



## AMERICAN SCHOLAR GROUP

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# Healthcare Worker Shortage in America

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In the United States, there is an increasing need for health care workers that have created staff shortages across the country. This need is driven by factors such as an aging population and a health care and education system that encourages students to specialize in areas that do not meet this need. This is compounded by disparities in access to healthcare between urban and rural areas. The result is a flood of openings across the country and heavy recruitment to meet this need.

According to the United States Census<sup>1</sup> and the Health and Aging Policy Fellows<sup>2</sup> around seventy-one million Americans, or about twenty percent of the population of the United States, will be aged 65 or older by 2030. The elderly are at greater risk for developing disabilities from illness or serious injury, increasing the amount of health care they require compared to other age groups. They require more tests, monitoring, procedures, and personal care, which means additional workers are needed to complete these tasks.

Combined with the obesity epidemic in the United States<sup>3,4</sup>, which also affects the elderly, the need for care for those with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and many other illnesses continues to grow. Yet a 2016 op-ed in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*<sup>5</sup> noted that “less than 1% of registered nurses and less than 3% of advanced practice registered nurses

are certified in geriatrics.” Despite the need, there aren’t enough trained and educated people focusing on the elderly population.

That same piece in the *JAMA* also notes that “more than 1 million direct care workers, including certified nursing assistants, home health aides, and home care and personal aides, deliver most of the paid care to home to older adults in numerous settings” and that demand for such workers is “projected to increase by nearly 50% between 2010 and 2020”. Certified nursing assistant and orderly positions alone are expected to see a 17% increase, far above the 7% average for all jobs<sup>6</sup>.

Other factors driving the demand for health care workers include things such as more knowledgeable and proactive citizens in terms of health care needs and advances in technology allowing for more conditions to be diagnosed and treated<sup>7</sup>. In addition, many areas in the United States are underserved, particularly more rural locations<sup>8</sup>. More desirable and well-paying positions are often located in major cities, and Americans with debt from large student loans find those positions more attractive. This opens a space for ambitious and caring individuals who wish to start a new career pathway and receive the kind of experience that can help them move forward with more options and greater employability.

Such disparities leave many regions of the United States in serious need for health care workers and provide an opening for employments in places such as nursing homes, personal care facilities, and small hospitals. These openings have created many opportunities for foreign-born workers. A report from 2016 notes that about 15% of registered nurses (RNs) were born outside of the United States<sup>9</sup>, while openings for nursing assistant, licensed practical nurses, and similar health care jobs are on the rise as employers seek to fill the rising number of vacancies at medical and care facilities.

For people looking to work in the United States and are seeking a pathway to a green card, there are tremendous opportunities available. Preparing now for these opportunities is particularly important given

the indications from parts of the U.S. government that emphasizing skill sets, English proficiency, and employability may become larger parts of immigration policy. Programs such as American Scholar's High School Nursing Assistant and Work in America are designed to assist those wishing to meet such criteria and find a future in the United States.

#### *Sources*

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