



TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

In Support

LD 651 – *An Act to Fund the Maine Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Program*

March 31, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Sally Weiss, and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Hospital Association to testify in support of LD 651.

First, I would like to thank Representative Murphy for introducing this critical legislation to sustain an essential healthcare workforce program.

Maine hospitals, like many healthcare providers across the state, are facing a severe shortage of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, licensed social workers, respiratory therapists, radiology technologists, and many others. In February 2025, the Maine Hospital Association (MHA) conducted a survey to assess current workforce needs and project future requirements based on the age distribution of the existing workforce. The results are alarming: Maine hospitals are actively recruiting for 4,227 budgeted positions, comprising 3,090 full-time and 1,137 part-time roles. Additionally, nearly 5,600 healthcare workers in the state are 55 years or older. These figures highlight not only the immediate demand for healthcare professionals but also the significant gap that will need to be filled as these workers retire.

Furthermore, Maine is projected to experience a 36.2% increase in residents aged 65 and older by 2030, roughly 400,000 individuals. As we know, older adults typically require healthcare services two to three times more than younger individuals, which will further increase demand. Given these projections, we must take immediate action to attract and retain healthcare professionals, especially in rural and underserved communities, where recruitment challenges are even more pronounced.

Many healthcare providers, particularly doctors, nurses, and mental health professionals, are often hesitant to work in these rural or underserved areas due to the high cost of education and the relatively lower salaries offered in these regions, combined with some of the challenges in securing housing and childcare. Loan repayment programs are an effective way to incentivize healthcare workers to take positions in these areas by offering to pay off part or all of their student loans in exchange for a commitment to work in underserved communities for a specified period of time.

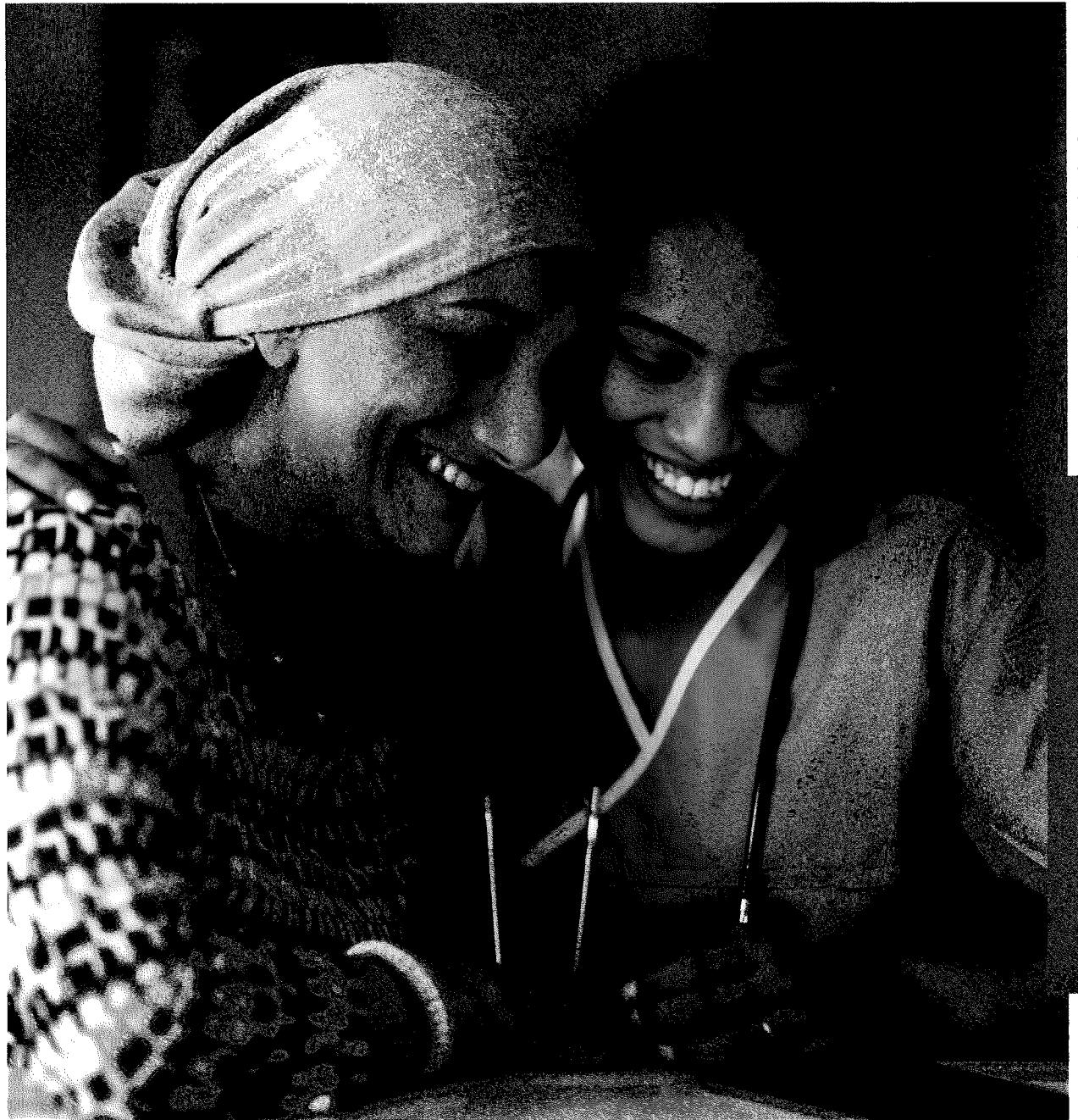
Loan repayment programs, such as the one proposed in LD 651, are one of many tools we can use to address the healthcare workforce shortage in Maine. By doing so, we can ensure that all communities in Maine continue to have access to care close to home.

