

5 Health Care Jobs on the Rise

Occupations in the industry are increasingly in demand because of an aging population and longer life spans.

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This article is part of our new series on the Future of Health Care, which examines changes in the medical field.

Economists at the Labor Department project that from 2019 to 2029 employment in health care in the United States will grow 15 percent, much faster than the average for all occupations, adding about 2.4 million new jobs during that span.

The health care and social assistance sector is expected to add the most new jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (B.L.S.), with six of the 10 fastest growing occupations. Spurring the expected growth: care for the aging baby-boom population; longer life spans; and persistent growth in the number of patients with chronic conditions.

A recent report by McKinsey & Company similarly expects the greatest growth in labor demand by 2030 among health aides, technicians, wellness occupations and health professionals.

As the world adjusts to the coronavirus pandemic, this figure could expand even more, as “demand for workers in the health care and STEM occupations may grow more than before the pandemic, reflecting increased attention to health,” according to the report.

Among the fastest-growing health care occupations are physician assistants, nurse practitioners (52 percent job growth rate is predicted from 2019 to 2029; the quickest in the field) and occupational therapy assistants.

Researchers at LinkedIn analyzed in-demand jobs pushed by the pandemic’s shock to develop a list of 15 “jobs on the rise.” LinkedIn’s data scientists looked at over 15,000 job titles to uncover the positions that have grown the most, compared with 2019 levels, Andrew Seaman, senior editor for job search and careers at LinkedIn News, said in an interview. “While there was already demand for some of these health care positions, the pandemic intensified that. Since 2019, hiring for health care positions has increased more than 34 percent.”

Here are five health care jobs on the rise.

Nurse practitioner

Overall employment growth of nurse practitioners is projected to top 50 percent from 2019 to 2029. The increase is mainly because of an increased importance on preventive care and demand for health care services from an aging population, according to the Labor Department’s forecast.

According to the B.L.S., registered nursing — a related but distinct job, involving separate state licenses and, in some cases, degrees — is listed among the top occupations in terms of job growth from 2019 to 2029, though it is an understaffed field. The B.L.S. projects that 11 million additional nurses are needed to avoid a further shortage.

Licensed nurse practitioners, who also must have a registered nursing license, legally are able to prescribe medications and have greater flexibility than registered nurses in diagnosing and treating illnesses. Average salaries also differ: In May 2020, the median annual wage for registered nurses was \$75,330, according to the B.L.S.; the median annual wage for nurse practitioners for the same period was \$111,680.

Nurse practitioners are licensed in all states and the District of Columbia. Certifications include those offered by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Board the American Nurses Credentialing Center and the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board.

Home health and personal care aide

Overall employment of home health and personal care aides is expected to jump 34 percent from 2019 to 2029, according to the Labor Department. The aging baby-boom generation and the growing elderly population are the main reasons for the increase.

Home health and personal care aides represent the sixth-fastest growing occupation in the country, according to Labor Department data, but the pay is low at about \$12.15 per hour, or \$25,280 per year.



A home care health aide training program in Queens, N.Y., go over Covid protocols. James Estrin/The New York Times

President Biden's American Jobs Plan to expand home- and community-based care is sparse on details for now, but calls for addressing the industry's low wages and "makes substantial investments in the infrastructure of our care economy, starting by creating new and better jobs for caregiving workers," according to the White House's fact sheet.

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There's plenty of need for paid workers at private homes, assisted-living communities, memory-care centers for dementia patients, hospice facilities and nursing homes. While the work, often booked through a home care agency, is rewarding, can be taxing mentally and physically. There are part-time positions in assisted-living facilities or hospices. Short-term training is generally on the job by registered nurses for those working for an agency or in-house facility.

There's typically formal training and a competency test to work for certified home health or hospice agencies that receive reimbursement from Medicare or Medicaid. Requirements vary from state to state. Some employers may require a certified nursing assistant certification and a criminal-background check is standard. CPR training and a driver's license are helpful, too.

Job openings are generally posted by local care facilities. There are a few big caregiving networks for job seekers. CareLinx, based outside of San Francisco, operates like an online matchmaking site for families. The network, which began in 2011, operates nationwide with over 500,000 professional caregivers ranging from certified nurse assistants all the way up to registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

Mental health specialist

Employment of substance abuse, behavioral disorder and mental health counselors is likely to grow 25 percent from 2019 to 2029, according to the Labor Department — further boosting current growth.

"According to our listing data, jobs in the mental health sector have risen 28 percent since 2019," said Sara Sutton, chief executive and founder of the job board FlexJobs. "Jobs like behavioral health care manager, risk reduction manager, social worker and case manager fall under this category. Regarding therapy jobs specifically, the board saw a whopping 56 percent increase in 2020. Titles include therapist, psychologist, counselor, and mental health clinician."

LinkedIn data shows nearly 24 percent year-over-year job growth among mental health professionals. Fast-growing positions include behavior therapist, mental health technician and psychotherapist. Most of these roles require an associate degree or higher, and training in areas like play therapy for children, mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy.

A play therapy set-up at the Nurture House, a counseling center for children in Franklin, Tenn. Kristine Potter for The New York Times

Educational requirements vary but most positions require at least a bachelor's degree. All states require mental health counselors to be licensed, after completing a period of post degree clinical work under the supervision of a licensed counselor.

Wages vary, but according to Payscale.com, a mental health counselor salary ranges from \$31,000 to \$64,000, annually. The median annual wage for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors was \$47,660 in May 2020, according to the B.L.S.

Massage therapist

Employment of massage therapists is projected to grow 21 percent in the next decade, according to the Labor Department. Demand will likely increase as more health care providers understand the benefits of massage and these services become part of treatment plans.

This is a job well suited to a home-based business where clients come to a therapist's in-house studio. A growing specialty is geriatric massage therapy, which is gentle massage for older adults focusing on circulation and relaxation. The core work consists of assessing the client's medical past and delivering a treatments based on the clients needs.

Most states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapy and require a license or certification after graduating from an accredited training program of 500 or more hours of study and experience, although standards and requirements vary greatly by state or other jurisdiction. A high school diploma or equivalent is usually required for admission to a massage therapy program. The median annual wage for massage therapists was \$43,620 in May 2020, according to the B.L.S.

A respiratory therapist treating a Covid-19 patient at Sharp Coronado Hospital in Coronado, Calif., in December. Mario Tama/Getty Images

Respiratory therapist

Respiratory therapists treat patients with heart and lung problems such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and sleep apnea. They perform diagnostic tests for lung capacity, administer breathing treatments, document patient progress, and confer with physicians and surgeons.

Employment of respiratory therapists is forecast to grow 19 percent from 2019 to 2029, according to the B.L.S.

Respiratory therapists typically need an associate degree, but some have bachelor's degrees in respiratory therapy. Respiratory therapists are licensed in all states except Alaska; requirements vary by state. The American Association for Respiratory Care has a job board.

Educational courses are offered by colleges and universities, vocational technical institutes and the U.S. military. Completion of a program that's accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care may be required to gain a license.

Licensure requirements vary by state; for most states they include passing a state or professional certification exam. For specific state requirements, contact the state's health board. The National Board for Respiratory Care is the main certifying body and the board offers two levels of certification: certified respiratory therapist and registered respiratory therapist. The median annual wage for respiratory therapists was \$62,810 in May 2020, according to the B.L.S.