

2025 North Shore High Demand Occupations:

Healthcare and Social Assistance Career Pathways



Prepared by

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Economic and
Public Policy Research

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North Shore High Demand Occupations: Healthcare and Social Assistance Career Pathways

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Introduction

The North Shore is a significant historical, cultural, and economic region of Massachusetts encompassing 30 communities that stretch across the shoreline and inland between Boston and New Hampshire. The North Shore Alliance for Economic Development brings together the regional leaders from 30 communities in the North Shore to facilitate collaboration and help develop actions aimed at addressing economic development issues that advance the region and the Commonwealth. The MassHire North Shore Workforce Board serves as the policy-making body for federal and state funded employment and training services in the region and helps address critical labor market issues within the North Shore region.

The Alliance and the MassHire North Shore Workforce Board commissioned this report from the Donahue Institute with the aim of developing a comprehensive exploration of specific career pathways for select occupations within healthcare and social assistance that are experiencing large growth in the region. UMDI used the North Shore Alliance's FY24 Future of Work: Talent Retention of College Graduates in the Region report and UMDI's 2024 Northeast Massachusetts Regional Blueprint conducted for the local MassHire affiliates as starting points to provide additional information on career pathways for occupations within healthcare and social assistance so that a progression from entry-level jobs to higher-paying jobs in the field can be followed.

The analysis of career pathways includes an examination of education and training opportunities for four key occupations within healthcare and social assistance in the region. Additionally, any gaps in pathway training and education are identified for the workforce system in the region to address in the short- and long-term. To develop this report, UMDI conducted a literature review of the regional economic development and workforce development space, a labor market scan to identify occupations and/or occupational groupings with the most employment potential for job seekers in North Shore region, a comprehensive exploration of four targeted occupations and their associated pathways, and interviews with key stakeholders to better understand employment opportunities in targeted and related occupations.

Executive Summary

Previous regional workforce studies have identified Healthcare and Social Assistance as a key sector in the North Shore region, projecting job growth as well as increased demand on the healthcare system from an aging population. However, there have been barriers to developing the workforce necessary to meet this demand. On behalf of the North Shore Alliance for Economic Development and the MassHire North Shore Workforce Board, The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) conducted thorough workforce analysis and has prepared a High Demand Occupations Report of Healthcare and Social Assistance Career Pathways in the North Shore Region of Massachusetts.

UMDI's research develops summary data on occupations within healthcare and social assistance in the region. Additionally, this report provides a deeper analysis of four selected occupations and maps their opportunity pathways so that a clear progression from entry-level jobs can be followed to higher-paying opportunities. For this study, the targeted occupations include home health and personal care aides, nursing assistants, medical assistants, and social and human service assistants. Particular attention was given to gathering research related to organizations in the acute care and long-term care industries on the North Shore.

This report provides information for workforce development, policymakers, and educational providers to help support occupational pipeline advancement for healthcare and social assistance occupations in the North Shore region. From the Donahue Institute's research:

1. Local labor market data show:
 - Healthcare and social assistance¹ is the largest industry in the North Shore region, making up 18 percent of all jobs in the region. Comparatively, 13 percent of all jobs in the U.S. are in healthcare and social assistance, demonstrating a particular concentration of work in this field in the region.
 - The largest occupation in the North Shore region is home health and personal care aide² with 11,580 jobs in 2024. This is approximately 4.8 percent of all jobs in the North Shore.
 - Home health and personal care aide, social and human service assistant, and medical assistant employment is expected to grow by 12 percent, seven percent, and four percent respectively over the next five years.
2. Interviews with local labor market experts and local employers reveal some of the hiring and retention challenges in healthcare and social assistance occupations in the North Shore region including:
 - Potential employees face challenges with language barriers, childcare, transportation, and a general lack of knowledge for both cultural norms expected within American workplaces as well as the processes involved in navigating occupational pathways.

¹ Healthcare and social assistance is classified as one industry by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)

² Home health and personal care aide is classified as one occupation by the Standard Occupational Classification system (SOC)

- Potential employees are not always aware of all the options for careers in healthcare and social assistance occupations or how to find resources to become qualified and get hired.
 - The combination of prohibitive cost of living and low salaries for entry-level healthcare and social assistance positions makes it difficult to recruit and retain staff.
3. Based on the combination of labor market data and key informant interviews, UMDI developed the following recommendations to help support pathways in healthcare and social assistance occupations in the North Shore region:
- Providing training and certification in multiple languages can help reach more potential staff and accommodate diverse patient populations.
 - Providing support and flexibility for challenges employees might be facing including transportation support, flexible schedules for family responsibility, training for the hiring process, and others can help employees and potential employees be successful.
 - Partnering with local educational organizations to create career pipelines and further education for employees can help recruit and retain staff.
 - Internal training and opportunities for advancement can help incentivize employees to stay.

Literature Review

Existing research and previously completed workforce studies offer several key insights to inform UMDI's focused analysis of high-demand healthcare and social assistance occupations in the North Shore region. The UMass Donahue Institute has conducted similar analyses in recent years, including the Greater Boston and Northeast Massachusetts Regional Blueprint reports and other commissioned workforce studies that inform this section.

The relevant literature reviewed in the following section explores other related work on regional workforce conditions, workforce development in the healthcare and social assistance sectors, and career pathways for high-demand healthcare occupations with a focus on entry-level positions that do not require a four-year post-secondary degree.

Key questions driving the following section of this literature review include:

1. What are the current and projected conditions of the regional healthcare and social assistance workforce?
2. What barriers exist that hinder the development and retention of workers in high-demand healthcare and social assistance roles?
3. How have other regions or studies demonstrated effective strategies (such as career pathway mapping or paid training opportunities) to drive growth in healthcare and social assistance employment?
4. What insights can be synthesized to support a strategic and equitable approach to workforce development in identified high-demand entry-level healthcare occupations in the North Shore region?

Workforce Trends and Historical Context

Previous regional labor market analyses offer important context on demographic and occupational trends including long-term labor supply issues and future demand in key industries in the region.

In 2024 UMDI conducted The Northeast Massachusetts Regional Blueprint, a regional study commissioned by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. This study highlighted regional workforce trends and identified priority industries, including projected slow population growth in the North Shore between 2020 and 2050. The study also noted the aging population in the region with individuals aged 65 and older projected to increase from 17 percent to 23 percent of the total population by 2040.³ The Greater Boston Blueprint—a comparable workforce analysis by UMDI on another region—documents similar findings and recommendations for addressing a shrinking labor pool in key industries such as healthcare and social assistance, additionally highlighting the aging population and declining numbers in the working-age cohort starting in 2018.⁴

The labor pool shrinks as individuals retiring from the workforce are not replaced with a sufficient volume of young adults entering the job market, consequently limiting the ability to meet current and

³ Stewart, Branner, Annie Alexander, Ember Skye Kane-Lee, and Mark Melnik. "Northeast Massachusetts Regional Labor Market Blueprint." UMass Donahue Institute Economic & Public Policy Research Group, June 2024.

