2022 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses Snapshot

Demographics

- Nursing is the nation's largest health care profession, with a current estimate of 4.3 million actively licensed registered nurses (RNs). Approximately 3.5 million of all actively licensed RNs are working as RNs.
- This is a net increase of almost 400,000 licensed RNs since 2017.
- The nursing workforce is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic Asian RNs now constitute 11% and 9% of the RN workforce, respectively, compared to 8% and 5% in the previous National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses.
- Male RNs now make up 12% of the workforce (approximately 140,000).
- The nursing workforce is getting younger. In 2017, 38% of nurses were age 55+, but by 2021 they were only 34% of the workforce.

Training and Education

- 70% of RNs indicated that they were employed in a health-related job prior to completing their first nursing degree. The most common positions were nursing assistant (45%), licensed practical nurse/licensed vocational nurse (LPN/LVN) (16%), or home health aide (10%).
- 46% of RNs who completed their degree between 2016 and 2020, completed part online, significantly higher than the 19% for those who graduated between 2000 and 2015.
- Nearly 2 million individuals (45% of the workforce) entered the nursing workforce with a bachelor's degree, now making it the most common degree for initial U.S. licensing.
- 11% of licensed RNs have completed an additional degree qualifying them as an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN).
- 2.2 million RNs (51% of the workforce) borrowed money to finance a degree.
- RNs have approximately $48 billion of student loan debt outstanding.
- Nearly 2 million RNs (45% of the workforce) indicated that they used federally assisted student loans to finance at least part of their initial nursing degree.

Employment

- Most (82%) of the 3.5 million employed RNs work full-time.
- 85% (2.9 million) of employed RNs had patient care responsibilities.
- Over 5% of the workforce are now travel nurses. In the 2018 survey, 1% of RNs worked as travel nurses. Travel nurses are younger than other RNs on average; only 13% of travel RNs are over the age of 55.
- 17% of RNs employed at the time of survey had already retired by the time they completed the survey or planned to retire within the next 5 years. This is only slightly higher, a 1 percentage point increase, from what RNs reported in the prior survey.

Job Satisfaction and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- While overall job satisfaction among RNs remains relatively high (80%), the degree of dissatisfaction grew from 11% in 2017 to almost 20% in 2021. Job satisfaction declined the most among hospital-based RNs.
- 82% of RNs who had been employed in the same position for at least a year indicated that they had felt burned out at some point in their career, with the majority reporting that their feelings of burnout increased during the pandemic.
- 26% of RNs said they felt burnout every day in 2021.
- RNs under age 34 or younger were more likely to report feeling burnout. 93% of RNs age 34 or younger reported feeling burned out. 85% of RNs age 35 – 54 reported feeling burned out, and 71% of RNs age 55 and older reported feeling burned out.
- Some changes brought on by the pandemic impacted wages. For example, nearly a quarter of RNs employed during the pandemic experienced some form of employer-driven employment disruption, including forced leave, being furloughed (with or without pay), or being laid off.
- 5% of the nursing workforce (approximately 195,000 RNs) left the nursing workforce due to the pandemic. While 43% plan to return, 19% indicated that they did not intend to come back
- The most common reasons given for leaving the workforce were high-risk working conditions (51%), feelings of being overworked or burned out (50%), inadequate staffing (39%), and unsatisfactory safety protocols (37%).

Nursing Workforce Projections

- At the national level, shortages are projected for RNs and LPN/LVNs through 2036.
- If labor force patterns remain the same as today, the demand for RNs in 2036 will exceed supply by 9%, resulting in a shortage of 337,970 full-time equivalent (FTE) RNs.
- The same is true for LPNs, who are estimated to experience a 12% shortage (99,070 LPN/LVN FTEs) in 2036.
- In addition to projected national shortage, inequality in geographic distribution of RNs remains.
- Nationally, non-metro areas in the U.S. are projected to have a much higher shortage of RNs (14%) than metro areas (8%) by 2036.
- Supply adequacy of RNs and LPN/LVNs among states varies considerably, ranging from projected RN shortages of almost 30% to projected oversupply of even greater percentages in other states. The same is true for LPN/LVNs, whose distribution ranges vary significantly across states.

Scan to learn more about the NSSRN or to download data and reports

About the Survey

The National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses (NSSRN) is the longest running national sample survey of Registered Nurses in the U.S. Since 1977, the NSSRN has provided educators, health workforce leaders, and policymakers with key details and developments on the nursing workforce. In collaboration with the U.S Census Bureau, HRSA administered the 11th NSSRN data collection in 2022 and early 2023. A total of 49,234 registered nurses completed the survey via a web form or a paper questionnaire—a response rate of over 40%. The comprehensive nature of the NSSRN coupled with the large response allows for meaningful data across many different dimensions of the nursing workforce experience.

HRSA
Health Resources & Services Administration