

# MEDICAL ASSISTANTS in the SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION REGION



Healthcare is one of the largest employers in California, providing a wide range of well-paying career opportunities for residents. In 2014, the Centers of Excellence partnered with the Health Workforce Initiative (HWI) and the California Hospital Association (CHA) on two healthcare surveys to **assess workforce needs** at both state and regional levels. The surveys targeted three healthcare sectors:

- **Hospitals** provide medical, diagnostic, and treatment services to inpatients and some outpatient services.
- **Ambulatory Healthcare Services** provide healthcare services to outpatients in settings such as offices of physicians, outpatient care centers, and laboratories.
- **Nursing and Residential Care Facilities** provide residential care combined with either nursing, supervisory, or other types of care as needed.

Statewide, 190 hospitals responded to the hospital survey and 1,600 clinics, labs and facilities responded to the ambulatory and residential care survey, providing an excellent sample to analyze healthcare workforce demand across the state and in several regions. The research focused on identifying: (1) labor market demand for key occupations in healthcare industries, (2) training supply supporting healthcare industries, and (3) key issues impacting supply and demand.

This report is one in a series of reports profiling healthcare occupations in the San Francisco Bay region.<sup>1</sup> There are ten occupational profiles in the series: registered nurses, certified nursing assistants, licensed vocational nurses, medical assistants, medical coders, physician’s assistants, healthcare social workers, medical laboratory technicians, occupational therapy assistants and home health aides.

## Labor Market Demand

In the San Francisco Bay region, there are approximately 5,450 medical assistant (MA) jobs in the ambulatory and residential care subsectors. Over a 12 month period (Apr 2014 to Mar 2015), employers in these subsectors will need to fill over 1,080 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs.

### Projected Employment for Medical Assistants<sup>2</sup>

Ambulatory & Residential Care Industries (n=127)	Current Employment (2014)	12-Month Growth	Replacement Jobs	Total Openings (Growth + Replacements)
	5,450	139	942	1,081

California Hospital Association members that responded to the survey employ 474 medical assistants. This sample does not include an estimate of total hospital employment because less than half (41%) of CHA regional member hospitals participated in the survey.

### Current Employment for Medical Assistants<sup>2</sup>

Hospitals (n=34)	Current Employment*	Full-time Positions	Part-time Positions	Per Diem Jobs
	474	419 (88%)	55 (12%)	112

\*Ending headcount for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2013.

<sup>1</sup>The Bay region includes the following 12 counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Sonoma counties.

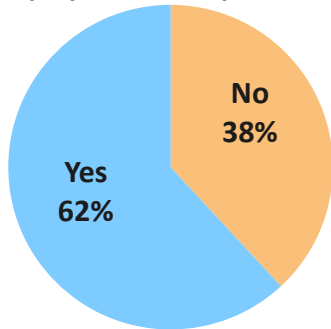
<sup>2</sup> Ambulatory and residential care and hospital employment counts include full-time and part-time employment. Additional data on per diem employment for hospitals is totaled separately.

## Hiring Trends

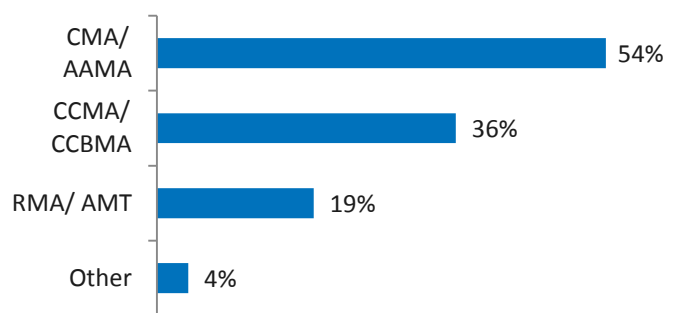
In the ambulatory and residential care survey, employers were asked about their medical assistant related certification requirements. These certifications include the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), the California Certified Medical Assistant (CCMA) by California Certifying Board of Medical Assistants (CCBMA) and the Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) by the American Medical Technologists (AMT).

