

Compensation and Retention:

WHAT OREGON NURSE WAGE DATA TELLS US

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oregon is an attractive place for nurses to work for a variety of reasons, but one of the main ones is the high wages that registered nurses enjoy. Oregon ranks third in the nation in terms of mean hourly wage and has the highest mean hourly wage after adjusting for the cost of living (Gooch, 2025).

Understanding nurse wages in this broader context is important to discussions about Oregon's nursing workforce. Wages influence not only the state's ability to attract nurses, but also where nurses choose to work, whether they stay in their roles, and how the workforce is distributed across care settings. Looking more closely at wages helps clarify both the strengths and the limitations of Oregon's current workforce landscape.

In 2023, the Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) conducted a statewide salary survey of registered nurses (RNs) to better understand wage patterns across practice settings, roles, and geographic regions. With responses from 1,807 nurses, the study provides one of the most detailed Oregon-specific views of RN compensation currently available, addressing a longstanding gap between high-level federal data and less granular national surveys.

Findings indicate the average RN wage in Oregon is \$55.14 per hour (\$114,694 annually), closely aligning with external benchmarks. Hospitals offer

the highest wages, while non-hospital settings show relatively narrow variation. Additionally, geographic differences are evident, with higher nominal wages in the Portland metropolitan area and other areas west of the Cascades.

A key and unexpected finding emerges when adjusting wages for cost of living: nurses in rural regions often experience greater purchasing power than their urban counterparts, despite lower nominal wages.

This challenges prevailing assumptions about rural wage competitiveness and has important implications for recruitment and retention strategies.

Overall, this report provides critical, Oregon-specific insights into the structure of nurse compensation and offers valuable guidance for policymakers, employers, and nursing professionals seeking to improve workforce stability, address perceived inequities, and develop more effective, data-informed retention strategies across diverse practice settings.

The findings from OCN's 2023 survey remain highly relevant given ongoing concerns about nurse vacancies, workforce distribution, and retention. By re-releasing this data, OCN hopes to generate conversation around nurse wages, challenging incorrect assumptions and helping inform current policy and workforce strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, OCN conducted a statewide wage survey of Oregon's RNs. This comprehensive examination was undertaken to shed light on the disparities in compensation for RNs across various practice settings and geographic regions within Oregon. This pivotal research aimed to unveil the underlying wage structures influencing nurse retention and challenge prevailing assumptions about income variations among nurses. By engaging nurses from every corner of the state, representing a broad spectrum of practice environments, this survey provides a robust foundation for understanding the economic landscape faced by these vital healthcare professionals. This endeavor sought not only to map out the current state of nurse compensation but also to inform and guide policymakers, nursing professionals, and employers in addressing the critical issues of workforce sustainability and fairness in pay.

In 2025, OCN revised the report based on the 2023 study to include additional data graphs that allow for easier comparison across variables (e.g., practice setting and position). These data remain pertinent as nurse compensation typically evolves gradually through structured mechanisms like contracts and annual adjustments; in other words, the 2023 data remain a stable and informative baseline. More importantly, the survey's key insights, such as relative differences across practice settings and the rural versus urban purchasing power dynamic, are structural patterns that persist even as wages rise. These findings continue to align with external benchmarks, including those from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, reinforcing that the data remain valid and relevant.

METHODS

Between November 16 and December 8, 2023, 42,530 RNs licensed by the state of Oregon were

invited to participate in the 2023 OCN RN Salary Survey. The survey was completed by 1,807 RNs. The survey was administered electronically via an email invitation by OCN. Responses were submitted electronically, and the data was managed and analyzed by OCN staff.

This survey instrument was based on income and earnings questions from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS) [U.S. Department of Commerce]. The CPS is a monthly sample survey sponsored jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and is the primary sources of labor force statistics in the United States.

OCN's survey asked respondents about their hourly wage and work hours, along with questions pertaining to the respondent's practice setting, nursing position, and demographic information such as location of practice, longevity, and educational attainment.

The results of the survey are presented as average hourly wages, while annual earnings are estimated by multiplying the average hourly wage by 2,080 work hours per year (Oregon Employment Department, 2023). According to Bureau of Labor Statistics researchers, the measure of central tendency for wage data is generally reported as the median, because the distribution of wages usually does not meet the statistical requirement for the use of parametric statistics, such as a mean, as the influence of very high wage earners skew the average markedly toward the high end of the wage scale (West, Kratzke, & Butani, 1992). However, when the criteria for describing a normal distribution is met, parametric statistics, like the mean (average), can be used (Wilks, 1946). The assumptions that must be met in describing a normal distribution are symmetry, unimodal, asymptotic, and when the mean, median, and mode are equal.



