Trends in the Licensed Practical Nurse Workforce from 2008 to 2013

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Background

- In 2013, more than 600,000 people were employed as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) in the United States
- The number of LPN jobs is projected to grow by nearly 25% between 2012 and 2022.

Objective

To assess trends in the supply and employment patterns of LPNs in the USA from 2008 to 2013.
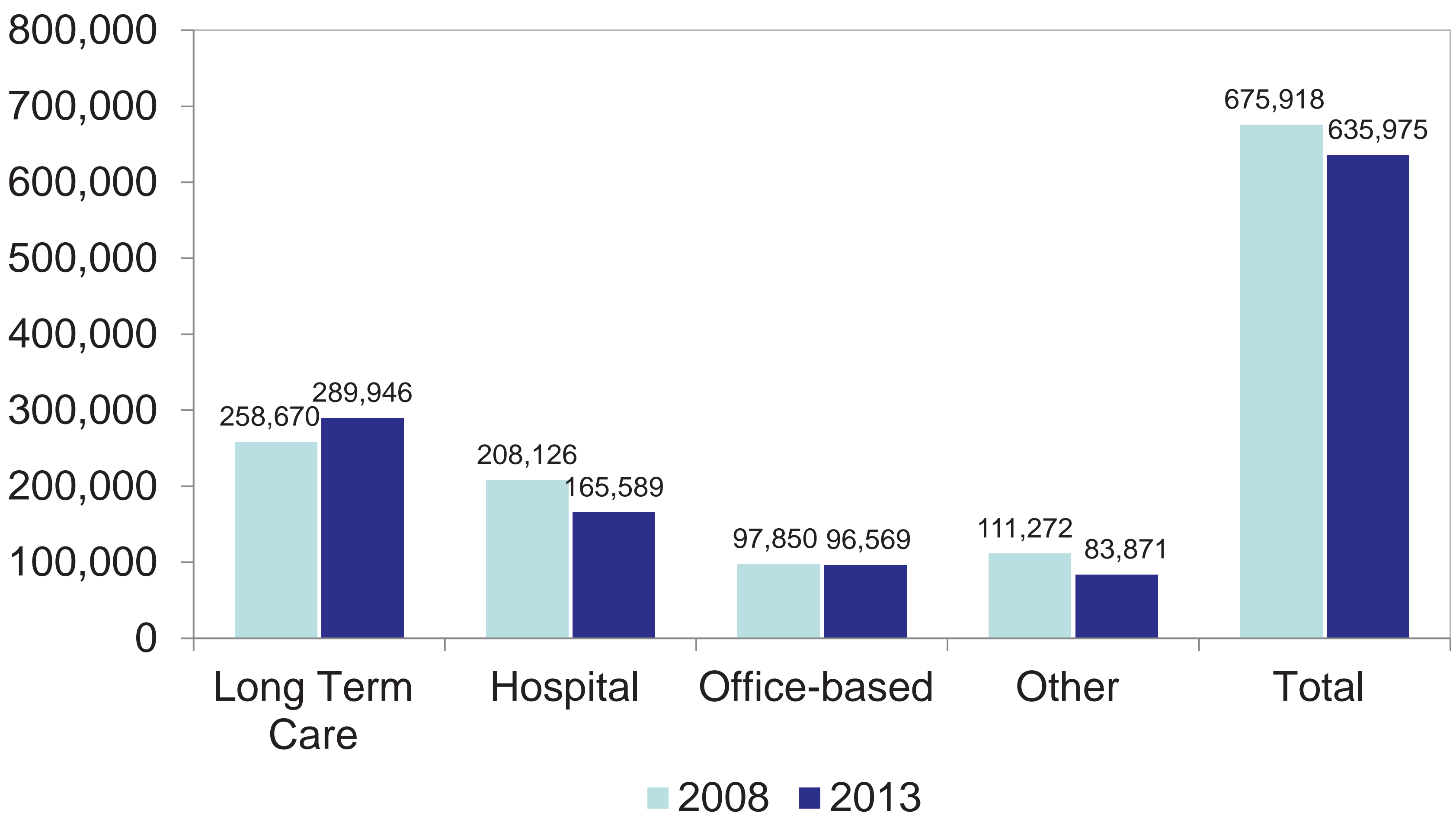
Methods

