California Community Colleges

Career Advancement Guide for Current & Prospective Students

Career in nursing

August 2024

A11Y 8/29/25

Introduction

What are career advancement maps?

- **Key steps that you could take to begin** (or move up in) a specific career
- Guides explaining the **education and certifications needed** to hold specific jobs / roles
- Collection of **expected wages for each job / role** to help you understand the potential financial value of a career

What should you use this guide for?

- **Exploring potential careers** and learning more about jobs of interest
- Understanding the **education requirements, time, and effort necessary to start or advance** in a chosen career
- Informing **further research and/or discussions with a counselor on choosing a college program that is right for you**

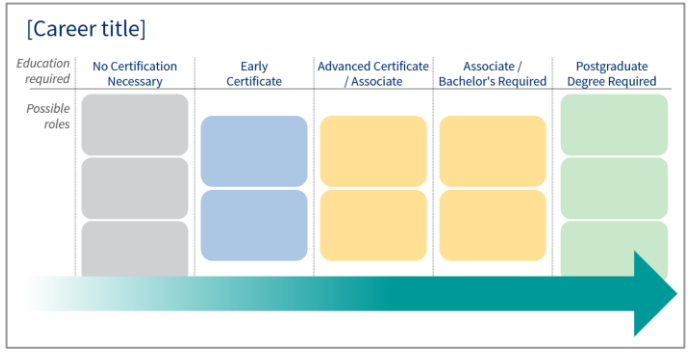
Note: *This guide* ***does not explain every possible career, and the options shown are not always the only routes possible****; instead, these maps illustrate the most common routes to pursue a few specific careers*

How to use this guide

Read career maps from left to right

Roles with no certification necessary are found on the far left of the map; the **level of education required for each role increases as you move from left to right**

Whether you are starting at step zero or step five, these career maps can help you find jobs of interest, along with the education needed and expected wages

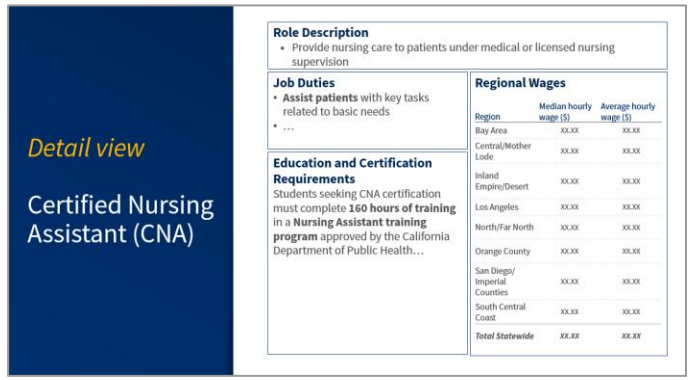


Sample career map

Look to additional pages for further detail

Career maps are followed by **detailed pages on specific roles**

These pages can tell you information on **job descriptions, wages in your area, and more detailed education / certification requirements**



Sample additional detail page

More research is needed!

Use this guide to start exploring career options, then **do more research and talk to a counselor** to get personalized advice

Counselors can give advice on **choosing a California Community Colleges program that will help you achieve your goals**

Note: *This guide highlights* ***education / certification requirements and wages for the State of California, specifically.*** *Students who plan to work outside of California should research requirements and wages in other states.*

The following pages outline what advancement through a career in nursing looks like & requires

Nursing is defined by the American Nurses Association as **"the art and science of caring, [focusing] on the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and human functioning…through compassionate presence"**[1]

This guide highlights key steps along a career in nursing, including detail on the most common positions (Nursing Assistant, Medical Assistant, Licensed Vocational Nurse, Registered Nurse, and more)

Workers within the field of nursing may be employed in a variety of settings, such as **healthcare facilities** (e.g., hospitals, clinics, nursing homes), **state facilities** (e.g., correctional facilities, veteran services agencies), or **educational institutions** (e.g., elementary, middle, & high schools)

1. American Nurses Association, "Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice"

Programs offered at California Community Colleges

Nursing career advancement

Note: *Program completion times assume Full-Time student status; additionally, career progression is not linear (e.g., it's possible to become RN without having previously been CNA, LVN)*

Additional yrs. of education req.