⁴ James, Jennifer (EOLWD). "Greater Boston Regional Blueprint" 2024.

future labor force needs in key occupations and industries. Moreover, an aging population could increase demand for healthcare services, long-term care, and other healthcare support occupations in particular, placing additional pressure on a workforce that is already facing severe capacity constraints and worker shortages.

Declining birth rates and low rates of in-migration are also identified as potential long-term challenges for the labor supply in the Greater Boston region. The prohibitive costs of housing, childcare, and transportation may all be salient factors pushing younger families to other regions and contributing to this overall trend.⁵

Moreover, significant job growth has been identified in priority industries such as professional services, which saw an increase of nearly 24,000 jobs in the region between 2020 and 2024. Healthcare and social assistance also saw a significant increase of over 8,500 jobs in the same period, making it another priority industry for the region. As noted later in this section, regional educational institutions have not graduated enough individuals to fulfill this need in growing sectors. Studies have also identified shrinking job sectors in the region between 2020 and 2024, including retail trade, losing over 13,000 jobs, accommodation and food service losing over 10,000 jobs, and administration and waste services which lost over 5,500 jobs.⁶

Previous regional workforce analyses outline the opportunity to engage more diverse populations to address labor supply shortages in high-demand sectors and increase access to well-paid career opportunities, particularly for the growing foreign-born resident population. Strategies aimed at expanding training incentives and career development opportunities could be an effective tool for filling high-demand roles while connecting individuals in the region to well-paying careers with room for professional growth and development.⁷ This is expanded upon further later in this literature review.

Challenges and Barriers to Job Growth

An unpublished 2024 UMDI report focused on barriers to job growth in healthcare professions prepared for the University of Massachusetts highlights the acute labor shortage and notable obstacles to job growth in the healthcare and social assistance workforce across the state. Despite graduating roughly 3,400 BSN-qualified nurses in 2021, this number falls significantly short of the annual demand which exceeds 7,000 positions. Capacity constraints (in the form of limited teaching space, simulation/tech labs, and instructors, etc.) limit the ability to accept additional qualified applicants and were identified as primary contributors to this shortfall and lack of training capacity.⁸ The Metro South/West Behavioral Health Workforce Study conducted by UMDI in 2023 describes barriers to healthcare workforce development and retention in the region, particularly for the behavioral health sector. Challenges such as high turnover, burnout, employment qualification mismatches, and the high living costs in the region are identified as potential barriers to job growth. Despite a substantial and growing number of graduates in behavioral health fields in the state, workforce shortages persist, suggesting graduates may be leaving the region for a lower cost of living or choosing to work in other fields.⁹

⁵ "Greater Boston Regional Blueprint"

⁶ "Greater Boston Regional Blueprint"

⁷ "Northeast Massachusetts Regional Labor Market Blueprint"

⁸ Stewart, Branner, Rebecca Loveland, Annie Alexander, Kassie Breest, Rye McKenzie, Allison Hauff, and Mark Melnik. "Labor Challenges and Solutions for Healthcare Professions in Massachusetts." UMass Donahue Institute Economic and Public Policy Research, March 2024.

⁹ Stewart, Branner, Annie Alexander, and Lily Harris. "Metro South/West Behavioral Health Workforce Study." UMass Donahue Institute Economic & Public Policy Research Group, June 2023.

The following section details strategies and best practices identified in relevant literature for overcoming these workforce barriers with a focus on healthcare and social assistance occupations.

Effective Strategies and Best Practices

To address the growing demand in the healthcare and social assistance sectors, literature points to the necessity of expanding and diversifying the workforce and engaging populations currently outside of the workforce. The Engaging Hidden and Future Workers to Grow the Local Economy report prepared by UMDI in 2022 identifies several strategies to overcome barriers and increase labor market engagement in the following four broad categories:¹⁰

1. **Geographic** - Incentivize carpooling, including the development of micro-transit on-demand, shared transportation options that use technology to provide flexible, localized transportation, coordinate shifts with transit schedules, commuting/transportation subsidy, proximity of housing to transit options, housing assistance
2. **Skills** - Paid training and education vouchers, internship and mentorship programs, professional development incentives, adjust skill requirements, career ladders/pathways, collaboration with educational institutions
3. **Work/Life Balance** - Worker satisfaction surveys, flexible scheduling, increased wages, and benefits, offering benefits to part-time employees, incentives for career advancement and longevity
4. **Structural** - Remove low-priority recruiting requirements, change applicant filtering, efforts to recruit from more diverse candidate pools, make workplace ADA compliant, work to eliminate/mitigate benefit cliffs for employees

Additionally, several strategies are frequently identified across other related literature including targeted recruitment and retention incentives, paid internships, training programs, and clear Career Advancement Pathways (Career Pathway Mapping) described in further detail below.

Recruitment and Retention Incentives

Recruiting and training incentives are commonly cited as a potential strategy to address labor shortages in key occupations. These programs often focus on expanding the labor pool by directly addressing financial or skills barriers through sign-on bonuses, help with transportation and/or childcare, or even lowering unnecessary skills requirements for jobs to attract additional applicants.

Noted in the Northeast Regional Blueprint, recruitment strategies are most effective when targeted to populations facing specific barriers to entering the workforce such as language, childcare, or transportation challenges. It may also be advantageous to coordinate resources and form strategic partnerships and networks between workforce development stakeholders to amplify the collective impact.¹¹

Investments in Paid Internships and Training

A primary challenge for workforce development in the healthcare sector specifically is lack of capacity in required education and certification programs. Nursing and healthcare support training opportunities have

¹⁰ Stewart, Branner, Kazmiera Breest, Michael McNally, Allison Hauff, and Mark Melnik. "Engaging Hidden and Future Workers to Grow the Local Economy." UMass Donahue Institute Economic & Public Policy Research Group, November 2022.