For these reasons, the Maine Hospital Association strongly supports LD 651.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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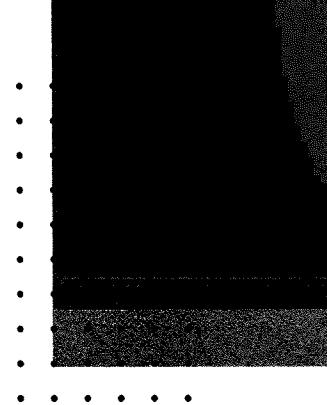
Maine Hospital Association



MAINE'S HOSPITAL
WORKFORCE: CURRENT &
FUTURE NEEDS

MARCH 2025

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2025, the Maine Hospital Association (MHA) conducted a survey of its members to assess current workforce needs and project future requirements based on the age distribution of the existing workforce. Of the 33 members surveyed, 27 responded, yielding an 82% response rate. The survey gathered data on the number of full-time and part-time budgeted positions currently being recruited, as well as the number of employees aged 55 or older by healthcare occupation. Additionally, hospitals were asked about their investments in salary increases, traveler expenses, and workforce development initiatives.

Maine hospitals are actively recruiting for 4,227 budgeted positions, which include 3,090 full-time and 1,137 part-time roles. Beyond filling open positions, hospitals have significantly invested in retaining their current workforce, reporting \$472,912,614 in salary increases between 2023 and 2025—nearly half a billion dollars—representing a 14% increase that outpaces inflation. Furthermore, hospitals have invested an additional \$151,723,080 in physician fees and salaries during the same period, reflecting a 22% increase. It is important to recognize that these salary increases do not account for other rising costs, such as benefits. Furthermore, unlike other industries, healthcare providers—including hospitals—cannot raise prices to offset these expenses. In fact, while hospitals are making these investments, they continue to experience a decline in reimbursements from payers.

Encouragingly, compared to previous years, the demand for contracted labor (or "travelers") has decreased, with total expenditures falling by 29% between 2023 and 2025. This suggests a stronger workforce and greater success in recruitment and pipeline development. Hospitals are also focused on strengthening their workforce pipelines by "growing their own" through workforce development initiatives. On average, hospitals reported investing \$426.29 per employee in workforce development efforts, totaling \$16,751,732 across 26 reporting hospitals in the past year. These efforts include partnerships with academic institutions, funding earn-while-you-learn programs, offering classroom-based education for clinical programs, hosting clinical rotations, providing tuition reimbursement and remission for clinical training, offering clinical faculty to academic programs, and providing clinical certification and leadership education courses.