Overall, 62% of non-hospital employers do require some certification for medical assistants that they employ. Of these, CMA and CCMA certifications are the most widely accepted. Generally, the RMA certification is not as valuable as others. Other certifications listed as important by employers include a vocational or education certificate from an accredited education institution.

**% of Employers that Require Certification**



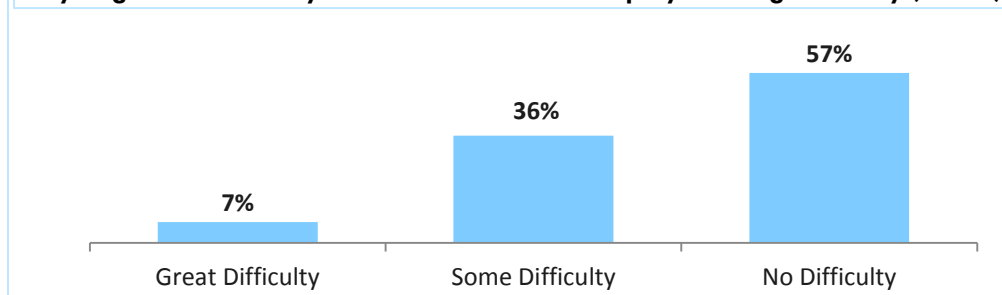
**% Accepted Certifications**



## Difficulty Hiring

43% of the employers in the **Bay region ambulatory and residential care** subsectors reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level medical assistant positions. Only 7% of **hospitals statewide** reported difficulty finding qualified MAs. Minimum qualifications may include certification, communication and customer service skills.

**Bay Region Ambulatory and Residential Care employer Hiring Difficulty (n=239)**



## Training Supply

39 education institutions awarded degrees or certificates 2010-13 in the San Francisco Bay region: 14 out of 17 community colleges and 25 other education institutes.

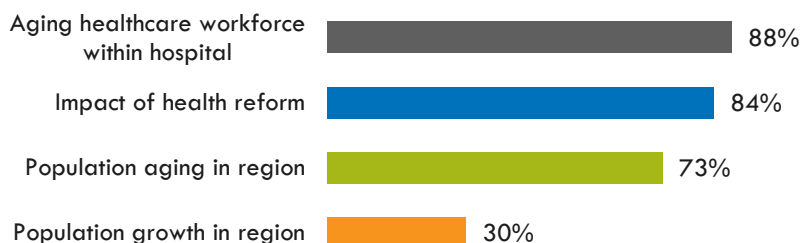
Degrees and Certificates Conferred	Community Colleges – Associates/Certificates 2<4 years	Community Colleges – Certificates <2 years	Other Education – Associates/Certificates 2<4 years	Other Education – Certificates <2 years	Annual Average (All)
3 Yr Annual Avg 2010-13 (% of total)	229	183	859	1,853	3,124
	7.3%	5.8%	27.5%	59.3%	

This estimate is based on data reported to the California Community College Chancellor's Office Data Mart and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Higher education institutions are required to report completion data to NCES if they participate in any federal financial assistance program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Completion data not reported to the NCES or CCCCO Data Mart were not included in the estimate.

## Supply Challenges

The healthcare sector is facing a variety of factors that may have a direct impact on the workforce supply. Across California, the majority of hospitals are concerned that health reform, the aging hospital workforce, and the aging population will have a significant impact on the state's ability to keep up with healthcare workforce demand. Healthcare reform is expanding coverage to thousands of uninsured residents, which is increasing demand for healthcare services across the board. The aging population will expand demand for certain types of services, creating additional need for skilled workers.

**Percent of Hospitals Moderately to Extremely Concerned Over Factors Impacting the Workforce Supply**



### MA Programs: San Francisco Bay Region

#### Community Colleges (17)

Cabrillo, Canada, Chabot, Contra Costa, DeAnza, Evergreen, Las Positas, Marin, Merritt, Monterey, Ohlone, San Francisco, San Jose City, Santa Rosa, Skyline, Solano, West Valley

#### Other Education Institutions (25)

BioHealth College, Blake Austin College, Carrington College: Antioch/Emeryville/Pleasant Hill/San Jose/San Leandro, Central Coast College, CET: Sobrato/Soledad/Watsonville, Empire College School of Business, Everest College: Hayward/San Francisco/San Jose, Heald College: Concord/Hayward/Salinas/San Francisco/San Jose, Institute for Business & Technology, InterCoast Colleges-Fairfield, Mt Diablo Adult Ed. Unitek, West Med

