

The South Carolina Licensed Practical Nurse Workforce | 2022

September 2024



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Report Preparation

This document was produced by the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce (SCOHW), a division of the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (SC AHEC). It contains information about the licensed practical nurses (LPNs) actively employed as nurses in South Carolina as reported by the nurses themselves during their biennial license renewal process ending on May 1, 2022.

For additional information about nurses and many other health professionals in South Carolina, please call us at 843-792-4430 or visit our website: www.scohw.org.

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About the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce

SCOHW, a division of South Carolina AHEC, studies issues that affect the balance of supply and demand for different types of health professionals across South Carolina. Its primary mission is to develop accurate, reliable information about the healthcare workforce in South Carolina and to make that information widely available to support planning and policy decisions.



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| APRN | Advanced Practice Registered Nurse |
| eNLC | Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact |
| LLR | South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation |
| MSA | Metropolitan Statistical Area |
| NCLEX | National Council Licensing Examination |
| NCSBN | National Council of State Boards of Nursing |
| RFA | South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office |
| RN | Registered Nurse |
| SC | South Carolina |
| SC AHEC | South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium |
| SCBON | South Carolina Board of Nursing |
| SCOHW | South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce |

Executive Summary

Nurses make up the largest part of the healthcare workforce in South Carolina, and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) account for 15% of the state’s nursing workforce. This report, produced by the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce at the South Carolina Area Health Education Consortium (AHEC), describes the licensed practical nurse (LPN) workforce in South Carolina, based on data reported by LPNs during their biennial license renewal process ending on May 1, 2022.

Data Highlights

- **Supply:** Although the number of LPNs in the workforce increased by 1.1%, from 8,797 in 2012 to 8,892 in 2022, the ratio of LPNs per 10,000 population decreased by 8.2% during the same period.
- **Demographics:** The average age of LPNs in 2022 was 47, and more than a third were age 51 or older. Over 40% of LPNs actively working in SC in 2022 did not identify as White.
- **Education:** The number of LPN graduates in South Carolina has decreased by 37.7% since 2012. Nearly half of responding LPNs (49%) received their original LPN degree in South Carolina.
- **Employment:** Most LPNs in 2022 indicated that they work full-time. Just under half were employed in a long-term care setting, and most indicated that their position title fell into the category of “Staff Nurse/ Direct Care/General Duty Nurse.”
- **Demand:** In 2020, LPNs were the 23rd most in-demand occupation in South Carolina.

Key Takeaways

- **Following national trends, the LPN workforce in South Carolina is declining.** Since 2012, the ratio of LPNs per 10,000 population has decreased from 18.6 to 17.1. This decline is more pronounced in metropolitan counties. Continued efforts to support health careers programs, students and practicing LPNs are needed to ensure a sufficient supply of LPNs to care for patients at all life stages and in all areas of the state.
- **The LPN workforce is more reflective of the diversity of the state’s population than the South Carolina healthcare workforce as a whole.** A diverse health workforce that is well-distributed across the state improves the chances of racial concordance, or shared identity, between providers and patients. This allows patients to establish relationships with providers who share common backgrounds and have similar life experiences, and can lead to improved care and health outcomes. Supporting, enhancing and maintaining career pathways for LPNs will support and maintain the diversity of this workforce.
- **During COVID, nursing homes were hit harder and have taken longer to recover than other healthcare settings.** From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 until January 2022, nursing homes lost 238,000 caregivers, or 15% of its total workforce.

The data in this report represent the activity status and practice location of LPNs in South Carolina in 2022, *during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.* Due to the disruptive influence of the pandemic on the healthcare services and employment patterns of health professionals, caution should be used in interpreting these data for current conditions.

Introduction

Nurses make up the largest part of the healthcare workforce in South Carolina, and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) account for 15% of the state's nursing workforce. LPNs are an important part of the care team, providing basic medical care under the direction of registered nurses (RNs) and physicians and performing such tasks as checking blood pressure, changing bandages, and helping patients bathe and dress.¹ More than a third of LPNs in South Carolina are employed in nursing homes, where they are responsible for residents' day-to-day care. Understanding the supply and distribution of LPNs across the state, as well as their demographic, education, and employment characteristics, is critical for effective workforce planning, decision making, and policy development, particularly in a time of labor and economic instability.

What is an LPN?

To become an LPN (also known as a licensed vocational nurse or LVN in some states), one must complete an accredited practical nursing certificate program, which usually takes one to two years to complete, pass the National Council Licensing Examination, or NCLEX-PN, and then become licensed in the state of their choosing. LPNs have a narrower scope of practice than RNs and provide lower levels of patient care. They must work under the supervision of an RN, advanced practice registered nurse (APRN), physician or dentist, and they perform such duties as collecting vital signs, distributing medications, and assisting with daily living tasks like getting dressed, eating and drinking, and bathing.² The median pay for LPNs in South Carolina in 2022 was \$50,020.³

Defining the Licensed Practical Nurse Workforce

Data Source and Limitations

Licensure data were obtained from the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA), the official repository of data collected by the state's licensing boards under the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (LLR). All data were self-reported to the South Carolina Board of Nursing (SCBON) by LPNs during the biennial license renewal period ending on May 1, 2022, or at the time of initial application for newly licensed nurses.

The analyses in this report include only those LPNs who hold an active license and are currently employed as an LPN in South Carolina. The results present a conservative estimate of the LPN workforce in South Carolina for several reasons:

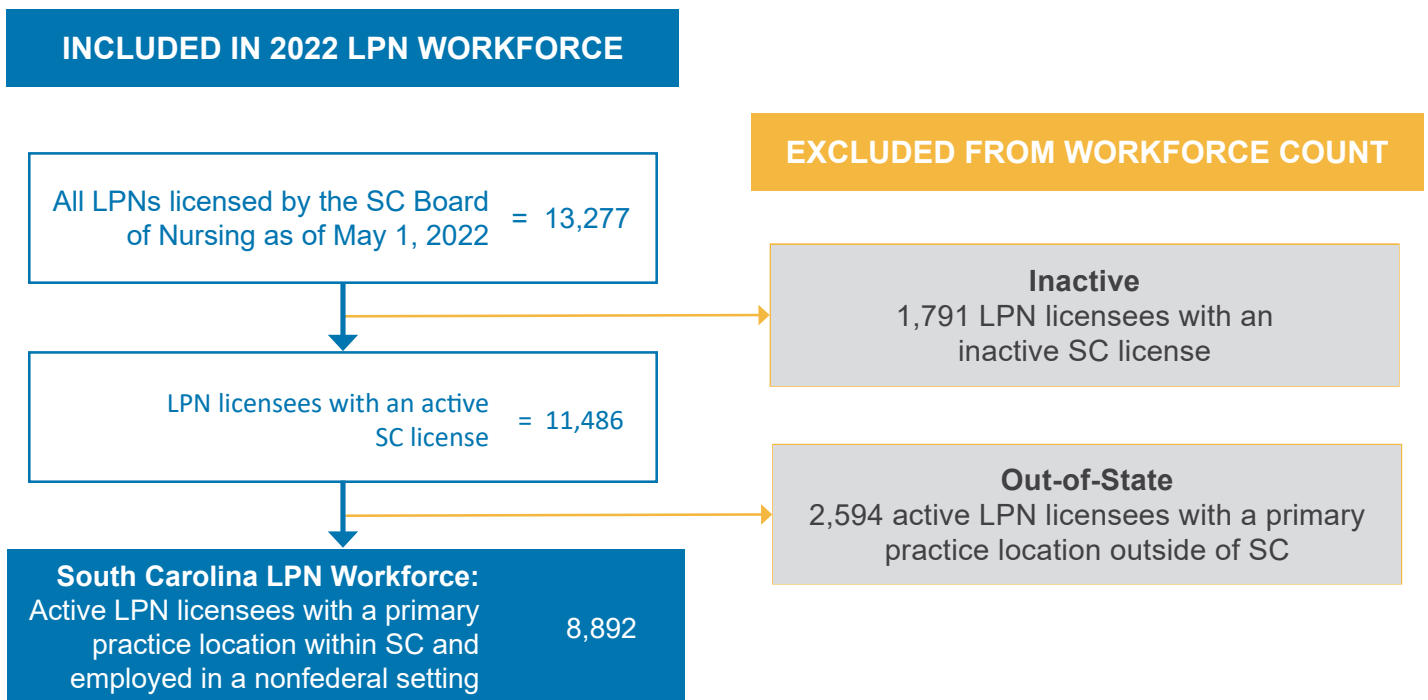
1. Licensee information is updated on a biennial cycle, making it difficult to count LPNs that enter or leave the workforce in between renewal periods.
2. New licensees are not required to report their employment location or practice status in their initial license application. Until they report a practice address and activity status during the biennial license renewal process, they are not captured in the active workforce definition. Depending on when new licensees receive their initial license to practice, they may be a productive part of the workforce for as much as two years before they are reflected in official workforce counts.
3. In previous reports in this series, only nonfederal nurses were included in the analyses, because federal nurses serve specific populations (eg, military members and family on base). Prior to 2020, LPNs with a South Carolina license who were employed in a federal or military setting could be identified in the licensure file and excluded from analysis. Starting in 2020, federal and military LPNs are no longer identifiable, so they are included in this report. In 2018, 365 (4.1%) LPNs were employed in a federal or military setting.
4. As long as a federal LPN is licensed in one state or territory, they can work under federal employment in any state.^{4,5} Federal LPNs that work in South Carolina but hold a license from another state are not counted in this report.
5. South Carolina participates in the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (eNLC).⁶ RNs and LPNs in eNLC states and territories may apply for a single-state or multi-state license. A single-state license allows them to practice only within their state of permanent residence (home state). A multi-state license, much like a driver's license, allows them to practice within their home state and in any other participating eNLC state without having to obtain additional licenses or registrations. Nurses who hold a current multi-state license with SC as their home state and indicate an active practice location within South Carolina are counted in the 2020 analyses. Because they are not required to register with the SCBON, eNLC nurses licensed in a home state outside of SC are not captured in the 2022 SC licensure data.

