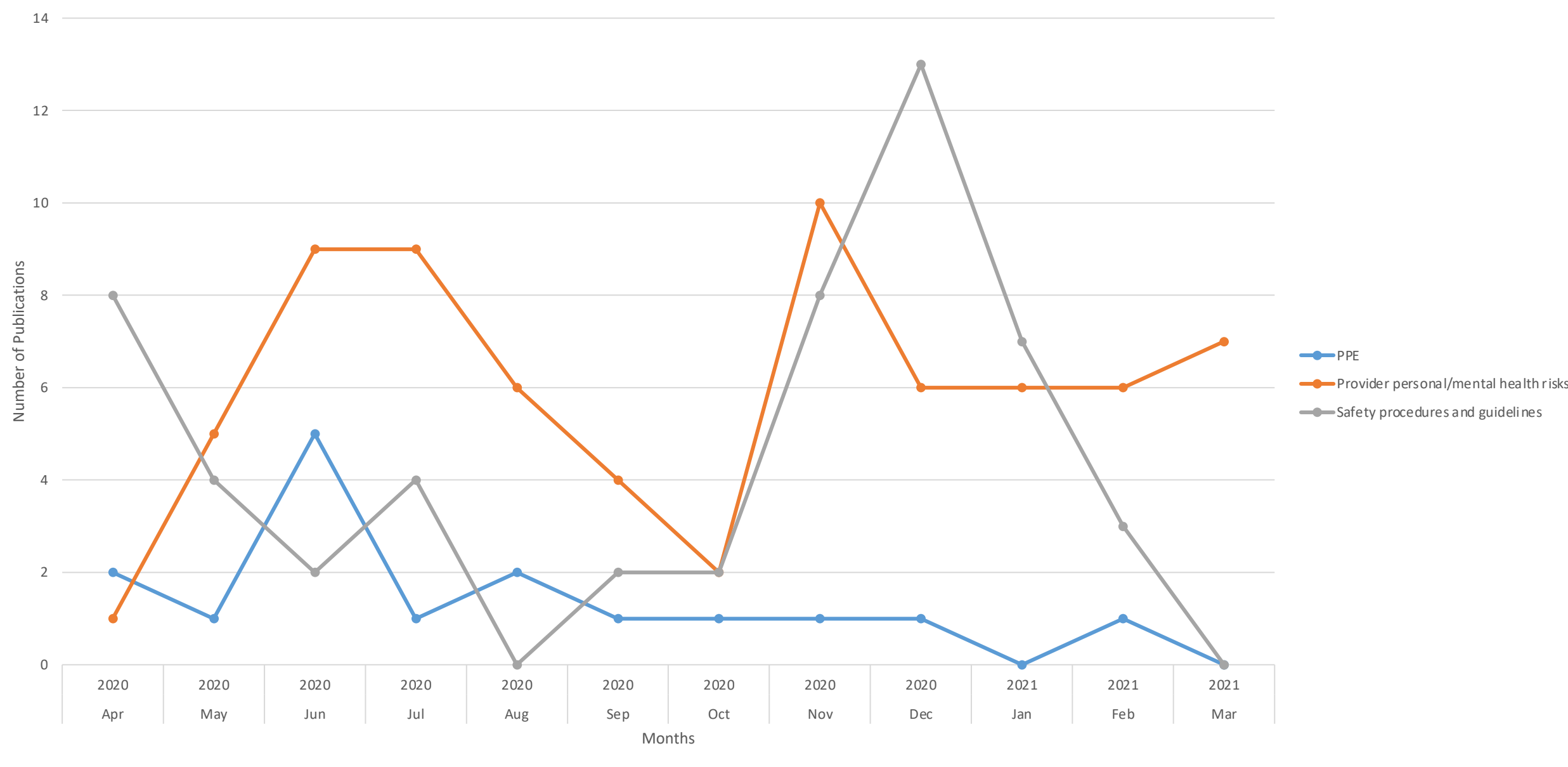
- The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to the health workforce, with workforce safety, changes to health care delivery, use of technology, health care funding, workforce shortages, and other issues requiring attention
- Understanding and addressing these challenges requires information and analysis of the trends in the impact of the pandemic on the health workforce

