

MEDICAL ASSISTANTS in California



Healthcare is one of the largest employers in California, providing a wide range of well-paying career opportunities for residents. In 2014, the Centers of Excellence partnered with the Health Workforce Initiative (HWI) and the California Hospital Association (CHA) on two healthcare surveys to **assess workforce needs** at both state and regional levels. The surveys targeted three healthcare sectors:

- **Hospitals** provide medical, diagnostic, and treatment services to inpatients and some outpatient services.
- **Ambulatory Healthcare Services** provide healthcare services to outpatients in settings such as offices of physicians, outpatient care centers, and laboratories.
- **Nursing and Residential Care Facilities** provide residential care combined with either nursing, supervisory, or other types of care as needed.

Statewide, 190 hospitals responded to the hospital survey and 1,600 clinics, labs and facilities responded to the ambulatory and residential care survey, providing an excellent sample to analyze healthcare workforce demand across the state and in several regions. The research focused on identifying: (1) labor market demand for key occupations in healthcare industries, (2) training supply supporting healthcare industries, and (3) key issues impacting supply and demand.

This report is one in a series of reports profiling healthcare occupations in California. There are 12 occupational profiles in the series: certified nursing assistants, home health aides, licensed vocational nurses, medical assistants, medical coders, registered nurses, physician assistants, healthcare social workers, medical laboratory technicians, clinical laboratory scientists, occupational therapy assistants and respiratory therapists.

Labor Market Demand

In California, there are approximately 24,500 medical assistant (MA) jobs in the ambulatory and residential care subsectors. Over the next 12 months, employers in these subsectors will need to fill over 4,700 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs.

Projected Employment for Medical Assistants¹

Ambulatory & Residential Care Industries	2014 Employment	12-Month Growth	Replacement Jobs	Total Openings (Growth + Replacements)
	24,515	1,234	3,504	4,738

California Hospital Association members that responded to the survey employ approximately 2,990 medical assistants. This sample does not include an estimate of total hospital employment because not all of California's hospitals participated in the survey.

Current Employment for Medical Assistants

Hospitals	Current Employment*	Full-time Positions	Part-time Positions	Per Diem Jobs
	2,992	2,573	419	284

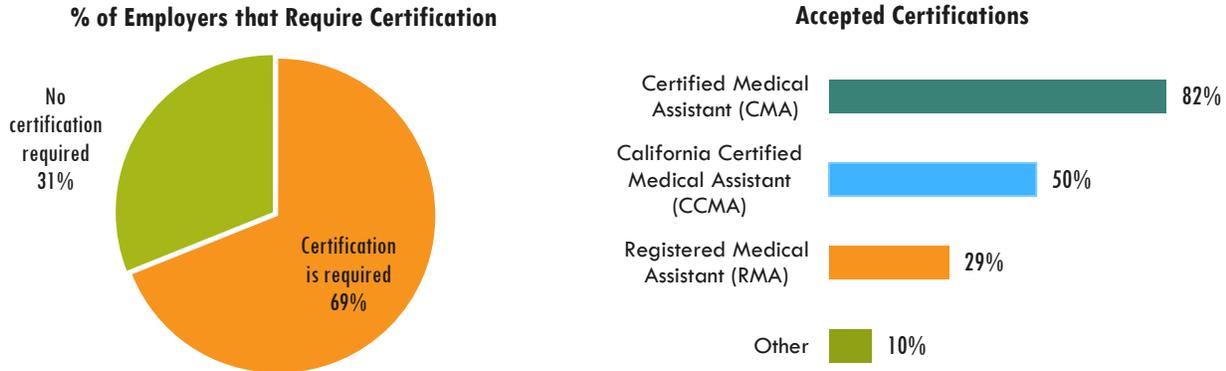
*Ending headcount for the 4th quarter of 2013.

¹ Ambulatory/residential care and hospital employment counts include full-time and part-time employment. Additional data on per diem employment for hospitals is totaled separately.