Enumerating the South Carolina Licensed Practical Nurse Workforce: Who is Counted?

It is important to understand how nurses are counted for the purposes of workforce analysis. While nurses must be licensed by the South Carolina Board of Nursing (SCBON) or within an eNLC state to practice in South Carolina, not all nurses holding a South Carolina license are actively practicing within the state. The 2022 LPN workforce described in this report includes only active licensees with a primary practice location in South Carolina who were currently employed in their field in 2022 as an LPN. Prior to 2020, LPNs employed in a federal or military setting could be identified in the licensure file and excluded from analysis. Federal and military LPNs are no longer identifiable, so they are included here.

Of the **13,277** LPNs licensed by the SCBON in 2022, **8,892** (67%) were actively working as an LPN in South Carolina - this is the total number used throughout this report. **Figure 1** illustrates how the LPN workforce total was derived.

Figure 1. Identifying active, in-state, non-federal licensed practical nurses in South Carolina, 2022.



Trends in LPN Supply and Distribution, 2012-2022

Between 2012 and 2022, the number of LPNs held steady, increasing by 1.1% from 8,797 in 2012 to 8,892 in 2022 (Table 1). However, relative to the state's population, this growth translates to a decrease of 1.5 LPNs per 10,000 population over the 10-year period. This mirrors national trends – the number of LPNs in the U.S. decreased by 12.1% from 718,800 in 2012 to 632,020 in 2022.³ Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of LPNs across the state.

An increase in the total number of LPNs statewide is similarly mirrored in the state's 13 nonmetropolitan counties (129 LPNs added since 2012). The ratio of LPNs per 10,000 population also increased in nonmetropolitan counties, unlike the statewide data. In micropolitan counties, both the total population and number of LPNs decreased during the 10-year period.

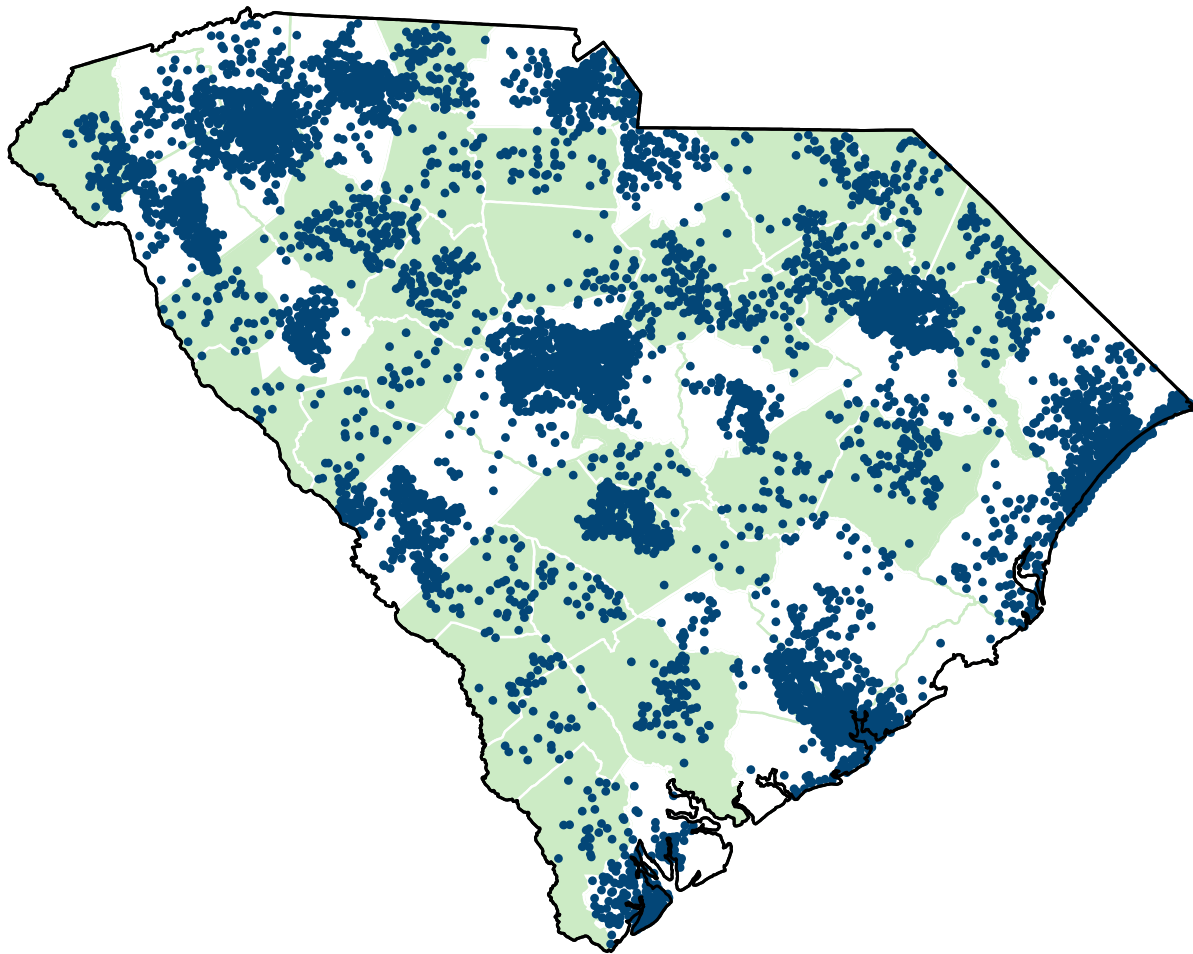
Table 1. Changes in the size of the South Carolina LPN workforce, 2012-2022.

| | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 | % Change 2012-2022 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| Number of LPNs | | | | | | | |
| Metropolitan counties (n= 26 counties) | 7,401 | 7,434 | 7,492 | 7,134 | 7,384 | 7,422 | 0.3% |
| Micropolitan counties (n = 7 counties) | 898 | 885 | 875 | 861 | 841 | 843 | -6.1% |
| Nonmetropolitan counties (n = 13 counties) | 498 | 507 | 512 | 491 | 487 | 627 | 25.9% |
| Total state (n = 46 counties) | 8,797 | 8,826 | 8,880 | 8,486 | 8,712 | 8,892 | 1.1% |
| LPNs per 10,000 population | | | | | | | |
| Metropolitan counties | 18.5 | 18.0 | 17.6 | 16.3 | 16.4 | 16.6 | -10.1% |
| Micropolitan counties | 19.7 | 19.4 | 19.2 | 18.8 | 18.4 | 20.4 | 3.5% |
| Nonmetropolitan counties | 19.0 | 19.6 | 20.1 | 19.6 | 19.8 | 20.1 | 5.7% |
| Total state | 18.6 | 18.3 | 17.9 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 17.1 | -8.2% |
| State Population | | | | | | | |
| Metropolitan counties | 4,006,331 | 4,119,187 | 4,252,203 | 4,377,070 | 4,515,013 | 4,467,738 | 11.5% |
| Micropolitan counties | 455,626 | 455,028 | 454,776 | 457,114 | 457,548 | 413,499 | -9.2% |
| Nonmetropolitan counties | 261,766 | 258,267 | 254,140 | 249,943 | 245,479 | 312,029 | 19.2% |
| Total state | 4,723,723 | 4,832,482 | 4,961,119 | 5,084,127 | 5,218,040 | 5,193,266 | 9.9% |

Note: Metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas are geographic entities defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for use by federal statistical agencies in collecting, tabulating, and publishing federal statistics. A metropolitan area contains a core urban area of 50,000 or more population. A micropolitan area contains an urban core of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 population. Each metropolitan or micropolitan area consists of one or more counties and includes the counties containing the core urban area, as well as any adjacent counties that have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core (as measured by commuting to work). Any county that is not designated a metropolitan or micropolitan area is designated as a nonmetropolitan area. The designations reported in this book are based on 2020 delineations as updated in July 2023. See <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/time-series/demo/metro-micro/delineation-files.html> for more information.

