

## Health Workforce Projections: Dietitians and Nutritionists

### KEY FINDINGS

Between 2012 and 2025:

- The dietitians and nutritionists supply is projected to grow by 36 percent.
- The demand for dietitians and nutritionists is projected to grow by 20 percent.

This fact sheet presents the national supply of and demand for dietitians and nutritionists for 2012 through 2025 using HRSA's Health Workforce Simulation Model (HWSM).<sup>1</sup> While the nuances of modeling supply and demand differ for individual health professions, the basic framework remains the same. The HWSM assumes that demand equals supply in the base year. For supply modeling, the major components (beyond common labor-market factors such as unemployment) include characteristics of the existing workforce in a given occupation, new entrants to the workforce (e.g., newly trained workers), and workforce decisions (e.g., retirement and hours worked patterns). For demand modeling, the major components include population demographics, health care use patterns (including the influence of the Affordable Care Act health care coverage), and demand for health care providers (translated into Full-Time Equivalents). Over the period studied, the model assumes that current national patterns of labor supplied and services demanded remain unchanged within each demographic group.<sup>2</sup> These projections do not account for the geographical distribution of providers which may impact access to care in certain communities.

### BACKGROUND

Dietitians and nutritionists advise people on the proper nutrition necessary to lead a healthy lifestyle or achieve a specific health-related goal. They have several specialty roles which include: providing medical nutrition therapy, developing programs and educating the public on food and nutrition topics, and planning meal programs in food service settings (e.g., hospitals, prisons, cafeterias, etc.). They also may work with other health care professionals using a team-based approach to coordinate patient care.

Although these two professions are related, they maintain some distinctive qualities. The biggest difference between dietitians and nutritionists lies in their licensure and educational pathways. Many dietitians choose to earn the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) credential. RDNs are required to obtain at least a baccalaureate degree. While there are no formal educational requirements for nutritionists, many complete some formal coursework in nutrition-related subjects to qualify for

<sup>1</sup> This model uses a micro-simulation approach where supply is projected based on the simulation of career choices of individual health workers. Demand for health care services is simulated for a representative sample of the current and future U.S. population based on each person's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, health-related behavior, and health risk factors that affect their health care utilization patterns. For more information on data and methods, please see [BHW HRSA Health Workforce Supply and Demand Stimulation Model](#).

<sup>2</sup> Ono T, Lafortune G, Schoenstein M. "Health workforce planning in OECD countries: a review of 26 projection models from 18 countries." *OECD Health Working Papers*, No. 62. France: OECD Publishing; 2013:8-11.

employment. Nutritionists that choose to earn the Certified Nutrition Specialist (CNS) credential are required to complete a baccalaureate or advanced degree in a nutrition discipline.

## FINDINGS

Between 2012 and 2025, the supply of dietitians and nutritionists is projected to increase by 36 percent (Exhibit 1), reflecting growth over the past decade in the annual number of new dietitians and nutritionists trained. Demand for dietitians and nutritionists is projected to grow by 20 percent. It is projected that supply will exceed demand in 2025, suggesting that the U.S. will have adequate numbers of dietitians and nutritionists to meet future demand.

Exhibit 1. Estimated Supply and Demand for Dietitians and Nutritionists in the U.S., 2012 – 2025

	Dietitians and Nutritionists
<b>Supply</b>	
Estimated supply, 2012	67,400
Total supply growth, 2012-2025:	24,000 (36%)
New entrants	45,840
Changing work patterns (e.g., part time to full time hours)	1,280
Attrition (e.g., retirements, mortality)	(23,120)
Projected supply, 2025	91,400
<b>Demand</b>	
Estimated demand, 2012	67,400
Total demand growth, 2012-2025:	13,600 (20%)
Changing demographics impact	13,000
ACA insurance coverage impact	600
Projected demand, 2025	81,000
<b>Adequacy of supply, 2025</b>	
Projected supply (minus) projected demand	10,400

The HWSM accounts for the aging of the population, which will result in an increase in chronic conditions and the associated demand for dietetic services. However, with high rates of obesity and metabolic disease across the U.S. and national goals to reduce prevalence of these conditions, growth in demand for dietitians and nutritionists could be higher than projected under the scenario modeled.

### [About the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis](#)

The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis informs public and private-sector decision-making related to the health workforce 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 about the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis please visit our website at [bhw.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/](http://bhw.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/).