

RESPIRATORY CARE PRACTITIONERS 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 skilled nursing, long-term, transitional care, 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: respiratory care practitioners, certified nursing assistants, healthcare social workers, home health aides, licensed vocational nurses, medical assistants, medical coders, physician assistants, medical laboratory technicians, clinical laboratory scientists, occupational therapy assistants and registered nurses.

Labor Market Demand

In California, there are approximately 5,700 respiratory care practitioner (RCP)¹ jobs in the ambulatory and residential care subsectors. Over the next 12 months, employers in these subsectors will need to fill over 860 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs.

Projected Employment for Respiratory Care Practitioners²

Ambulatory & Residential Care Industries	2014 Employment	12-Month Growth	Replacement Jobs	Total Openings (Growth + Replacements)
	5,725	220	646	866

California Hospital Association members that responded to the survey employ 4,690 respiratory care practitioners. 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 Respiratory Care Practitioners

Hospitals	Current Employment*	Full-time Positions	Part-time Positions	Per Diem Jobs
	4,690	3,611	1,079	1,280

*Ending headcount for the 4th quarter of 2013

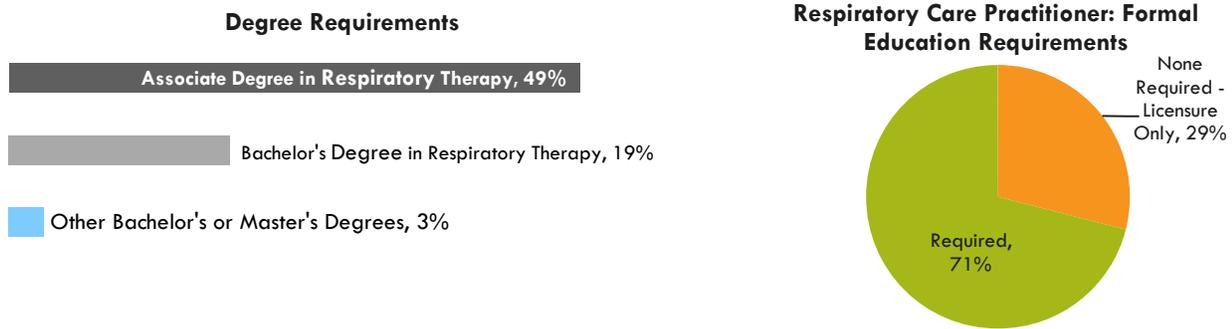
¹ Once licensed, graduates of Respiratory Therapy education programs are known as Respiratory Care Practitioners, the term used by the Respiratory Care Board of California that is the regulatory and licensing agency, <http://www.rcb.ca.gov>. However, some employers still use the occupational term of Respiratory Therapist.

² 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.

Employer Preferences

In the **ambulatory and residential care survey**, employers were asked about the level of formal education required for respiratory care practitioners at their organization. Almost three-fourths (71%) of employers require formal education — either an Associate Degree in Respiratory Therapy (49%) or a Bachelor’s Degree in Respiratory Therapy (19%).

Since July 1, 2000, the minimum education requirement for licensure in California is completion of an associate degree from an accredited program. Therefore the 29% of employers who indicated they have no requirements for formal education, only the State of California license, most likely hired their respiratory therapists prior to the adoption of the current law.



Difficulty Hiring

Nearly half of employers in the **ambulatory and residential care** subsectors reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level respiratory care practitioner positions.³ Beside the required current state license, the minimum qualifications may include experience in acute and/or non-acute care settings, knowledge of another language, basic computer skills, and communication skills.



Training Supply

The minimum education requirement for a RCP is an associate degree. Effective January 1, 2015, passing the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) exam is the minimum requirement for licensure to practice in California. According to the California Department of Consumer Affairs, Respiratory Care Board of California, there are currently 37 accredited programs in the state.⁴ Eighteen (18) programs are offered at community colleges and 19 programs are offered at private education institutions. Thirty-six (36) programs offer an associate degree, and one program offers a bachelor’s degree. These programs annually confer approximately 1,222 degrees.⁵ One community college and five private education institutions did not report student completion data.

