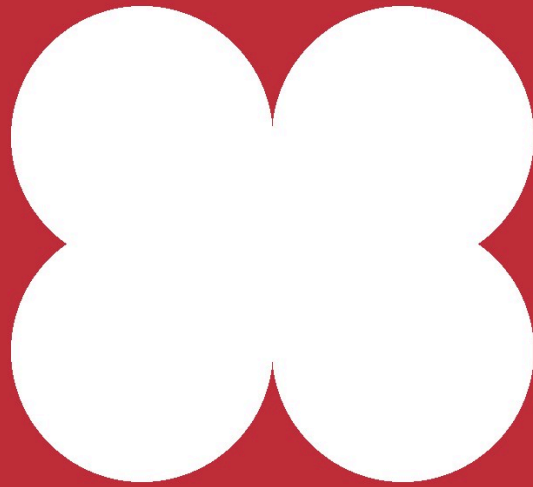




The Healthcare Job Search Guide

Find the job, read the pay,
win the offer

2026 EDITION

CareJobs.Now

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By CareJobs.Now, October 2026. CC BY 4.0. Free to read, copy and share with credit to CareJobs.Now (<https://carejobs.now>).

About this guide

This is a free guide for anyone looking for a healthcare job in the United States: registered nurses and LPNs, nursing assistants and patient care techs, caregivers and home health aides, medical assistants, therapists, imaging, lab, surgical and pharmacy techs, EMTs and paramedics, dental staff, and the people who keep a hospital's front desk running.

It is written by CareJobs.Now, a free US healthcare job board that reads open jobs every day from the career sites of hospitals, health systems, clinics and care companies, and shows the pay each posting states. Every figure in this guide comes from those postings, counted on 20 October 2026, unless another source is named. The live numbers, updated every night, are at carejobs.now/pay.

The guide follows a job search in the order it happens:

1. The market today: how many jobs are open and where
2. What healthcare jobs pay, by kind of job
3. Reading a job posting for what it really says
4. Applying: how hospital hiring works and how to get through it
5. Resumes and cover letters that healthcare recruiters read
6. Interviews: what they ask, how to answer, what to ask back
7. Offers: comparing them with arithmetic and negotiating
8. Licenses and certifications
9. New graduates and career changers
10. A one-page checklist

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1. The market today

On 20 October 2026, CareJobs.Now counted **320,522 open healthcare jobs at 2,025 US employers and sources**, and 42,342 of them had been first listed in the previous seven days. Healthcare hires all the time: jobs open as people move, retire, change units and finish school, and the openings never run out.

The national picture agrees. On the last business day of August 2026, US health care and social assistance employers had 1.36 million job openings, and made 703,000 hires during the whole month (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey).

Open jobs by kind of job (20 October 2026):

Kind of job	Open jobs
Registered nurses and LPNs	101,125
Physical, occupational, speech and respiratory therapy	41,318
Mental health and social work	21,598
Radiology and imaging techs	21,296
Physicians and surgeons	21,091
Nursing assistants and patient care techs	16,994
Patient access, coding and medical admin	15,968
Nurse practitioners and physician assistants	15,190
Pharmacists and pharmacy techs	13,182
Lab techs and phlebotomists	11,352
Medical assistants	10,602
Caregivers and home health aides	8,526
Other allied health	8,373
Dentists, hygienists and dental assistants	6,544
Surgical techs and sterile processing	5,140
EMTs and paramedics	2,048

The states with the most open healthcare jobs were Texas (18,867), California (17,008), Florida (15,836), New York (13,679), Pennsylvania (13,660), Illinois (13,130), Ohio (10,605), Georgia (10,575), North Carolina (10,340) and New Jersey (10,151).

What this means for you: in most places, for most jobs, you have choices. The question is rarely whether anyone is hiring. It is which job, on which unit, on which schedule, for which pay, and how fast you can get

through the hiring process.