While these two factors will increase demand for new healthcare workers, the aging healthcare workforce within hospitals creates a need for replacement workers. However, in the hospital setting this is not a critical issue in the medical assistant workforce. 71% of MAs employed by hospitals statewide fall within the age cohort of 25 to 45, which indicates that there is a sufficient pipeline of younger workers entering the medical assisting field.<sup>3</sup>

## Employer Perspective

Two-thirds of ambulatory and residential care facilities provide professional development (either in-house or sponsored training) for their MAs. Some of the training topics include: continuing education units to obtain or update certifications, front and back office, CPR, electronic health records, OSHA, computers and new equipment, immunizations, vitals, and HIPPA regulations. Ambulatory and residential care employers discussed the topics that community colleges could offer or improve upon to support professional development for their existing staff. The following suggestions were offered:

### Sidebar Discussion

What is the impact of the Affordable Care Act on the medical assisting workforce?

→ 50% of ambulatory and residential care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for medical assistants in response to the Affordable Care Act.

→ 37% are not sure if they will make any changes.

Offer

- Practice scenarios that demonstrate compassion for patients (i.e. appropriate patient interactions and bedside manner)
- Training on electronic medical billing and coding
- More business courses on front and back office issues and how to run an office
- Phlebotomy training

Improve

- Update medical terminology course (general & pharmaceutical terms)
- Integrate more hands-on components to curriculum (taking vital signs, patient safety during position changes, etc.)
- Integrate customer service skills into curriculum: effective oral communication, telephone etiquette, etc.
- Integrate basic computer skills into curriculum (MS Word & Excel)
- Integrate workplace skills into curriculum, such as professionalism, time management and business etiquette

<sup>3</sup> Hospital Survey, statewide data.

## In Summary

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Key issues affecting supply and demand for medical assistants include:

### Ambulatory and Residential Care

- 43% of the ambulatory and residential care employers reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level MA positions in the Bay region.
- The majority of ambulatory and residential care employers require or accept certification when hiring medical assistants or supporting existing staff. The preferred certification is Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) certification by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA).
- The majority of ambulatory and residential care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for MAs in response to the Affordable Care Act.

### Hospitals

- Seven out of 10 MAs in the hospital setting fall in the age cohort of 25 to 45, indicating there is a sufficient pipeline of younger workers entering the medical assisting field.
- Very few hospitals reported difficulty finding qualified MA applicants.

The data indicates that there is most likely not a shortage of trained medical assistants entering the workforce, but since 43% of employers are having difficulty finding qualified applicants, there may be a need to improve existing training programs. Community colleges can improve upon existing MA programs by aligning curriculum with national certification standards. In addition, employers indicated that existing staff need to improve customer service and workplace skills. To address this issue from the onset, training providers should integrate customer service skills and workplace skills (time management, professionalism and business etiquette) into existing curriculum.

## For More information

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This document and others are available to download at [www.coecc.net/health](http://www.coecc.net/health). For more information on this study, contact:

John Carrese, COE Director  
San Francisco Bay Region  
(415) 452-5529  
[jcarrese@ccsf.edu](mailto:jcarrese@ccsf.edu)

Barbara Brock,  
Deputy Sector Navigator Health  
Interior Bay  
(707) 815-5733  
[Barbara.Brock@solano.edu](mailto:Barbara.Brock@solano.edu)

Cynthia Harrison,  
Deputy Sector Navigator Health  
Bay  
(408) 855-5340  
[cynthia.harrison@wvm.edu](mailto:cynthia.harrison@wvm.edu)



Health Workforce Initiative

**More about the Health Workforce Initiative:** The HWI provides education and training programs to meet emerging demands for healthcare industry workers; to determine needs, facilitate development of innovative solutions and to locate resources to implement planned responses; to evaluate and initialize health-related educational programs. More information about the Health Workforce Initiative is available at [www.ca-hwi.org](http://www.ca-hwi.org).



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