Hiring Trends

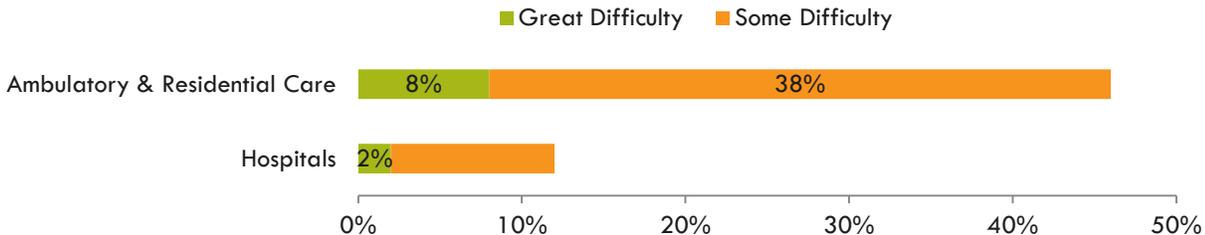
In the survey of **ambulatory and residential care** providers, employers were asked about their medical assistant related certification requirements. These certifications include the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), the California Certified Medical Assistant (CCMA) by California Certifying Board of Medical Assistants (CCBMA) and the Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) by the American Medical Technologists (AMT).

Overall, more than two-thirds of non-hospital employers do require some certification for medical assistants that they employ. Of these, CMA and CCMA certifications are the most widely accepted. Generally, the RMA certification is not as valuable as others. Other certifications listed as important by employers include a vocational or education certificate from an accredited education institution.



Difficulty Hiring

Just under half of the employers in the **ambulatory and residential care** subsectors reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level medical assistant positions. Among **hospital** employers, only 12% reported any difficulty finding qualified applicants for MA entry-level positions. Minimum qualifications may include certification, communication and customer service skills.



Training Supply

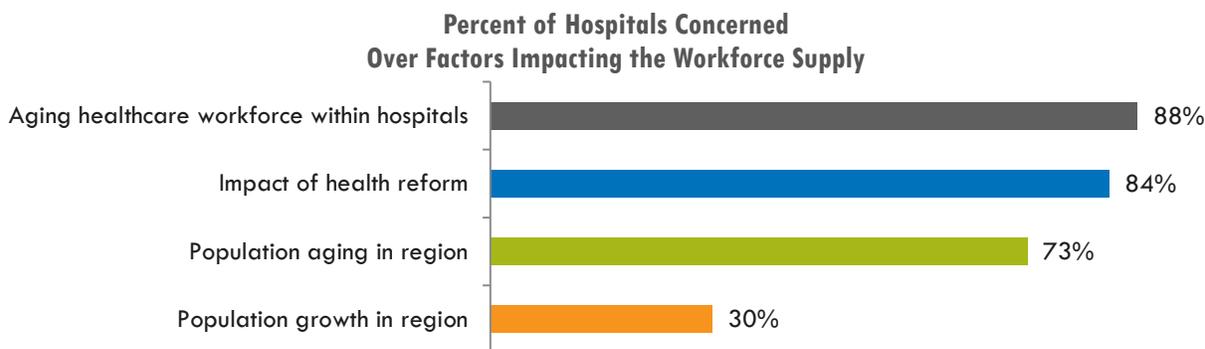
There are 42 community colleges and 151 private education institutions with medical assisting training programs across the state.

Degrees/Certificates Conferred (3-yr annual average)	CA Community Colleges – Associate Degree	CA Community Colleges – Certificate	Private Education – Associate Degree	Private Education – Certificate	Annual Average (All)
	248	775	2,476	14,530	18,029

This estimate is based on data reported to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office Data Mart and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Higher education institutions are required to report completion data to NCES if they participate in any federal financial assistance program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Completion data not reported to the NCES or CCCC Data Mart were not included in the estimate.