The distribution of wage data collected by OCN's survey meets all criteria and thus, it is appropriate to report means. The mean wage from respondents was \$55.14 per hour and the reported median wage was \$54.63. While the mean and the median are not equal, they differ by \$0.51, which represents a difference of less than one percent (0.93%).

Most of the analyses of wage data from this survey were conducted statewide. However, a series of analyses were conducted by region of the state to assess geographic disparities among nurse wages. For these analyses, the regions defined by the Oregon Employment Department were used (see below).

COUNTY COMPOSITION OF OREGON EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT'S REGION

REGION	COUNTIES
East Cascades	Crook, Deschutes, Gilliam, Hood River, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler
Eastern	Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa
Lane	Lane
Mid-Valley	Linn, Marion, Polk, Yamhill
Northwest	Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook
Rogue Valley	Jackson, Josephine
Southwestern	Coos, Curry, Douglas
Tri-County	Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington

Key Findings: An Exploration of Wages Across Variables

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

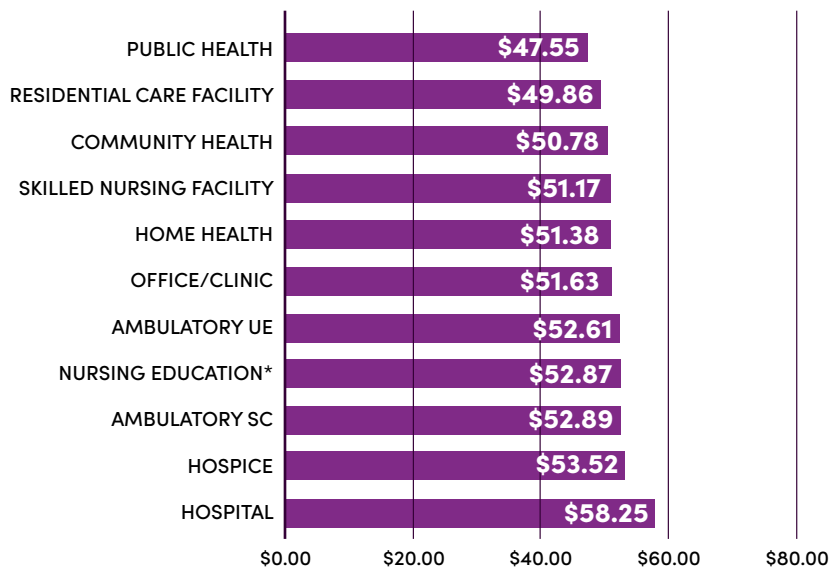
Each of the pages that follow examines a different variable. Data is presented in table format, followed by detailed interpretation and analysis. The wage variables covered in this report include:

- Practice setting
- Position
- Practice setting and staff nurses
- Longevity
- Level of education attained
- Region
- Region and staff nurses
- Region and cost of living

AVERAGE WAGE BY PRACTICE SETTING

PRACTICE SETTING	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
Ambulatory Surgical Center	90	\$52.89	\$110,014
Ambulatory Urgent/Emergency	50	\$52.61	\$109,435
Community Health	42	\$50.78	\$105,612
Home Health	46	\$51.38	\$106,875
Hospice	61	\$53.52	\$111,315
Hospital	894	\$58.25	\$121,163
Nursing Education*	54	\$52.87	\$82,483
Office/Clinic	248	\$51.63	\$107,390
Public Health	42	\$47.55	\$98,898
Residential Care Facility	25	\$49.86	\$103,702
Skilled Nursing Facility	55	\$51.17	\$106,430
Across All Practice Settings		\$55.14	\$114,694

* Note: Based on 9-Month Contract



Based on the data from this survey, the average wage for RNs in Oregon is \$55.14/hour (\$114,694 annually), which is comparable to the wage reported for RNs by the Oregon Employment Department at \$53.23/hour (\$110,710 annually).