In previous reports in this series, only nonfederal nurses were included in the analyses. Prior to 2020, LPNs employed in a federal or military setting could be identified in the licensure file and excluded from analysis.

Figure 2. Active licensed practical nurses by primary practice location, South Carolina, 2022.



Rural/Urban Status
(Number of Counties)

■ Rural (28)

Urban (18)

● 1 Dot = 1 LPN

Total LPNs, 2022 = 8,892

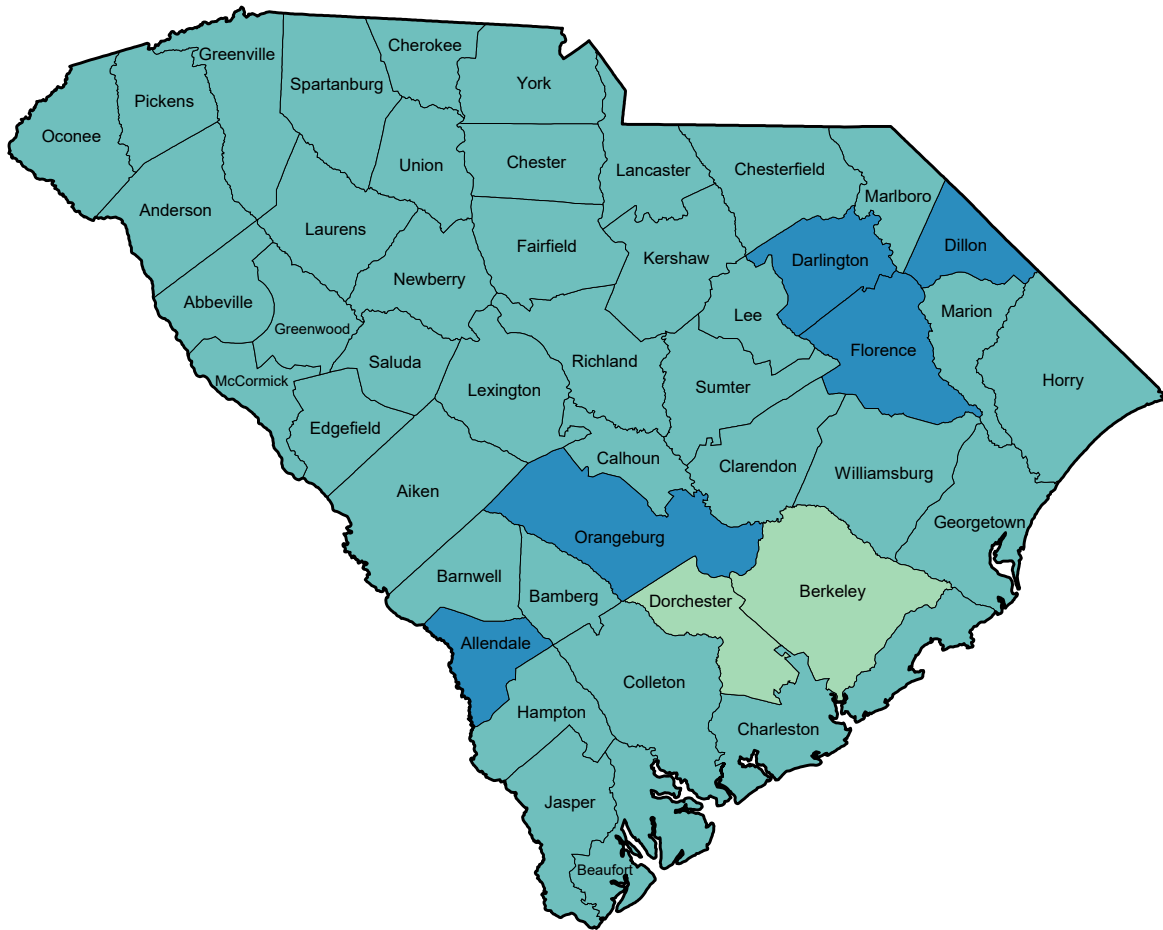
Total rural LPNs = 1,824

Total urban LPNs = 7,068

This information is based on all licensed practical nurses (LPNs) with an active license to practice and a primary practice location in South Carolina as of 5/1/2022. Counts are based on best available self-reported practice location information. Dots are randomly scattered within the zip code area and may not represent the actual street address of the practice.

Source: SC Office for Healthcare Workforce, SC AHEC, with data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (LLR) and obtained from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA). Rural definition from the U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>. Rural counties are those counties where 50% or more of the population lives outside an urbanized area based on the 2020 Census.

Figure 3. Licensed practical nurses per 10,000 population, South Carolina, 2022.



Number of LPNs per 10,000 Population
(Number of Counties)

| | |
|---|------|
| 25.0 or More | (5) |
| 10.0 to 24.9 | (39) |
| 5.0 to 9.9 | (2) |
| 0.1 to 4.9 | (0) |
| No Active LPNs | (0) |

Total LPNs, 2022 = 8,892

Total population, 2021 = 5,193,266

Overall rate per 10,000 population = 17.1

Counties in SC range from a low of 5.4 to a high of 40.8 LPNs per 10,000 county residents.

This information is based on all licensed practical nurses with an active license to practice and a primary practice location in South Carolina as of 5/1/2022. Counts are based on best available self-reported practice location information.

Source: SC Office for Healthcare Workforce, SC AHEC, with data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (LLR) and obtained from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA). Population data (2021) provided by the Data Integration and Analysis Division of RFA, based on the Vintage 2022 Estimate Series from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Demographic Characteristics of the LPN Workforce

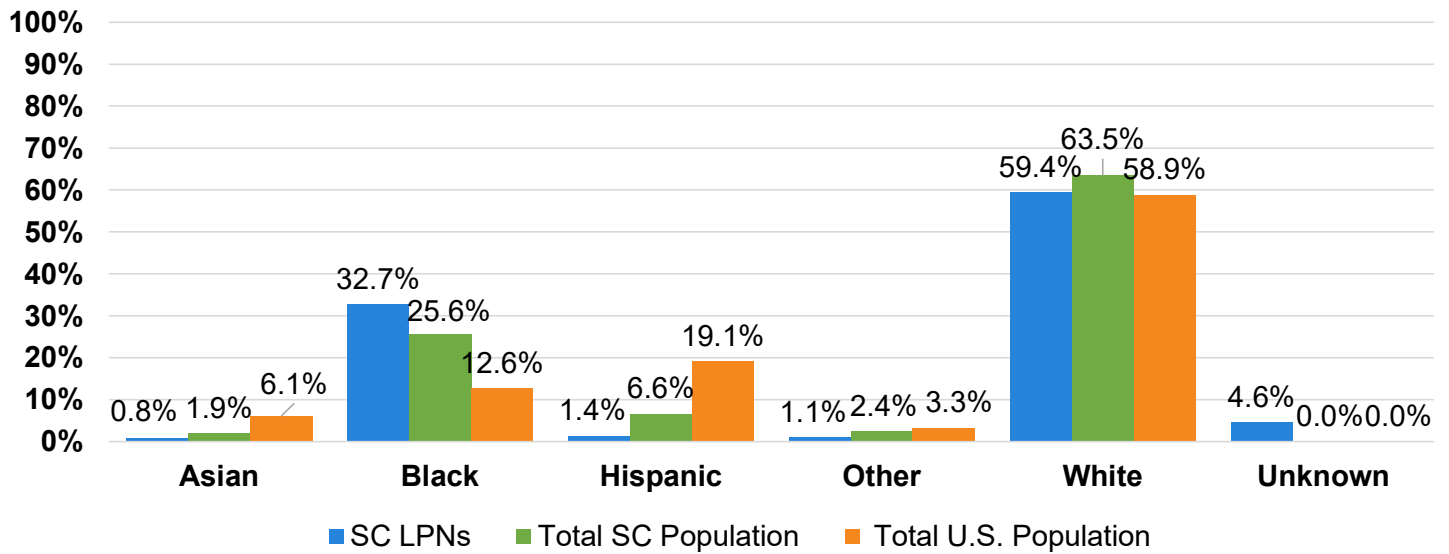
Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of LPNs in 2012 and 2022. In 2022, the LPN workforce was primarily female; only 4.5% of LPNs were male, a proportion that has remained essentially unchanged since 2012. Nationally, the LPN workforce was 10.2% male in 2022.⁷ Nearly 60% of LPNs actively working in SC in 2022 identified as White. **Figure 4** shows that Black LPNs were overrepresented, with 32.7% identifying as Black compared to 25.6% of the SC population. Compared to the South Carolina healthcare workforce as a whole, LPNs are more racially and ethnically diverse. The median age* of LPNs in 2022 was 47, and more than a third (39.9%) were age 51 or older (**Table 2**). Nationally, the median age of LPNs was 47 in 2022, and 44.7% of LPNs were 50 or older.⁷ As a group, LPNs age 50 and younger or 66 and older were more diverse than LPNs between 51 and 65 years old (**Figure 5**).