Supply Challenges

The healthcare sector is facing a variety of factors that may have a direct impact on the workforce supply. Across California, the majority of hospitals are concerned that health reform, the aging hospital workforce, and the aging population will have a significant impact on the state’s ability to keep up with healthcare workforce demand. Healthcare reform is expanding coverage to thousands of uninsured residents, which is increasing demand for healthcare services across the board. The aging population will expand demand for certain types of services, creating additional need for skilled workers.



While these two factors will increase demand for new healthcare workers, the aging healthcare workforce within hospitals creates a need for replacement workers. In the hospital setting, this is not a critical issue in the medical assistant workforce. Seventy-one percent of medical assistants employed by hospitals fall within the age cohort of 25 to 45, which indicates that there is a sufficient pipeline of young workers entering the medical assisting field.²

Ambulatory and Residential Care: Employer Perspective

Two-thirds (65%) of ambulatory and residential care facilities provide professional development (either in-house or sponsored training) for their MAs. Some of the training topics include: continuing education units to obtain or update certifications, CPR, front and back office administration, electronic health records, updates in policies and treatment protocols, immunizations, vitals, OSHA and HIPPA regulations. Ambulatory and long-term care employers discussed the topics that community colleges could offer or improve upon to support professional development for their existing staff. The following suggestions were offered:

Offer	}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in medical operations in various settings and specialty areas: primary care, urgent care, specialist office, pediatrics, physical therapy and acupuncture • Training on electronic health records, billing and coding • Training in communication (written and spoken) with nursing team, and with patients and family members • Training in phlebotomy, injections and X-ray preparation
Improve	}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate more hands-on components to curriculum (taking vital signs, patient safety during position changes, etc.) • Update medical terminology course (general, specialty & pharmaceutical terms) • Integrate customer service skills into curriculum: effective oral communication, telephone etiquette, eye contact, bedside manner, and compassion for patients • Integrate basic computer skills into curriculum (MS Word, MS Excel) • Integrate workplace skills into curriculum, such as professionalism, business etiquette, time management and cultural diversity

Sidebar Discussion

What is the impact of the Affordable Care Act on the medical assisting workforce?

→ 47% of ambulatory and residential care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for medical assistants in response to the Affordable Care Act.

→ 38% are not sure if they are making changes.

² Hospital Survey, statewide data.

In Summary

Key issues affecting supply and demand for medical assistants include:

Ambulatory and Residential Care

- 46% of the ambulatory and residential care employers reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level medical assistant positions.
- The majority of ambulatory and residential care employers require certification when hiring medical assistants. The preferred certification is Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) certification by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA). To be more competitive and marketable in the field, future MA's should acquire either CMA or CCMA certification.
- The majority of ambulatory and residential care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for medical assistants in response to the Affordable Care Act.

Hospitals

- Seven out of 10 medical assistants in the hospital setting fall in the age cohort of 25 to 45, indicating there is a sufficient pipeline of young workers entering the medical assistant field.
- Very few hospitals reported difficulty finding qualified MA applicants.

Community colleges can improve upon existing medical assistant programs by aligning curriculum with national certification standards. In addition, employers indicated that their staff needs more hands-on training in daily duties, along with communication, customer service and workplace skills to be more successful in the office and clinical settings where they are employed.

For More information

This document and others are available to download at www.coecc.net/health.

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More about the Health Workforce Initiative: The HWI provides education and training programs to meet emerging demands for healthcare industry workers; to determine needs, facilitate development of innovative solutions and to locate resources to implement planned responses; to evaluate and initialize health-related educational programs. More information about the Health Workforce Initiative is available at www.ca-hwi.org.



More about the Centers of Excellence: The Centers of Excellence (COE), in partnership with business and industry, deliver regional workforce research customized for community college decision making and resource development. This information has proven valuable to colleges in beginning, revising, or updating economic development and Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, strengthening grant applications, assisting in the accreditation process, and in supporting strategic planning efforts. More information about the Centers of Excellence is available at www.coecc.net.

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