Possible roles

No Certification Necessary

Self-Employed Care Worker
~$15-18/hr
- *If IHSS provider, must attend orientation on program rules*

Personal Care Aide (PCA)
~$15.63/hr
- *Up to 8 hrs of training, varying by type of worker or program*
- *IHSS providers must attend orientation on program rules*

Other Occupation

<1 Year — Early Certificate

Home Health Aide (HHA)
~$15.63/hr
- *120 hrs of supervised clinical training and classroom instruction*

OR

- *40-hr HHA-specific training program for CNAs*

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)
~$20.12/hr
- *160 hrs of supervised clinical training and classroom instruction*
- *Must pass CNA examination*

+1-2 Years — Advanced Certificate / Associate

Medical Assistant
~$22.43/hr
- *Complete a Medical Assisting training program to earn either a certificate (~1-2 yrs) or Associate degree (~1.5-2 yrs); typically includes training on both administrative & clinical duties*
- *Pass a Medical Assisting credentialing exam (several options available; see backup pages for additional detail); note that a certifying credential is not required to work as a Medical Assistant, though majority of employers prefer it*

Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)
~$33.00/hr
- *Complete a Vocational Nursing program (~3 semesters of clinical and classroom training)*
- *Some programs may require CNA certification*
- *Must pass NCLEX-PN examination*

+2-4 Years[1] — Associate / Bachelor's Required

Registered Nurse
~$66.23/hr[3]

ADN (RN – ADN)
- *Earn Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) in ~2 yrs*
- *ADNs may pursue accelerated path to BSN; most MSN programs require BSN for admission*
- *Must pass NCLEX-RN examination*

BSN (RN – BSN)
- *Earn Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) in 4 yrs[4]*
- *Healthcare facilities and employers tend to prefer BSN applicants to ADN (many RN positions require BSN)*
- *Must pass NCLEX-RN examination*

Note: BSN-prepared RNs earn higher starting salaries, greater lifetime earnings, and see stronger employment outcomes (e.g., employment at magnet hospitals) on average than ADN-prepared RNs

+2-3 Years[2] — Postgraduate Degree Required

Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP)
~$78.46/hr
- *Graduate with a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) in ~2 yrs (clinical and classroom training)*
- *Must pass National NP Certification Board Exam*

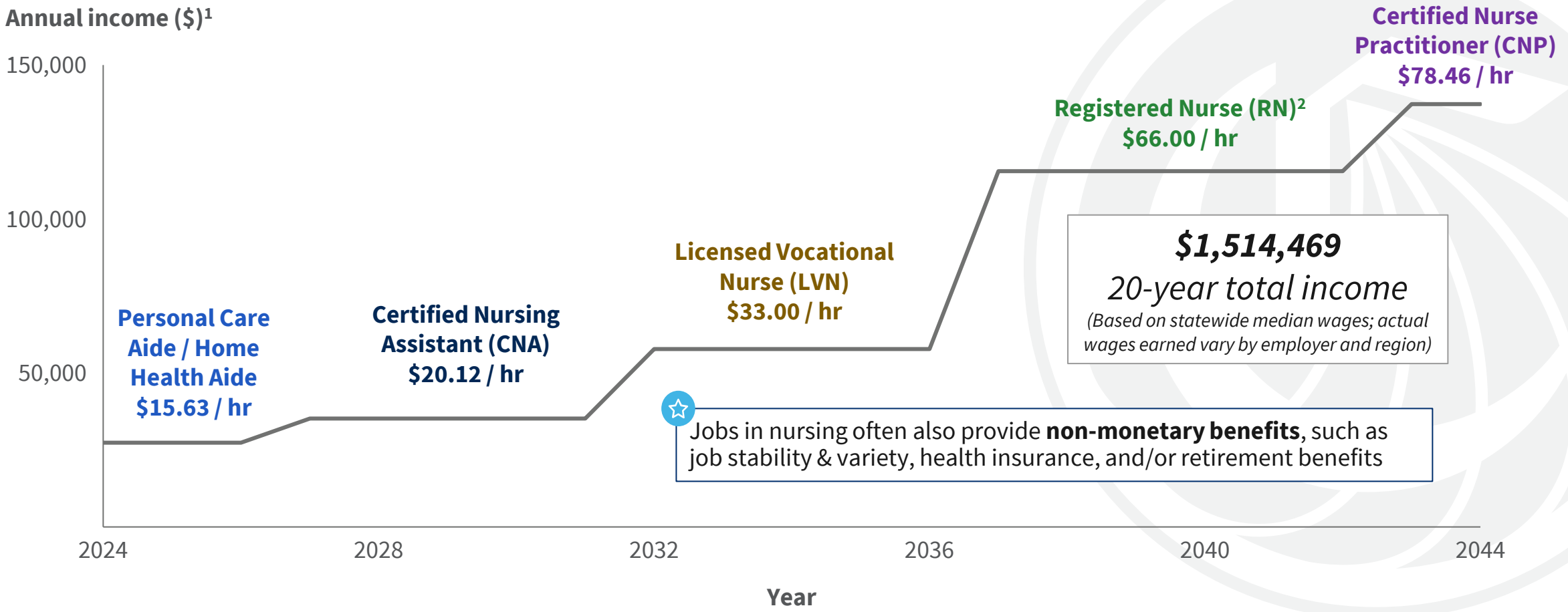
Certified Nurse-Midwife (CNM)
~$88.77/hr
- *Graduate with a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) in ~2 yrs (clinical and classroom training)*
- *Must pass AMCB examination*

