

New Hampshire ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

September 2021

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Temporary Staffing in New Hampshire's Health Care Industry

In 2019, the health care and social assistance industry became the largest industry in New Hampshire, employing an average of 94,100 workers. The industry averaged 1.6 percent labor force growth from 2017 to 2019, faster than New Hampshire's total workforce, which grew at a rate of 1.0 percent. Compared to the U.S., New Hampshire has a larger and wealthier (on average) population of residents over the age of 65, which has been a factor in the overall growth of the health care and social assistance industry.

Federal regulations require health care facilities to maintain adequate staffing to care for their patients. Patients require staff 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The number of patients in a facility can fluctuate, and additional

staff may be needed to provide care for a higher than normal volume of patients. To cover these fluctuations, as well as staff illness, vacations, and other leave time, the health care industry maintains staffing levels through use of temporary staff, including per-diem and travel workers.

Per-diem staff work on a day-by-day basis, often filling in as needed in a variety of clinical settings, and at several health care facilities within a region.¹ Travel positions are longer-term, and typically involve relocating to an area to work in a specific position.² Travel positions usually last for approximately 13 weeks (3 months), but can be longer or shorter.

Both per-diem and travel workers are typically employed by a staffing

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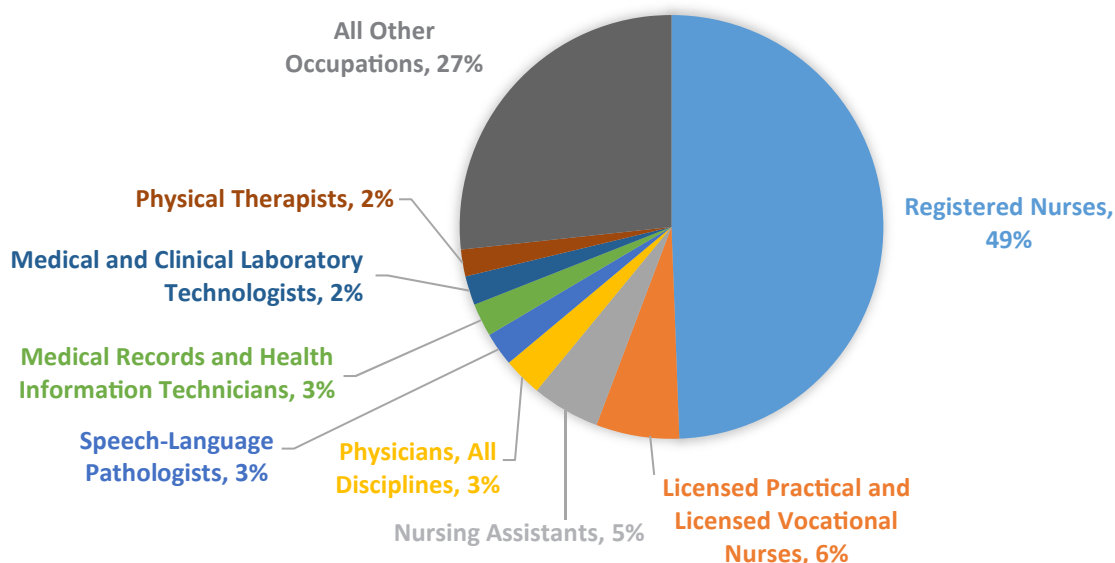
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agency, and paid a higher salary than permanent staff to compensate for irregular schedules. Travel workers generally receive benefits such as health insurance and a 401(k) through their employer, as well as assistance finding housing each time they relocate to work a new temporary position. Per-

diem workers, since they do not have a set schedule or hours, are less likely to receive benefits or paid leave time. Instead, they have the flexibility to work as much or as little as they want.

Emsi Burning Glass' Labor Insight tool was used to identify health care job postings that requested travel and per-diem health care workers.³ Job postings from the first six months of 2021 were analyzed to provide information about temporary health care workers in New Hampshire's workforce.

Job Postings for Travel Healthcare Positions in New Hampshire



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

¹ Cross Country Medical Staffing Network, 6 Reasons Why You Should Take A Per Diem Assignment. <https://www.crosscountrymsn.com/blogs/top-reasons-to-take-a-per-diem-assignment>.