2. What healthcare jobs pay

Most healthcare postings state an hourly rate or a range. The table below is the pay that open jobs posted on 20 October 2026, before shift differentials, overtime and bonuses. "Median" is the middle posted rate. "Typical" runs from the 25th percentile of what jobs pay (the middle of each advertised range) to the 90th-percentile advertised ceiling.

Kind of job	Median posted pay	Typical range
Registered nurses and LPNs	\$45 an hour	\$40 to \$80
Nurse practitioners and physician assistants	\$75 an hour	\$65 to \$170
Physicians and surgeons	\$145 an hour	\$50 to \$300
Nursing assistants and patient care techs	\$20 an hour	\$20 to \$30
Caregivers and home health aides	\$19 an hour	\$17 to \$25
Physical, occupational, speech and respiratory therapy	\$45 an hour	\$40 to \$75
Mental health and social work	\$30 an hour	\$25 to \$70
Pharmacists and pharmacy techs	\$35 an hour	\$25 to \$95
Radiology and imaging techs	\$45 an hour	\$40 to \$75
Lab techs and phlebotomists	\$30 an hour	\$25 to \$65
Surgical techs and sterile processing	\$35 an hour	\$30 to \$55
EMTs and paramedics	\$25 an hour	\$25 to \$45
Medical assistants	\$25 an hour	\$20 to \$35
Dentists, hygienists and dental assistants	\$30 an hour	\$25 to \$60
Patient access, coding and medical admin	\$25 an hour	\$20 to \$40

Across every open job with a rate, the median was \$40 an hour (66,515 posted rates at 1,406 employers). Note what is missing: 225,956 of the 320,522 open jobs posted no hourly rate at all. Pay transparency laws in a growing list of states, including California, Colorado, Washington, New York, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont and Massachusetts, now require a pay range in many postings, so the share of jobs with a stated rate keeps rising. Where a posting states nothing, compare it with what similar jobs nearby post before you apply, and ask the recruiter for the range in your first call.

How to read a posted range. A range like "\$38.50 to \$57.75 an hour" is the employer's pay scale for that job, not an offer. Most hospitals place you on the scale by your years of relevant experience, sometimes plus certifications or education. A new graduate usually starts near the bottom; an experienced nurse can ask where on the scale their years put them, and should ask to see the scale itself.

Travel pay works differently. Travel nurse assignments post a weekly gross figure: a taxable hourly rate plus weekly housing and meal stipends. On 20 October 2026, 6,355 open travel RN and LPN assignments posted a median of \$2,283 a week, with the middle half between \$1,983 and \$2,618. Cath lab (\$2,651), labor and delivery (\$2,483) and operating room (\$2,439) paid the most; licensed practical nurse assignments paid much less (about \$1,479). Stipends are tax-free only when you keep a real tax home you are duplicating, so read the split between the taxable rate and the stipends, not only the weekly total.

3. Reading a job posting

A healthcare posting is dense. These are the lines that change what the job is worth to you.

The schedule. "3x12 nights", "rotating days and nights", "every third weekend", "8-hour days Monday to Friday". The schedule decides your differentials, your overtime and your life. If the posting says "variable" or "as needed", ask what that meant for the last person in the job.

FTE. 1.0 is full time (usually 72 to 80 hours per two weeks); 0.9, 0.6 and 0.5 are fewer shifts. Benefits often start at a minimum FTE such as 0.5 or 0.6. PRN or per diem means no guaranteed hours, usually a higher hourly rate and no or few benefits.

Shift differentials. Federal law does not require extra pay for nights, weekends or holidays (US Department of Labor), so every employer writes its own rules. Differentials come in two forms. A percentage differential is a share of your base rate and grows as your base rate grows; a flat differential is a fixed dollar amount per hour, the same for everyone. Under federal rules a night differential counts in the "regular rate" used to calculate overtime, so it raises your overtime rate too (29 CFR 778.207). A posting that says "plus differentials" without numbers is a question for your first call.