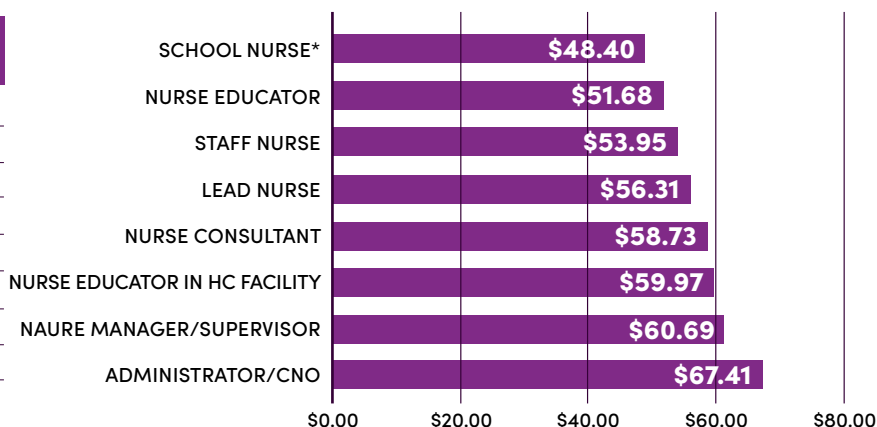
The main findings from the analysis of wages by practice setting show:

- RNs practicing in hospital settings tend to earn higher wages (\$58.25/hour) than nurses practicing in other settings.
- Wages for RNs practicing in non-hospital settings tend to be similar across settings (Range: \$47.55–\$53.52/hour).
- RNs practicing in public health tended to earn less (\$47.55/hour) than nurses in other settings.
- Nurses in nursing education make a comparable wage to other non-hospital RNs, but annual earnings are lower due to the shorter contract period of about 9 months.
- While some nursing programs offer 12-month contracts for year-around school or for faculty teaching during summer sessions, based on the reported hourly wage, nurses practicing in nursing education (including administrators) and working under a 12-month contract would earn about \$109,970 per year.

AVERAGE WAGE BY POSITION

PRACTICE POSITION	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
Administrator/CNO	24	\$67.41	\$140,221
Lead Nurse	161	\$56.31	\$117,133
Nurse Consultant	31	\$58.73	\$122,150
Nurse Educator*	51	\$51.68	\$80,624
Nurse Educator in HC Facility	16	\$59.97	\$124,735
Nurse Manager/Supervisor	166	\$60.69	\$126,240
School Nurse*	31	\$48.40	\$75,500
Staff Nurse	1,103	\$53.95	\$112,215
Across All Practice Positions		\$55.14	\$114,694

* Note: Based on 9-Month Contract



These data show the average wage earned by RNs by the positions they hold, regardless of the setting in which they practice.

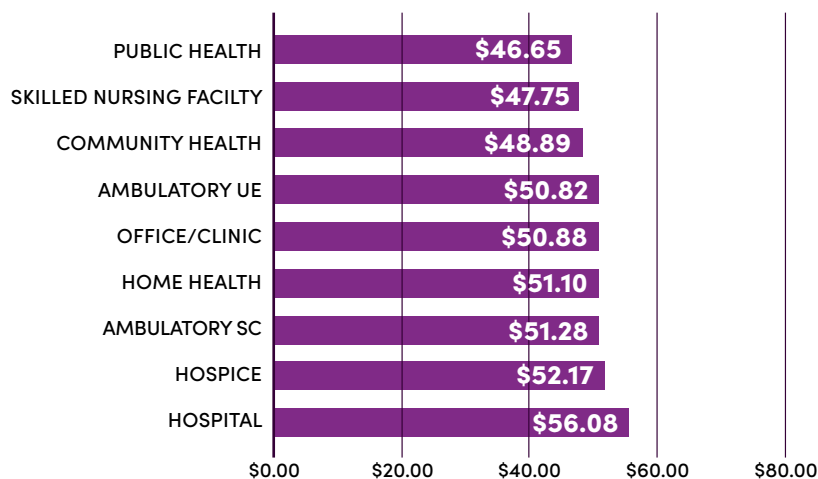
- RNs in leadership positions (e.g., administrators, nurse managers, and lead nurses) tend to earn higher wages than nurses in most other specialized positions and staff nurses.
- Staff nurses' average wage is \$53.95/hour, which is about \$112,215 per year.
- The wage earned by nurse educators is somewhat lower than staff nurses; their annual wage is affected by the shorter 9-month contract period. While many nurse educators work under a 9-month contract,

there are instances where a nurse educator may work under a 12-month contract (year-round schooling or teaching during summer sessions) and earn about \$107,494 per year.

- School nurses tend to earn the lowest wage among nurses surveyed, and their annual wage is also affected by a shorter contract period (9 months).