Photo by Jonathan Borba: (www.pexels.com)

Despite these substantial investments and early signs of progress, hospitals face significant challenges due to a limited recruitment pool and an increasing number of employees aged 55 or older. The aging workforce in Maine's hospitals mirrors the broader healthcare sector and the state as a whole. According to the Office of the State Economist's June 2023 report, Maine's prime working-age population (ages 20-64) is projected to decline by 5.3% from 2020 to 2030, as the Baby Boomer generation continues to age out of the cohort. By 2030, the youngest Baby Boomers will be 66 years old. The concern is compounded by the expected 2% decline in Maine's younger working-age population over the same period, leaving fewer individuals to fill critical healthcare positions as the Baby Boomer generation retires.^[1]

[1] Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Office of State Economist, "Maine Population Outlook 2020-2030," June 2023. [Maine Population Outlook 2020-2030](#)

Reflecting on Maine's population change between 2020 and 2030, it becomes increasingly evident why hospitals, communities, and the state must prioritize workforce development. This includes expanding the healthcare talent pipeline, enhancing and creating new training programs, and reducing barriers to entering the healthcare field. As the population ages, the demand for healthcare services naturally rises. Data shows that individuals aged 65 and older utilize healthcare services two to three times more than younger populations. With a projected 36.2% increase in Mainers aged 65 or older—nearly 400,000 individuals—Maine must urgently act to ensure adequate care for its aging population.

Maine Statewide Population by Age			
	2020 (historical)	2025	2030
Age 0-19 years	286,218	264,935	258,901
Age 20-39 years	320,309	325,242	313,804
Age 40-64 years	466,899	444,771	431,560
Age 65+ years	288,854	339,780	393,399

	Percent Change in Population		
	2020-2025	2025-2030	2020-2030
Age 0-19 years	-7.4%	-2.3%	-9.5%
Age 20-39 years	1.5%	-3.5%	-2.0%
Age 40-64 years	-4.7%	-3.0%	-7.6%
Age 65+ years	17.6%	15.8%	36.2%

• • • • • [1] Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Office of State Economist, "Maine Population Outlook 2020-2030," June 2023. [Maine Population Outlook 2020-2030](#)