Degrees Conferred (3-year annual average)	CA Community Colleges Associate Degree	Private Education Institution Associate Degree	Private Education Institution Bachelor's Degree	Total Awards
	407	801	14	1,222

³ Hospitals were not asked about the level of difficulty they experienced in finding qualified applicants for entry-level respiratory care practitioner positions.

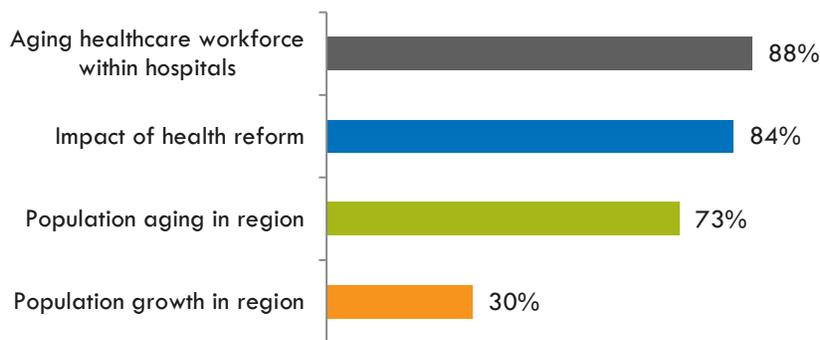
⁴ <http://www.rcb.ca.gov/applicants/caschools.shtml>

⁵ 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 CCCCCO 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 previously 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.

Percent of Hospitals Moderately to Extremely Concerned Over Factors Impacting the Workforce Supply



- California Community Colleges Accredited Respiratory Therapist Programs**
- American River College
 - Antelope Valley College
 - Butte College
 - Crafton Hills College
 - East LA College (in partnership with Santa Monica College)
 - El Camino College
 - Foothill College
 - Fresno City College
 - Grossmont College
 - Hartnell College
 - Los Angeles Valley College
 - Modesto Junior College
 - Mt. San Antonio College
 - Napa Valley College
 - Ohlone College (in partnership with Diablo Valley College)
 - Orange Coast College
 - Skyline College
 - Victor Valley College

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 respiratory care practitioner workforce. **Fifty-seven percent of respiratory care practitioners employed by hospitals fall within the age cohort of 25 to 45, which indicates that there is a sufficient pipeline of young workers entering this field.**⁶

Ambulatory and Residential Care: Employer Perspective

Nearly half (46%) of ambulatory and residential care facilities provide professional development (either in-house or sponsored training) for their respiratory care practitioners. Some of the topics include: continuing education units; policies and procedures; new trends in treatments, protocols and techniques; guidelines and regulations; and training on sleep breathing disorders. Employers discussed the topics that community colleges could offer or improve upon to support professional development for their existing staff.

Offer

- Establish new programs in rural areas in regions with moderate-to-large populations expressing demand for more qualified RCPs
- Expand existing programs to enroll more students in classes to meet employment demand
- Training/experience with neonatal and pediatric patients
- Training on medical records and coding
- Training on patient care related to behavioral issues
- Training on conveying compassion, appropriate customer service, patient interaction, and communication

Improve

- Patient services in home health and hospice settings
- Training using more advanced equipment & technology
- Training in communications: with other departments, patients and family members
- Training with patient care who are on ventilators and those with COPD
- Tracheotomy care of patients who take showers
- Training in cultural diversity
- Sleep apnea testing

⁶ Hospital Survey, statewide data.

In Summary

Key issues affecting supply and demand for respiratory care practitioners include:

- **Ambulatory and residential care** employers will need to fill over 866 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs over the next 12 months.
- 42% of **ambulatory and residential care** employers report difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level respiratory care practitioner positions.
- There are 37 accredited Respiratory Therapist programs in the state that award more than 1,222 degrees annually.
- Almost one-fourth of employers (22%) require a bachelor's degree, yet only one program, Loma Linda University, currently offers this program.
- Some regions, especially rural areas, are requesting colleges to establish education programs due to lack of available qualified RCPs. Other areas are requesting existing programs to expand their classes to include additional students to meet employment demand.
- 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.

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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