AVERAGE WAGE FOR STAFF NURSES BY PRACTICE SETTING

PRACTICE SETTING	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
Ambulatory Surgical Center	72	\$51.28	\$106,669
Ambulatory Urgent/Emergency	42	\$50.82	\$105,702
Community Health	14	\$48.89	\$101,682
Home Health	30	\$51.10	\$106,278
Hospice	42	\$52.17	\$108,514
Hospital	653	\$56.08	\$116,645
Office/Clinic	140	\$50.88	\$105,820
Public Health	17	\$46.65	\$97,022
Skilled Nursing Facility	23	\$47.75	\$99,315

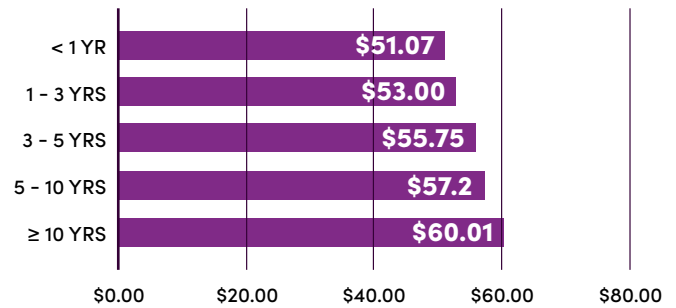


This analysis directly compares the wages of staff nurses across various practice settings. The large number of staff nurses responding to the survey allows for comparisons across practice settings, which is not available for other positions due to small cell sizes. Staff nurses account for about 61% of survey respondents.

- Staff nurses practicing in hospital settings earn the largest wage (\$56.08/hour) across all reported practice settings.
- Staff nurses in home health and hospice earn higher wages than staff nurses working in skilled nursing facilities and are on par with nurses practicing in ambulatory care (e.g., office/clinic, ambulatory surgical centers, and urgent/emergency care centers).

AVERAGE WAGE BY LONGEVITY

LONGEVITY	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
Less than 1 year	332	\$51.07	\$106,234
At least 1 year but less than 3 years	558	\$53.00	\$110,246
At least 3 years but less than 5 years	236	\$55.75	\$115,966
At least 5 years but less than 10 years	341	\$57.29	\$119,163
10 years or more	345	\$60.01	\$124,819

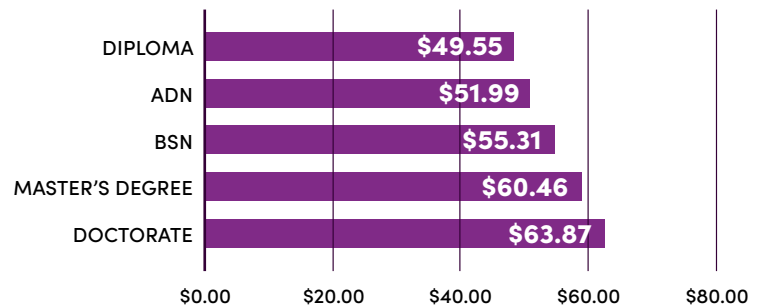


An examination of these data shows a steady increase in pay corresponding with increased longevity. These data reflect wages based on longevity alone and do not account for differences in practice setting or position.

- RNs with 10 or more years of experience tend to earn almost \$10 per hour more than RNs with less than 1 year of practice experience.
- These data show a steady progression of pay with experience in nursing, although changes in setting and/or nursing role will also likely impact the increase of wages over the course of a nurse's career.

AVERAGE WAGE BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
Diploma	22	\$49.55	\$103,063
ADN	408	\$51.99	\$108,129
BSN	1,147	\$55.31	\$115,049
Master's Degree	199	\$60.46	\$125,757
Doctorate (DNP, PhD, or DNSc)	17	\$63.87	\$132,841