Table 2. The licensed practical nurse workforce in South Carolina, 2012 and 2022

| | 2012 | | 2022 | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | Count | Percent | Count | Percent |
| Total | 8,797 | 100.0% | 8,892 | 100% |
| County of Primary Employment | | | | |
| Metropolitan | 7,401 | 84.1% | 7,422 | 83.5% |
| Micropolitan | 898 | 10.2% | 843 | 9.5% |
| Nonmetropolitan | 498 | 5.7% | 627 | 7.1% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Sex | | | | |
| Female | 8,418 | 95.7% | 8,496 | 95.5% |
| Male | 379 | 4.3% | 396 | 4.5% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| American Indian | 23 | 0.3% | 17 | 0.2% |
| Asian | 48 | 0.5% | 70 | 0.8% |
| Black or African American | 2,590 | 29.4% | 2,911 | 32.7% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 61 | 0.7% | 123 | 1.4% |
| Other | 49 | 0.6% | 80 | 0.9% |
| White | 5,834 | 66.3% | 5,281 | 59.4% |
| Unknown | 192 | 2.2% | 410 | 4.6% |
| Age | | | | |
| 25 or Younger | 241 | 2.7% | 234 | 2.6% |
| 26-30 | 677 | 7.7% | 663 | 7.5% |
| 31-35 | 921 | 10.5% | 1,000 | 11.2% |
| 36-40 | 1,145 | 13.0% | 1,025 | 11.5% |
| 41-45 | 1,139 | 12.9% | 1,146 | 12.9% |
| 46-50 | 1,158 | 13.2% | 1,278 | 14.4% |
| 51-55 | 1,239 | 14.1% | 1,112 | 12.5% |
| 56-60 | 1,205 | 13.7% | 1,022 | 11.5% |
| 61-65 | 704 | 8.0% | 832 | 9.4% |
| 66-70 | 239 | 2.7% | 390 | 4.4% |
| 71-75 | 89 | 1.0% | 151 | 1.7% |
| 76 or Older | 40 | 0.5% | 39 | 0.4% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Median Age* | 47 years | | 47 years | |

* Note: The median represents the midpoint of a set of data, where half of the datapoints fall below and half fall above the median.

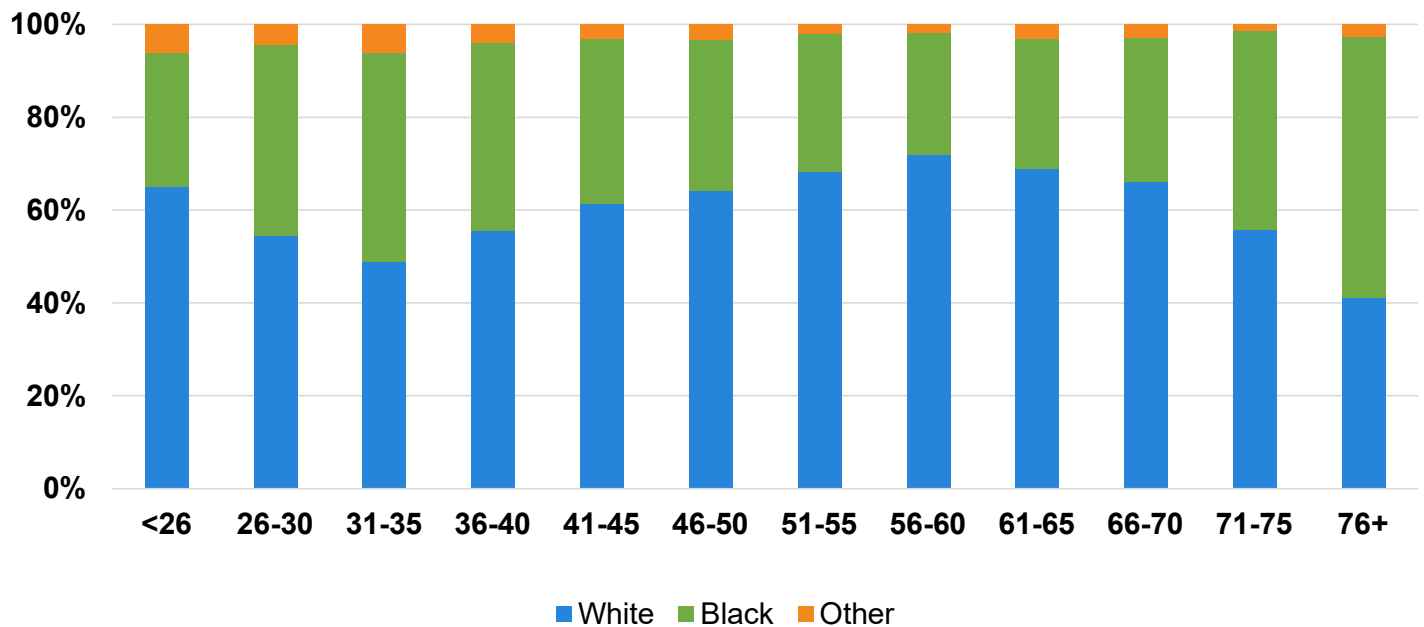
Figure 4. Race/ethnicity of LPNs in South Carolina relative to state and national total population, 2022.



Note: "Other" category includes "American Indian or Alaskan Native" and "two or more races."

Source: Population data (2022) provided by the Data Integration and Analysis Division of RFA, based on the Vintage 2022 Estimate Series from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 5. LPN racial diversity by age group, South Carolina, 2022.*



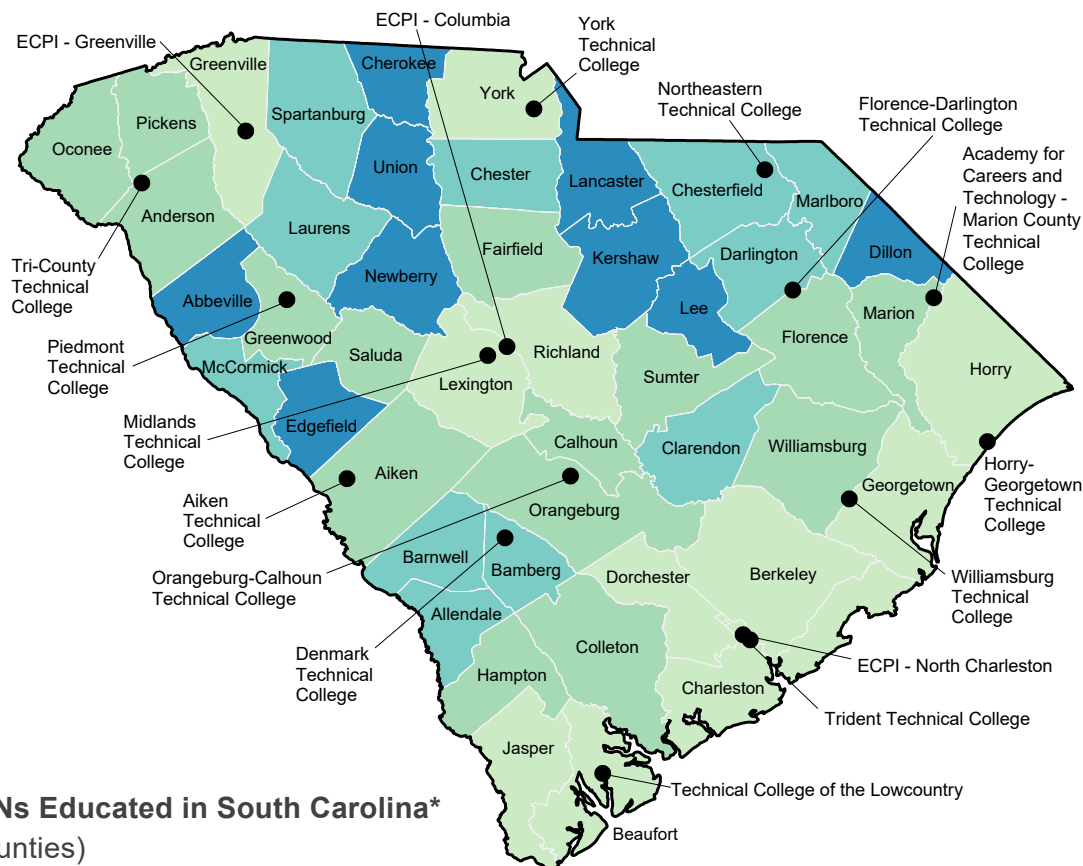
* Note: The data in this figure do not include 410 LPNs for whom race/ethnicity was unknown (N = 8,482).

