

Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index: Understanding Nursing in the Broader Healthcare Labor Market

Rick Allgeyer, PhD

Oregon's healthcare workforce operates as an interconnected system. When one profession faces staffing or retention challenges, the impact ripples across care teams and affects patient care. Nurses, who represent the largest segment of this workforce, often experience these effects most directly. When complementary roles in healthcare are scarce—such as medical assistants, respiratory therapists, or certified nursing assistants—registered nurses shoulder a greater share of the workload, leading to higher turnover and persistent vacancies.

Understanding nursing's stability, therefore, requires examining the broader healthcare labor market. The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) adapted a decision-support model developed by the Michigan Health Council (MHC, 2024) to the Oregon setting. Using publicly available data from the Oregon Employment Department (OED), OCN

developed the **Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index**, which compares workforce stability and demand across healthcare occupations.

This approach recognizes that nursing workforce challenges are not isolated problems, but rather symptoms of systemic pressures across healthcare roles. By analyzing growth, shortage, turnover, and wages across 35 occupations, the Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index helps identify how interdependent roles influence each other, and where targeted investments could strengthen Oregon's entire healthcare workforce.

Why a Workforce Index?

Workforce issues are typically analyzed in isolation, such as focusing solely on shortages or wages. However, these single-metric approaches often obscure the complex trade-offs and pressures facing specific occupations. The Healthcare Workforce Index offers a more comprehensive and comparative approach. By evaluating four key dimensions—shortage, turnover, growth, and wages—across multiple and often interdependent healthcare roles, the index helps identify which occupations face the

Acknowledgement: This report was made possible by the Oregon Nurse Advancement Fund.

Suggested Citation: Allgeyer, R. (2025). *Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index: Understanding Nursing in the Broader Healthcare Labor Market*. Portland, Oregon: Oregon Center for Nursing.

Copyright © 2025 Oregon Center for Nursing

**Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index:
Understanding Nursing in the Broader Healthcare Labor Market**

greatest workforce stress and which are relatively more stable or competitive. For the nursing workforce, this index helps describe the opportunities and challenges with complementary healthcare roles and directs policy toward the issues that can reduce vacancies and burnout.

Method

The Oregon Healthcare Workforce index includes 35 healthcare occupations and incorporates four publicly reported measures. All measures utilized publicly available data from OED, notably their wage data and their 10-year occupational employment projections. The four measures are:

- **Growth:** This measure examines the growth in positions within occupations over the 10-year period of 2023-2032 (OED, 2024a). The calculation entails the percentage change of projected employment in 2032 over employment in 2023.
- **Shortage:** An indicator of how many vacant positions exist for each occupation. It is based on the ratio of total number of projected job openings to the number employed in 2023 (OED, 2024a).
- **Turnover:** Because occupation-level turnover data does not reliably exist, a proxy measure was used to assess turnover. It is based on the ratio of job openings due to attrition over total job openings for a given occupation (OED, 2024a).
- **Wage:** The median wage is a central indicator of economic viability and competitiveness of an occupation and is a strong signal of how well workers in that occupation are rewarded in the labor market. This measure is the

reported median wage for each occupation (OED, 2024b).

Occupations were assigned ordinal ranks for each measure to allow comparison across roles. Lower ranks indicate stronger performance on that specific dimension. These ordinal ranks were summed up to create an overall ranking.

Physicians were not included in the Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index due to data limitations within OED's publicly available datasets. The occupational projections and wage data used to construct the index do not provide reliable or complete information for physicians as a unified occupational group. The data often separates physicians into subspecialties and tends to lack comprehensive wage reporting due to confidentiality thresholds within these subspecialties.

Key Findings

The index reveals important distinctions across occupations:

- **Nurse practitioners and physician assistants** rank near the top of the index, due to strong projected growth, moderate shortages, and relatively low turnover.
- **Registered nurses (RNs)** rank mid-range, with high projected demand and relatively high wages, but also high turnover and moderate shortages.
- Some allied health roles, such as **diagnostic medical sonographers** and **respiratory therapists**, also show high turnover and moderate wage competitiveness.

- **Nurse anesthetists** top the index, driven by high wages, moderate turnover, and limited shortages.

These findings show that while nursing roles are under strain, they are not alone. Several non-nursing occupations—including roles that support nursing—face similar or even greater challenges, particularly around turnover and shortage.