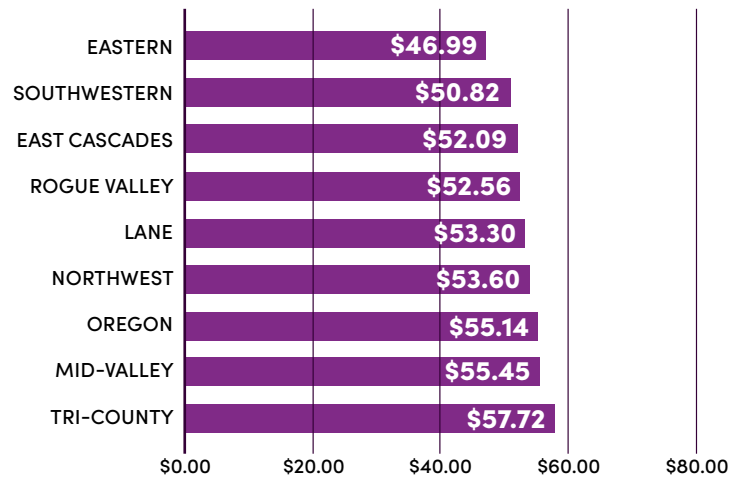


Wages for RNs tended to increase linearly with the level of education attained. As with previous analyses, these data only examined the impact of education on wages and do not account for differences in pay across practice settings, position, or longevity.

- RNs holding a baccalaureate degree tend to earn about \$3 more per hour than associate degree prepared RNs.
- RNs with graduate-level education tend to earn between \$5–\$8 more per hour than those with a baccalaureate degree.

AVERAGE WAGE BY REGION

REGION	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
East Cascades	181	\$52.09	\$108,345
Eastern	76	\$46.99	\$97,733
Lane	135	\$53.30	\$110,856
Mid-Valley	238	\$55.45	\$115,334
Northwest	90	\$53.60	\$111,495
Rogue Valley	159	\$52.56	\$109,323
Southwestern	74	\$50.82	\$105,711
Tri-County	861	\$57.72	\$120,051
State of Oregon		\$55.14	\$114,694

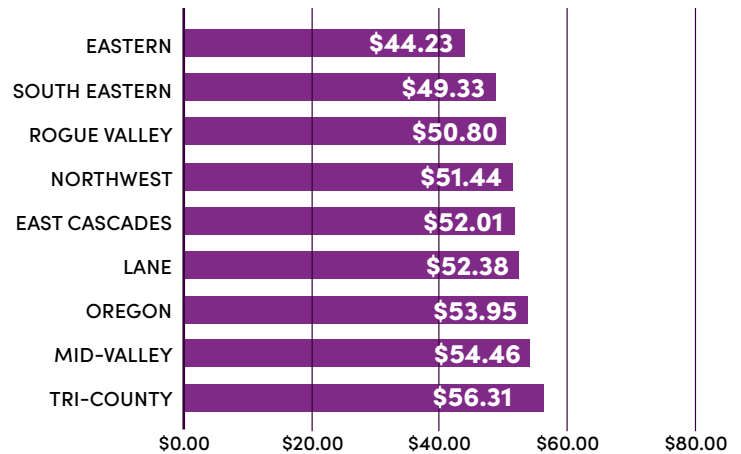


Geographic pay disparities were examined by comparing regions to the statewide average. These data reflect wages across all practice settings and all practice positions.

- Generally, RNs practicing in the western part of the state tend to earn higher wages than the eastern portion, except for the southwestern region.
- RNs practicing in the most populous regions (Tri-County and Mid-Valley regions) tended to earn higher wages than other regions.
- Wages were the lowest in the eastern region of Oregon.
- The observed pay disparities may be due to a variety of reasons, including
 - the location of major medical centers with high competition for nurses,
 - the practice location of specialized nursing roles and nurse management, and
 - higher costs of living within the major metropolitan areas of the state.

AVERAGE WAGE BY REGION FOR STAFF NURSES

REGION	N	AVERAGE WAGE	
		HOURLY	ANNUAL
East Cascades	99	\$52.01	\$108,176
Eastern	41	\$44.23	\$92,008
Lane	76	\$52.38	\$108,959
Mid-Valley	138	\$54.46	\$113,267
Northwest	45	\$51.44	\$106,996
Rogue Valley	105	\$50.80	\$105,661
Southwestern	47	\$49.33	\$102,608
Tri-County	552	\$56.31	\$117,125
State of Oregon		\$53.95	\$112,215

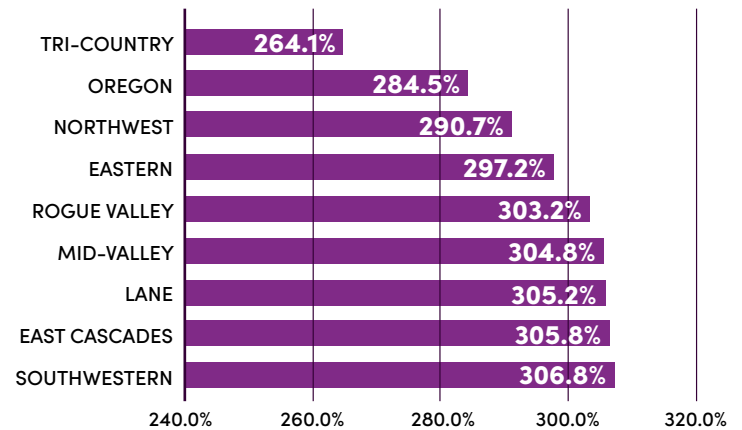


An examination of the wage data on staff nurses across regions eliminates the impact of nurse managers, administrators, and specialty roles in regional comparisons.