LPN Education

Location of LPN Education Programs

Figure 6 shows the location of LPN education programs in South Carolina in 2022, along with the percent of LPNs by county that completed their LPN education in South Carolina. As of 2024, two additional programs were seeking approval or had received initial approval from the SCBON.

Table 3. Percent of LPNs educated in South Carolina by county and location of LPN education programs, 2022.



Percent of LPNs Educated in South Carolina* (Number of Counties)

| | |
|----------------|------|
| 70.0% to 83.0% | (9) |
| 60.0% to 69.9% | (11) |
| 50.0% to 59.9% | (15) |
| 25.5% to 49.9% | (11) |

Total LPNs, 2022 = 8,892

Total LPNs trained in SC = 4,361 (49%)

Note: 3,222 (36%) LPNs were missing school state

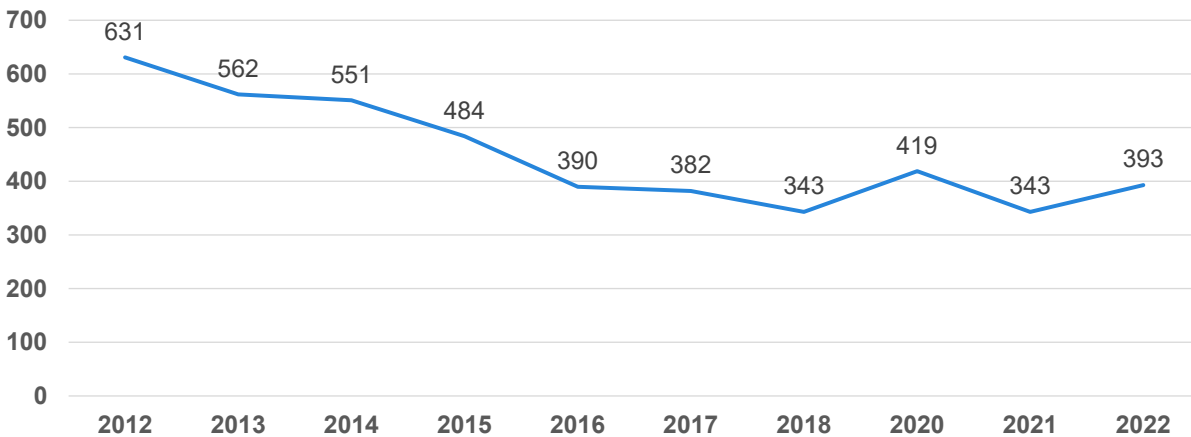
This information is based on all licensed practical nurses (LPNs) with an active license to practice, a primary practice location in South Carolina as of 5/1/2022. Counts are based on self-reported primary practice location or mailing address if practice address was missing. *Note: Original nursing degree state was only available for 5,670 (63.8%) of LPNs. This map includes programs that reported South Carolina LPN graduates to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) in 2022. While graduates from all ECPI campuses are counted in aggregate in Virginia for IPEDS and do not show up for South Carolina, the three ECPI campuses in South Carolina are included on this map.

Sources: LPN data from the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce, SC AHEC, with data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and obtained from the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office. Education program data from the South Carolina Board of Nursing; Practical Nursing Programs Approved by the State Board of Nursing for South Carolina. Accessed on 7/11/2024 at <https://lhr.sc.gov/nurse/pdf/NursingPrograms/PNPrograms.pdf>.

Number of LPN Graduates

Figure 7 shows the number of graduates from South Carolina LPN education programs from 2012 to 2022.⁸ The number of graduates has decreased by 37.7% since 2012, while the number of institutions offering LPN education stayed the same at 15, although different programs have opened and closed during the 10-year period. Nationally, the number of LPN graduates decreased by 26.1%, while the number of institutions offering LPN education decreased by 7.7%.⁸

Figure 7. LPN graduates from SC education programs, 2012-2022.



Source: The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

State and Year of LPN Education

When LPNs renew their license every two years, they are asked to indicate their original and highest nursing degrees as well as the programs and years in which they received their original and highest degrees. **Table 3** shows the number of LPNs who listed an LPN credential as their original nursing degree. **Table 4** shows the top 10 states where LPNs in South Carolina received their LPN credential. This information was only available for 63.8% of LPNs. Among LPNs for whom this information was available, over three-quarters (76.9%) received their original LPN degree in South Carolina.

Table 3. LPNs by original nursing degree type, 2022.

| | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|
| LPN School | 4,306 | 48.4% |
| LPN Diploma | 4,152 | 46.7% |
| LPN Educational Equivalency | 224 | 2.5% |
| LPN Multiple Options | 5 | 0.1% |
| Non-LPN Credential | 183 | 2.1% |
| Missing/Unknown | 22 | 0.2% |

Table 4. Top 10 LPN credential states for SC LPNs, 2022.

| | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| South Carolina | 4,361 | 49.0% |
| New York | 186 | 2.1% |
| North Carolina | 125 | 1.4% |
| Georgia | 120 | 1.3% |
| Ohio | 96 | 1.1% |
| Pennsylvania | 94 | 1.1% |
| Florida | 82 | 0.9% |
| Virginia | 76 | 0.9% |
| Texas | 73 | 0.8% |
| New Jersey | 71 | 0.8% |
| All other states | 363 | 4.1% |
| International | 23 | 0.3% |
| Missing credential state | 3,222 | 36.2% |

LPN Employment and Practice

Every two years, LPNs renewing their licenses are asked to:

- indicate their employment status and whether they are full-time, part-time or as needed;
- indicate the number of hours they work per week in their primary and secondary practice locations;
- identify the type(s) of setting(s) that most closely corresponds with their nursing practice position; and
- identify the position title(s) that most closely corresponds with their nursing practice position(s).

LPN Practice Hours

Most LPNs in 2020 (80.8%) indicated that they work full-time. Around two-thirds (67.8%) reported working between 36 and 40 hours per week across primary and secondary practice locations (Table 5). LPNs age 66 and older worked fewer median hours than did those younger than 66 (Figure 8). Those younger than 66 worked 40 hours per week, on average, regardless of their age category.

Table 5. Total hours worked per week by LPNs across primary and secondary practice locations by age group, SC, 2022.

| Total Weekly Hours | Count | Percent |
|--------------------|-------|---------|
| 1-10 | 131 | 1.5% |
| 11-20 | 412 | 4.6% |
| 21-25 | 389 | 4.4% |
| 26-30 | 241 | 2.7% |
| 31-35 | 368 | 4.1% |
| 36-40 | 6032 | 67.8% |
| 41-45 | 272 | 3.1% |
| 46-50 | 361 | 4.1% |
| 51-60 | 339 | 3.8% |
| 61-70 | 114 | 1.3% |
| 71-80 | 112 | 1.3% |
| Missing | 121 | 1.4% |

Figure 8. Median hours worked per week by LPNs across primary and secondary practice locations by age group, SC, 2022 (N=8,382).

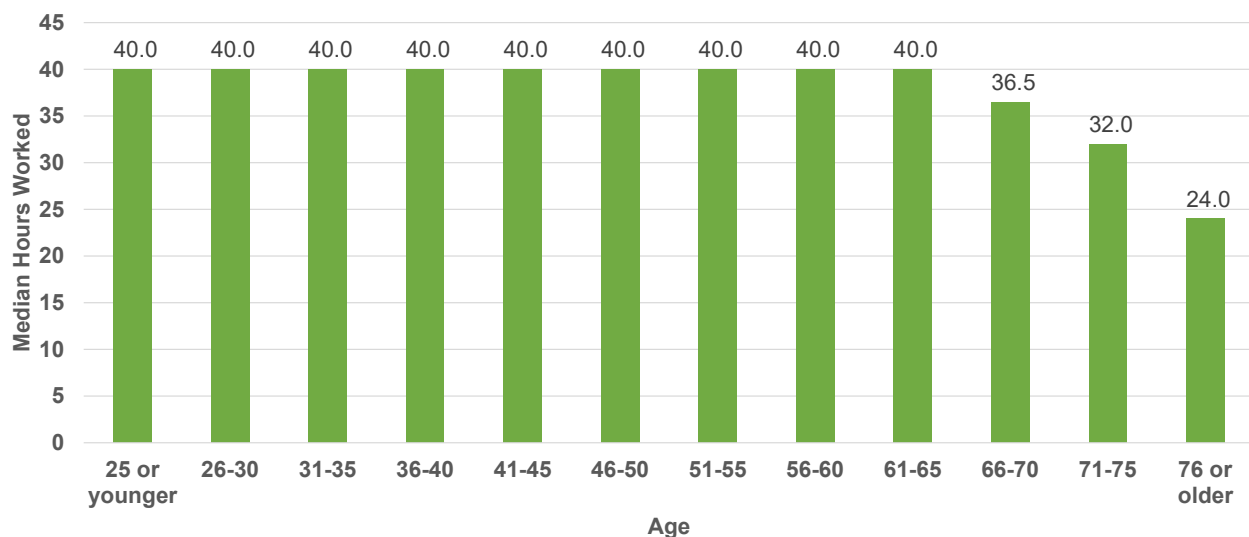


Table 5. Detailed LPN practice settings, SC, 2022.