¹¹ "Northeast Massachusetts Regional Labor Market Blueprint"

become increasingly competitive, driven in large part by the shortage of adequate training sites, simulation space, and teaching faculty across the region.¹²

Initiatives and investments aimed directly at increasing the capacity for healthcare support professionals to be trained are recommended promising best practices to address the growing healthcare labor shortage. This would involve collaboration with public and private stakeholders (healthcare providers, educational institutions, and workforce development and job training organizations) to coordinate additional educational offerings, certification programs, and on-the-job trainings and internships.¹³

As mentioned previously, it may be necessary to tailor recruitment initiatives to drive enrollment in trainings, identifying population-specific workforce barriers that could be addressed in the training program design (i.e., childcare or transportation vouchers, compensated study time, etc.).¹⁴

Career Advancement Pathways/Career Pathway Mapping

Creating Career Advancement Pathways (or Career Pathway Mapping) is a well-documented strategy for growing employment in key sectors while also addressing gaps in access to career opportunities. This involves identifying, investing in, and communicating clear occupational pathways that allow for career progression with stacking training credentials and/or experiential learning.¹⁵

This has shown to be particularly promising in the healthcare field, exemplified in strategic career tracks like the pathway from certified nursing assistant (CNA) to licensed practical nurse (LPN) and on to Registered Nurse (RN), where stacking credentials and experience are critical components to career advancement.¹⁶ These pathways can help to offset staffing shortages while extending opportunities to primarily lower-income individuals with less access to education or human capital.¹⁷ The “Mapping Your Career in Healthcare” resource from the Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare is a representative example of communicating this approach, detailing the identified career pathways and “steps” delineated by educational prerequisites, wage expectations, and defined job roles and responsibilities.¹⁸

Research on career pathways for medical assistants illustrated effective implementation in primary care settings, reporting enhanced compensation and improved job satisfaction among some participants in structured career advancement pathway opportunities.¹⁹ However, it was underscored that more research and progress tracking is needed to assess the impact on job quality and longer-term workforce development outcomes.²⁰

¹² “Labor Challenges and Solutions for Healthcare Professions in Massachusetts”

¹³ “Labor Challenges and Solutions for Healthcare Professions in Massachusetts”

¹⁴ “Northeast Massachusetts Regional Labor Market Blueprint”

¹⁵ Elsey, Bonnie, Laura Lanier, and Jessie Stadd. “Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development.” U.S. Department of Labor, 2015.

¹⁶ “Labor Challenges and Solutions for Healthcare Professions in Massachusetts”

¹⁷ Sarna, Maureen, and Julie Strawn. “Career Pathways Implementation Synthesis.” U.S. Department of Labor, February 2018.

¹⁸ “Mapping Your Career in Healthcare - A Step-by-Step Guide to Career Advancement.” Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare, January 2007.

¹⁹ Dill, Janette, Jennifer Craft Morgan, and Emmeline Chuang. “Career Ladders for Medical Assistants in Primary Care Clinics.” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 36, no. 11 (November 1, 2021): 3423–30. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-06814-5>.

²⁰ Vilendrer, Stacie, Alexis Amano, Cati Brown Johnson, Timothy Morrison, and Steve Asch. “A Qualitative Assessment of Medical Assistant Professional Aspirations and Their Alignment with Career Ladders across Three Institutions.” *BMC Primary Care* 23, no. 1 (May 16, 2022): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-022-01712-z>.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Despite the successful examples of implementing career pathways, the literature points to specific areas for further exploration, particularly regarding the availability of comprehensive outcomes data and evidence for the long-term positive impact on participants.

It was also noted that there is a lack of systemic implementation and analysis in how these programs are meeting workforce development goals. Most current examples of career pathway mapping are somewhat isolated to a singular group of organizations and are not backed up with sustainable funding streams.²¹ One potential concern with this lack of systemic integration is the limited options beyond the career ladders established by these programs, as some credentials do not stack or are not recognized outside of the lower-level health assistance occupations.²²

²¹ Sarna, Maureen, and Julie Strawn. "Career Pathways Implementation Synthesis." U.S. Department of Labor, February 2018.

²² "Career Ladders for Medical Assistants in Primary Care Clinics"

Regional Labor Market Scan

This section describes the regional labor market in the 30 municipalities of the North Shore region: Amesbury, Beverly, Boxford, Danvers, Essex, Georgetown, Gloucester, Groveland, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lynn, Lynnfield, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Marblehead, Middleton, Nahant, Newbury, Newburyport, Peabody, Revere, Rockport, Rowley, Salem, Salisbury, Saugus, Swampscott, Topsfield, Wenham, West Newbury, Winthrop. This includes cities and towns within both the Alliance and MassHire Workforce Boards areas. To accomplish this, UMDI uses industry and occupational data from Lightcast, a proprietary labor market analytics tool. Job posting data is presented for Essex County, as county-level data is the most granular for hiring and job posting data.

This section describes the regional job market broadly and places the career paths within healthcare and social assistance described later in the context of the larger regional labor market. This section begins with a broad examination of the largest regional industries and occupations overall, then focuses on the highlighted industry of healthcare and social assistance in more detail.

Table 1 below shows the largest industries in the North Shore region and their location quotients. Location quotient is a measure of the employment concentration of an industry or occupation locally compared to the nation, calculated by taking the percentage of jobs locally divided by the percentage nationally. When an occupation makes up the same proportion locally as the U.S., the location quotient, or LQ, would be 1.0. In instances with the LQ is over 1.0, there is a higher concentration of those jobs locally compared to U.S. When the LQ is under 1.0, it signals that occupation is under-concentrated in the local economy. The largest industry in the North Shore region is healthcare and social assistance with 18 percent of jobs. It also has a location quotient at 1.34, meaning it has a high concentration in the region as compared with the nation. This industry includes all the occupations that will be discussed in detail in this report. Retail trade is also a concentrated industry in the North Shore with a location quotient of 1.26.

Table 1: Top Employment Industries in the North Shore Region

Industry	2024 Jobs	% of Total Jobs	Location Quotient
Healthcare and Social Assistance	43,702	18%	1.34
Government	34,994	15%	0.95
Retail Trade	28,904	12%	1.26
Accommodation and Food Services	24,422	10%	1.17
Manufacturing	22,588	9%	1.19
Construction	13,618	6%	1.12
Other Services (except Public Administration)	12,318	5%	1.19
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	10,978	5%	0.69
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	10,177	4%	0.74
Educational Services	7,324	3%	1.21

Source: Lightcast

Table 2 below shows the top occupations by employment in the North Shore region. The largest occupation is home health and personal care aides with 11,580 jobs in 2024. Registered nurse is the sixth

largest occupation in the region. Both occupations are part of the healthcare and social assistance industry, which is discussed below.

Table 2: Top Occupations by Employment in the North Shore Region

Occupation	2024 Jobs
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	11,580
Fast Food and Counter Workers	7,417
Retail Salespersons	6,875
General and Operations Managers	6,610
Cashiers	5,820
Registered Nurses	4,703
Waiters and Waitresses	4,357
Stockers and Order Fillers	4,148
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	4,078
Office Clerks, General	3,415

Source: Lightcast

Table 3 below shows the top ten occupations by employment within healthcare and social assistance in the North Shore region. Four entry-level occupations were selected as target starting points for thinking about careers pathways in healthcare and social assistance, and the next section involves a comprehensive exploration of these occupations. The four selected occupations discussed in depth below: home health and personal care aide, nursing assistant, medical assistant, and social and human service assistant; are all in the top five occupations by employment within healthcare and social assistance in the region. Of these occupations, home health and personal care aide and social and human service assistants are very highly concentrated in the region with respective location quotient values of 1.84 (approaching twice the concentration locally compared to nationally) and 1.52.