Certified Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)
~$117.38/hr
- *Graduate with a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) in ~2 yrs (clinical and classroom training)*
- *Must pass NCE examination*

1. No prior certifications necessary to earn Associate or Bachelor's Degree, but prior experience (e.g., as CNA, LVN) may boost a candidate's application for ADN or BSN programs 2. Most MSN programs require BSN for admission (some online programs may accept ADN, but uncommon) 3. RN wage data combines RN-ADN and RN-BSN wages; wages may vary by education level 4. ADNs may earn a BSN on an accelerated track
Note: Wages reflected are 2023 median hourly in California (entry-level wages may differ); Program completion time listed assumes Full-Time student status (at least 12 credits per term at a California Community College; may vary for Bachelors & Masters programs)
Source: California Department of Public Health; California Community Colleges; American Nurses Association; National Board of Certification & Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists; California Health Care Foundation; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

Continued education along a nursing career journey can lead to high long-term financial value

Sample student journey is shown; however, career progression does not have to be linear (it is possible to move directly into a more advanced role)



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1. Assuming 35 working hours per week, 50 working weeks per year; based on statewide median wages 2. BSN-prepared RNs generally earn higher starting salaries and greater lifetime income than ADN-prepared RNs
Note: Charts depicted are simple representations based on wages as of May 2024 & do not account for wage growth due to inflation, nor do they assume any time value of money due to saving
Source: Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey 2023

Role-specific details

Role details

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)

Role Description

- Provide nursing care to patients under medical or licensed nursing supervision
- May work in **assisted living centers, nursing homes, patient homes, government facilities, clinics**, and several other settings where healthcare services are administered

Job Duties

- **Assist patients** with key tasks, such as bathing, dressing, feeding, walking, socializing, and wound dressing
- **Assist RNs** with key tasks, such as recording vital signs, monitoring patients, administering medications

Education and Certification Requirements

Students seeking CNA certification must complete **160 hours of training** in a **Nursing Assistant training program** approved by the California Department of Public Health. Training requires both **classroom / laboratory instruction** (60 hours) and **supervised clinical practice** (100 hours) with patients.

After training, students must **pass California's CNA examination** to be certified as a CNA. Students with **existing CNA certification in another state** may apply for reciprocity in California.