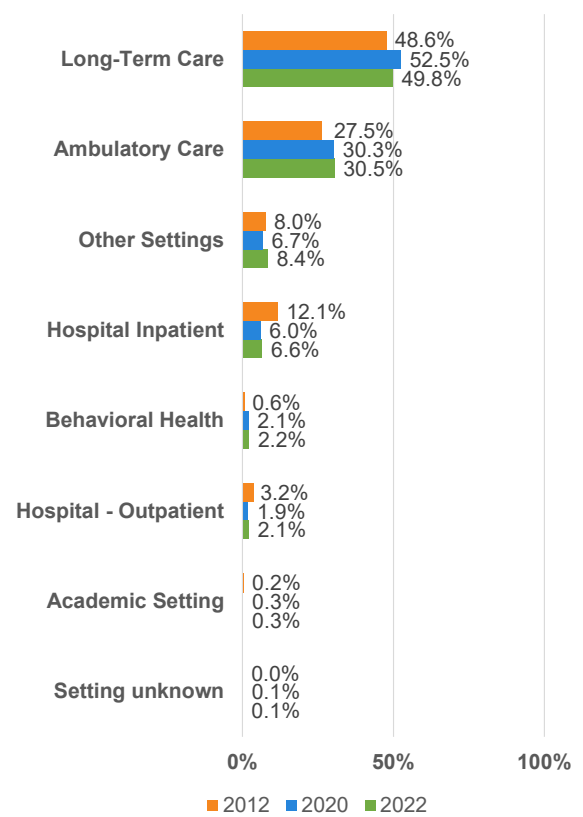
| LPN Practice Settings | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Academic | 25 | 0.3% |
| Academic Setting (Nursing) | 11 | 0.1% |
| Academic Setting (Other) | 14 | 0.2% |
| Behavioral Health | 192 | 2.2% |
| Alcohol/Drug Detox Center | 59 | 0.7% |
| Mental Health Center | 133 | 1.5% |
| Ambulatory Care | 2,713 | 30.5% |
| Ambulatory Care Setting | 152 | 1.7% |
| Ambulatory Surgery Center | 23 | 0.3% |
| Community Health | 166 | 1.9% |
| Dialysis | 50 | 0.6% |
| Federal Clinic | 280 | 3.1% |
| NP Provider Clinic | 17 | 0.2% |
| Occupational Health | 73 | 0.8% |
| Physician/Medical Office | 1,556 | 17.5% |
| Public Health Department | 52 | 0.6% |
| Retail/In-Store Clinic | 21 | 0.2% |
| Rural Health Center | 42 | 0.5% |
| School Health Service | 223 | 2.5% |
| Urgent Care | 58 | 0.7% |
| Long-Term Care | 4,430 | 49.8% |
| Assisted Living Facility | 519 | 5.8% |
| Home Health | 791 | 8.9% |
| Hospice (Inpatient only) | 40 | 0.4% |
| Nursing Home | 3,080 | 34.6% |
| Hospital Inpatient | 588 | 6.6% |
| Hospital – Emergency Room | 78 | 0.9% |
| Hospital – General Inpatient | 297 | 3.3% |
| Hospital – Other Inpatient | 17 | 0.2% |
| Hospital – Subacute Care | 122 | 1.4% |
| Hospital – Wide | 43 | 0.5% |
| Hospital – Surgical Services | 31 | 0.3% |
| Hospital - Outpatient | 185 | 2.1% |
| Hospital - Outpatient | 185 | 2.1% |
| Other Settings | 751 | 8.4% |
| Correctional Facility | 231 | 2.6% |
| Health Industry/Insurance Company | 122 | 1.4% |
| Multi-Setting | 59 | 0.7% |
| Policy Planning | 4 | < 0.1% |
| Other | 335 | 3.8% |
| Setting unknown | 8 | 0.1% |
| Total LPN Workforce | 8,892 | |

LPN Practice Settings

Almost half of LPNs (49.8%) were employed in a long-term care setting, and most of those worked in nursing homes. Roughly three in ten (30.5%) were employed in ambulatory care (Table 5).

Between 2012 and 2020 the percentage of LPNs working in long-term care and ambulatory care settings grew steadily, while employment in hospital and other settings decreased; however, between 2020 and 2022 the percentage of LPNs long-term care settings decreased, while employment in hospitals, both inpatient and outpatient, increased (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Percent of LPNs by practice setting, SC, 2012, 2020, and 2022.



LPN Position Titles

While practice setting allows us to understand where nurses are working, position title is one way to understand nurses' roles. In 2022, over half of LPNs indicated that their position title fell into the category of "Staff Nurse/Direct Care/General Duty Nurse" and nearly 20% indicated "LPN" as their position title ([Table 7](#)). These position types most likely provide direct patient care. Two percent (2%) of LPNs indicated their position title was supplemental staffing/travel/VNS nurse.

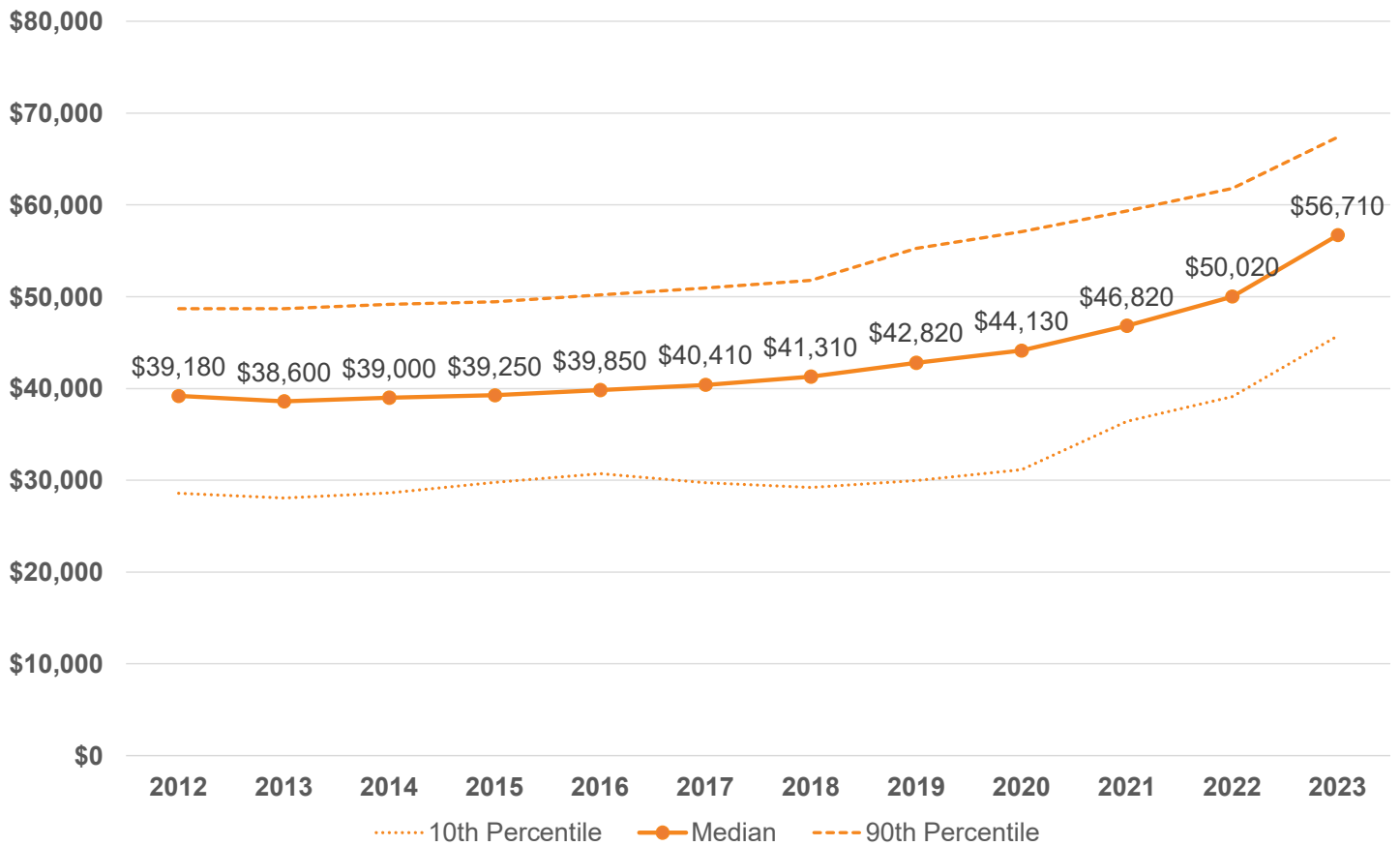
Table 7. Position titles reported by LPNs, SC, 2022.