- As before, staff nurses practicing in the Tri-County and Mid-Valley regions earn higher wages than the state average.
- Staff nurses practicing in the eastern and southwestern regions tend to earn the lowest wages.
- Wage for staff nurses practicing in the Rogue Valley, Northwest, East Cascades, and Lane earn less than the state average.
- The average wage across these four differ by less than 5%.

AVERAGE WAGE BY REGION ADJUSTED FOR THE COST OF LIVING

REGION	RN WAGE	LIVABLE WAGE	% OF LW
East Cascades	\$52.09	\$17.04	305.8%
Eastern	\$46.99	\$15.81	297.2%
Lane	\$53.30	\$17.46	305.2%
Mid-Valley	\$55.45	\$18.19	304.8%
Northwest	\$53.60	\$18.44	290.7%
Rogue Valley	\$52.56	\$17.33	303.2%
Southwestern	\$50.82	\$16.56	306.8%
Tri-County	\$57.72	\$21.85	264.1%
Oregon	\$55.14	\$19.38	284.5%



To understand the impact of cost of living on spending power, the livable wage for each county was obtained from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Their "Living Wage Calculator" examines geography-specific costs for food, childcare, healthcare, housing, transportation, other basic needs (e.g., clothing, personal care items, and broadband, among others), and taxes at the county, metro, and state levels. This analysis provides insight into the spending power of wages earned by nurses in various regions across the state. The data show the nursing wages as a percent of the living wage in the respective region.

- When adjusted for the cost of living, RNs in the Tri-County region (Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties) had less actual spending power than the statewide average and all the other regions.
- RNs in more than half of the state's regions earned up to three times (300%) of their region's living wage.
- RNs practicing in rural regions of the state tend to have higher "real" wages compared to nurses in the Portland metro area.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

These findings provide fresh insights into the wages earned by nurses practicing in Oregon that have not previously been available to healthcare leaders. Generally speaking, wage data come from two sources: national salary studies, and state and federal governmental entities. Both tend to fall short, but in different ways.

National salary studies provide an overview of the compensation of nurses in Oregon but typically lack deeper Oregon-specific information. When national studies do provide regional breakouts, California's size tends to overshadow all the other states on the West Coast.

State and federal sources, such as data from the Oregon Employment Department or the Bureau of Labor Statistics, provide a high-level view of the wages earned in Oregon but do not offer the level of granularity necessary to understand the wage structure across the various settings or geographic locations where nurses practice.

Thus this report represents a significant step toward demystifying longstanding salary disparities and fostering a more informed dialogue about the economic valuation of nursing practice in Oregon.

The most interesting, and unexpected, finding from this study is that nurses in rural communities across Oregon tend to earn higher relative wages than RNs practicing in the metro areas of northwest Oregon (when adjusted for the local cost of living). This finding runs counter to the perception of employers in rural communities. In a recent study examining the barriers and attractors related to retaining and recruiting nurses in rural Oregon communities, employers from various practice settings indicated that they

felt the local employers could not compete with the wages paid by employers in the Portland area (Allgeyer & Schoenthal, 2023). While these employers are correct in the sense that wages in the Tri-County area are higher than those paid by employers in rural communities, nurses' spending power tends to be greater in rural communities due to the lower cost of living.

The findings from this study provide employers with objective data on the wages nurses earn in rural communities. More broadly, these findings reinforce that wage levels alone do not fully explain Oregon's nurse workforce challenges.

Understanding how wages interact with factors such as cost of living, practice setting, and geographic distribution of nurses is essential to developing more targeted and effective workforce strategies.

These are crucial insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, nursing professionals, employers, and recruiters who are at the forefront of crafting strategies to enhance nurse retention and ensure equitable compensation. By focusing on these disparities and drawing attention to the factors influencing nurse retention, the report aims to serve as a catalyst for meaningful policy changes and improvements in the professional lives of nurses across the state.

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