

## Trends in Employment of the U.S. Licensed Practical Nurse Workforce from 2008 to 2013

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**Purpose of study:** In 2013, more than 600,000 people were employed as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) in the United States, making it the second-largest health care occupation that requires postsecondary education. The LPN workforce is more diverse than many other health professions that require postsecondary education; in 2013, 39% of the workforce was non-white. LPNs play a vital role in the delivery of health care services, especially in long-term care settings. The number of LPN jobs is projected to grow by nearly 25% between 2012 and 2022. This study assesses trends in the supply and employment patterns of LPNs in the United States between 2008 and 2013.

**Methods:** Data from the 2008 and 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample were analyzed. The ACS is a monthly household survey with a sample size of 3.5 million addresses and includes questions regarding demographic, social, and economic characteristics. Chi-square tests were performed to identify statistically significant trends in labor force participation, employment setting, and demographic characteristics of LPNs. Estimates were weighted using ACS's sampling weights.

**Key findings:** The number of employed LPNs decreased by 6% between 2008 and 2013, from 675,918 to 635,975 LPNs. The distribution of LPNs across employment settings also changed. The number employed in long-term care settings increased by 13% from 249,971 to 281,552, whereas the number employed by hospitals decreased by 20% from 208,126 to 165,589. In both 2008 and 2013, skilled nursing facilities employed the largest number of LPNs working in long-term care settings but employment in skilled nursing facilities grew much more slowly compared to employment in home health agencies and residential care facilities. Home health agencies accounted for 65% of the increase in employment in long-term care between 2008 and 2013. Although LPNs remains predominantly female, the number of male LPNs in the workforce increased by 8% and the number of female LPNs decreased by 7%. The LPN workforce also became more racially and ethnically diverse due to increases in the numbers of Hispanic and Asian LPNs as well as the number of foreign-born LPNs. The age distribution of LPNs did not change significantly during this period.

**Implications:** An increasingly racially and ethnically diverse LPN workforce will improve the profession's ability to meet the needs of the U.S.'s increasingly diverse population. Shifts away from hospital employment may indicate lower demand for LPNs by hospitals. Two possible reasons for this are (1) that hospitals are striving to increase the education and skill level of their nursing workforce in order to improve quality, and thus preferring to hire registered nurses (RNs), and (2) as the RN shortage abated it became easier for hospitals to hire RNs instead. These shifts also could reflect increased demand for labor in long-term care relative to hospitals which may make employment in long-term care settings more attractive for LPNs. Employment growth in long-term care settings, especially home health, suggests a need to ensure that LPN education programs are preparing students for practice in these settings.