| Position Title | Count | Percent |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| Staff nurse/Direct care/General duty nurse | 5,333 | 60.0% |
| LPN (Other not listed) | 1,727 | 19.4% |
| Nurse Manager | 329 | 3.7% |
| Charge Nurse/Supervisor | 328 | 3.7% |
| School nurse | 196 | 2.2% |
| Care Coordinator/Case Mgr/Discharge planner | 189 | 2.1% |
| Supplemental Staffing/Travel/VNS nurse | 174 | 2.0% |
| Other - Health Related (Patient Focus) | 157 | 1.8% |
| Quality/Utilization Review (Incl. Accreditation) | 127 | 1.4% |
| Triage/Advice nurse | 73 | 0.8% |
| Nurse Executive/Administration | 64 | 0.7% |
| Patient Educator | 29 | 0.3% |
| Other - Health Related (Org/Operations Focus) | 27 | 0.3% |
| Telehealth nurse | 26 | 0.3% |
| Nurse Educator (inc. In-Service, Prof. Dev.) | 17 | 0.2% |
| Information Nurse/Informatist | 14 | 0.2% |
| Consultant (eg: Legal, Edu., Prac. Standards) | 13 | 0.1% |
| Faculty/Professor | 13 | 0.1% |
| Nurse Researcher | 13 | 0.1% |
| Other - Non-Health Related | 4 | 0.0% |
| Missing | 39 | 0.4% |
| Total | 8,892 | 100.0% |

LPN Wages

South Carolina nursing licensure data does not include wage information, but the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks median annual salary. **Figure 10** shows the median annual salary of LPNs in South Carolina from 2012-2022, as well as the 10th percentile and 90th percentile salaries. Prior to 2020, wages grew by less than 4% per year, but from 2020-2021 they grew by 6.1% and from 2021-2022 they grew by 6.8%.³

Figure 10. Licensed practical nurse wages, South Carolina, 2012-2022: 10th percentile, median, 90th percentile.



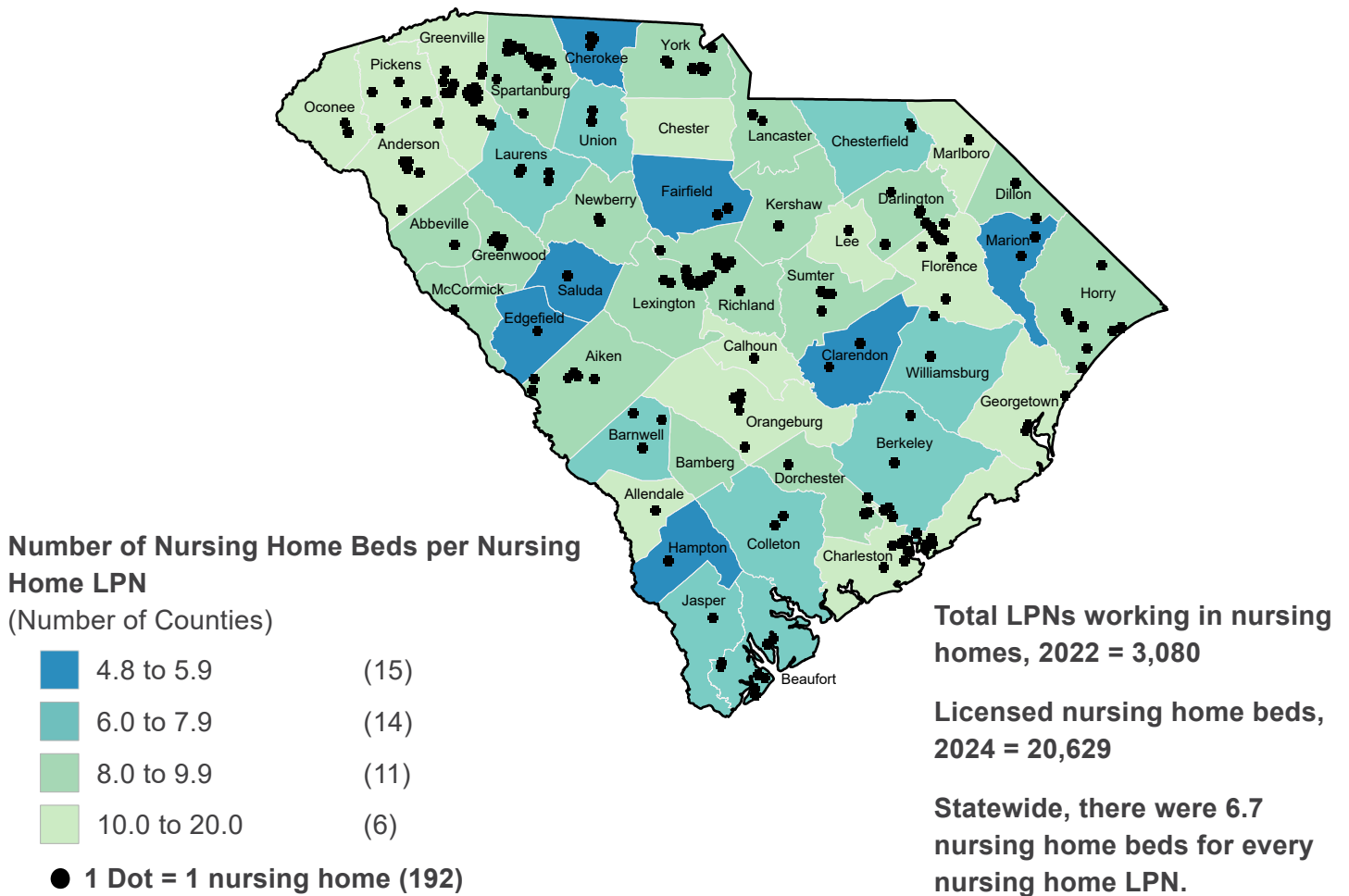
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Characteristics of LPNs Employed by Nursing Homes

Nursing homes are the largest employer of LPNs in South Carolina. These facilities employ other staff such as RNs and Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs). Higher staffing rates result in better patient outcomes and lower staff turnover.⁹

In 2022, 3,080 LPNs were employed by nursing homes. To gauge relative distribution, **Figure 11** shows the ratio of nursing home beds per LPNs employed in nursing homes in South Carolina in 2022. In six rural counties – Cherokee, Clarendon, Edgefield, Fairfield, Marion, and Saluda – there were ten or more nursing home beds per nursing home LPN, compared to Marlboro and Chester counties, which had the fewest number of beds per nursing home LPN at 4.4 and 5.0, respectively. This ratio is an indirect measure of supply adequacy and should be used with caution, because it does not take into account other clinical nursing home staff, the number of beds that are filled at any given time or levels of patient acuity.

Figure 11. Licensed nursing home beds per nursing home LPN, SC, 2022.



Note: This information is based on all licensed practical nurses (LPNs) with an active license to practice, a primary practice location in South Carolina and a primary practice setting of “nursing home” as of 12/1/2020. Counts are based on self-reported primary practice location, or mailing address if practice address was missing. The map shows all nursing homes that are licensed by the SC DHEC Bureau of Health Facilities Licensing as of 4/12/2023.

Sources: LPN data from the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce, SC AHEC, with data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and obtained from the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office. Nursing home locations from SC DHEC Find a Facility tool. Accessed on 4/12/2023 at <https://scdhec.gov/healthcarequality/healthcare-facility-licensing/licensed-sc-healthcare-facilities-lists/licensed>.

LPNs employed by nursing homes were more likely to be 50 or younger and African American than LPNs working in other settings (Table 8). They also were more likely to be practicing in nonmetropolitan areas. Most LPNs employed by nursing homes held the position title staff nurse/direct care/general duty nurse.

Table 8. Characteristics of LPNs employed by nursing homes, SC, 2022.