Table 3: Top Occupations in Healthcare and Social Assistance

Occupation	2024 Jobs	Location Quotient
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	11,580	1.84
Registered Nurses	4,703	0.96
Nursing Assistants	2,407	1.13
Medical Assistants	1,089	0.92
Social and Human Service Assistants	998	1.52
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	976	0.99
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	946	1.49
Dental Assistants	764	1.37
Pharmacy Technicians	729	1.06
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	724	1.33

Source: Lightcast

Table 4 below shows the average monthly hires over 2024 and all unique postings in the last year for the top occupations in healthcare and social assistance in Essex County. Home health and personal care aides had the highest average monthly hires in 2024 at 735, which is over 500 more per month than nursing

assistants, the next highest. Home health and personal care aides are second in terms of unique postings in the last year due to unique circumstances surrounding posting and hiring for those jobs and registered nurse jobs. Home health and personal care aides are often hired in large batches from one job posting so the unique postings do not appear to match hiring. Postings for registered nurses are a notable outlier. This is likely due to high demand without enough qualified applicants and employers posting new positions consistently in case they need to hire due to high turnover rates. Posting and hiring trends within the four occupations selected for comprehensive exploration will be discussed further below.

Table 4: Hiring and Job Postings in Healthcare and Social Assistance in Essex County

Occupation	2024 Average Monthly Hires	Unique Postings in the Last Year
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	735	1,763
Nursing Assistants	209	677
Registered Nurses	201	10,897
Medical Assistants	71	735
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	70	651
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	69	1,112
Social and Human Service Assistants	65	53
Dental Assistants	58	368
Pharmacy Technicians	47	437
Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	40	493

Source: Lightcast

ANALYSIS OF CORE OCCUPATIONS

Home Health and Personal Care Aides

Home health and personal care aides support individuals with chronic conditions or disabilities by monitoring their well-being and assisting with everyday tasks.²³ Their responsibilities include monitoring patient health status, addressing medical needs like dressing wounds or administering medications (under supervision), and helping with routine activities such as bathing, feeding, mobility, and some light housework.²⁴ The typical education requirement is a high school diploma or equivalent, providing an entry-level opportunity for individuals looking into careers in healthcare that may not have had access to post-secondary education.

Home health and personal care aides often continue to gain education and experience that leads to a higher-paying occupation in the healthcare field. The overlap in education and experience requirements sets up a clear path to roles such as licensed practical nurse (LPN), and registered nurse (RN) or nurse practitioner (NP) after additional years in nursing school.

²³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Occupational Outlook Handbook. "Home Health and Personal Care Aides." Accessed April 25, 2025. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home-health-aides-and-personal-care-aides.htm>.

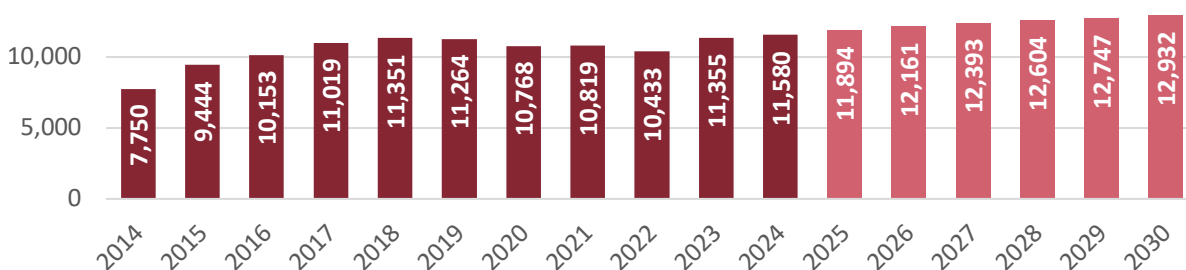
²⁴ O*NET Online. "31-1121.00 - Home Health Aides." Accessed April 25, 2025. <https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-1121.00>.

Table 5. Core Occupation Data – Home Health and Personal Care Aides	
Average Monthly Hires (2024)	735
Unique Postings in the Last Year (2024)	1,763
Total Number of Jobs (2024)	11,580
Total Number of Jobs (2014)	7,750
Job Growth 2014-2024	49%
Projected Job Growth 2025-2030	12%
Typical Education Requirement	High school diploma or equivalent
Median Annual Earnings (2024)	\$38,720
Location Quotient/Regional Concentration	1.84

As shown above in **Table 5**, home health and personal care aides have seen strong employment growth over the past ten years. Total employment rose from 7,750 in 2014 to 11,580 in 2024, a 49 percent increase, and is projected to grow by another 12 percent in the region between 2025 and 2030, reaching an estimated 12,932 jobs by 2030, displayed below in **Figure 1**.

Notably, the location quotient of 1.84 indicates that the North Shore region has a significantly higher concentration of home health and personal care aide jobs than the national average, at nearly twice the concentration in the local economy. In 2024, home health and personal care aides saw 735 monthly hires on average, indicating a turnover rate of around 6 percent of the total workforce in the region. The median annual earnings are \$38,720, or about \$18.60 an hour.

Figure 1. Total Employment Projection - Home Health and Personal Care Aides



Source: Lightcast

Nursing Assistants

Nursing assistants perform basic care tasks and assist with daily living tasks for patients such as changing sheets, helping patients eat or take medications, and patient observation. They work mainly in hospitals and residential care facilities.²⁵ There are training requirements for nursing assistants, usually including a postsecondary non-degree award conferred by a certification program. The median annual earnings are \$42,381, or about \$20.35 hourly.

Like other entry-level healthcare assistance occupations, nursing assistants often continue to gain education and experience that leads to a higher-paying occupation in the healthcare field. The overlap in

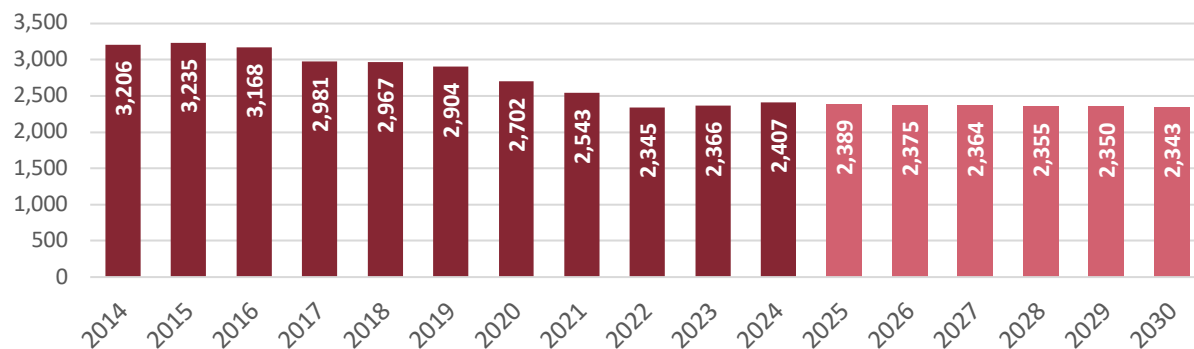
²⁵ "31-1131.00 - Nursing Assistants." Accessed May 20, 2025. <https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-1131.00>.

education and experience requirements sets up a clear path to a job as licensed practical nurse (LPN), and registered nurse (RN) or nurse practitioner (NP) after additional training in nursing school.

