

# Nursing Assistants and Care Aides

Demand continues to grow as population gets older

**W**ith the aging of the population, the jobs that provide hands-on, long-term care for the elderly and people with chronic conditions are expected to be some of the fastest-growing occupations in health care. (See exhibits 1 and 2.)

Known as “direct service workers,” these certified nursing assistants, home health aides, and personal care aides help their clients with daily activities and provide companionship and emotional support.

These services often allow seniors to stay in their homes when they might otherwise need to be institutionalized. They also provide a large number of secure, mostly year-round jobs. In 2012, 14,212 people held a direct service job in Alaska.

## Services and where they work

Certified nursing assistants primarily work in nursing homes, other long-term care facilities, or hospitals. They move patients and assist with eating, grooming, dressing, bathing, and using the bathroom. CNAs also help with clinical tasks such as range-of-motion exercises, taking vital signs, and changing wound dressings.

Personal care and home health aides work in a client’s home, or occasionally in an assisted living facility, helping with daily activities such as bathing and dressing. These workers also take care of household chores such as cleaning, making beds, doing laundry, preparing meals, and washing dishes. They may also help manage medication and advise on nutrition, cleanliness, or household activities.

Although personal care and home health aide are separate occupations, their duties are essentially the same in Alaska. (See the sidebar on page 13 for more explanation.)

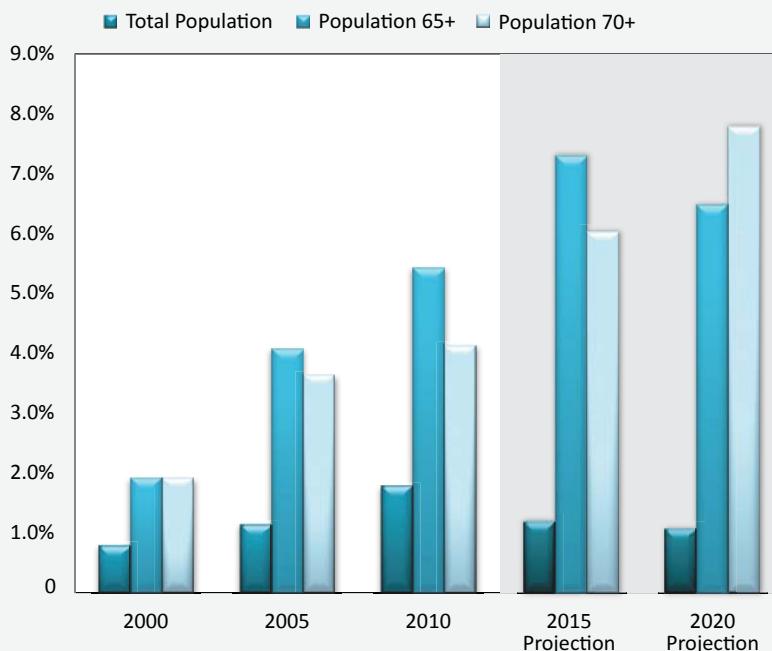
In 2012, home health and personal care aides made up over 83 percent of direct service workers in Alaska, or 11,768. In contrast, Alaska had fewer than 2,500 certified nursing assistants.

## More seniors will need care

Nationwide, the number of senior citizens — those 65 and older — is projected to grow by nearly 32 million between 2010 and 2030 to nearly a fifth of the U.S. population, up from 13 percent in 2010.

Alaska’s senior population grew by 79 percent between 2000 and 2012 and is expected to follow the U.S. trend, with the number of Alaskans over 70 growing by just under 60 percent in the next seven years. More than 130,000 baby boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964

## 1 Rapid Growth in Senior Citizens Alaska, 2000 to 2010



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

— will reach retirement age in Alaska over the next 16 years.