² American Traveler, Travel Nursing: Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.americantraveler.com/travel-nursing-career-faqs>.

³ Healthcare workers include two major occupational groups: healthcare practitioners and technical occupations and healthcare support occupations

Travel and Per-Diem Worker Occupations and Specializations

Job postings from January through June 2021 requested travel workers for a variety of healthcare occupations, although *registered nurses* were most common, accounting for almost 50 percent of all postings. *Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses* and *nursing assistants* were also frequently requested, accounting for six and five percent of postings, respectively. In total, postings for travel positions requested workers for 60 different occupations, including physicians and a number of technician and technologist positions.

Among job postings requesting per-diem workers, *registered nurses* were also the most frequently requested, although they accounted for a smaller proportion of total postings, only 28 percent. Per-diem *nursing assistants* and *licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses* were frequently requested as well, accounting for twelve and ten percent of postings.

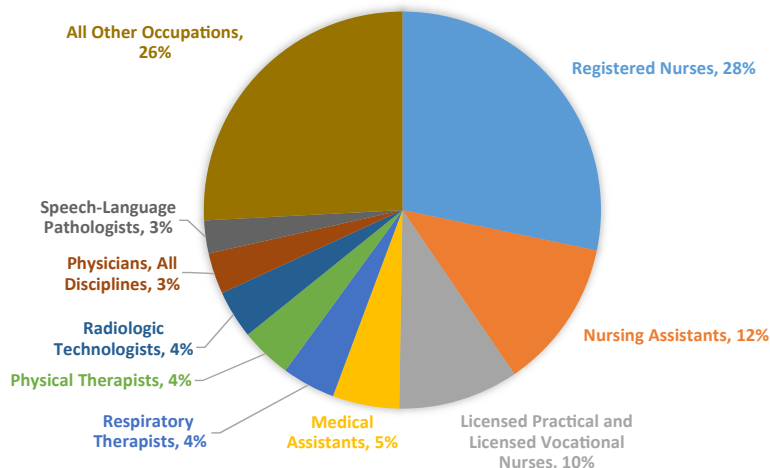
Job postings for travel *registered nurses* typically included a specialization, reflecting the different settings nurses work in, as well as the different types of patients they care for. Postings typically required at least one year of experience in the relevant specialization, to ensure that workers would be able to perform their work with minimal onboarding. The most requested specializations were all in hospital settings: intensive or critical care, operating room, medical-surgical, and emergency room nursing.⁴ Outside of hospitals, travel nurses were most commonly requested for home health care and hospice positions, two specializations that reflect the needs of New Hampshire's growing older population.

Medical-surgical, intensive or critical care, and operating room nurses were frequently requested specializations in job postings for per-diem nurses as well. The most frequently requested specialization for per-diem nurses was clinical care management. Clinical care managers coordinate medical care and provide advocacy to help patients get the best and most affordable care; requests for per-diem clinical care managers came from both hospitals and home health care providers.⁵

4 The health care industry includes three subsectors. Hospitals provide inpatient services, including general medical and surgical, psychiatric and substance abuse, and specialty hospital facilities. Ambulatory health care services provide outpatient services, including offices of physicians, outpatient care centers, medical and diagnostic laboratories, and home health care services. Nursing and residential care includes facilities that provide residential care combined with either nursing, supervisory, or other types of care.

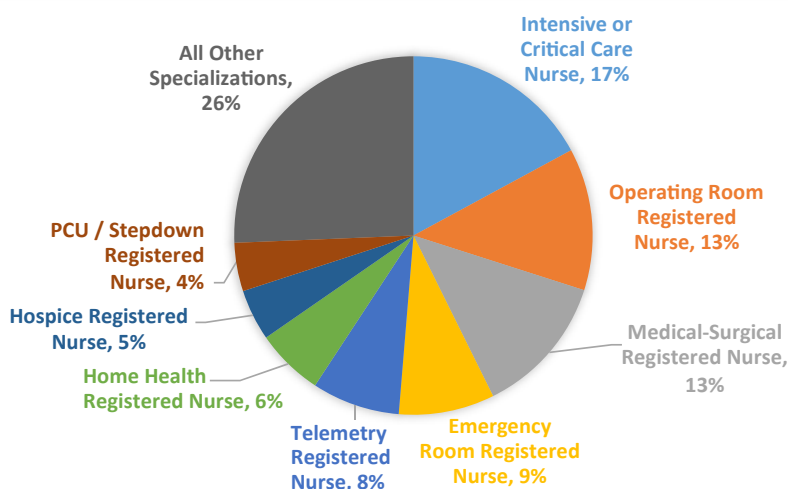
5 Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Job Postings for Per-Diem Healthcare Positions in New Hampshire



