

# Physical Therapist Assistant

*Inland Empire/Desert Region (Riverside and San Bernardino counties)*

*This workforce demand report uses state and federal job projection data developed before the economic impact of COVID-19. The COE is monitoring the situation and will provide more information as it becomes available. Please consult with local employers to understand their current employment needs.*

## Summary

- The community college physical therapist assistant program provides the knowledge and skills that lead to the physical therapist assistants occupation.
- The physical therapist assistants occupation is projected to have 100 annual job openings, increasing employment by 34% through 2024.
- The 10<sup>th</sup> percentile hourly wage for this occupation is \$25.35 per hour, above the regional \$19.94 per hour self-sustainable wage standard for a single adult with one child.
- There are no physical therapist assistant programs offered by community colleges in the region. However, private educational institutions in the region conferred an annual average of 46 awards over the last three academic years.
- The Centers of Excellence recommends expanding physical therapist assistant programs to meet the demand for physical therapist assistants due to projected annual job openings and the high hourly earnings.

## Introduction

California Community College physical therapist assistant (TOP 1222.00) programs prepare students for employment through instruction related to the principle and procedures used to assist a physical therapist in implementing a prescribed plan of therapy for a patient, including patient instruction and administration of treatments (Taxonomy of Programs, 2012). The knowledge and skills trained by physical therapist assistant programs lead to the physical therapist assistants occupation. The Public Policy Institute of California identifies this occupation as an essential critical infrastructure occupation. This classification of occupation is vital in supporting California's basic health, safety, and economic needs or may have the ability to social distance (Bohn et al.).

### Physical Therapist Assistants (31-2021)

Assist physical therapists in providing physical therapy treatments and procedures. May, in accordance with state laws, assist in the development of treatment plans, carry out routine functions, document the progress of treatment, and modify specific treatments in accordance with patient status and within the scope of treatment plans established by a physical therapist. Generally requires formal training.

**Sample job titles:** Certified Physical Therapist Assistant (CPTA), Home Care Physical Therapy Assistant, Home Health Physical Therapist Assistant, Licensed Physical Therapist Assistant (LPTA), Licensed Physical Therapy Assistant, Outpatient Physical Therapist Assistant, Per Diem Physical Therapist Assistant (Per Diem PTA), Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA), Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA)

*Entry-Level Educational Requirement:* Associate degree

*Training Requirement:* None

*Work Experience Requirement:* None

*Incumbent workers with a Community College Award or Some Postsecondary Coursework:* 60%

## Job Opportunities

In 2019, there were 542 physical therapist assistant jobs in the Inland Empire/Desert Region. This occupation is projected to have 100 annual job openings to fill new or backfill jobs that workers are permanently vacating (includes occupational transfers and retirements). This occupation is expected to increase employment by 34% through 2024. Exhibit 1 job counts, five-year projected job growth, job openings, and the share of incumbent workers age 55 years and greater working as physical therapist assistants in the Inland Empire/Desert Region.

*Exhibit 1: Physical therapist assistants five-year projections, 2019-2024*

2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	5-Yr % Change (New Jobs)	5-Yr Openings (New + Replacement Jobs)	Annual Openings (New + Replacement Jobs)	% of workers age 55+
542	725	34%	603	100	11%

Source: Emsi 2021.1

## Job Postings

Exhibit 2 displays the number of online job ads posted over the last 12 months, along with the regional and statewide average time to fill for physical therapist assistant positions.

On average, local employers fill online job postings for physical therapist assistant positions within 36 days, 5 days shorter than the statewide average, indicating that local employers likely experience fewer challenges filling open positions than other employers in California as a whole.

*Exhibit 2: Job ads and time to fill*

Job Ads	Regional Average Time to Fill (Days)	California Average Time to Fill (Days)
152	36	41