Table 6. Core Occupation Data – Nursing Assistants	
Average Monthly Hires (2024)	209
Unique Postings in the Last Year (2024)	677
Total Number of Jobs (2024)	2,407
Total Number of Jobs (2014)	3,206
Job Growth 2014-2024	-25%
Projected Job Growth 2025-2030	-1.9%
Typical Education Requirement	Postsecondary non-degree award
Median Annual Earnings (2024)	\$42,381
Location Quotient/Regional Concentration	1.13

Shown in **Table 6** above, nursing assistants have seen a notable loss in jobs over the past decade. Total employment declined from 3,206 in 2014 to 2,407 jobs in 2024, a 25 percent loss over ten years. Displayed in **Figure 2** below, this decline is projected to slow, but another 1.9 percent drop in total employment is projected in the region by 2030.

Figure 2: Total Employment Projections - Nursing Assistants



Source: Lightcast

Social and Human Service Assistants

Social and human service assistants support professionals in social work, psychology, and related fields by helping clients navigate services and access benefits. They assist with organizing and implementing programs that address issues like substance use, family support, and rehabilitation. These roles often serve as the frontline liaisons between individuals and social support programs.²⁶ The typical education requirement is a high school diploma or equivalent, providing an entry-level opportunity for individuals looking into careers in social work or human services that may not have had access to post-secondary education. The median annual earnings are \$43,243, or about \$20.75 an hour.

²⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. "Social and Human Service Assistants." Accessed April 24, 2025. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes211093.htm>.

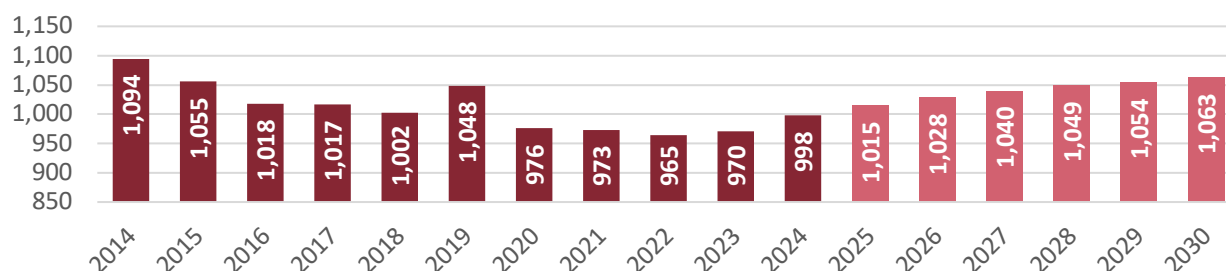
Social and human service assistants often continue to gain experience and pursue education to further their careers in the field. The overlap in training requirements sets up a clear pathway to higher-paying social assistance occupations such as substance abuse, behavioral disorder or mental health counselor, or social and community service manager. With additional graduate-level education, there is potential to become a social worker or guidance counselor or even a clinical or counseling psychologist.

Table 7. Core Occupation Data – Social and Human Service Assistants	
Average Monthly Hires (2024)	65
Unique Postings in the Last Year (2024)	53
Total Number of Jobs (2024)	998
Total Number of Jobs (2014)	1,094
Job Growth 2014-2024	-9%
Projected Job Growth 2025-2030	7%
Typical Education Requirement	High school diploma or equivalent
Median Annual Earnings (2024)	\$43,243
Location Quotient/Regional Concentration	1.52

Source: Lightcast

There is a high concentration of social and human service assistants in the North Shore region with the location quotient indicating a 52 percent higher prevalence when compared to the national average. Despite this regional concentration, as shown above in **Table 7** there was a 9 percent decline in jobs over the past ten years in the region from 1,094 in 2014 to 998 in 2024. However, Lightcast projections estimate a 7 percent rebound in job growth from 2025 to 2030, reaching 1,063 jobs in the region by 2030, displayed below in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3. Total Employment Projections - Social and Human Service Assistants



Medical Assistants

Medical assistants work with a physician to complete both administrative and clinical tasks including scheduling appointments, taking patient vital signs, recording medical histories, and administering medications.²⁷ They work in various medical settings including hospitals, physician's offices, outpatient clinics, and others. There are training requirements for medical assistants, usually a postsecondary non-degree award conferred by a certification program. The median annual earnings are \$43,390 or about \$20.85 an hour.

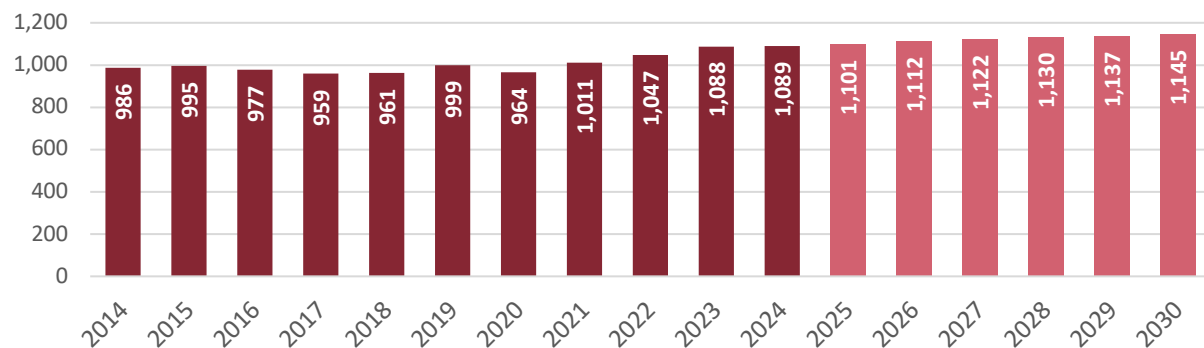
²⁷ "31-9092.00 - Medical Assistants." Accessed May 20, 2025. <https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/31-9092.00>.

Like other entry-level healthcare assistance occupations, medical assistants often continue to gain education and experience that leads to a higher-paying occupation in the healthcare field. The overlap in education and experience requirements sets up a pathway to a job as licensed practical nurse (LPN), and registered nurse (RN) or nurse practitioner (NP) after additional years in nursing school.