## METHODS

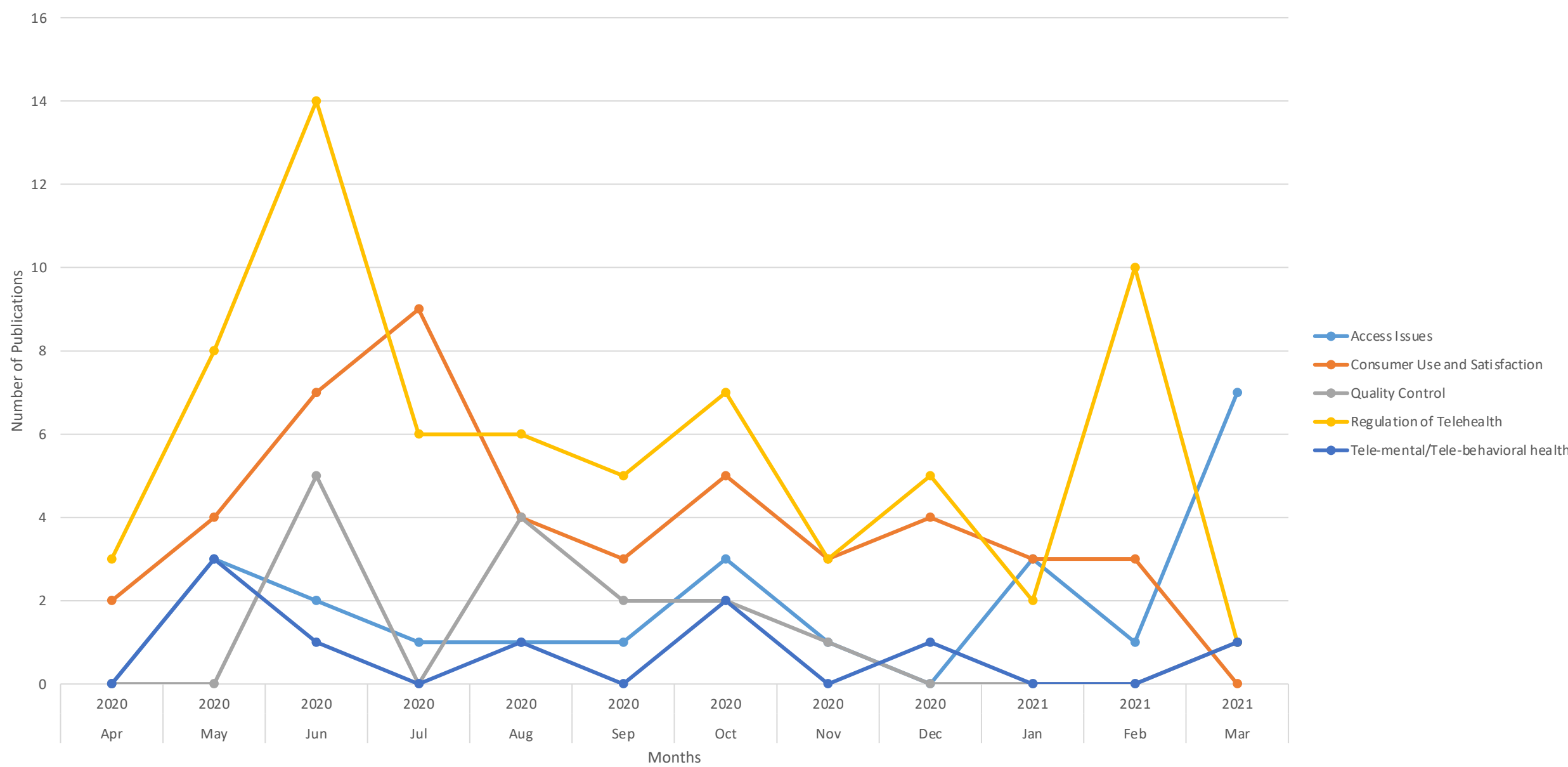
- Webpage "[COVID-19 & the Health Workforce](#)" set up by HWTAC to monitor publications relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce from April 2020 onwards
- Key informant interviews conducted in 23 states to better understand state responses to health workforce demands during COVID-19
  - Key informants included state primary care officers, hospital administrators, and health workforce researchers, among others
- Websites and web searches conducted daily to monitor for relevant developments
  - Websites checked included *Health Affairs*, *Becker's Hospital Review*, and *Kaiser Health News*, among others
  - More than 20 search terms including "health workforce covid-19" and "health care worker safety covid-19," among others
- Publications were organized into themes based on the nature of their content
  - Themes included "Workforce Safety," "Telehealth," and "Vaccine Information," among others, developed following discussion and expert consideration
- Publications were included on the basis of:
  - Relevancy (health workforce primary focus)
  - Scope (eg, national, regional/multi-state, statewide, large metro)
  - Quality of source/reputation of publication
  - Lack of paywall to view source
- Publications consisted of:
  - News articles
  - Scientific journal articles
  - Editorials, opinion pieces, and expert interviews
  - Health policy-focused resources, tool kits, and webpages
  - Federal- and state-level guidance, press releases, and webpages