Regional Wages

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	23.72	25.38
Central/Mother Lode	18.91	19.93
Inland Empire/Desert	18.91	19.98
Los Angeles	19.84	21.52
North/Far North	19.88	21.40
Orange County	19.64	21.02
San Diego/Imperial Counties	19.62	21.26
South Central Coast	19.38	20.76
Total Statewide	***20.12***	***21.90***

Source: California Department of Human Resources; California Department of Public Health CNA Certification Site; NurseJournal; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

Role details

Medical Assistant (I/II)

Role Description

- **Administrative (sometimes called "front office"):** Assist with clerical duties in healthcare facilities
- **Clinical (sometimes called "back office"):** Perform non-invasive routine medical tasks and procedures under the supervision of a licensed healthcare professional
- May work in **physicians' offices, hospitals, outpatient clinics,** and other healthcare facilities

Job Duties

- Assist supervising healthcare professionals with **administrative tasks**, such as medical billing / coding, patient charting, and scheduling
- Assist supervising healthcare professionals with **clinical tasks**, such as taking patient vitals, gathering biological specimens (e.g., blood, urine) for testing, and administering medication under supervision

Education and Certification Requirements

Students may complete a **Medical Assisting Training program** to earn either a non-degree **Certificate of Achievement** (~1-2 years[1]) or an **Associate Degree** (~1.5-2 years[1]). Medical Assisting training programs consist of **classroom / laboratory instruction, clinical practice**, and **externship experience**.

Certification is not required to work as a medical assistant in California but is **highly encouraged to improve employability** outcomes. Most Medical Assisting training programs give students eligibility to sit a credentialing examination.[2]

There are **several MA certification options** to consider in the state of California; ***see detailed breakdown on following page.***

Be sure to ask your community college which exams your program will qualify / prepare you to sit for, as **this may impact job availability following program completion!

Regional Wages[2]

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	28.81	28.67
Central/Mother Lode	19.78	21.85
Inland Empire/Desert	18.75	20.61
Los Angeles	20.24	22.25
North/Far North	28.66	26.62
Orange County	19.34	21.89
San Diego/Imperial Counties	21.82	22.41
South Central Coast	21.93	22.50
Total Statewide	***22.43***	***24.05***

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status (at least 12 credits per semester at a CCC) 2. Wage data does not distinguish between MAs performing administrative tasks only, clinical tasks only, or those performing both administrative & clinical tasks – wages may vary
Source: American Association of Medical Assistants; Medical Board of California; Bureau of Labor Statistics; California Community Colleges; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

Role details | Medical Assistant certification options (II/II)

Certification	Certifying organization	California Board-approved?[1]	NCCA accredited?[2]	Content covered by exam
Certified Medical Assistant (CMA)	American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)	Yes	Yes	Administrative & Clinical
Clinical Medical Assistant Certification (CMAC)	American Medical Certification Association (AMCA)	Yes	Yes	Administrative & Clinical
Registered Medical Assistant (RMA)	American Medical Technologists (AMT)	Yes	Yes	Administrative & Clinical
California Certified Medical Assistant (CACMA)	California Certifying Board of Medical Assistants (CCBMA)	Yes	No [3]	Administrative & Clinical
National Certified Medical Assistant (NCMA)	Multiskilled Medical Certification Institute	Yes	Yes	Administrative & Clinical
Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA)	National Healthcareer Association (NHA)	No [4]	Yes	Administrative & Clinical

Be sure to ask your community college which certification(s) your program will qualify / prepare you to sit for, as this may impact your job availability following program completion!

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1. The Medical Board of California has a published list of five certifications that designate a "qualified medical assistant" *in the state of California* 2. The National Committee for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) accredits certification programs based on defined national standards of program quality and excellence 3. CCBMA plans to seek NCCA accreditation 4. California jobs may still be available to CCMA credential holders, but up to employer discretion
Source: Medical Board of California Medical Assistant Certification site, American Association of Medical Assistants, American Medical Technologists, California Certifying Board of Medical Assistants, Multiskilled Medical Certification Institute, National Healthcareer Association

Role details

Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)

Role Description

- Provide **basic general nursing care** under the direction of a registered nurse or physician
- May work in various settings, including **hospitals, home care agencies, and outpatient clinics**
- Option to **certify & work in advanced area** (e.g., gerontology, wound care, IV therapy)

