

## Profile of the Licensed Practical Nurse/Licensed Vocational Nurse Workforce from 2008 to 2013

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### I. Introduction/Background

Licensed practical nurses (LPNs), referred to as licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) in some states, are the second-largest health care occupation that requires postsecondary education. More LPNs work in long-term care (LTC) than in any other sector. Demand for LPNs among LTC providers is expected to increase substantially over the next several decades. There is a need to better understand recent trends in the LPN workforce and their implications for the future supply of LPNs available to provide long-term care. This report updates previous studies of the LPN workforce by presenting the latest national data available on LPN employment patterns with emphasis on employment in long-term care. The report also describes trends in the demographic characteristics and educational attainment of LPNs.

### II. Methods

Data from the 2008 and 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample were analyzed.

### III. Findings

Between 2008 and 2013, LPN employment overall declined from 675,918 LPNs in 2008 to 635,975 LPNs in 2013, a decrease of 6%. However employment by these workers in LTC settings increased by 13% (largely attributable to a 58% increase in their employment by home health agencies), while hospital employment of LPNs decreased by 20%. The age distribution and gender distribution (predominantly female) did not change significantly. There were some racial and ethnic shifts, including a small increase in the percentage of Hispanic or Latino LPNs, a small decrease in the percentage of whites, and an increased percentage of LPNs who were foreign-born or spoke a language other than English. The percentage of African American LPNs was higher than in the general population. In all these demographic categories there were regional differences, as well as differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

### IV. Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that the total number of LPNs in the United States is decreasing and that employment patterns are changing. The number of LPNs employed by hospitals has decreased significantly while the number employed in long-term care settings has increased. Within the LTC sector, LPN employment has grown most substantially in home health care settings. The racial/ethnic diversity of the LPN workforce is likely to increase in the coming

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

- 1) Although the LPN workforce in the U.S. is shrinking overall, employment patterns are changing, with LPN employment growing in long-term care settings, particularly home health care.
- 2) Racial and ethnic diversity is likely to increase in the coming decades because non-white LPNs are younger, on average, than white LPNs and, thus, likely to remain in the labor force longer.
- 3) LPN education programs should address the particular skills LPN workers need for long-term care settings.

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The findings from this analysis also suggest that there are some important differences in LPN employment patterns between Census regions and between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Further research is needed to assess the extent to which these differences are related to differences in state policies regarding healthcare staffing, reimbursement for healthcare services, or other characteristics of healthcare markets

## **V. Policy Implications**

The growth in demand for LPNs in long-term care settings relative to hospitals has important implications for LPN education. LPNs who work in long-term care settings have less direct supervision than their counterparts in hospitals and need to exercise more independent judgment regarding patient care. LPN education programs need to ensure that students obtain sufficient clinical training in long-term care settings and have the critical thinking and communications skills necessary to practice effectively in these settings.

## **References**

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