Table 8. Core Occupation Data – Medical Assistants	
Average Monthly Hires (2024)	71
Unique Postings in the Last Year (2024)	735
Total Number of Jobs (2024)	1,089
Total Number of Jobs (2014)	986
Job Growth 2014-2024	10%
Projected Job Growth 2025-2030	3.9%
Typical Education Requirement	Postsecondary non-degree award
Median Annual Earnings (2024)	\$43,390
Location Quotient/Regional Concentration	0.92

Shown above in **Table 8**, there was a 10 percent growth in total employment for medical assistants over the past ten years in the North Shore region, from 986 in 2014 to 1,089 in 2024. Additionally, Lightcast projects an additional 3.9 percent employment growth in the region over the next five years, reaching around 1,145 jobs by 2030, shown in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Total Employment Projections - Medical Assistants



Source: Lightcast

Regional Opportunities and Challenges for Healthcare and Social Assistance Occupations

To supplement our understanding of the employment opportunities within the targeted occupations described in the last section of this report, interviews were conducted with five organizational representatives. These individuals were identified by the Alliance and MassHire North Shore Workforce Board and selected due to their background as industry leaders, educators, or workforce development professionals who have a depth of knowledge regarding the current issues and barriers to entry for workers in healthcare and social assistance.

Interviewing key participants who have insight on the various challenges faced by entry-level workers in healthcare and social assistance fields offers a more illustrative perspective of these occupations within the North Shore. Interviewees included a healthcare program manager, long-term care facility director, a community health facility staff member, the vice president of a local college and a local hospital talent acquisition specialist.

In the following section, the regional employment opportunities in targeted and related occupations, and the challenges faced by workers in these fields will be discussed thematically. Organization names in this section are pseudonyms, to maintain participant confidentiality.

Current Employment Landscape

There was consensus among interviewees that entry-level healthcare jobs are in high demand in the North Shore region and that these occupations tend to offer opportunities for career growth in the healthcare field. One key informant noted that the current healthcare employment landscape has been growing in the North Shore region since the COVID pandemic in 2020, particularly for entry-level occupations like Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs). Another interviewee characterized the current employment landscape as “robust,” observing:

There are many ways to enter healthcare. The CNA, the CMA, the home healthcare aide— all of those are traditionally the pathways in healthcare from which we see people move on quite often to an LPN role in a subacute setting, or in an acute healthcare setting, with many, many moving on to nursing... There are many opportunities for those entry-level positions.

Echoing this sentiment, one healthcare program manager we spoke to emphasized the broad range of opportunities available to someone holding a certification as a CNA:

Hospitals are looking for [healthcare workers]. Hospice agencies and visiting nurse agencies are looking for home health aide CNAs. There are lots of different opportunities for folks who have that certification.

Entry-level healthcare occupations like medical assistant were identified as a common stepping stone to higher-paying roles in the healthcare field. One community health facility staff member described the pathways available for career growth within their healthcare facility:

We are a big believer in really encouraging folks to grow into other roles within the organization. So if you start as a medical assistant and then go to school while you're here— we're very encouraging of those sorts of pathways.

Another interviewee mentioned the numerous job opportunities they have observed at their health center both in the entry-level healthcare occupations like CNA and CMA as well as other support occupations in IT, administration, community health, rehabilitation, and finance. It was clear among all interviews that the key informants UMDI spoke with saw many opportunities available within healthcare and assisted living facilities across the region.

Pathway Challenges and Recommended Interventions

The following section examines challenges and barriers for employees finding work in the North Shore region, particularly in the context of healthcare and social service occupation pathways. The challenges discussed below are organized thematically and include language barriers, childcare, transportation, professionalization, and a general lack of knowledge for navigating occupational pathways. This analysis includes a description of the barriers or challenges associated with each theme, detailing recommendations for challenge mitigation.

LANGUAGE

Language barriers were brought up across interviews as a frequent pathway challenge in the context of hiring and providing service to diverse patient populations. One interviewee observed, “There isn't some statewide scaled model to really take advantage of individuals for whom English is not their first language but are interested in a certified nursing pathway; they want to train right now.” People who are potentially interested in entry-level healthcare positions may not speak English at the proficiency level required to complete a training program. This creates a barrier to entry for possible employees as well as employers who may be experiencing a labor shortage.

Interviewees pointed out that this challenge presents an opportunity for local programs to reach more people by offering programming in multiple languages outside of English. One key informant suggested:

Building out multilingual CNA programs is the thing to do. You can even take your CNA test now in other languages but finding institutions that offer CNA prep or certification with multiple ESL— either multiple language speakers or dedicated CNA for Spanish speakers or for Portuguese speakers ... It's not the norm in Massachusetts.

Other interviewees echoed this sentiment, mentioning that application materials, exams, and class materials can and should be offered in multiple languages by employers in order to reach the largest possible pool of trainees.

This approach to broadening the applicant pool also presents a major benefit to employers in the form of developing a multilingual workforce. It is important to have employees matching the diversity of patient populations in healthcare settings to provide the best possible care. One key informant suggests:

Ideally, there would be programming for some of the most frequently spoken languages in your region. Clearly Spanish is important. We also have seen a rise in the need for Haitian Creole with the number of folks who entered the shelter system up until a year ago. Portuguese is still important. There are pockets of Russian speakers in and around Massachusetts. You want to know your demographics, especially recent immigration cycles. The good news is a lot of cultures in other countries place high value on elder care and caregiving and so they actually are interested in the pathway.

Considering the need for a multilingual workforce, it would benefit healthcare facilities in the North Shore region to take advantage of the language backgrounds people learning English as a second language already have by providing certification and employment opportunities that are accessible in their native languages.

CHILDCARE

A significant barrier that potential employees face is childcare issues. A long-term care facility director we interviewed noted, “I know a lot of folks that are becoming certified or starting on that entry-level are folks often who are juggling childcare issues.” Childcare can be extremely expensive and sometimes unreliable making it difficult for employees with children to maintain a consistent school or work schedule. Key informants offered several suggestions to help support employees navigating these issues.

One suggestion is to have organizations partner with childcare organizations, to offer discounted childcare and with this, allow people to work while addressing childcare access issues. Another intervention is to allow flexibility in employee work scheduling. One interviewee described what their healthcare facility is currently doing to help address childcare barriers:

From an employer perspective, we try as best we can to offer some flexibility and some flexible schedules so that folks aren't necessarily tied to an 8-hour or 12-hour shift. We find sometimes folks— particularly with childcare issues— if they can work a shorter shift or in the evening hours that often works for some of those folks... I know that folks have been successful and being able to continue on their journey when we're able to offer them some of that flexibility.

Offering these types of accommodations is valuable for everyone, particularly for employees balancing family responsibilities with work. Offering flexible accommodation also allows employers to reach a larger employee hiring pool.