Data from the 2008 and 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample were analyzed using ACS sampling weights. Chi-square tests were performed to identify statistically significant trends.
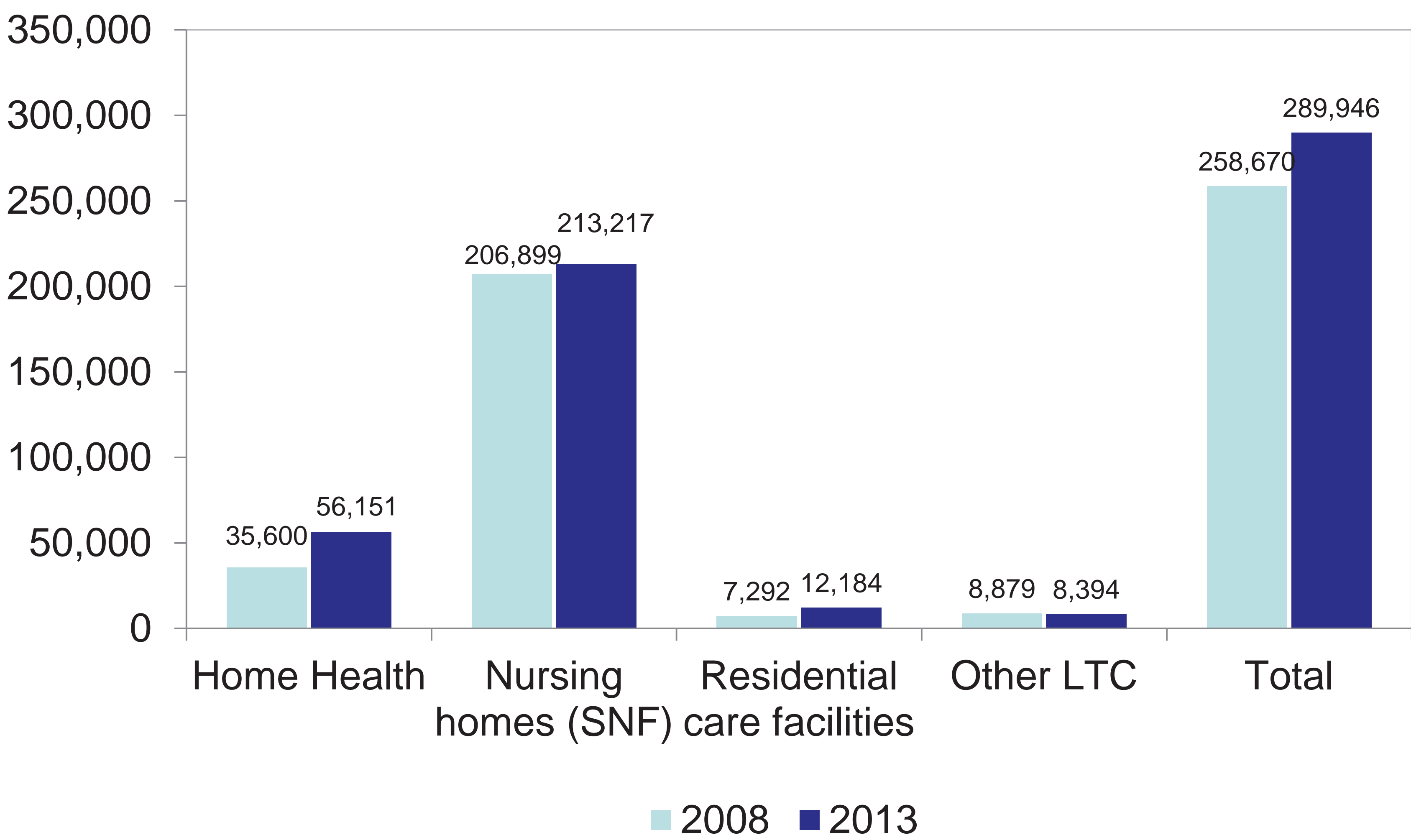
Results

- While the total number of employed LPNs has dropped by 5.9%, the number of LPNs working in long-term care has increased by 12.1%. (p=0.00).

Distribution of Employed LPNs by Setting

Setting	2008	2013
Long Term Care	258,670	289,946
Hospital	208,126	165,589
Office-based	97,850	96,569
Other	111,272	83,871
Total	675,918	635,975

- The percentage of male LPNs increased from 7.6% to 8.6% (p=0.07).

2008

Male	Female
51,258	624,660

2013

Male	Female
55,380	580,595

- The increase in long-term care employment was largely due to a 57.7% increase of LPNs in home health (p=0.00).