Job Duties

- Perform **basic nursing procedures**, such as administering medication, patient monitoring, and assisting with patient examinations
- Can legally **perform a broader scope of clinical duties than CNAs** and may **supervise a nursing assistant**

Education and Certification Requirements

Students must complete a **Vocational Nursing program** to earn either a non-degree **Certificate of Achievement** (~1-2 years[1]) or an **Associate Degree** (~1.5-2 years[1]). Vocational Nursing program curricula include, at minimum, **576 hours of classroom / laboratory instruction and 954 hours of clinical experience**. Course content includes topics such as **anatomy, nursing fundamentals, pharmacology, and psychology.** Some Vocational Nursing programs may require CNA certification as a prerequisite for admission.

In addition to completing a Vocational Nursing program, students **must pass the NCLEX-PN examination**, developed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) in order to achieve licensure.

Regional Wages

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	38.18	39.52
Central/Mother Lode	31.49	32.74
Inland Empire/Desert	31.55	32.39
Los Angeles	32.47	34.23
North/Far North	32.63	34.51
Orange County	32.07	33.76
San Diego/Imperial Counties	32.17	33.73
South Central Coast	32.63	33.73
Total Statewide	***33.00***	***34.91***

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status (at least 12 credits per semester at a CCC)
Source: Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians LVN Licensure Requirements Site; California Department of Human Resources; California Career Institute; National Council of State Boards of Nursing; Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey 2023 collected by California Employment Development Dept

Role details

Registered Nurse (RN)

Role Description

- **Develop nursing care plans**, direct patient care, and educate patients and their families
- Work in various settings, including **hospitals, physicians' offices, home healthcare services, nursing homes, schools, and outpatient clinics**
- May work up to **12-hour shifts** and/or at **nighttime** in hospital settings

Job Duties

- **Provide patient care** through key tasks, such as giving physical exams, administering medications, assisting with diagnostic tests, and educating patients and their families about patient conditions

Education and Certification Requirements

Students without existing LVN licensure must complete an approved Nursing program to earn an **Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN)** (~2 years[1]) or a **Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)** (~4 years[1]). Students with existing LVN licensure in California may complete a specialized program ("30 Unit Option") to qualify for the NCLEX-RN examination without a formal degree in nursing.[2]

To achieve licensure as an RN, **students must pass the NCLEX-RN examination** developed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).

Healthcare facilities and employers prefer or require RNs with a BSN – 71% of new nurse positions prefer candidates with BSN and **25% of hospitals and other healthcare settings require a BSN** (according to 2023 American Association of Colleges of Nursing annual report). In addition, **96% of BSN-prepared nurses secure employment within 4-6 months of graduation.**

Students who have already earned an ADN may earn a BSN on an accelerated track.

Regional Wages[3]

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	82.64	79.82
Central/Mother Lode	60.95	62.56
Inland Empire/Desert	61.00	60.64
Los Angeles	64.07	62.66
North/Far North	67.70	69.63
Orange County	66.09	61.45
San Diego/Imperial Counties	58.78	58.57
South Central Coast	56.54	60.04
Total Statewide	***66.23***	***66.56***

! *BSN-prepared RNs earn ~$20K/year more on average than ADN-prepared peers, resulting in greater long-term earnings*

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status (at least 12 credits per semester at a CCC) 2. RN licensure earned through post-LVN non-degree training may not transfer to other states; LVNs who wish to practice as RNs outside of California should consider pursuing an ADN or BSN 3. Reflects RN wages in California across all levels of education

Source: California Department of Human Resources; California Board of Registered Nursing Licensure Requirements summary; National Council of State Boards of Nursing; ; American Association of Colleges of Nursing 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept; Payscale

Role details

Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP)

Role Description

- Provide **advanced nursing care for a specialty patient population or practice area** (e.g., pediatrics, adult-gerontology, women's health), often in collaboration with a licensed physician
- Work in various settings including **clinics, hospitals, private practices, nursing homes, and schools**

Job Duties

- **Collaborate with physician to coordinate patient care** through key tasks such as summarizing patient status for physicians, implementing nursing care plans, and liaising between care providers

Education and Certification Requirements

NPs must earn a **Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)** (~2-3 years[1] after RN licensure) and/or a **Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)** (~3-5 years[1] after RN licensure), and specialize in a practice area such as **Family, Pediatrics, Neonatal, Adult-Gerontology, Women's Health, and Psychiatry / Mental Health.** It is typically recommended to **work as an RN for some years** before selecting a preferred specialty to pursue an NP education in.