TRANSPORTATION

Access to transportation is another barrier that can affect workers and employer hiring pools. Transportation access is particularly an issue for those who live rurally and for employer locations that are more remote and not located close to public transportation: bus and/or train routes. One key informant we spoke to observed, “For some candidates, transportation can become an issue. We [skilled nursing

facility] are not on public transportation, so folks need to be able to get here other than a bus or a train and that can be a challenge for some job candidates as well.” People looking for work may not have personal transport options and may rely on public transit to travel to an employer’s location. There are steps employers can take to alleviate this, such as what one healthcare staff member suggests:

There can be transportation challenges (for entry-level healthcare workers) and so a lot of hospitals and other institutions have worked to address those issues, whether it's providing a stipend for transportation of some sort or another, or (if they can) arrange some sort of a van for transportation.

These are all interventions that may help, but it can be expensive and difficult for smaller healthcare facilities to implement them.

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Another challenge noted in interviews, particularly for those seeking entry-level employment, is that employees may not be familiar with the cultural norms and approaches to professionalization of American workplaces. One key informant we interviewed whose organization runs skilled nursing facilities explains:

There are a lot of regulatory steps that we must take in the hiring of a new employee... And sometimes it's challenging with some candidates especially if this might be an entry-level job they may not have worked or may not have worked in this country. So being able to identify a reference, a professional reference, is sometimes challenging for candidates for us. But you know, we can sometimes use a teacher or somebody else in that type of a relationship. But sometimes getting professional references can be challenging.

The healthcare industry is highly regulated due to the sensitive nature of patient care and privacy concerns. It is critical that these standards be maintained. This is challenging for people who may not have knowledge of what professionalization operates like in the United States healthcare field and are seeking employment. Often, potential employees may not be aware of what is involved in getting hired, including resume writing, references, and other requirements. Providing education and access to information for people interested in healthcare and social service fields is a crucial step to getting them into the workforce. One interviewee recommends:

Career centers provide those kinds of workshops to prepare people that are interviewing for these positions to help them put a resume together, to help them to be able to handle themselves during an interview.

Local organizations able to provide this education are a strong resource for employers. Working with them and providing information specific to the healthcare industry and employer needs is an effective way to reach a larger employee population.

LACK OF INFORMATION

The final barrier mentioned in interviews is that people are not aware of all the types of employment opportunities available in hospitals or educational programs. One healthcare program manager we spoke with observed:

I think sometimes people don't understand the types of opportunities that are available in a hospital setting for employment... Everybody knows what a nurse is, but when it comes to other positions, and understanding the requirements... I think there's a lack of awareness that there are so many opportunities that exist.

Healthcare settings have a wide range of job opportunities and positions that each come with a variety of education and skill requirements many people may not be aware are existing options. Sharing this information with the public is a key step towards reaching a broad audience and in this, recruiting a potential future workforce. One interviewee shared an initiative their institution deploys on a weekly basis, to help spread information:

Within the walls of a hospital there are so many different roles... We do something here called Walk-in-Wednesday. It's like a mini-in-house job fair and we advertise those on social media. Just attending something like that and coming in and saying, 'I'm not quite sure what I'm eligible for, but I really want to work in a hospital' or 'Someday, I think I want to be a nurse—how do I start that?' And the people that are running those types of job fairs can help with that. I think it's important to connect with the organizations that are in their community.

This strategy to connect with local organizations and have an opportunity to share resources with those organizations and the public is a valuable way to build a network for getting people employed. A related issue around lack of information is a misalignment between educational programs and job requirements. It is important that employers and educators be in communication with each other about requirements, so people leave educational programs with the appropriate qualifications for jobs with local employers. One interviewee explained:

You can have the best college and education systems, but if businesses aren't part of that work creating clinical placements, doing externships, making sure that their job descriptions align to the curriculum of those institutions . . . honestly, being clear with employees about how to get access to those programs while they're incumbent workers. So, I mean, solving healthcare talent shortages is not a one-entity solution; it really will take multiple players to get at that.

This healthcare employer emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and employers for addressing workforce needs in healthcare, both in entry-level recruitment and for career advancement with current employees. For entry-level employees, it is also important to consider the transition into increasingly difficult jobs that cannot be completely trained in an educational program. One key informant we spoke with describes the importance of these considerations:

How do we pave a road that is successful for these people? And there are a lot of different initiatives that they take, whether it's a buddy system, whether it's a longer probationary system, whether it is giving them additional training beyond what they received for their certification, so that they understand that there needs to be mentoring. Because these jobs in healthcare—they're not easy jobs.

Employers should collaborate with the educational programs to ensure people are supported in their transition from educational training to the workforce.

Employer Challenges in Hiring and Retention

This section discusses challenges identified in interviews from the employer side around hiring and retaining staff, particularly in entry-level healthcare roles. Issues of recruitment and retention of entry-level healthcare staff are intertwined because of the high turnover rate. Large pools of new staff are required to maintain staffing since workers do not stay long. The most prominent issue that causes high turnover is the relatively low pay and the prohibitive cost of living in the region. One long-term care facility director UMDI interviewed describes this issue:

The competitive salary issue which is something we're currently working on to ensure that we are competitive to others in in our area. But I would say right now, that's probably the number one issue in retaining people.

Interviewees also mentioned that the cost of living, particularly in the North Shore region which has exceedingly high housing costs, is a related issue that can make it unsustainable for people to continue in these roles long-term. Another reason for high turnover is that many people view these entry-level positions as a stepping stone to a higher education-level career in healthcare. The local college president we interviewed points out:

The CNA position is an entry-level position into healthcare. So some folks are starting their healthcare career or trajectory as a CNA. They're not looking to do that as a career; they're looking to do that to gain experience as a stepping stone to either become a nurse or another allied health professional... There has always traditionally been a fairly sizable turnover in that position.

This is not always a negative factor to employers as higher roles in many healthcare career pathways are often difficult to fill. If employers offer incentives to employees to keep working for them in higher-level roles as they advance their careers, it may help alleviate staffing challenges at all levels. One healthcare program manager we interviewed describes the benefits of such an approach:

Training from within and being able to move people up into other roles that are equally as hard to fill as the role that they might be leaving but probably a narrower pipeline into that higher-level position. So it certainly helps us fill the needs that we have internally.

Partnering with local educational institutions to offer free or reduced-cost classes and loan repayment programs are common interventions discussed by the people we interviewed.

Conclusion

The North Shore High Demand Occupations Report developed by the UMass Donahue Institute provides summary data on occupations within the North Shore region offering an overview of occupations within healthcare and social assistance in the area and identifying pathways for growth within growing entry-level occupations within these fields.

The North Shore region's healthcare and social assistance occupations represent a significant part of the region's workforce growth. Within these fields, UMDI conducted a comprehensive exploration of four occupations within those fields, mapping their pathways so that a progression from entry-level jobs on up can be followed: home health and personal care aides; nursing assistants; medical assistants; and social and human service assistants.

All four of the occupations included in this study's comprehensive exploration have low barriers to entry, and with additional education and/or certifications, have a clear pathway pipeline towards higher-paying jobs that are in high demand within the North Shore region. Four infographics have been developed by UMDI illustrating the various steps one may take to move forward through any occupation given a comprehensive exploration, and detailing the additional education needed and the average increase in hourly and annual salary.