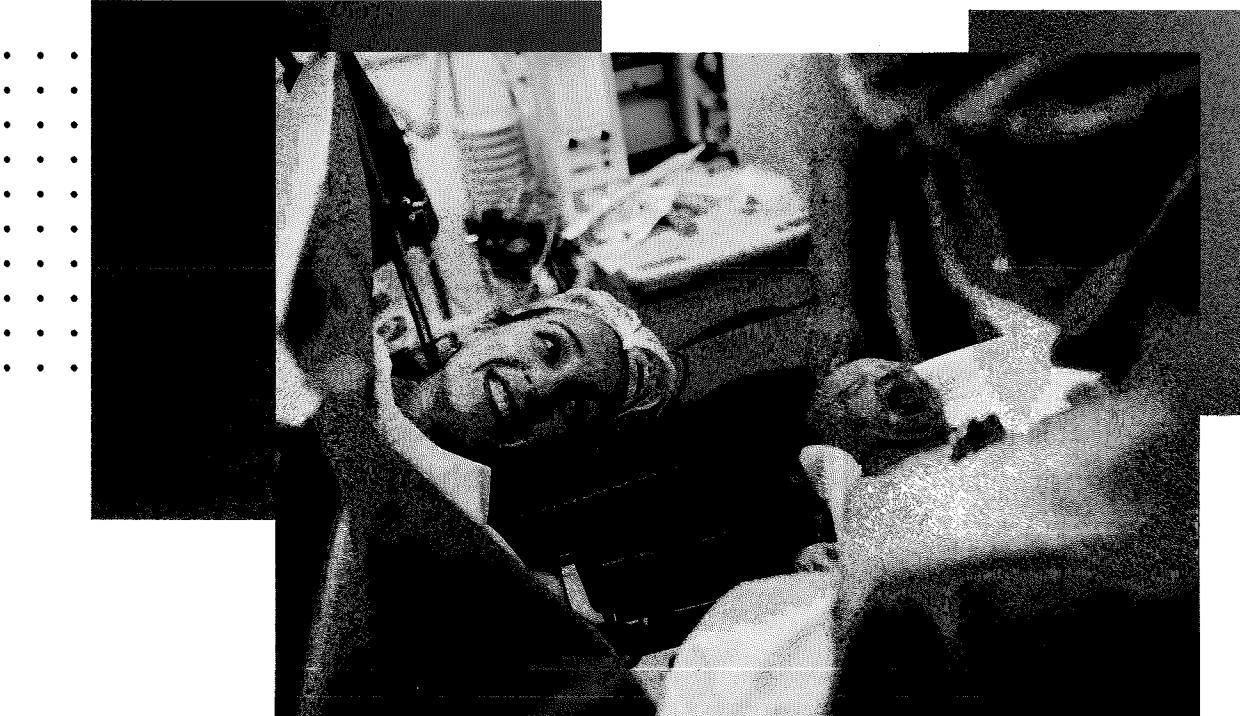


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KEY STATISTICS

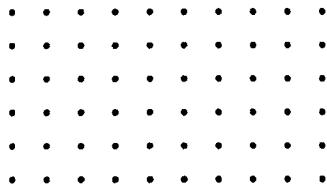
- 4227 full-time (3,090) & part-time (1,137) budgeted positions actively being recruited
- \$472,912,614 is the total increase in salaries between FY 23 and FY 25. Close to a half a billion dollars, which accounts for a 14% increase overall and a 4.6% increase when adjusted for inflation.
- \$151,723,080 is the total increase in physician fees and salaries between FY23 and FY25, which represents a 22% increase.
- 29% decrease in contracted labor between FY 23 and FY 25
- \$426.29 is the average amount spent per FTE on workforce development efforts, with a total of \$16,751,732 spent per year on workforce development efforts (26 hospitals reporting).

NURSING WORKFORCE

In November 2024, The Nursing Workforce in Maine: Trends & Forecasts 2020/2021 to 2022/2024 highlighted that due to Maine's aging population, the demand for nurses is expected to rise, with a projected shortage of 2,817 nurses by 2030. The report also noted that this shortage would have been significantly greater had the state not invested in recruitment, education, and training—efforts that added 2,198 licensed nurses between 2021 and 2024.

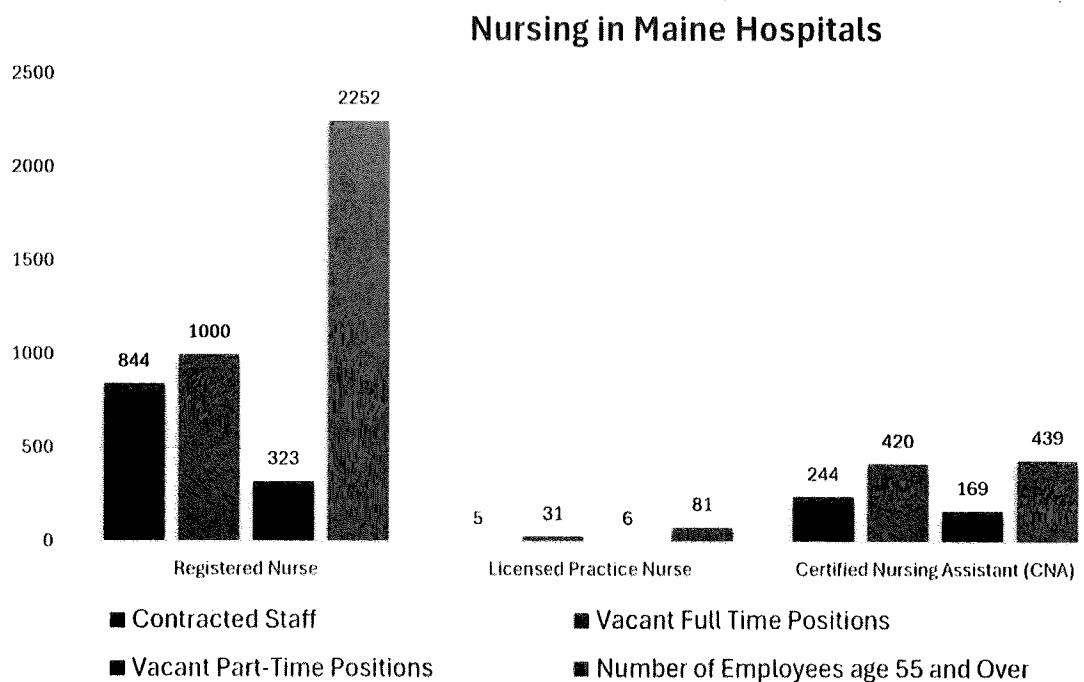
Currently, Maine hospitals are actively seeking to fill 1,323 nursing positions and report that 2,252 nurses are aged 55 or older. Among all healthcare occupations, registered nurses (RNs) are in the highest demand and represent the largest proportion of employees aged 55 or older. Contrary to some perceptions, there is not a significant number of unemployed nurses actively seeking work. According to the November 2024 report, only 765 registered nurses were unemployed and looking for work, while 689 were unemployed but not seeking employment.