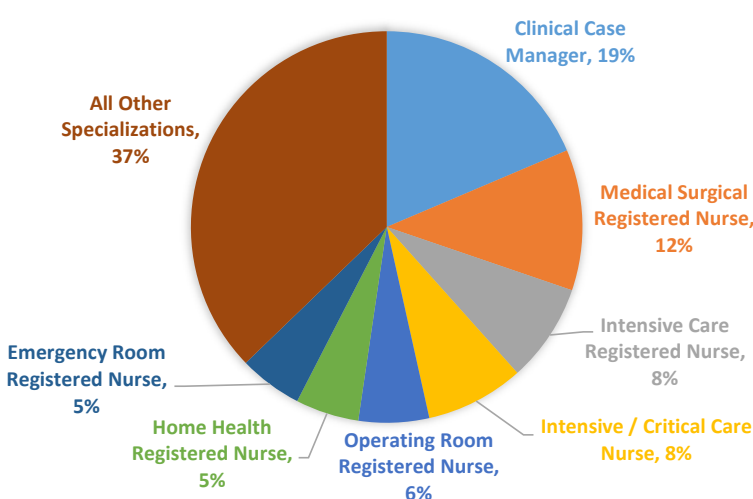
Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Travel Nurse Specializations Requested



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Per-Diem Nurse Specializations Requested



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Industries Employing Travel and Per-Diem Workers

The majority of job postings for travel health care workers were from employers in ambulatory health care services and hospitals, which each accounted for more than 30 percent of postings.⁶ Nursing and residential care facilities accounted for five percent of postings, as did two industries outside of the health care and social assistance industry sector: professional, scientific and technical services (scientific research and development or consulting businesses) and health and personal care stores (primarily pharmacies located in retail stores). Most postings for travel workers in health and personal care stores were for either pharmacists or pharmacy technicians, and most postings in the professional, scientific and technical services industry were for technician and technologist positions.

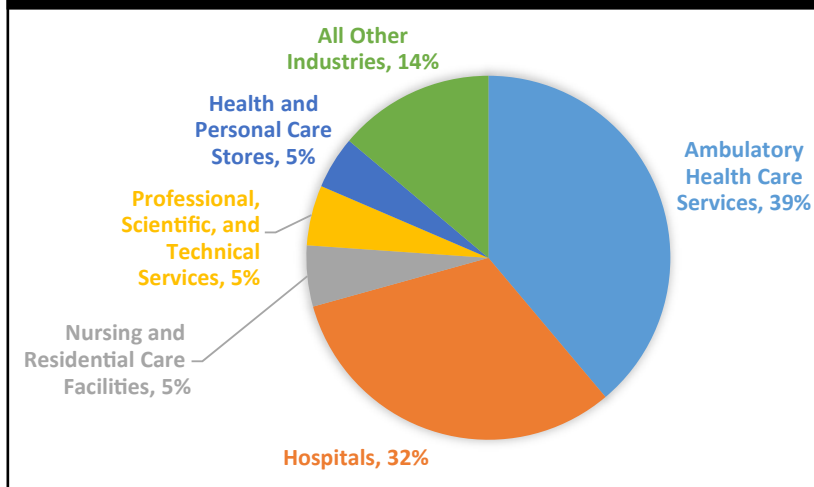
Among job postings requesting per-diem workers, more than two-thirds were from hospitals, while nursing and residential care facilities accounted for 17 percent of postings, and ambulatory health care services accounted for 13 percent. Other industries accounted for just two percent of postings.