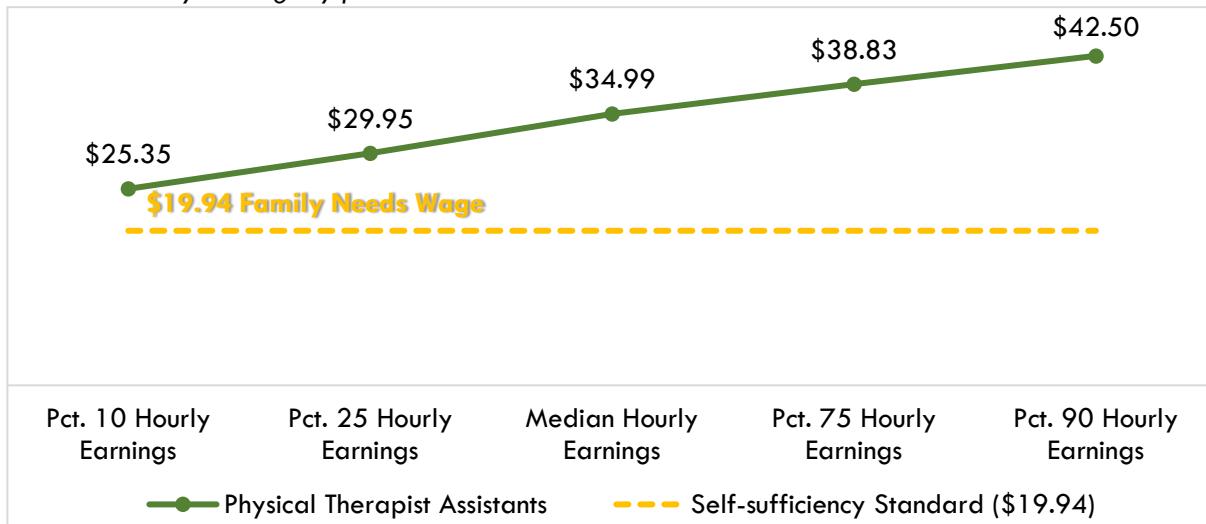
Source: Burning Glass – Labor Insights

## Earnings and Benefits

Community colleges should ensure their training programs lead to employment opportunities that provide self-sustainable income. The University of Washington estimates that a self-sufficient hourly rate for a single adult with one school-age child is \$19.94 per hour or \$41,475 annually in Riverside County; \$19.49 per hour or \$40,539 annually in San Bernardino County (Pearce, 2018). For this study, the higher hourly earnings requirement in Riverside County is adopted as the self-sufficiency standard for the two-county region.

Earnings for physical therapist assistants exceed the self-sustainability rate at the 10th percentile, indicating that approximately the top 90% of workers in this occupation earn self-sufficient hourly wages in the region. Exhibit 3 displays the hourly earnings for the region.

*Exhibit 3: Hourly earnings by percentile*



Source: Emsi 2021.1

According to the occupational guides developed by the California Labor Market Information Division, physical therapist assistants working for large health care providers or government entities usually receive benefits including medical, dental, life, and vision insurance as well as vacation, sick leave, and retirement plans. Benefits vary by employers for assistants working in smaller offices (Detailed Occupational Guides, 2020).

## Advertised Salary

Exhibit 4 displays advertised salary data for physical therapist assistant positions over the last 12 months. Advertised salary information reveals that employers are willing to pay physical therapist assistants \$74,000 annually, above the \$41,475 (\$19.94 hourly) required annually for a family of one adult with a

school-age child to be self-sufficient in Riverside County (\$40,539 annually in San Bernardino County). Consider the salary information with caution since only 32% (49 out of 152) online job postings for this occupation provided salary information. The salary figures are prorated to reflect full-time, annual wage status.

*Exhibit 4: Advertised salary information*

Real-Time Salary Information					
Number of job postings	Less than \$35,000	\$35,000 to \$49,999	\$50,000 to \$74,999	More than \$75,000	Average Annual Salary
49	6%	16%	35%	43%	\$74,000

Source: Burning Glass – Labor Insights

## Employers, Skills, Education, Work Experience, and Certifications

Exhibit 5 displays the employers posting the most online job advertisements for physical therapist assistant positions during the last 12 months in the region.

*Exhibit 5: Employers posting the most online job ads*

Employers	Job Ads
Vibra Healthcare	11
Bridge Home Health & Hospice	10
ONR (Orthopaedic Neurological Rehabilitation)	5
All Care Home Health Care	5
Lorian Health	4
Loma Linda University Health	4
All other employers	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>

Source: Burning Glass – Labor Insights

Exhibit 6 displays a sample of specialized and employability skills employers seek when looking for workers to fill physical therapist assistant positions. Specialized skills are occupation-specific skills that employers request for industry or job competency. Employability skills are foundational skills that transcend industries and occupations; this category is often referred to as "soft skills." The skills requested in job postings may be utilized to guide curriculum development.

Exhibit 6: Sample of in-demand skills from employer online job ads

Specialized Skills	Employability Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)</li> <li>• Home Health</li> <li>• Patient Care</li> <li>• Rehabilitation</li> <li>• Treatment Planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication Skills (Verbal/Oral and Written)</li> <li>• English</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> <li>• Physical Abilities</li> <li>• Teamwork/Collaboration</li> </ul>

Source: Burning Glass – Labor Insights

Exhibit 7 displays the entry-level education typically required to enter employment as a physical therapist assistant according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), educational attainment for incumbent workers with "some college, no degree" and an "associate degree" according to the U.S. Census (2016-17), and the real-time minimum advertised education requirement from employer job ads for physical therapist assistant positions. Job ads reveal that employers sought candidates with an associate degree.