The unit and the ratio. Med-surg, step-down, ICU, ED, L&D and outpatient clinics are different jobs with the same title. Patient ratios are rarely in the posting, and only a few states (California and Oregon among them) set nurse-to-patient ratios in law, so ask.

Float. "Float pool" and "may float to other units" mean you may work wherever the hospital is short that day. Some people love the variety; others want one team. Know which you are.

Sign-on bonuses. On 20 October 2026, 9,180 open healthcare jobs at 498 employers stated a sign-on bonus, with a median of \$10,000 (and the same median for 3,485 RN and LPN jobs), and some as high as \$100,000. Read the terms before you count the money: most bonuses are paid in parts (for example, half after 90 days and half after a year), require a commitment of one to three years, and must be paid back, in full or in part, if you leave early. Some exclude internal transfers or rehires within a year or two.

Requirements. "Required" usually means a license, certification or minimum experience the hospital will verify. "Preferred" means they would like it and will often hire without it. Apply when you meet the required lines.

4. Applying: how hospital hiring works

Hospitals want people, and they still take a long time to bring them in. In a 2026 survey of 527 hospitals in 40 states, NSI Nursing Solutions found that recruiting an experienced registered nurse took 78 days on average (NSI 2026 National Health Care Retention and RN Staffing Report). Hospital hiring is a chain of handoffs, and each link can add days:

1. **The requisition.** A manager gets an approved, budgeted position, and HR posts it.
2. **The applicant tracking system.** You apply through the employer's own career site, usually Workday, iCIMS, Oracle or a similar system. Many systems screen applications with knockout questions (license, years, shift) before a person sees them. Answer those honestly and precisely.
3. **The recruiter screen.** A recruiter, often carrying dozens of openings, checks your license and fit, usually by phone. This is the first chance to ask about pay range, schedule and unit.
4. **The hiring manager interview.** The unit manager, sometimes with a panel of nurses or techs from the unit.
5. **The offer.** Usually verbal first, then written, built from the pay scale and your experience.
6. **The checks.** Background check, license and certification verification, references, drug screen and an employee health assessment (vaccines, TB test, sometimes a fit test for a respirator).
7. **Onboarding.** Orientation dates are fixed in advance, so your start date often waits for the next orientation class.

What speeds you up:

- Apply on the employer's own career site, where the requisition actually lives. A job board like CareJobs.Now links you there.
- Keep a current copy of every license and certification card, your immunization record and two or three references with phone numbers, ready to upload the day they ask.
- Apply to several jobs at once. Hiring takes weeks at each employer, so a search with one application at a time takes months.
- Follow up one week after applying if you hear nothing, and again a week after any interview. A short, polite email to the recruiter is normal and expected.
- Track every application, its status and its next date. A free tracker for Notion, Excel and Google Sheets: carejobs.now/job-search-tracker.

5. Resumes and cover letters

Healthcare resumes are read twice: first by software or a recruiter checking requirements in seconds, then by a manager deciding whether you can do the job on their unit.

Put these at the top, where a recruiter looks first:

- Your license with its state and type (for example "RN, Texas, multistate compact license"), and your certifications with their expiry months (BLS, ACLS, PALS, NIHSS, TNCC, CNOR, ARRT, CPhT, NREMT and so on).
- Your current or most recent role, unit and setting, in plain words: "Med-surg RN, 32-bed unit, Level II trauma center".

Write experience as what you did, for whom, and how well. "Cared for 5 to 6 telemetry patients per shift; precepted 4 new graduates; charge nurse on nights two shifts a month" says more than "provided compassionate care". Name the systems you know (Epic, Cerner/Oracle Health, Meditech, Pyxis, Omnicell) and the patient populations you have cared for.

Keep it honest and short. One page for most aides, techs and new graduates; two pages are fine for experienced nurses and therapists. Never list a certification you do not hold or one that has lapsed.

Cover letters matter most where a job draws many applicants: new graduate residencies, outpatient clinics with day hours, and specialty units. Three short paragraphs: why this unit and this employer, the two or three things you have done that match the posting, and your license, availability and the shift you want.