Temporary Labor to Fill Staffing Shortages

Although temporary healthcare workers are primarily intended to manage regular fluctuations in patient and staff levels, they can also be used to cover systemic labor shortages. As demand for health care services in New Hampshire increases, the industry has struggled to maintain a local workforce large enough to support its needs. A 2019 survey of 20 New Hampshire hospitals by the New Hampshire Hospital Association found that there were 2,035 vacancies out of a total of 21,427 positions, meaning nine percent of positions were not filled.⁷

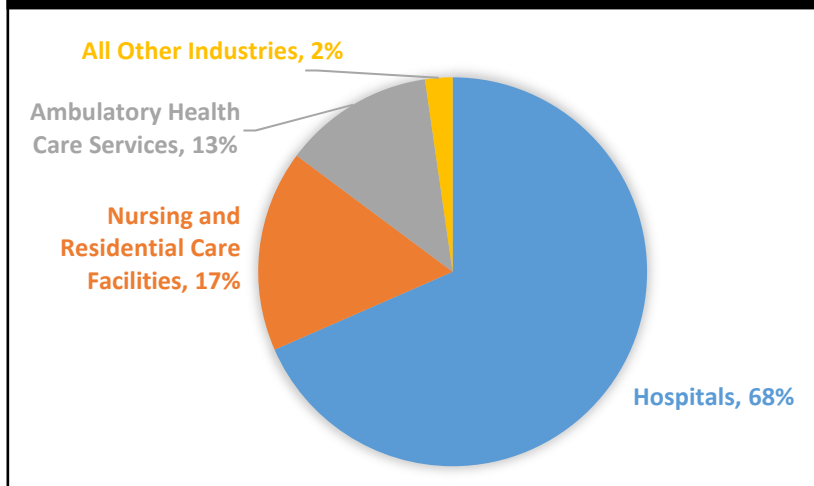
Because so many positions have been difficult to fill, some health care employers have relied on staffing agencies to provide temporary labor to fill what would otherwise be permanent positions. Nursing and residential care facilities in particular report relying on staffing agencies and temporary staff to fill vacancies.⁸ This shortage is most severe for lower-paid workers, such as licensed nursing assistants (LNAs), who earned a median wage of \$16.38 per hour in New Hampshire in 2020.⁹

Industries Requesting Travel Health Care Workers



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Industries Requesting Per-Diem Health Care Workers



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

Since temporary workers are more expensive than permanent workers, relying on temporary workers puts a financial strain on employers. The *New Hampshire Bulletin* reported that in 2020, Rockingham County, which operates a rehabilitation and nursing center, as well as a county jail, paid staffing agencies \$3.7 million to fill vacant healthcare positions.¹⁰

Many long-term care facilities rely on Medicaid reimbursement to pay for the services they provide, and have less financial flexibility to increase staff pay in order to increase employee retention. As tight labor market

6 For classifying temporary health care worker job postings into industries, job posting data generally identified the health care facility requesting temporary staff, not the staffing agencies that directly employed travel and per-diem health care workers. As a result, most postings were included in the health care and social assistance industry sector, not the administrative and support services sector, which includes staffing agencies and other employment services. Not all job postings identified end clients, in these cases, postings were categorized in the health care and social assistance sector, but more specific industry subsector information was not available.

7 Plenda, Melanie, "Health-Care Staffing: Feast or Famine," *BusinessNH Magazine*. <https://www.businessnhmagazine.com/article/health-care-staffing-feast-or-famine>.

8 Covenor, Amy, "New Hampshire long-term care facilities face 'huge' staffing shortage," *WMUR*. <https://www.wmur.com/article/new-hampshire-long-term-care-facility-staffing-crisis/37259507#>.

9 New Hampshire Employment Security, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, June 2020.

10 Timmins, Annmarie, "As health care workforce shortage persists, employers boost incentives," *The New Hampshire Bulletin*. <https://newhampshirebulletin.com/2021/07/02/as-health-care-workforce-shortage-persists-employers-boost-incentives/>.

conditions in 2021 have increased wages in some industries, long-term care facilities report many lower-wage health care workers are leaving the industry for more lucrative work.¹¹

To attract more workers into LNA positions, the New Hampshire Health Care Association created the NH Needs Caregivers initiative. This initiative, intended to train as many as 700 individuals to work as LNAs in nursing homes, offers tuition reimbursement, covers licensing costs, and pays a \$500 retention bonus after six months.¹² There were an estimated 8,100 LNAs employed in New Hampshire in 2019, so an additional 700 LNAs would represent a nine percent increase.