Additionally, while Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) play a smaller role in Maine hospitals, the true demand for them is much greater when factoring in their crucial roles in long-term care, home health, and residential care settings—areas not reflected in the survey. LPNs are vital to Maine hospitals, particularly in post-acute care, where they staff beds and provide essential patient care. Their contributions are critical to the healthcare continuum, ensuring hospitals can transition patients to lower levels of care and free up beds for more critically ill individuals.



NURSING WORKFORCE

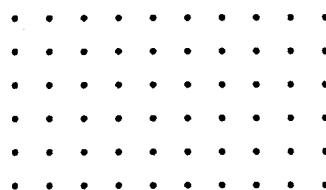
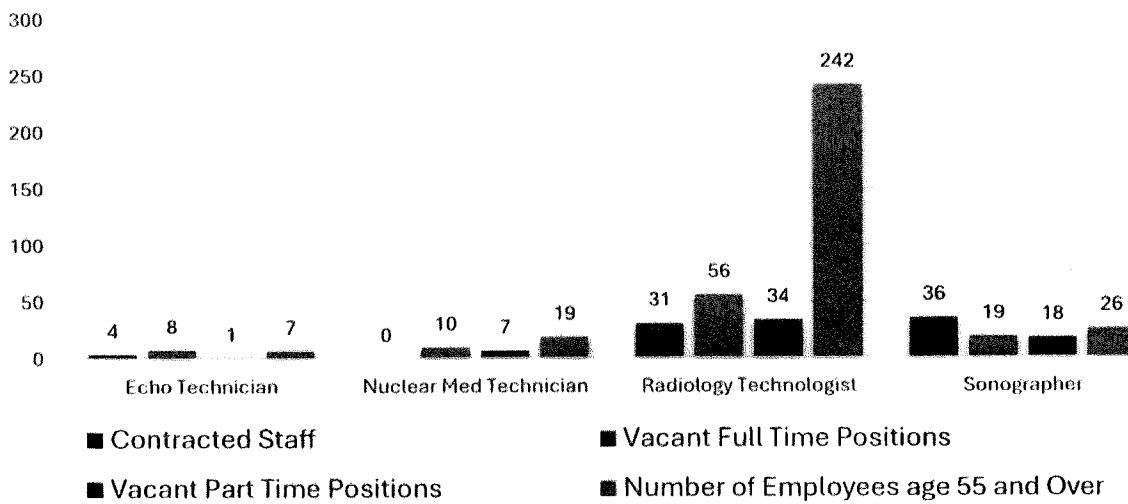
Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) also remain in high demand, with 589 open positions across the state. Hospitals have proactively addressed this need by developing their own CNA training programs or partnering with local educational institutions. Many of these programs utilize "earn while you learn" models to attract new enrollees, helping sustain a steady pipeline of certified CNAs. However, similar to LPNs, CNAs are heavily utilized in post-acute care settings, meaning the true statewide demand is likely much higher than hospital-reported figures suggest.



DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING WORKFORCE

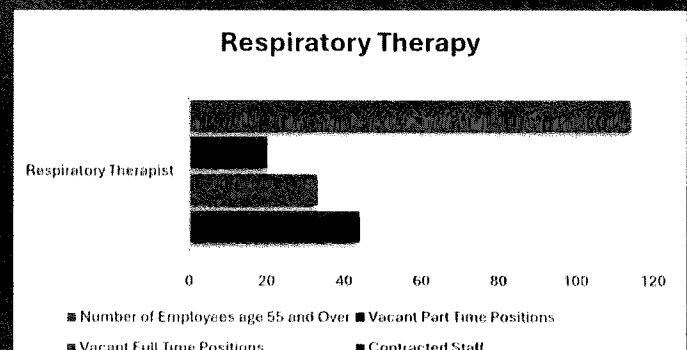
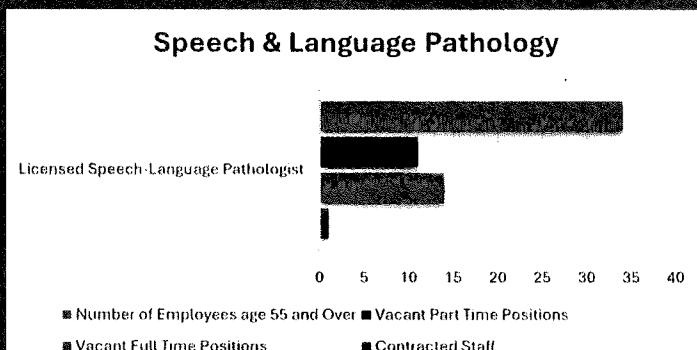
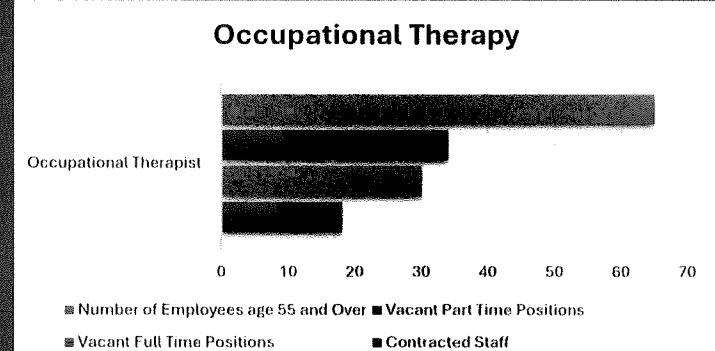
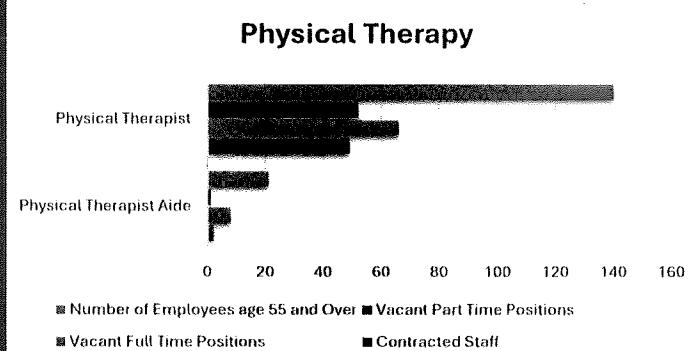
While the demand for diagnostic imaging technicians is lower than that for nurses, this does not diminish the critical role these professionals play in hospitals or the impact their vacancies have on patient care. Smaller hospitals may employ only one or two full-time technicians for a specific diagnostic imaging service, meaning that a single vacancy can severely limit access or even shut down the service entirely—forcing patients to travel farther for essential imaging tests. Strengthening the pipeline for diagnostic imaging professionals must be a key component of a long-term strategy. Achieving this will require coordination and collaboration among multiple stakeholders, as the demand and resources for independent training programs remain limited. A potential solution could be the development of statewide programs that connect multiple learning sites to a central hub through technology, expanding training opportunities for each diagnostic specialty in Maine.

Diagnostic Imaging in Maine Hospitals



THERAPY WORKFORCE

The demand for healthcare professionals providing respiratory, occupational, physical, and speech-language therapy services is expected to rise as Maine's aging population reaches its peak around 2030. Many older adults rely on these services to maintain their independence and age in place. While current workforce shortages already pose challenges to access, the aging workforce will further strain availability over the next 5 to 10 years.