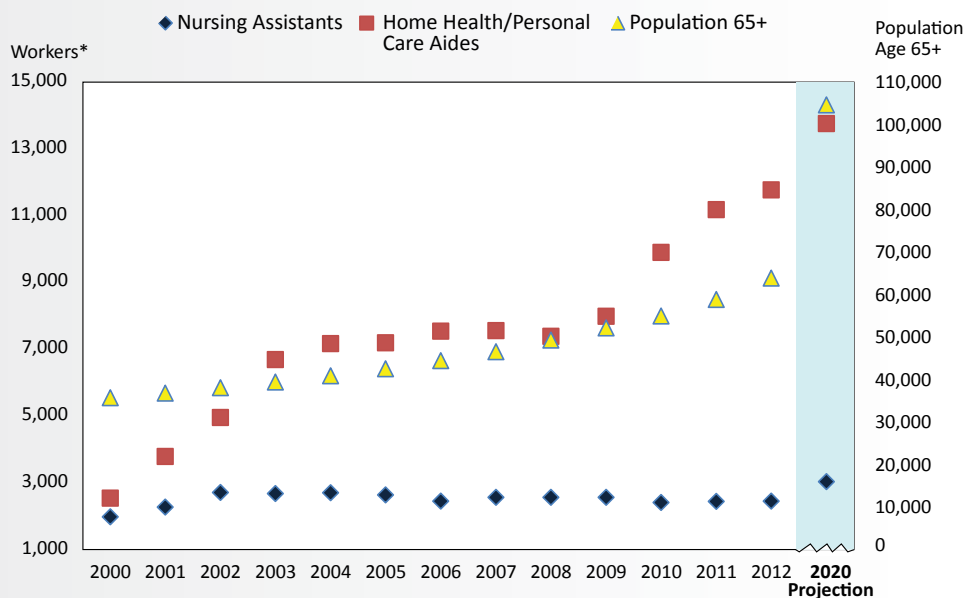
## High forecasted job growth

The number of direct service workers in Alaska more than tripled from 2000 to 2012, increasing by more than 9,200 workers. (See Exhibit 2.) Demand is expected to remain high for at least the next two decades.

The number of CNAs has remained relatively flat over the decade, but is expected to grow faster than average in the near future as the state's population gets older.

Alaska's broader health care and social services industry, which encompasses 80 percent of these direct service workers, is projected to grow by 31 percent between 2010 and 2020, or nearly 13,000 jobs. About 2,700 of those are expected to be new direct service jobs.

## 2 Numbers of Seniors vs. Service Workers\* Alaska, 2000 to 2020 projection



\*Number of people working in the occupation at any point during the year. Worker counts tend to be higher than job counts because more than one worker can fill a job during a year.  
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

With over a fifth of resident direct service workers currently over age 55, retirees and others leaving their positions are expected to create an additional 2,200 job openings.

## Distinguishing home health and personal care aides

Home health aides and assistants and personal care aides are classified as separate occupations, but in Alaska they're increasingly used interchangeably. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services no longer distinguishes between the two.

In addition to daily care, home health aides traditionally performed some basic medical duties while personal care aides did not, but those lines have blurred over the past few decades and their duties and training have become essentially the same in Alaska.

For Medicare purposes, both types of aides are typically classified as personal care aides. However, because by standard definition they're different and employers report them to the State of Alaska separately, this article includes data for both occupations.

## Jobs don't require a degree

These occupations don't require a four-year college degree, and workers can generally enter these positions without extensive training or education.

Home health and personal care aides are required to have at least a high school diploma and pass a background check. Employers may also require additional certification.

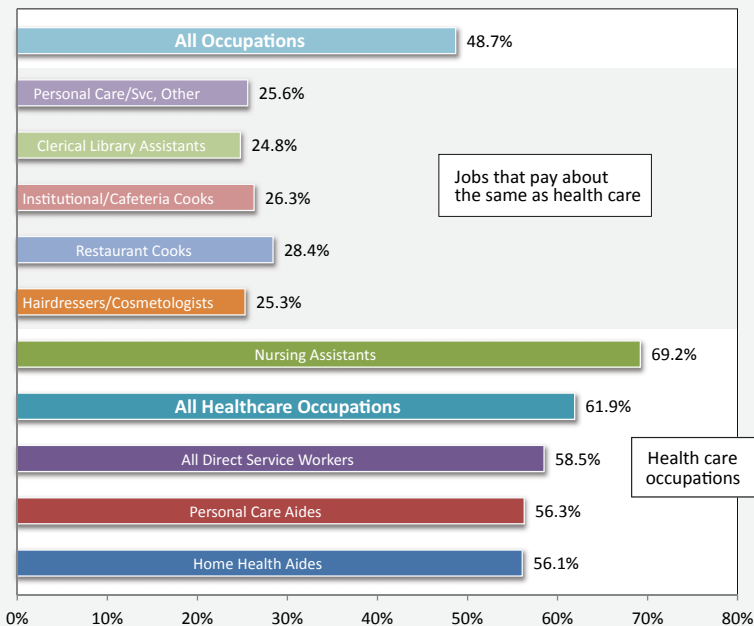
Home health aides no longer have a specified training program and certification test in Alaska, but they do in other states where this occupation is more prevalent — particularly in senior communities with a continuum of care services or other large assisted living facilities.

CNAs in Alaska work under the supervision of a registered nurse and must complete a state-certified training program and a certifying exam.

Workers in each of these occupations may also be

### 3 Percent Who Worked 3+ Quarters

Select Alaska occupations, 2012



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

required to complete basic preparatory courses in CPR, first aid, and bloodborne pathogens.

### Higher pay than jobs with similar training

Alaska is the top-paying state for CNAs and personal care aides, and the third-highest paying for home health aides. Personal care aides make an average of \$13.53 an hour, home health aides make \$13.79, and CNAs make \$16.82. These wages top the nationwide average by between \$3.30 and \$4.50 per hour.

For comparison, jobs requiring similar levels of experience and training as personal care and home health aides make significantly less. Child care workers in Alaska make an average of \$11.44 an hour, maids and housekeeping cleaners earn \$11.10, and nonrestaurant food servers make \$12 on average.

