Adventist Health Sonora Earns Blue Zones Worksite Certification, Driving Industry-Leading Caregiver Retention

Comprehensive well-being initiatives lead to double-digit improvements in employee retention and accelerated hiring for the rural healthcare provider.

SONORA, CA, UNITED STATES, October 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Adventist Health Sonora has officially achieved Blue Zones Worksite® certification, joining a growing nationwide movement of organizations recognized for creating workplace cultures where employees can truly thrive. With this designation, Adventist Health Sonora becomes the seventh Adventist Health hospital to earn the certification, reinforcing the system's ongoing investment in caregiver health, purpose, and burnout reduction.

The certified Blue Zones Worksite framework is based on the lifestyle habits of the world's longest-lived populations. By optimizing the physical environment, implementing policies that nudge healthier choices, and fostering strong social connections, the certification recognizes the hospital’s commitment to building a workplace that supports overall well-being and fosters a deep sense of belonging.

"In a close-knit community like Sonora, the health of our hospital and the health of our community are deeply connected. Becoming a certified Blue Zones Worksite reflects our belief that healthcare extends beyond treating illness,” said Adventist Health Sonora President Greg McCulloch. “It's also about creating the conditions that help people live healthier, more fulfilling lives. We're honored to be part of that work and grateful to our caregivers for embracing this journey."

Healthcare organizations nationwide have faced unprecedented workforce challenges in recent years, but Adventist Health Sonora has bucked the trend by focusing intentionally on the people

who power its mission.

To support associates daily, Adventist Health Sonora implemented comprehensive operational, environmental, and cultural enhancements across its campus:
- Nutritional Enhancements: Transformed the hospital cafe with Blue Zones-inspired plant-rich meals, healthier beverage options, and ongoing nutrition education.
- Restorative Spaces: Created outdoor gathering areas, walking paths, and a Labyrinth Peace Garden that encourage physical movement, social connection, and mental restoration.
- Operational Integration: Embedded well-being into daily operations through walking meetings, protected rounding time, expanded fitness opportunities, childcare resources, peer support, and mental health initiatives.
- Meaningful Connections: Expanded opportunities for purpose and connection through Purpose Workshops, volunteerism, peer mentoring, employee recognition, and family events.

These initiatives drove strong workforce participation, with 87% of staff engaging in well-being programs. Key highlights include 30% of associates discovering their mission in Purpose Workshops, 26% building lasting connections through 10-week Moai walking groups, and 359 team members giving back through local volunteer projects.

“The health of our community starts with the health of the people who care for it every day. Becoming a certified Blue Zones Worksite represents the intentional steps we've taken to make Adventist Health Sonora a place where our caregivers can thrive physically, mentally, and socially,” said Cathy Parker, well-being director at Adventist Health Sonora. “When we invest in the well-being of our employees, the benefits extend to our patients, their families, and our entire community.”

By embedding these well-being principles into its operational strategy, Adventist Health Sonora has achieved measurable successes in workforce retention and culture. Key outcomes include:
- Accelerated Hiring: The average time to fill open positions was reduced by more than half, dropping by 29 days (from a baseline of 56 days to just 27 days).
- Stronger Employee Retention: Overall voluntary employee turnover dropped by 31.5% (improving from 14.9% to 10.2%).
- Targeted Nursing & New-Hire Support: Voluntary turnover among registered nurses improved by 15%, while 90-day turnover for new hires saw a dramatic 37% improvement, dropping to just 4.6%.
- Sustained Caregiver Well-Being: While much of the country is seeing a decline in workplace well-being, Adventist Health Sonora remained steady in both its Gallup Employee Engagement score (rising to 4.28 out of 5) and Gallup Well-being Index (improving to 4.02 out of 5). Scores reflecting employees’ belief that the organization cares about their well-being also strengthened, demonstrating clear progress in leadership commitment and workplace culture.
- Elevated Patient Experience: The investment in employees has also translated into a better experience for patients. On the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) patient survey, the percentage of patients who said they would recommend

Adventist Health Sonora to friends and family increased from 60.98% in 2022 to 66.58% in 2026, a 9.2% increase over the course of the campus' transformation. The improvement reflects a better overall experience for patients and their families.

"As a former hospital and health system CEO, I know that healthcare workers are the backbone of our communities and that their work is both demanding and deeply impactful," said Brett McClung, CEO of Blue Zones. "Adventist Health Sonora has demonstrated a profound, measurable commitment to its people. By transforming their workplace, they have built a thriving culture that serves as a model for how improving the daily experience of caregivers leads directly to better workforce stability and elevated patient care—showing clearly that caring for staff is the foundation of caring for patients."
The certification marks a significant milestone in Adventist Health's broader initiative to design working environments that naturally foster healthy habits, reduce caregiver strain, and build lasting workplace purpose for years to come.

About Blue Zones
Blue Zones employs evidence-based ways to help people live better, longer. The company's work is rooted in explorations and research done by founder and National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner in blue zones regions around the world, where people live extraordinarily long and/or happy lives. The original research and findings were released in Buettner's bestselling books including The Blue Zones Solution, The Blue Zones of Happiness, Blue Zones Kitchen, Blue Zones Challenge, and Blue Zones Secrets for Living Longer — all published by National Geographic books. A hit docuseries, Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones, was released on Netflix in 2023. Using original Blue Zones research, Blue Zones works with cities, counties, and organizations to make healthy choices easier through permanent and semi-permanent changes to our human-made surroundings. Participating communities have experienced double-digit drops in obesity and tobacco use and have saved millions of dollars in healthcare costs. For more information, visit www.bluezones.com.

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