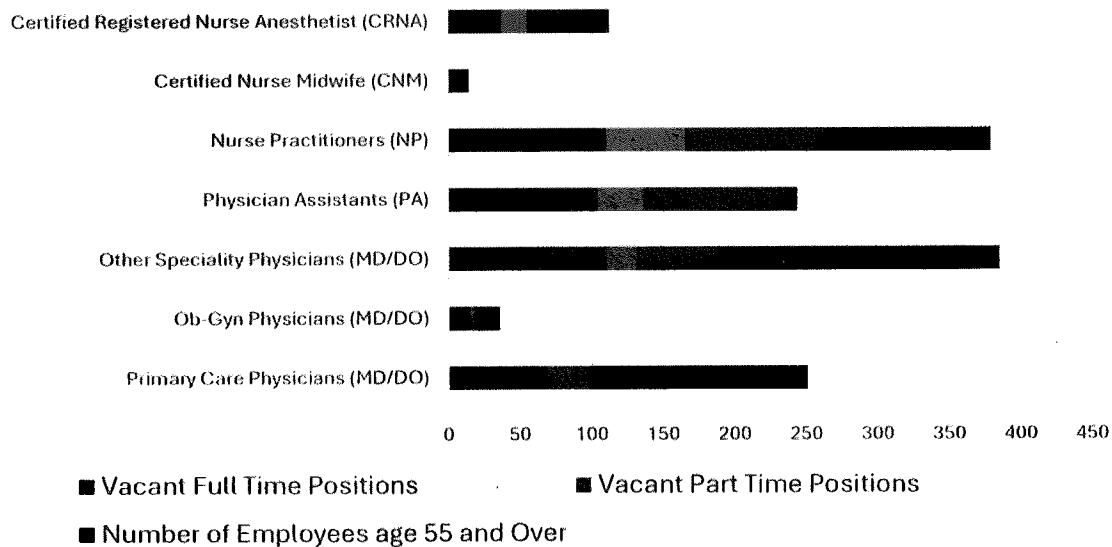


PROVIDER WORKFORCE

Maine hospitals are facing significant challenges in hiring providers across all specialties, from primary care to subspecialties. Current data highlight this reality, with hospitals actively recruiting 607 providers, including physicians and advanced practice providers. On average, it takes 277 days to recruit a single physician to practice in Maine, with even longer delays for rural, independent, and Critical Access Hospitals.

In 2022, Maine ranked first in the nation for the highest percentage of physicians aged 60 or older, at 39.3% (1,746 physicians), while ranking last for the proportion of physicians aged 39 or younger, with only 11.8% (525 physicians). Unfortunately, this trend persists in 2025, with 816 hospital-based providers now aged 55 or older, further exacerbating workforce shortages.