After graduation, NPs can **apply for state certification in California** through the state Board of Registered Nursing (BRN). In California, NPs graduating from a BRN-approved program do not need a national certification exam to practice; however, most insurances require it. **NP graduates can earn national certification by passing an exam from one of several certifying organizations. The exams offered by each organization differs in length, content, and pricing; NPs should compare exams to choose the certification that is right for them.**

Regional Wages

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	97.00	93.52
Central/Mother Lode	71.70	72.11
Inland Empire/Desert	68.82	72.85
Los Angeles	82.35	80.00
North/Far North	74.34	77.00
Orange County	80.68	78.33
San Diego/Imperial Counties	78.49	74.90
South Central Coast	72.82	74.30
Total Statewide	***78.46***	***78.94***

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status

Source: California Board of Registered Nursing Advanced Nursing Requirements; American Association of Nurse Practitioners; American Nurses Association; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

Role details

Certified Nurse-Midwife (CNM)

Role Description

- **Provide care to women** from adolescence through menopausal years, **especially related to pregnancy and childbirth**
- May work in various settings including **hospitals, clinics, birthing centers, and private practices**

Job Duties

- Provide care to women through key tasks such **as confirming pregnancy, providing prenatal / postpartum care, delivering newborns, performing preventive health screens, and treating gynecological disorders**

Education and Certification Requirements

CNMs must earn a **Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)** (~2-3 years[1] after RN licensure) and/or a **Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)** (~3-5 years[1] after RN licensure) specializing in nurse-midwifery.

After completion of the postgraduate program, nurse-midwives can **apply to take the CNM certification exam through the American Midwifery Certification Board**. Passing the exam grants CNM certification, which CNMs can use to qualify for state licensure to practice nurse-midwifery in California. CNMs **must hold state licensure in California through the Board of Registered Nursing** to practice nurse-midwifery in California.

Regional Wages

Region	Median hourly wage ($)	Average hourly wage ($)
Bay Area	91.23	93.87
Central/Mother Lode	71.34	73.20
Inland Empire/Desert[2]	-	-
Los Angeles	89.68	89.18
North/Far North	90.63	91.08
Orange County	92.76	90.25
San Diego/Imperial Counties	68.70	65.92
South Central Coast	88.77	84.63
Total Statewide	***84.90***	***82.88***

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status 2. Data incomplete for Inland Empire/Desert
Source: Mayo Clinic; California Board of Registered Nursing Advanced Nursing Requirements; American Midwifery Certification Board; Mayo Clinic; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

Role details

Certified Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)

Role Description

- **Administer anesthesia drugs** and provide care for patients before, during, and after surgery
- May work in various settings including **hospitals, surgical clinics, emergency rooms, and outpatient care centers**

Job Duties

- Perform key tasks throughout surgery such as **administering pain medication to keep patients pain-free and/or asleep and monitoring patients' vital signs, biological functions**

Education and Certification Requirements

To enter a nurse anesthesia educational program in California, candidates must hold an active RN license and have **one year of prior experience in acute care nursing**.

Candidates **must complete a nurse anesthesia educational program** accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs. These programs are frequently doctoral programs (~3-5 years[1] after RN licensure) that award a **Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) or Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice (DNAP) degree.**

After program completion, candidates must **pass the National Certification Examination** (NCE) developed by the National Board of Certification & Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists to become CRNAs. After passing, CRNAs should **apply for state certification through the California Board of Registered Nursing** to be able to practice in California.

Total Statewide Wages

Median Hourly Wage

$117.38

Average Hourly Wage

$123.08

1. Assumes full-time enrollment status

Source: California Department of Human Resources; California Board of Registered Nursing Advanced Nursing Requirements; Mayo Clinic; 2023 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey collected by California Employment Development Dept

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Thank you!

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