From our discussions with key stakeholders across the North Shore, UMDI recommends workforce training, policy makers, and educational providers support workshops that offer language learning support for ESL workers and continue to support outreach and educational initiatives that support the public's awareness of the regional healthcare and social assistance pathways. Additionally, from our research UMDI recommends that organizations develop, support, and encourage internal pipeline processes for entry-level healthcare and social assistance positions to increase their retention of workers who are initially hired within those entry-level positions.

Appendix A: Methodological Summary

Labor Market Scan

The labor market scan aimed to identify current workforce trends and how they relate to workforce development, particularly in healthcare and social assistance careers. Data on employment by industry and occupation, job postings, median incomes, and location quotient were downloaded from Lightcast, a proprietary employment data source. Data was collected and analyzed for the North Shore region municipalities (Amesbury, Beverly, Boxford, Danvers, Essex, Georgetown, Gloucester, Groveland, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lynn, Lynnfield, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Marblehead, Middleton, Nahant, Newbury, Newburyport, Peabody, Revere, Rockport, Rowley, Salem, Salisbury, Saugus, Swampscott, Topsfield, Wenham, West Newbury, and Winthrop) for all data points aside from hiring and job postings data, which is only available at the county level and was analyzed for Essex County. This data was presented and discussed with focus on the healthcare and social assistance industry, and on the four selected entry occupations discussed in detail in this report.

Qualitative In-depth Interviewing

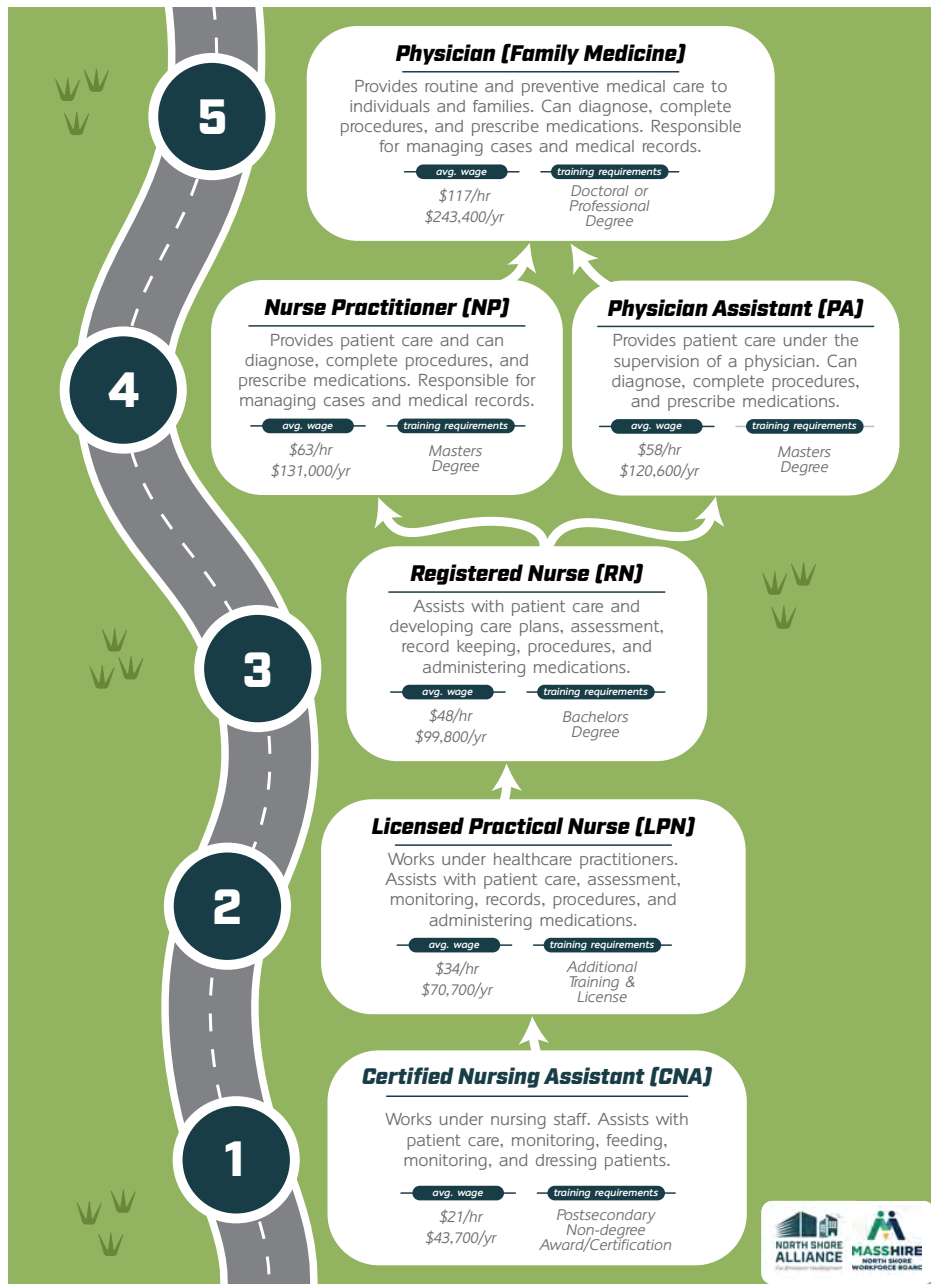
To help better understand the employment opportunities, barriers, and recommended interventions to address barriers within healthcare and social assistance occupations in the North Shore Region, UMDI interviewed five key informants. Interview data provides a unique and illustrative viewpoint of the specific perspective industry leaders, educators and workforce development professionals have on the current issues and barriers to entry for potential workers in healthcare and social assistance in the North Shore region.

For this qualitative methodological approach, all key informants were identified for interviews by the client. Interviews were conducted with a UMDI project member over Zoom for a maximum duration of 45 minutes and were audio-recorded for accuracy. Interview questions were designed to understand some of the opportunities, challenges, and issues facing current and potential workers in healthcare and social assistance occupations in the region.

Using the interview's audio recording, a verbatim transcript of the conversation was generated. This transcript was then coded thematically for data analysis. Key results from all interviews are presented throughout the report chapter, *Regional Opportunities and Challenges for Healthcare and Social Assistance Occupations*.

Appendix B: Occupational Pathway Comprehensive Exploration Infographics

Find Your Pathway to a Career in Healthcare on the North Shore! Starting as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)



Find Your Pathway to a Career in Healthcare on the North Shore! Starting as a Certified Medical Assistant (CMA)



Find Your Pathway to a Career in Healthcare on the North Shore! Starting as a Home Health or Personal Care Aide



Find Your Pathway to a Career in Social Work on the North Shore! Starting as a Social and Human Service Assistant

