

TALKING POINTS

2026 Michigan Healthcare Workforce Index

All Occupations Have Lower Projected Growth Than Last Year

Projected growth over the next decade is lower across all 36 occupations compared to the 2025 Index. 11 occupations went from projected growth to projected job decline over the next 10 years. The reasons for this shift vary by occupation, but overall, lower growth is partially driven by an aging workforce nearing retirement and an insufficient pipeline of replacement workers.

Only Eight Occupations Are Projected to Have a Surplus by 2035

Nearly all occupations are projected to face a workforce shortage by 2035. The eight Index occupations projected to experience a surplus include Cardiovascular Technologists and Technicians; Nurse Practitioners; the Physician Group; Diagnostic Medical Sonographers; the Dentist Group; Surgical Technologists; LPNs; and Radiation Therapists. However, statewide surpluses may mask regional distribution challenges, especially in rural areas.

Dentists Remain the Top-Ranked Occupation for a Second Year

The Dentist Group remains the top-ranked occupation in the Index overall, driven by having the highest wage growth (73 percent) among the occupations studied. This growth over the last ten years is related to the profession responding to decreased earnings from decreasing revenue and rising expenses. The Dentist Group has relatively low turnover, and the profession is growing and getting younger. However, younger Dentists are less likely to practice in rural areas, so regional shortages persist.

Pharmacy Technicians Rank Lowest Overall

Pharmacy Technicians are the "unhealthiest" occupation in the Index, the only Healthcare Support Occupation with negative projected job growth. A survey by the American Hospital Association found 65 percent of Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians experienced burnout, the highest rate among healthcare occupations surveyed.

Nursing Turnover and Burnout Remain High Six Years Post-COVID

Similar to most healthcare occupations this year, all three nursing occupations experienced an increase in turnover: LPNs' turnover increased 20 percent, RNs' 11 percent, and Nurse Midwives' 21 percent. Turnover is partially driven by Nurses retiring, but burnout still remains a significant factor in Nurse turnover—over 30% of existing RNs and LPNs cite being too stressed or burned out as a reason they are leaving the profession in the next five years.

Home Health Aides Face a Shortage of 145,000+ in the Next Decade

Home Health and Personal Care Aides (HHAs) face the most severe projected shortage, with 146,619 additional HHAs needed in the next decade to meet projected patient demand. An aging workforce and aging population have significant impacts on projected shortages, especially in occupations that care for older adults. Healthcare Support Occupations, such as HHAs and Nursing Assistants, have consistently ranked low in the Index. The data shows this is driven by high turnover, anticipated shortages, and challenges with comparatively lower wages.

Optometrists and Pharmacists Lag in Job Growth and Turnover Rates

Optometrists, historically ranked near the top, dropped to the bottom third in the Index. Pharmacists also dropped significantly in overall rank. Optometrists fell by 17 places due to weaker Turnover and Growth rankings, and Pharmacists fell 13 places due to moderate declines across all variables, most significant of which was Growth. Among the Advanced Practitioner Group, these two occupations have the lowest wage growth and the highest turnover rates.

Behavioral Health Workforce Struggles with Low Wages, Care Demand

The Behavioral Health workforce needs to be strengthened to meet population health needs—Michigan has 274 Mental Health Care HPSAs with over four million residents, and only 37.9 percent of the need is met in mental healthcare. The Psychologist Group experienced wage growth of only six percent over the past decade, the lowest of any occupation. Survey data highlights that low pay is the top stressor for Therapists, and many in the Behavioral Health field do not feel fairly compensated.

Career Pathway Expansion can Bolster High-Growth, Lower-Wage Roles

HHAs and Nursing Assistants are among the most in-demand occupations over the next ten years, yet both are experiencing shortages. Stronger career pathways could help workers stay and advance in the healthcare workforce while also better reflecting the communities they serve. Opportunities for advancement, especially in Healthcare Support Occupations, will be even more crucial as the population ages.

Education Costs Are Likely Harming Training and Recruitment Efforts

The cost of training and upskilling was noted across occupations as a barrier to job growth. The average annual cost of college tuition and fees has risen by more than 90 percent over the last 20 years, and many providers with graduate-level degrees have substantial debt. Increasing compensation is an important strategy in growing the overall healthcare workforce, but lowering educational costs may have a greater impact.