American Association of Colleges of Nursing
The Voice of Academic Nursing

CONTACT:
Robert Rosseter
AACN Chief Communications Officer
(202) 463-6930, ext.231
rrosseter@aacnnursing.org

Fact Sheet:
Nursing Workforce Fact Sheet

- Nursing is the nation's largest healthcare profession, with more than 5 million registered nurses (RNs) nationwide. Of all licensed RNs, 88% are employed in nursing.[1,2]

- The median age of RNs is 50 years. Approximately 40% of registered nurses report that they plan to retire or leave nursing over the next five years.[2]

- Considering racial backgrounds, the breakdown of RN population in 2024 was 76.6% White/Caucasian; 7.9% Asian; 8.6% Black/African American; 2.6% more than one race; 0.5% Native American or Alaska Native; 0.3% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; and 3.5% other. In addition, 7.2% of the RN workforce report their ethnicity as Hispanic.[2]

- From 2022 to 2024, the percentage of men in nursing decreased from 11.2% to 10.4%.[2]

- Most RNs today enter practice with a baccalaureate degree offered by a four-year college or university, or an associate degree offered by a community college. As of 2024, 72.9% of the RN workforce earned a baccalaureate degree as their highest level of nursing education.[2]

- The federal government projects that more than 189,000 job openings for registered nurses each year through 2034.[2]

- RNs comprise one of the largest segments of the U.S. workforce. Nearly 60% of RNs worked in general medical and surgical hospitals, with an average salary of $97,260 per year according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.[2]

- Nurses comprise the largest component of the healthcare workforce, are the primary providers of hospital patient care, and deliver most of the nation's long-term care.

- RN employment is projected to grow 5% from 2024 to 2034, faster than the average for all occupations.[2] Growth in the RN workforce will occur for a number of reasons, including an increased emphasis on preventive care; growing rates of chronic conditions, such as diabetes and obesity; and demand for healthcare services from the baby-boom population, as they live longer and more active lives.[2]

- Employment of Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners, advance practice

registered nurses requiring graduate-level preparation, is expected to grow by more than 35% over the next decade with 37, 200 job openings each year through 2034.[4]

- Most healthcare services involve some form of care by nurses. Registered nurses are in high demand in both acute care and community settings, including private practices, health maintenance organizations, public health agencies, primary care clinics, home health care, nursing homes, minute clinics, outpatient surgicenters, nursing school-operated clinics, insurance and managed care companies, schools, mental health agencies, hospices, the military, industry, nursing education, and healthcare research.

- Though often working collaboratively, nursing does not "assist" medicine or other fields. Nursing operates independent of, not auxiliary to, medicine and other disciplines. Nurses' roles range from direct patient care and case management to establishing nursing practice standards, developing quality assurance procedures, and directing complex nursing care systems.

- With more than four times as many RNs in the United States as physicians, nursing delivers an extended array of healthcare services, including primary and preventive care by nurse practitioners with specialized education in such areas as pediatrics, family health, women's health, and gerontological care. Nursing's scope also includes services by certified nurse-midwives and nurse anesthetists, as well as care in cardiac, oncology, neonatal, neurological, and obstetric/gynecological nursing and other advanced clinical specialties.[3]

- Employers are expressing a strong preference for new nurses with baccalaureate preparation. These nurses are prized for their skills in critical thinking, leadership, case management, and health promotion, and for their ability to practice across a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings.[4,5]

- In 2024, 20.6% of the nation's registered nurses held a master's degree and 4.5% held a doctoral degree as their highest educational preparation in nursing. The current demand for master's- and doctorally prepared nurses for advanced practice, clinical specialties, teaching, and research roles far outstrips the supply.[2]

REFERENCES

1. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2026). Active RN Licenses.

2. Smiley, R.A., Kaminski-Ozturk, N., Reid, M., Burwell, P., Oliveira, C.M., Shobo, Y., Allgeyer, R.L., Zhong, E., O'Hara, C., Volk, A., & Martin, B. (April 2025). The 2024 National Nursing Workforce Survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation,* 16(1), Supplement (S1-S88). DOI: 10.1016/S2155-8256(25)00047-X

3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook: Registered Nurses.

4. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). Occupational Outlook Handbook: Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners.

5. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2026). The Impact of Education on Nursing Practice.

Updated: September 2026

Contact
Robert Rosseter
rrosseter@aacnnursing.org