Exhibit 7: Typical entry-level education, educational attainment, and minimum advertised education requirements

Occupation	Typical Entry-Level Education Requirement	CC-Level Educational Attainment*	Real-Time Minimum Advertised Education Requirement			
			Number of Job Ads	High school diploma or vocational training	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
Physical Therapist Assistants	Associate degree	60%	26	-	100%	-

Source: Emsi 2021.1, Burning Glass – Labor Insights

\*Percentage of incumbent workers with a Community College Award or Some Postsecondary Coursework

Exhibit 8 displays the work experience typically required for physical therapist assistants and the real-time work experience requirements from employer job ads for physical therapist assistant positions.

Exhibit 8: Work experience required and real-time work experience requirements

Occupation	Work Experience Typically Required	Real-Time Work Experience			
		Number of Job Ads	0 – 2 years	3 – 5 years	6+ years
Physical Therapist Assistants	None	70	94%	6%	-

Source: Emsi 2021.1, Burning Glass – Labor Insights

The Physical Therapy Board of California (PTBC), within the Department of Consumer Affairs, is the regulatory agency that oversees the licensure for physical therapist assistants. According to the PTBC, there are three ways for applicants to qualify for the National Physical Therapist Assistant Examination by equivalency, through related military experience, 30-semester units of technical training or 36 months of

work experience under a physical therapist, and completion of a professional education program. For more information about physical therapist assistant requirements and training pathways, visit the PTBC website (PTCB, 2021). Exhibit 9 displays the certifications required by employers posting job ads for physical therapist assistant jobs in the Inland Empire/Desert Region.

*Exhibit 9: Certifications required by employer job ads for physical therapist assistants*

Occupation	Certifications
Physical Therapist Assistants (n=100)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Aid CPR AED</li> <li>• Driver's License</li> <li>• Basic Life Support (BLS)</li> <li>• American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Certification</li> </ul>

Source: Burning Glass – Labor Insights

## Student Completions

According to the Chancellor's Office Curriculum Inventory System (COCI), there are no physical therapist assistant (TOP 1222.00) programs offered by community colleges in the Inland Empire/Desert Region. Due to the lack of programs offered in the region, student completion and program outcome information are not available.

Physical therapy technician/assistant (CIP 51.0806) awards reported by other postsecondary education providers are displayed in Exhibit 10. Completion data is compiled from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for the most recent three years available. This program awarded 46 annual average awards. Due to IPEDS reporting limitations, it is assumed that each award represents a qualified worker since it is unknown if students are earning multiple awards from this program.

*Exhibit 10: Other educational providers physical therapy technician/assistant programs, three-year annual average credentials in the Inland Empire/Desert Region*

51.0806 – Physical Therapy Technician/Assistant	Associate degree	Award <1 Academic Year	Other Educational Providers Annual Average Credentials, Academic Years 2016-19
Loma Linda University	45	-	45
Summit College	-	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>46</b>

Source: IPEDS



## Recommendation

The community college physical therapist assistant (TOP 1222.00) program provides the knowledge and skills that lead to the physical therapist assistants occupation. This occupation is projected to have 100 annual job openings over the next five years, increasing employment by 34%. This occupation's 10<sup>th</sup> percentile earnings are \$25.35 per hour, above the \$19.94 per hour self-sustainable earnings estimate for a single adult with one child. This occupation typically requires an associate degree to enter employment, which was confirmed in job postings in which 100% of employers sought job candidates with an associate degree.

There are currently no regional community colleges that offer physical therapist assistant programs. However, private educational institutions in the region conferred an annual average of 46 awards over the last three academic years.

The Centers of Excellence recommends expanding physical therapist assistant programs to meet the demand for physical therapist assistants due to projected annual job openings and the high hourly earnings. Colleges should partner with relevant employers and concentrate on the skills that lead to the physical therapist assistants occupation.

## Contact

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## Appendix: Methodology

Job postings data is limited to the information provided by employers and the ability of artificial intelligence search engines to identify this information. Additionally, preliminary calculations by Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce found that "just 30 to 40 percent of openings for candidates with some college or an associate degree, and only 40 to 60 percent of openings for high school diploma holders appear online" (Carnevale et al., 2014). Online job postings often do not reveal employers' hiring goals or intentions; it is unknown if employers plan to hire one or multiple workers from a single online job posting or collect resumes for future hiring needs. A closed job posting may not be the result of a hired worker.



Table 1: 2019 to 2024 job growth, wages, education, training, and work experience required

Occupation (SOC)	2019 Jobs	5-Yr Change	5-Yr % Change	Annual Openings (New + Replacement Jobs)	Entry-Experienced Hourly Wage Range (10 <sup>th</sup> to 90 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	Median Hourly Wage (50 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	Average Annual Earnings	Typical Entry-Level Education & On-The-Job Training Required	Work Experience Required
Physical Therapist Assistants (31-2021)	542	183	34%	100	\$25.35 to \$42.50	\$34.99	\$71,500	Associate degree & None	None

Source: Emsi 2021.1