

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS in the SAN FRANCISCO BAY 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.¹ 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 690 occupational therapy assistant 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 350 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs.

Projected Employment for Occupational Therapy Assistants²

| Ambulatory & Residential Care Industries (n=35) | 2014 Employment | 12-Month Growth | Replacement Jobs | Total Openings (Growth + Replacements) |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|--|
| | 524 | 160 | 192 | 352 |

Labor Market Trends
In **Ambulatory and Residential Care Facilities**, the number of OTAs in the region is expected to grow by 31%

California Hospital Association members who responded to the survey only employ eight occupational therapy assistants. This sample does not include an estimate of total hospital employment because only 41% of hospitals in the region provided data for this occupation.

Current Employment for Occupational Therapy Assistants

| Hospitals (n=34) | Current Employment* | Full-time Positions | Part-time Positions | Per Diem Jobs |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

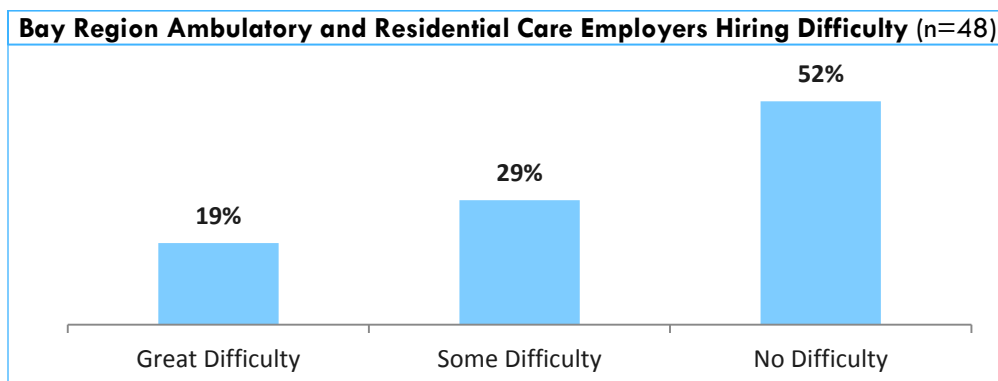
*Ending headcount for the 4th quarter of 2013.

¹The 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.

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

Difficulty Hiring

48% of employers in Bay region **ambulatory and residential care** subsectors reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level occupational therapy assistant positions.³ Minimum qualifications may include certification, knowledge of another language, basic computer skills, and communication skills.



Training Supply

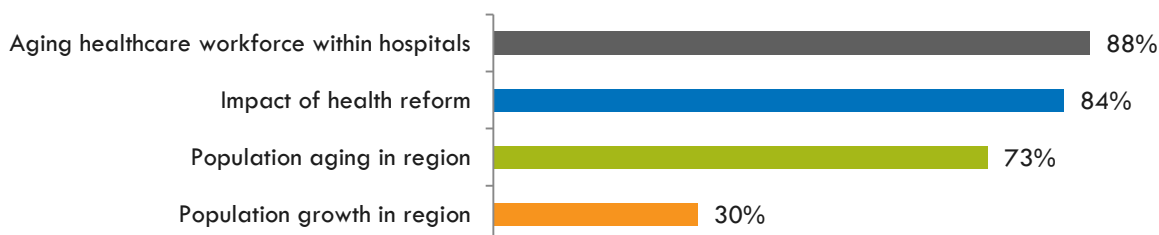
There are no accredited OTA programs in the San Francisco Bay region. There are only four accredited programs in California: Grossmont College in El Cajon, Sacramento City College, Santa Ana College and Stanbridge College in Irvine.⁴

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.

While these two factors will increase demand for new healthcare workers, the aging healthcare workforce within hospitals creates a need for replacement workers. In the hospital setting, this is not a critical issue in the occupational therapy assistant workforce. 58% of occupational therapy assistants 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 this field.⁵

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



³ Hospitals were not asked about the level of difficulty they experienced in finding qualified applicants for entry-level OTA positions.

⁴ Data from the American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.: <http://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Find-School/AccreditEntryLevel/OTAPrograms.aspx>

⁵ Hospital Survey, statewide data.

Employer Perspective

46% of **ambulatory and residential care** facilities provide professional development (either in-house or sponsored training) for their occupational therapy assistants. Ambulatory and residential care employers discussed the topics that community colleges could offer or improve upon to support professional development for their existing staff. Some of the training topics include: (1) Improve training for effective communication skills with patients and families; (2) Develop more OTA programs especially in Napa, Solano and Contra Costa counties; and (3) Offer training on understanding the aging population.

In Summary

Key issues affecting supply and demand for occupational therapy assistants include:

- **Ambulatory and residential care** employers will need to fill over 350 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs in the near term for OTAs.
- 48% of **ambulatory and residential care** employers report difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level occupational therapy assistant positions with one out of five employers reporting great difficulty in hiring OTAs.
- There are no occupational therapy assistant programs in the San Francisco Bay region.
- 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.

This study indicates that there is a shortage of qualified occupational therapy assistants in the San Francisco Bay region. Community colleges in the region should consider developing a training program to support a pipeline of occupational therapy assistants for the ambulatory and residential sector.

For More information

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

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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.



More about the Centers of Excellence: The Centers of Excellence (COE), in partnership with business and industry, deliver regional workforce research customized for community college decision making and resource development. This information has proven valuable to colleges in beginning, revising, or updating economic development and Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, strengthening grant applications, assisting in the accreditation process, and in supporting strategic planning efforts. More information about the Centers of Excellence is available at www.coecc.net.

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