## RESULTS

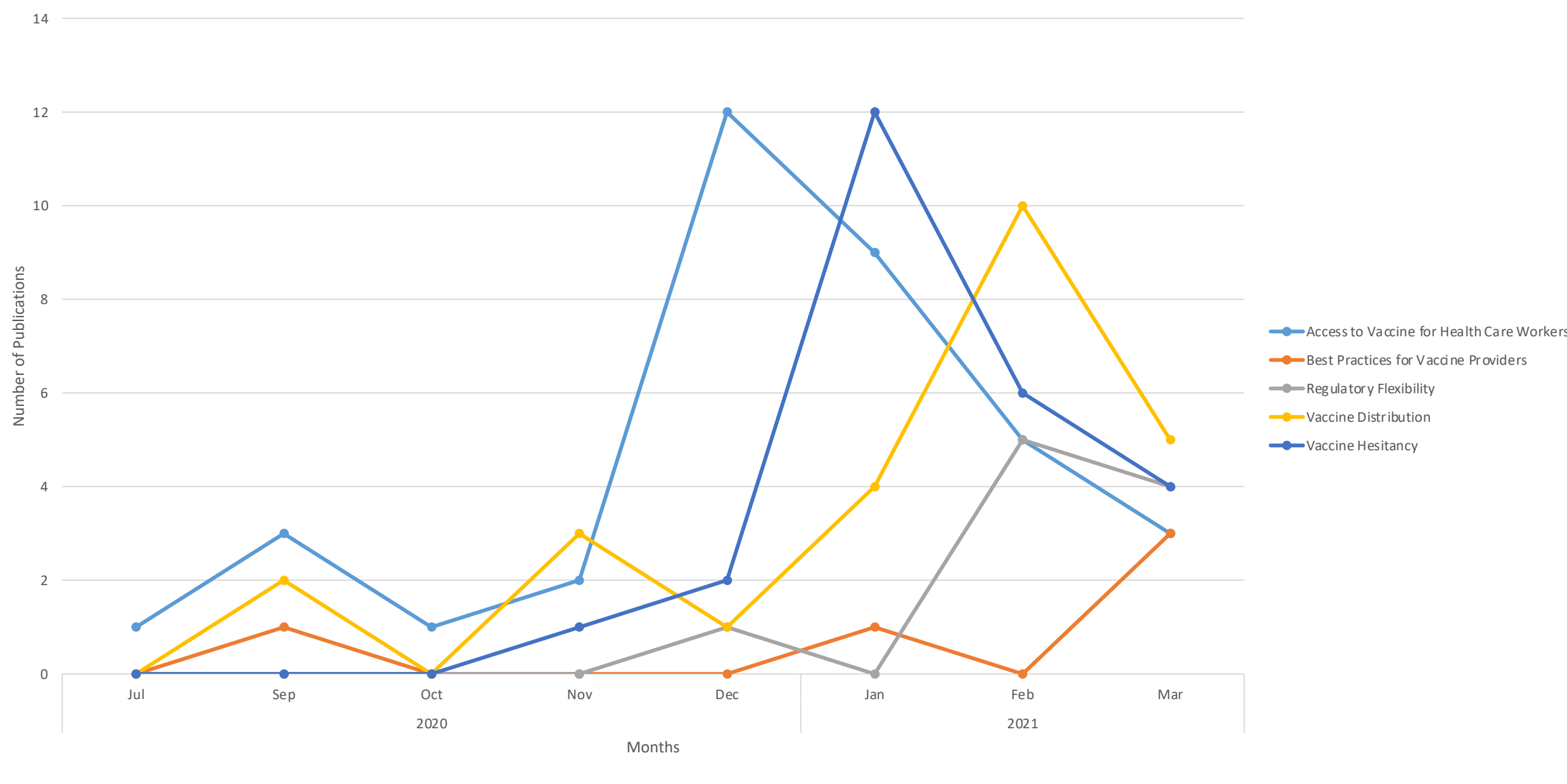
**Figure 1. Trends in Health Workforce Safety Publications During the COVID-19 Pandemic**



**Figure 2. Trends in Health Workforce Telehealth Publications During the COVID-19 Pandemic**



**Figure 3. Trends in Health Workforce Vaccine Information Publications During the COVID-19 Pandemic**



## RESULTS (cont.)

- Provider personal and mental health risks have been a dominant concern throughout the pandemic (Figure 1)
- Regulation of telehealth has consistently been a main focus (Figure 2)
- Access to the vaccine, vaccine hesitancy, and vaccine distribution form waves of focus in order from December 2020 to March 2021 (Figure 3)

## DISCUSSION

- The focus of publications regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce changed rapidly throughout the pandemic
- In the early months from April 2020 to July 2020, there was a rapid expansion of articles on telehealth and related services matching the policy changes at the state and national levels
- Health workforce safety (eg, difficulties in personal protective equipment acquisition) followed a similar pattern with a great deal of discussion in the early pandemic period (April 2020 through June 2020)
  - Unlike telehealth, discussion of health workforce safety peaked with the resurgence of the pandemic in the fall and winter months
- When evidence emerged that a vaccine may be ready, resources regarding health workforce vaccine access and distribution appeared as early as July 2020
  - Waves of focus followed, beginning with vaccine access as the first health care workers became vaccinated in December 2020, health care workforce vaccine hesitancy becoming a primary focus in January 2021, and vaccine distribution being the primary focus in February 2021
- Key informant interviews corroborated observed trends in accumulated resources, with emphasis on the dramatic changes to telehealth policy in the initial months of the pandemic, as well as difficulties acquiring protective equipment for workers early in the pandemic

## CONCLUSIONS

- While ongoing, the narrative of the health workforce has changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic
- Tracking these changes can help better prepare for future pandemics and understand both short-term and long-term pandemic-related impacts on the health workforce

The Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center (HWTAC) is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$447,164 with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the US Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov.