Long-Term Services and Support: Demand Projections, 2022-2037

November 2024

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 2022 and go through 2037. Full data on the workforce projections are 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 39% between 2022 and 2037, from 2.42 million full-time equivalent (FTE)[2] LTSS professionals to 3.37 million. Growth in demand varies across the professions, ranging from 28% for physical therapist assistants in LTSS settings, to 131% 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 assistants, and psychiatric aides – make up the largest segment of the LTSS workforce, accounting for 67% of the workforce in 2037. Demand for direct care workers is projected to grow as fast as the demand for long-term care nurses (39% growth between 2022 and 2037, see Exhibits 1a and 1b).

- Among direct care workers, demand for psychiatric aides is projected to grow the fastest (131%), followed by nursing assistants (41%), personal care aides (38%), and home health aides (35%). In contrast, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that employment of home health and personal care aides will grow by just 22% over the next decade (2022-2032), which may indicate that supply is growing slower than demand.[3]

- Among all other LTSS occupations, demand for social workers is projected to grow the fastest (119%) followed by recreational therapists (46%) and dietitians and nutritionists (44%).

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.

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[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 Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook. Accessed on August 28, 2024.

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

Occupation	2022	2027	2032	2037	Percent Change (2022-37)
Home Health Aides	413,220	461,610	510,610	556,180	35%
Nursing Assistants	636,860	712,300	805,650	900,470	41%
Personal Care Aides	564,190	627,210	702,710	778,570	38%
Psychiatric Aides	2,960	3,930	5,250	6,850	131%
All Direct Care Workers	*1,617,230*	*1,805,050*	*2,024,220*	*2,242,070*	*39%*

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

Occupation	2022	2027	2032	2037	Percent Change (2022-37)
Licensed Practical Nurses	275,180	307,080	345,840	384,590	40%
Registered Nurses	365,760	407,310	456,090	503,890	38%
All Nurses in LTSS	*640,940*	*714,390*	*801,930*	*888,480*	*39%*

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

Occupation	2022	2027	2032	2037	Percent Change (2022-37)
Dietitians and Nutritionists	11,300	12,650	14,410	16,240	44%
Occupational Therapists	27,860	30,400	33,560	36,770	32%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	10,940	11,980	13,270	14,550	33%
Physical Therapist Assistants	16,700	18,190	19,850	21,400	28%
Physical Therapists	43,350	47,530	52,410	57,160	32%
Recreational Therapists	4,160	4,670	5,350	6,060	46%
Social Workers	22,850	29,870	39,180	50,130	119%
Speech-Language Pathologists	25,570	28,330	31,600	34,850	36%
All Other Occupations in LTSS	*162,730*	*183,620*	*209,630*	*237,160*	*46%*
Total LTSS Workforce	**2,420,900**	**2,703,060**	**3,035,780**	**3,367,710**	**39%**

Note: 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

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[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.

projection period. In fact, by 2037 the demand for home health aides would be 5,450 FTEs higher than under baseline assumptions. [5]

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 also download the data from the dashboard in spreadsheet form.

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[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.