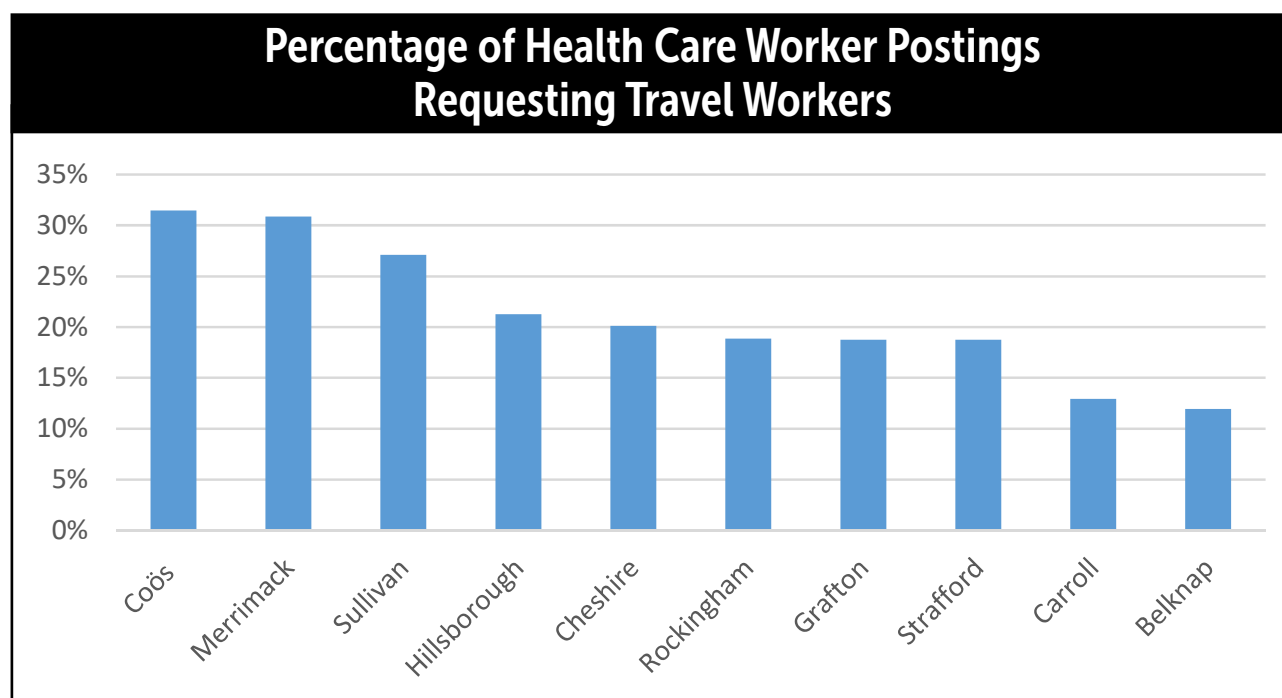
Location of Temporary Positions

Overall, 21 percent of all health care job postings in New Hampshire were for travel workers, although this percentage varied by county. Coös and Merrimack counties had the highest percentage, with 31 percent of postings requesting travel workers, followed by Sullivan County with 27 percent. The relatively high percentage of travel worker postings may suggest that the shortage for health care

workers is particularly high in these areas. Coös and Sullivan counties are largely rural, and they are two of the oldest four counties in New Hampshire; approximately one-quarter of the population in Coös and Sullivan counties is age 65 or older. Both of these factors contribute to health care worker shortages. The only hospital in Sullivan County, in Claremont, is located near Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and the White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont, and must compete for workers with these larger facilities.

Relative to the size of its workforce, Merrimack County has greater demand for health care workers than most of New Hampshire, which likely contributes to the shortage of workers in this county. In 2019, 20 percent of private employment in Merrimack County was in the health care and social assistance sector. Only Grafton County, home to Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, had a higher percentage of health care employment.

– Greg David, Economist



Source: Labor Insight, Emsi Burning Glass

¹¹ Covenor, op. cit.

¹² NH Needs Caregivers, <https://nhneeds caregivers.org/about/>