When other healthcare roles experience instability, nurse workloads increase, and retention becomes harder to sustain. Conversely, when advanced practitioners face shortages, nurses may have fewer colleagues to share patient care responsibilities or manage team leadership demands.

Together, these dynamics show that Oregon's nursing workforce depends on the strength and stability of the entire care team.

Implications for Policy and Planning

The Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index highlights that nursing workforce challenges cannot be solved in isolation. The same pressures that affect nursing—such as turnover, wage competition, and limited growth opportunities—also shape the experiences of other healthcare professionals. Policies that focus only on nurses risk overlooking the structural conditions that drive instability across the entire system.

These rankings are not intended to suggest that one role is more valuable than another. Instead, they reveal where workforce pressures are most intense and how those pressures relate across interconnected professions.

This index provides a foundation for more targeted and comparative workforce planning. It

highlights that nursing workforce challenges are part of broader systemic pressures affecting the healthcare sector. Interventions aimed solely at nursing may miss opportunities to strengthen other vulnerable parts of the workforce, which may then in turn weaken the nursing workforce if they are not tended to. Moreover, understanding how nursing compares to other roles can help inform recruitment strategies, wage competitiveness, and retention investments.

Conclusion

The Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index shows where nursing stands relative to other healthcare occupations. By combining four indicators from OED into a single, comparative tool, it clarifies which roles and settings are strained currently. This tool offers a data-informed foundation for more responsive and equitable workforce policy across Oregon's healthcare system.

This comparative approach is especially useful for understanding nursing's unique position. While nurses represent the largest segment of the healthcare workforce, they are not alone in facing labor market challenges. By evaluating nursing alongside other clinical roles, such as physical therapists, medical technologists, and physician assistants, the index helps distinguish which issues are specific to nursing and which reflect broader sectoral trends. This insight enables employers, policymakers, and educators to more effectively target investments, design recruitment and retention strategies, and align workforce policies with the evolving needs of Oregon's healthcare system.

References

Michigan Health Council (2024). Michigan healthcare workforce index: Insights into Michigan's nursing workforce. Okemos MI. Retrieved from <https://www.mhc.org/index>

Oregon Employment Department (2024a). Oregon occupational employment projections, 2023-2032. Salem OR. Retrieved from <https://qualityinfo.org/data>

Oregon Employment Department (2024b). 2024 Oregon wage information, statewide. Salem OR. Retrieved from <https://qualityinfo.org/data>

Oregon Healthcare Workforce Index

Occupation	Growth	Shortage	Turnover	Wages	Overall Score
Nurse Anesthetist	5	11	3	1	1
Physical Therapist	7	7	4	16	2
Physician Assistant	3	24	2	6	3
Nurse Practitioner	2	27	1	5	3
Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	1	17	6	13	5
Optometrist	20	3	8	7	6
Pharmacist	23	2	11	3	7
Clinical & Counseling Psychologist	10	15	9	8	8
Dentists, General	32	1	7	2	8
Respiratory Therapist	8	12	5	18	10
Nurse Midwife	21	6	12	4	10
Paramedic	12	9	10	23	12
Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologist	14	14	13	14	13
Occupational Therapist	16	13	14	15	14
Dental Hygienist	15	19	15	12	15
Registered Nurse	26	8	18	10	16
Radiation Therapist	33	4	19	9	17
Radiological Technologist & Technician	25	10	16	17	18
Nuclear Medicine Technologist	34	5	27	11	19
Physical Therapy Assistant	4	35	17	25	20
Cardiovascular Technologist & Technician	29	16	21	19	21
Occupational Therapy Assistant	9	29	24	24	22
Community Health Worker	11	28	22	29	23
Mental Health & Substance Abuse Social Worker	22	21	23	27	24
Emergency Medical Technician	19	22	20	33	25
Medical Assistant	6	33	25	31	26
Clinical Laboratory Technologist & Technician	31	18	26	21	27
Healthcare Social Worker	27	25	29	20	28
Licensed Practical Nurse	28	23	28	22	28
Dental Assistant	18	31	33	28	30
Phlebotomist	17	30	31	32	30
Home Health and Personal Care Aide	13	34	32	35	32
Child, Family, School Social Worker	35	20	35	26	33
Pharmacy Technician	30	26	30	30	33
Certified Nursing Assistant	24	32	34	34	35