Providers in Maine Hospitals

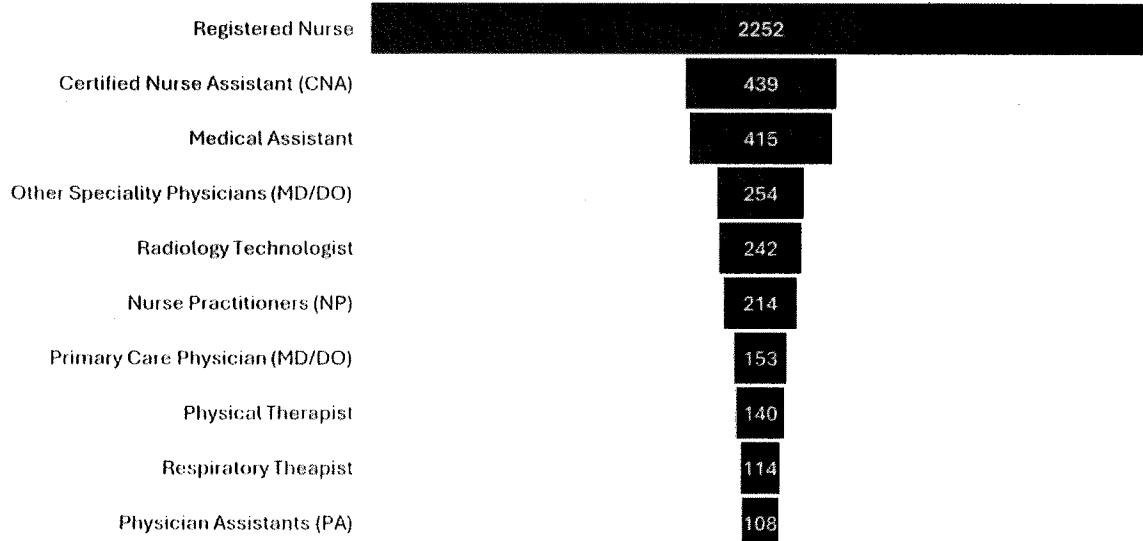


AN AGING WORKFORCE

Maine hospitals reported 5,592 employees aged 55 and older across 34 healthcare occupations, spanning providers, therapists, nurses, allied health professionals, and support personnel. However, this survey was not exhaustive and did not capture the full scope of the healthcare workforce in Maine's hospitals. As a result, the true scale of our aging workforce is even greater, particularly when considering the entire healthcare sector.

This demographic shift presents one of the most significant challenges we will face over the next five to ten years. The aging workforce in Maine hospitals mirrors the state's overall population trends and, as our members have noted, "tells a true story—one that many do not want to believe."

Top 10 Occupations with greatest number of employees 55 years or older



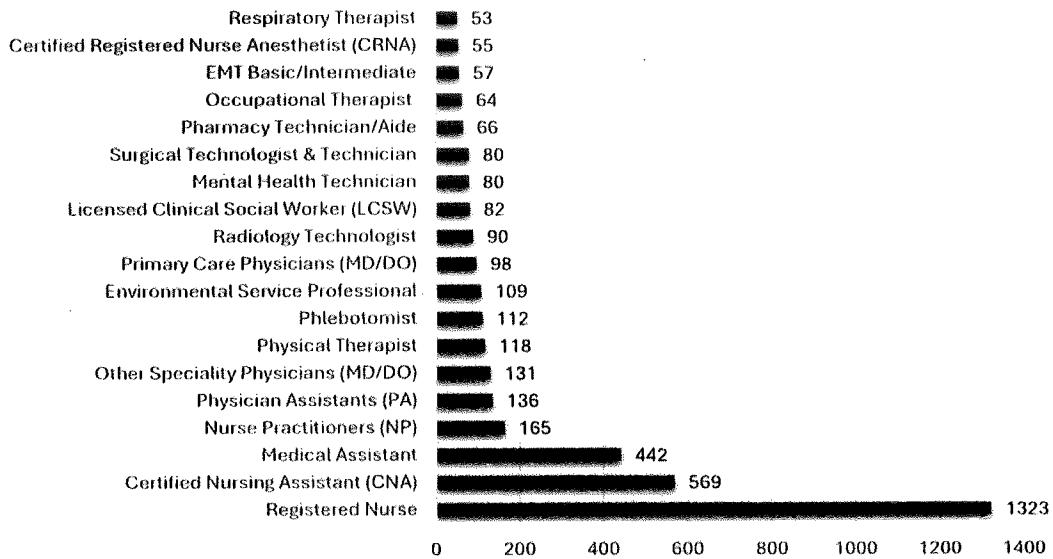
VACANCIES IN MAINE HOSPITALS

All 34 healthcare occupations identified in the survey reported both full-time and part-time vacancies. However, this graph highlights occupations with at least 50 or more vacancies, considering both types of positions.

As the state, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and policymakers evaluate where to invest, current vacancies serve as a valuable data point—especially when considered alongside the number of employees aged 55 and older by occupation. However, it is also important to recognize that some roles are limited in number within each hospital, meaning even a single vacancy can have a significant impact.

To make informed decisions about legislation, education, and clinical training investments, these data must be considered comprehensively.

Healthcare occupations in Highest Demand based on Current Vacancies



Other Data Sets:

- https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/mainemaine.gov.dafs.economist/files/inline-files/Maine%20Population%20Outlook%20to%202030_5.pdf
- <https://usm.maine.edu/school-nursing/mainemainenursing-workforce-data/>
- <https://www.themha.org/policy-advocacy/Issues/Workforce/2022Nurse-Forecast-Report.aspx>



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