Free tools that do the first draft from your own facts: a healthcare cover letter generator (carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-cover-letter-generator), a resume bullet writer (carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-resume-bullet-writer) and a LinkedIn profile writer (carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-linkedin-profile-writer).

6. Interviews

Most healthcare interviews now follow a structure: every candidate gets the same job-based questions, and the answers are scored against agreed examples. Research summarized by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology found structured interviews to be the single most predictive way to select employees. Interviewers take it seriously because a bad match is expensive: in NSI's 2026 survey, 22.7% of newly hired RNs left within a year, and 29.5% of all new hospital hires did.

Questions you are likely to hear:

- Tell me about yourself and why you want this unit.
- Tell me about a time a patient's condition changed quickly. What did you notice and what did you do?
- Tell me about a conflict with a coworker or a physician and how you handled it.
- How do you prioritize when several patients need you at once?
- Tell me about a mistake you made and what you changed afterwards.
- How do you handle a patient or family member who is upset?
- Why are you leaving your current job?

Answer "tell me about a time" questions in four parts: the situation, your task, the action you took, and the result. Pick real stories in advance: a deteriorating patient, a safety catch, a hard family, a conflict, a time you taught someone, a time you were wrong. Keep each answer to about two minutes.

Skills checks. Depending on the job, expect a medication math test, a rhythm strip test, a typing test, a skills demonstration, or a shadow shift on the unit.

Questions to ask them. The interview is your chance to learn what the posting does not say:

- What is the usual patient ratio on days and on nights?
- How long is orientation, and who precepts new staff?
- How often does the unit float staff, and to which units?
- How is overtime handled, and is there mandatory overtime?
- What are the night, weekend and holiday differentials?
- What does the sign-on bonus require, and what happens if I leave early?
- How are schedules made, and how far ahead are they posted?
- What is turnover like on this unit?

What they may not ask. Employers may not base hiring on age, race, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, disability or genetic information, and should not ask about them. You may decline to answer a question like "Are you planning to have children?" and still be considered.

After the interview, send a short thank-you email the same day to each person who interviewed you (a free writer: carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-interview-thank-you-email). Practice beforehand with the free interview coach at carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-interview-coach.

7. Offers: compare with arithmetic, then negotiate

Two offers with different base rates can be worth the reverse of what they look like once the schedule is counted. Compare them over a real year.

A worked example. Offer A pays \$42 an hour on nights, three 12-hour shifts a week, with a \$4.50 night differential. Offer B pays \$45 an hour on days, three 12-hour shifts a week.

- Offer A: $(\$42.00 + \$4.50) \times 36 \text{ hours} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$87,048$ a year.
- Offer B: $\$45.00 \times 36 \text{ hours} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$84,240$ a year.

Offer A pays \$2,808 more, before weekend premiums, and nights may suit you or may not. Then add what else differs: weekend and holiday premiums, the sign-on bonus divided over its commitment years, health insurance premiums and deductibles, the retirement match, PTO hours, and your commute.

What is usually negotiable:

- **Your step on the pay scale.** Ask how they counted your years of experience, and whether related experience (as an LPN before you were an RN, or in another specialty) counts.
- **The start date**, especially to match an orientation class or a bonus window.
- **Sign-on bonus terms**, sometimes more than the amount: a shorter commitment or a pro-rated payback.
- **Schedule:** a fixed shift instead of rotating, a weekend commitment, or a self-scheduling option.
- **Education:** tuition help, certification exam fees, CEU money.

What usually is not: the published scale itself at a unionized hospital, and benefits plans.

Ask by email, politely and specifically, with the reason ("My five years of telemetry experience would place me at step 5 on the scale you shared; could you check whether the offer reflects that?"). A free writer: carejobs.now/tools/healthcare-offer-negotiation-email. For travel contracts, check the taxable rate, the stipends, guaranteed hours, the cancellation clause and who pays for missed shifts (carejobs.now/tools/travel-nurse-contract-checker).