Distribution of Employed LPNs by Long-Term Care Setting
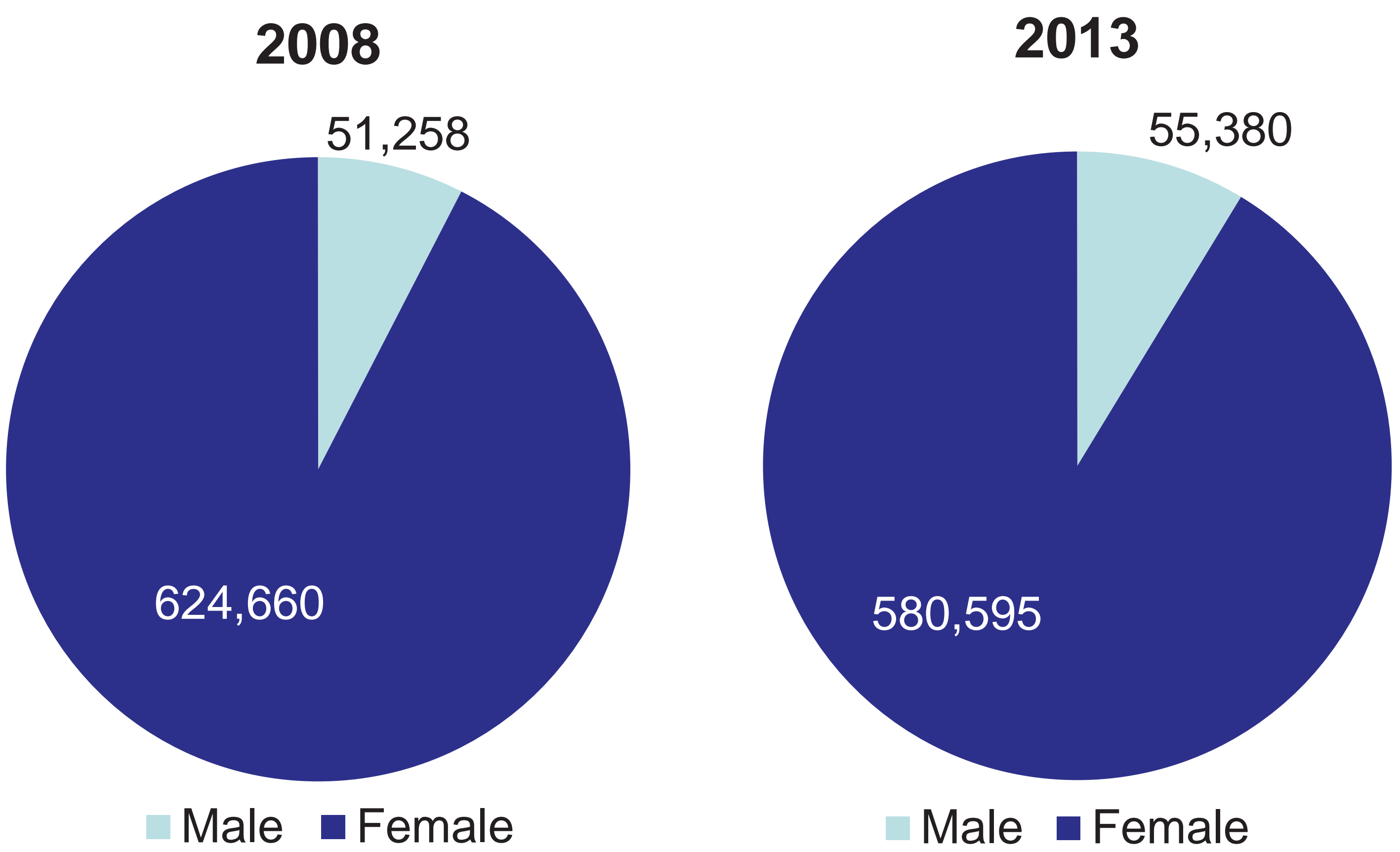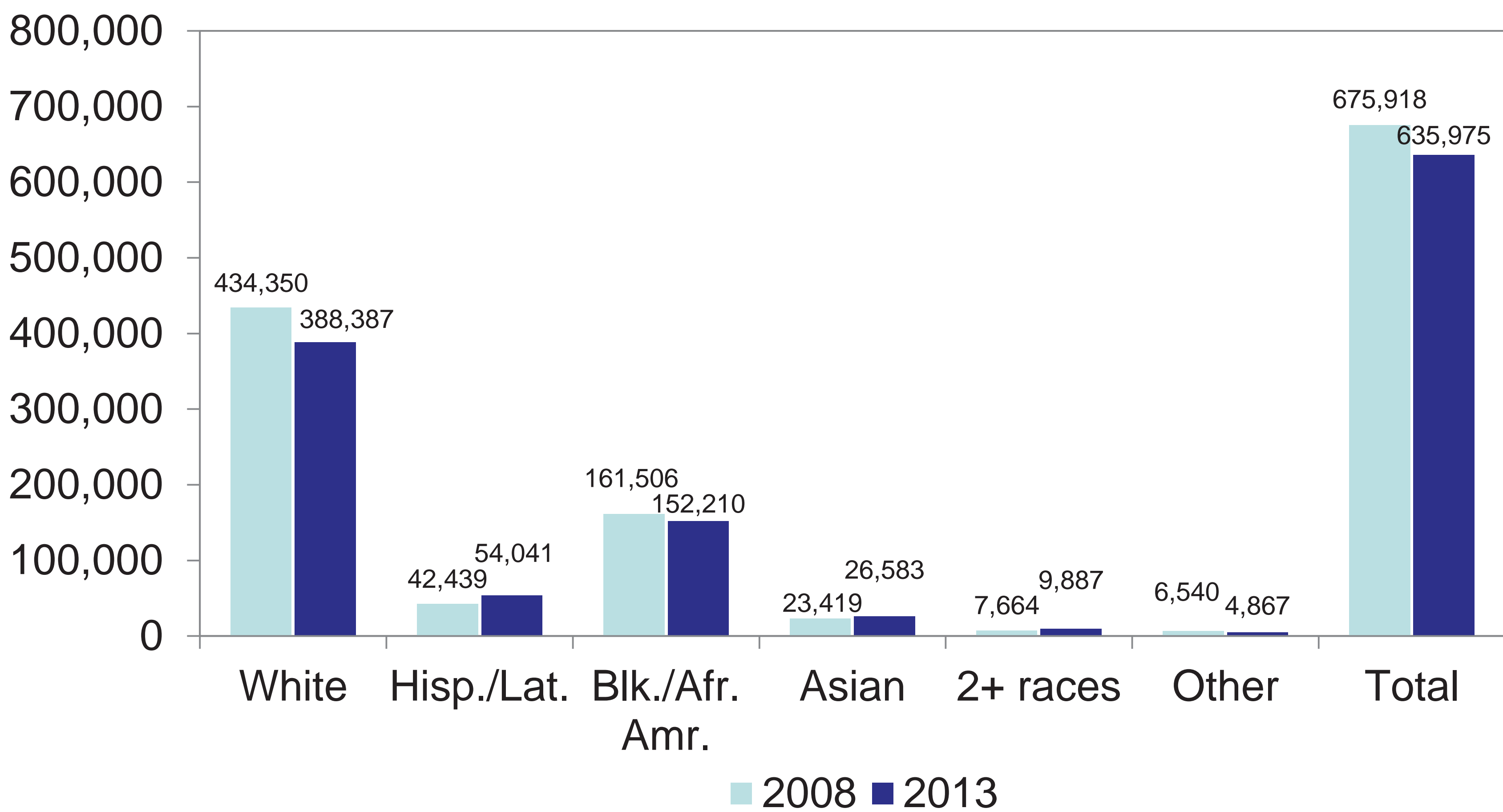

Setting	2008	2013
Home Health	35,600	56,151
Nursing homes (SNF)	206,899	213,217
Residential care facilities	7,292	12,184
Other LTC	8,879	8,394
Total	258,670	289,946

- The number of Hispanic/Latino and Asian LPNs increased by 27.3% and 13.5%, respectively (p=0.00).

Distribution of Employed LPNs by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2008	2013
White	434,350	388,387
Hisp./Lat.	42,439	54,041
Blk./Afr. Amr.	161,506	152,210
Asian	23,419	26,583
2+ races	7,664	9,887
Other	6,540	4,867
Total	675,918	635,975

Implications

- Shifts away from hospital employment may indicate lower demand for LPNs by hospitals, possibly because:
    1. Hospitals are striving to increase the education and skill level of their nursing workforce, and thus preferring to hire registered nurses (RNs).
    2. As the RN shortage abated, it may have become easier for hospitals to hire RNs instead of LPNs.
- Employment projections suggest an increased demand for LPNs in long-term care.
- There is a need to ensure that LPN education programs are preparing students for practice in long-term care settings.
- An increasingly diverse LPN workforce will improve the profession's ability to meet the needs of the U.S.'s increasingly diverse population.

Limitations

- No information about scope of practice
- Limited industry categories