



Long-Term Services and Support: Demand Projections, 2020-2035

November 2022

This brief contains highlights of workforce projections for occupations based in long-term services and support (LTSS) in the United States. These include direct care workers (such as nursing aides, home health aides, and personal care aides) as well as registered nurses and licensed practical nurses working in long-term care settings.

These projections were generated using HRSA's Health Workforce Simulation Model (HWSM) and start with the year 2020 and go through 2035. Full data on the workforce projections will be made available in the [Workforce Projections Dashboard](#).

Key Results and Takeaways

- Forecasting future supply of the LTSS workforce is complicated for several reasons, including low barriers to entry and exit and the presence of unpaid or informal caregivers (such as family members).¹ As a result, future supply projections are not provided.
- Nationally, the overall demand for workers in LTSS settings is projected to grow by 44% between 2020 and 2035, from 2.5 million full-time equivalent (FTE)² LTSS professionals to 3.6 million. Growth in demand varies across the professions, ranging from 38% for occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants in LTSS settings, to 59% for psychiatric aides in LTSS settings. Growth in the demand for these services and support is driven by the aging population and increasing longevity.
- Direct care workers – including home health aides, personal care aides, nursing aides, and psychiatric aides – make up the largest segment of the LTSS workforce, accounting for 66% of the workforce in 2035. Demand for direct care workers is projected to grow faster than the demand for long-term care nurses and other providers in the LTSS sector (45% compared to 43%, see **Exhibit 1**).
- Among direct care workers, demand for psychiatric aides is projected to grow the fastest (59%), followed by nursing aides (48%), personal care aides (43%), and home health aides (42%). In contrast, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that employment of home health and personal care aides will grow by just 25% over the next decade (2021-2031), which may indicate that supply is growing slower than demand.³
- Among all other LTSS occupations, demand for recreational therapists is projected to grow the fastest (50%) followed by dietitians and nutritionists (49%) and social workers (49%).

About the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis informs public and private sector decision makers on health workforce issues by expanding and improving health workforce data, disseminating workforce data to the public, and improving and updating projections of the supply and demand for health workers.

For more information, visit the [Health Workforce Analysis](#) webpage.

¹ For more information see the [HWSM technical documentation](#).

² An FTE is defined as working 40 hours per week.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Services, [Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2021](#). Accessed on November 25, 2022.

Exhibit 1a – Projected national demand for LTSS occupations: Direct care workers

Occupation	2020	2025	2030	2035	Percent Change (2020-35)
Home Health Aides	395,420	444,960	504,100	562,300	42%
Personal Care Aides	528,780	586,680	667,320	756,900	43%
Nursing Aides	727,520	811,120	935,480	1,074,820	48%
Psychiatric Aides	6,590	7,440	8,800	10,470	59%
All Direct Care Workers	1,658,310	1,850,200	2,115,700	2,404,490	45%

Exhibit 1b – Projected national demand for LTSS occupations: Nurses in LTSS

Occupation	2020	2025	2030	2035	Percent Change (2020-35)
Licensed Practical Nurses	285,960	317,350	363,340	414,110	45%
Registered Nurses	397,320	441,460	501,370	566,110	42%
All Nurses in LTSS	683,280	758,810	864,710	980,220	43%

Exhibit 1c – Projected national demand for LTSS occupations: Other LTSS occupations

Occupation	2020	2025	2030	2035	Percent Change (2020-35)
Dietitians and Nutritionists	11,710	13,030	15,070	17,420	49%
Occupational Therapists	28,460	31,060	34,920	39,250	38%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	10,700	11,680	13,150	14,770	38%
Physical Therapist Assistants	19,500	21,710	24,570	27,490	41%
Physical Therapists	46,760	52,170	59,240	66,590	42%
Recreational Therapists	4,530	5,050	5,860	6,810	50%
Social Workers	35,930	39,960	46,180	53,630	49%
Speech-Language Pathologists	14,640	16,230	18,490	20,990	43%
All Other Occupations in LTSS	172,230	190,890	217,480	246,950	43%
Total LTSS Workforce	2,513,820	2,799,900	3,197,890	3,631,660	44%

Notes: Demand projections are in full-time equivalents (FTEs), defined as working 40 hours a week.

- Note, the above results assume a continuation of current trends in the key drivers of demand and care utilization over the projection period. If, instead, we assume that reductions in the barriers to access for underserved populations increase the use of long-term care services delivered in ambulatory and hospital settings, as well as home health care, there would be a further increase in the demand for LTSS providers in these settings.⁴

For example, if residents of nonmetro areas utilized home health services at the same rate as residents in metro areas, the demand for home health aides would be higher in each year during the projection period. In fact, by 2035 the demand for home health aides would be 10,240 FTEs higher than under baseline assumptions.⁵

⁴ Because many LTSS services in residential facilities are covered by Medicaid and Medicare, this scenario is only estimated for ambulatory, hospital, and home healthcare settings. See the [HWSM technical documentation](#) for further information.

⁵ NCHWA also reports projections under alternative demand scenarios, such as expanded insurance coverage and improved access to care. The projected estimates under each scenario can be accessed in the [Workforce Projections Dashboard](#).

These projections were generated using some data from the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic impacted the population seeking care, the workforce providing care, and the data available for both. These projections should be interpreted with caution as the behavior of those seeking care and the size and composition of the workforce providing care during the pandemic may not be fully reflected in these projections. See the [HWSM technical documentation](#) for details on the methodology and datasets used to generate these projections.

For full data on the workforce projections, see the [Workforce Projections Dashboard](#). You can access a [webinar](#) about the Workforce Projections Dashboard that shows how to use it. You can also [download the data](#) from the dashboard in spreadsheet form.