Before you accept, get the offer in writing with the base rate, differentials, FTE, shift, start date and every bonus term.

8. Licenses and certifications

Nursing licenses. The Nurse Licensure Compact lets an RN or LPN with a multistate license from their home state practice in every other member state. In 2026, 43 jurisdictions have enacted it, with Pennsylvania fully implemented in July 2025 and Connecticut in October 2025 (NurseCompact.com). California, New York and several other large states are not members, so a nurse moving there or taking a travel contract there needs that state's own license. Your "primary state of residence" decides which state issues your multistate license; when you move to another compact state for good, you apply there for a new license within 60 days.

Certifications expire. American Heart Association BLS, ACLS and PALS cards are valid for two years. Many employers will not let you start, or will take you off the schedule, with a lapsed card. Write every expiry date in one place and book the renewal class two months ahead.

Other compacts now exist for physicians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, EMTs and paramedics, counselors, social workers and physician assistants, each with its own member states and timelines.

9. New graduates and career changers

New graduate nurses. Many hospitals hire new RNs into nurse residency programs: paid jobs with a longer orientation, classes and a cohort of other new nurses, usually six to twelve months. On 20 October 2026, 114 hospitals and health systems had 1,506 new grad RN and residency jobs open, with cohorts named from Fall 2026 to Fall 2027. Apply early: popular programs open applications months before each cohort, and many close within weeks. The current list, by state and city: carejobs.now/nurse-residency-programs.

Starting in weeks or months. Several healthcare jobs open after a short training program: nursing assistant (CNA), patient care tech, phlebotomist, medical assistant, pharmacy tech, EMT, home health aide, sterile processing tech. Many hospitals hire nursing assistants and techs while they study, and some pay for the training or for nursing school later. The plain-language guide to every kind of healthcare job, with training time and posted pay: carejobs.now/learn.

Per diem as a bridge. PRN or per diem work pays a higher hourly rate with no guaranteed hours. It is a common way to try a new specialty, add income, or keep skills current while studying (carejobs.now/prn-jobs).

10. One-page checklist

Before you apply

- License and certification cards current, with copies saved as PDFs.
- Immunization record and TB test result at hand.
- Two or three references who have agreed, with phone numbers and emails.
- Resume with license and certifications at the top.
- A tracker for applications, interviews and follow-ups.

For each job

- Read the schedule, FTE, unit, differentials and bonus terms.
- Check what similar jobs nearby post (carejobs.now/pay).
- Apply on the employer's own site; note the date.
- Follow up after one week.

At the interview

- Five real stories ready in four parts (situation, task, action, result).
- Your questions about ratio, orientation, floating, overtime, differentials and bonus terms.
- A thank-you email the same day.

At the offer

- Compare offers over a year with arithmetic.
- Ask about your step on the scale, start date and bonus terms.
- Get it in writing before you resign from your current job.

Free resources from CareJobs.Now

- **Healthcare jobs with posted pay**, read every day from employers' own career sites: carejobs.now/jobs
- **Pay by kind of job and state**: carejobs.now/pay
- **Job alerts** for your role and state: carejobs.now/job-alerts
- **Free AI career tools** (cover letters, resume bullets, interview coach, thank-you emails, offer negotiation, travel contract checker, LinkedIn profile writer): carejobs.now/tools
- **Healthcare Job Search Tracker** for Notion, Excel and Google Sheets: carejobs.now/job-search-tracker
- **In-depth guides** to hospital hiring, shift differentials, the Nurse Licensure Compact and healthcare interviews: carejobs.now/learn
- **Weekly podcast**, CareJobs.Now Weekly: carejobs.now/podcast

Figures in this guide were measured by CareJobs.Now on 20 October 2026 from open job postings; the method is at carejobs.now/methodology. Data CC BY 4.0, credit CareJobs.Now. This guide is general information, not legal, tax or immigration advice.