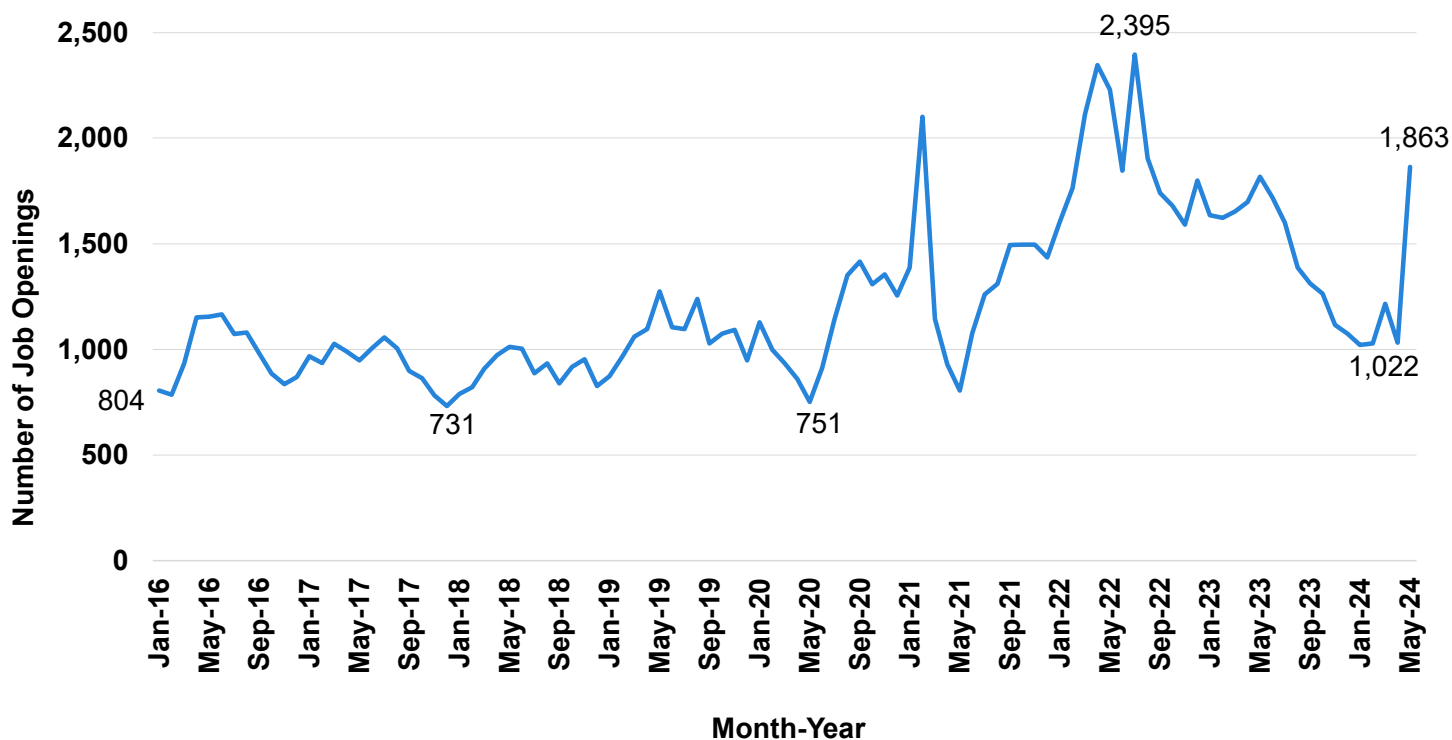
| | Nursing Home Setting | | All Other Settings | |
|---|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Count | Percent | Count | Percent |
| Total | 3,080 | 34.6% | 5,812 | 65.0% |
| County of Primary Employment | | | | |
| Metropolitan | 2,540 | 82.5% | 4,882 | 84.0% |
| Microropolitan | 286 | 9.3% | 557 | 9.6% |
| Nonmetropolitan | 254 | 8.2% | 373 | 6.4% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Sex | | | | |
| Female | 2,933 | 95.2% | 5,563 | 95.7% |
| Male | 147 | 4.8% | 249 | 4.3% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| American Indian | 6 | 0.2% | 11 | 0.2% |
| Asian | 33 | 1.1% | 37 | 0.6% |
| Black or African American | 1,332 | 43.2% | 1,579 | 27.2% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 43 | 1.4% | 80 | 1.4% |
| Other | 33 | 1.1% | 47 | 0.8% |
| White | 1,473 | 47.8% | 3,808 | 65.5% |
| Unknown | 160 | 5.2% | 250 | 4.3% |
| Age | | | | |
| 30 or younger | 309 | 10.0% | 588 | 10.1% |
| 31-40 | 753 | 24.4% | 1272 | 21.9% |
| 41-50 | 839 | 27.2% | 1585 | 27.2% |
| 51-60 | 734 | 23.8% | 1400 | 24.1% |
| 61-70 | 383 | 12.4% | 839 | 14.4% |
| 71 or Older | 62 | 2.1% | 128 | 2.2% |
| Unknown | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Median Age* | 47 years | | 47 years | |
| Position Title | | | | |
| Staff nurse/Direct care/General duty nurse | 2,050 | 66.6% | 3,283 | 56.5% |
| LPN (Other not listed) | 453 | 14.7% | 1274 | 21.9% |
| Charge Nurse/Supervisor | 197 | 6.4% | 131 | 2.3% |
| Nurse Manager | 165 | 5.4% | 164 | 2.8% |
| Supplemental Staffing/Travel/VNS nurse | 70 | 2.3% | 104 | 1.8% |
| Care Coordinator/Case Mgr/Discharge planner | 58 | 1.9% | 131 | 2.3% |
| Other | 77 | 2.5% | 696 | 12.0% |
| Missing | 10 | 0.3% | 29 | 0.5% |

* Note: The median represents the midpoint of a set of data, where half of the datapoints fall below and half fall above the median.

Demand for LPNs

The South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) tracks employment data, including the number of job openings in the state. In 2022, DEW reported that LPNs were the 23rd most in-demand occupation in South Carolina.¹⁰ **Figure 12** shows the number of job openings for LPNs in South Carolina by month from January 2016 to May 2024.¹¹ From January 2016 to February 2020, the average number of job postings per month was 975. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, that number increased to 1,457 between March 2020 and May 2024.¹² This increase could be due to the creation of new LPN positions or high job turnover.

Figure 12. Number of job openings for licensed practical nurses in South Carolina, January 2016 - May 2024.



Source: SC Department of Employment and Workforce

Conclusions

The data presented in this report describe the LPN workforce in 2022 and can inform decisions affecting nurse education, recruitment and deployment. Key findings include:

- 1. The LPN workforce in South Carolina is not keeping pace with population growth.** Since 2012, the ratio of LPNs per 10,000 population has decreased from 18.6 to 17.1. This decline is more pronounced in metropolitan counties and mirrors national trends. The 2022 National Nursing Workforce Survey found that the LPN workforce had decreased by 60,000 since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled in part by a plateau in the number of education programs, decreasing enrollment in education programs, and increasing workforce turnover.¹³ The number of LPN graduates from South Carolina educational programs has decreased by 37.7% since 2012. Continued efforts to support health careers programs and students, as well as workplace retention strategies, are needed to ensure a sufficient supply of LPNs to care for patients at all life stages.
- 2. The LPN workforce is more reflective of the diversity of the state's population than the South Carolina healthcare workforce as a whole.** In South Carolina, individuals identifying as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) comprise 36% of the state's overall population, yet they represent less than 25% of the state's licensed healthcare workforce. LPNs are more representative of the state's diverse population than any other single health profession – over 40% of SC LPNs do not identify as white. A racially and ethnically diverse health workforce helps improve provider-patient communication, patient outcomes and satisfaction, and access to care for underserved populations; reduce disparities in healthcare; and provide better experiences for students in the health professions.^{14,15,16,17} A diverse health workforce that is well-distributed across the state improves the chances of racial concordance, or shared identity, between providers and patients, allowing patients to establish relationships with providers who share common backgrounds and have similar life experiences.¹⁸ Licensed practical nursing is an easily accessible career with great potential to lead to other careers in healthcare, so supporting and enhancing career pipeline programs for LPNs could lead to increasing numbers of BIPOC healthcare workers.
- 3. Most LPNs continue to work in long term care settings, specifically in nursing homes.** Currently there are no federal minimum staffing requirements for nursing homes, but the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services are conducting a study to “determine the minimum level and type of staffing needed to enable safe and quality care in nursing homes.”¹⁹ Studies of nurse staffing mandates in California (the only state with a minimum nursing mandate) and abroad suggest that minimum staffing requirements ensure adequate staffing and improve patient outcomes.^{20,21} Insufficient staffing is also a major factor in nurse burnout and intent to leave the profession.^{22,23} Still, nationally, 80% of nursing home administrators are very concerned that they may not be able to meet potential federal staffing mandates, which may result in having to close facilities, limit number of residents served, and rely on agency staff to fill shifts.²⁴
- 4. During COVID, nursing homes were hit harder and have taken longer to recover than other healthcare settings.** From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 until January 2022, nursing homes lost 238,000 caregivers, or 15% of its total workforce.²⁵ Nursing homes lost more jobs than any other healthcare sector between February 2020 and December 2022.²⁶ One of the key drivers of these losses is burnout - around half of LPNs nationally report feeling burned out, emotionally fatigued, or drained at least a few days per week.²⁷ Ongoing support and resources are needed to ensure that nursing homes can continue to provide the level of care needed for their residents.

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