### Entering the health care field

Because these occupations are an opportunity to

enter the health and social services field, they give workers a clear path for advancing their careers.<sup>1</sup>

For example, with additional training, personal care and home health aides can advance to positions as CNAs, licensed practical nurses, psychiatric aides and technicians, medical assistants, and health care social workers.

CNAs can expand their education and training to become licensed practical nurses, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, health care social workers, and registered nurses.

### Workers mostly women, 92 percent Alaska residents

Direct service workers span the state, and the vast majority in every area are care aides. Personal care or home health aides vastly outnumber CNAs in the Anchorage and Gulf Coast Regions by more than fourfold. In other regions of the state, there are from 1.8 to 3.3 times as many aides as CNAs.

These jobs are dominated by women, particularly among CNAs, with a ratio of seven women to every man. Home health and personal care aides had slightly lower ratios, at 3.1 and 3.5 respectively. Among all health care support jobs, the female-to-male ratio is 4.9.

These jobs are also mostly filled by Alaskans, with nearly 12 times as many resident workers — that’s about 92 percent resident, over the statewide average of about 80 percent.

Among aides, resident workers exceed nonresidents by nearly three times the rate for all Alaska jobs. Certified nursing assistants are even higher, with about 17 times as many residents.

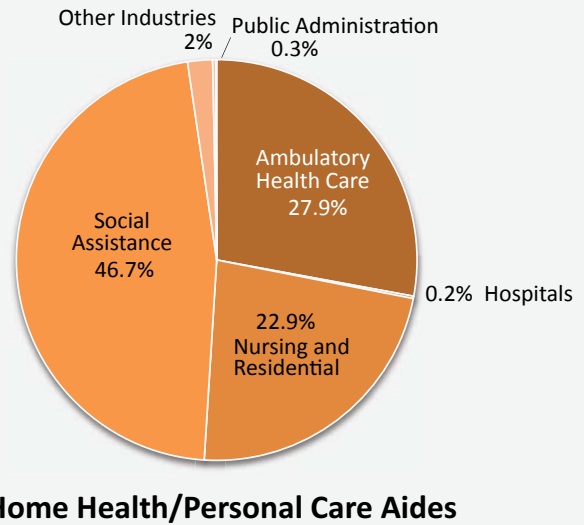
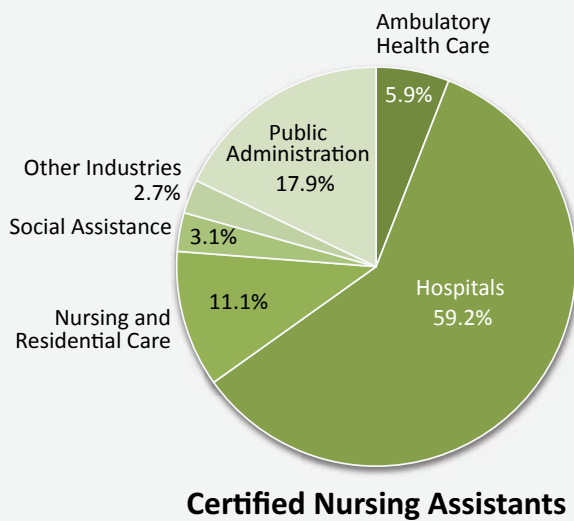
The comparatively high level of resident workers is partly explained by the nature of the work, which tends to be less seasonal than jobs that pay a similar wage. Because clients’ needs are constant, care varies little throughout the year. These jobs also tend to have less turnover than average.

Nearly 60 percent of direct service workers

<sup>1</sup>As shown in the Alaska Career Lattice: [live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cl/cloccs.cfm](http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cl/cloccs.cfm)

## 4 Industries that Employ Care Aides and Nursing Assistants

Alaska, 2012



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

worked three or more quarters in 2012, compared to just under half for all other occupations. (See Exhibit 3.)

The difference is even more pronounced when comparing to occupations with similar pay. For example, only about a quarter of other personal care and service workers, less than a third of restaurant cooks, and about a quarter of clerical library assistants worked three or more quarters.

### Vast majority of jobs are private

Over 94 percent of direct service workers worked for private employers in 2012, and local governments employed only about 3 percent. The State of Alaska employs only CNAs in the facilities it manages.

Most of the private-sector workers were aides

working for about 470 employers. Among those, 47.9 percent employed personal care aides, 34 percent used home health aides, and 18 percent hired CNAs.

The majority of CNAs work in private hospitals — about three in five. (See Exhibit 4.)

Among CNAs, about 11 percent worked in private nursing and residential care facilities in 2012, 6 percent in ambulatory health services (services for those not requiring long-term care), and 3 percent in private social assistance. About 18 percent of CNAs worked in publicly owned hospitals or other public health care or social assistance facilities.

Just under half of aides worked in social assistance. The other occupations were nearly equally distributed between ambulatory health care (27.9 percent), and nursing home and residential care (22.9 percent).