



# THE STATUS OF THE NURSING WORKFORCE IN MONTANA

A Summary of the Results from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing 2024 Survey

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Montana Department of  
**LABOR & INDUSTRY**

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Montana's healthcare system relies on a highly skilled nursing workforce. Over the last few years Montana's healthcare industry has grown, as an aging population and strong migration have increased the demand for healthcare services. This strong growth follows a period of uncertainty and changes stemming from the global pandemic. The combination of these events has made understanding the current and future nursing workforce essential. To help provide insight into these workers, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) conducts a national nursing survey every two years, including questions related to educational attainment, employment, earnings, overall well-being, and other demographic information. The Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI) analyzed this survey data for Montana's 23,000 actively licensed registered nurses (RNs) and 2,200 actively licensed practical nurses (LPNs). The following sections explore employment dynamics, educational attainment, demographics, and health of Montana nurses, and can be used to guide discussions on the status of Montana's nursing workforce.

## Survey Highlights

### Registered Nurses

- The number of Montana RNs increased over the last two years, driven partially by migration. The largest increase was for RNs aged 30 to 49. There are 23,000 RN licenses in the state, up from 20,000 in 2022.
- Growth in the registered nursing workforce has helped alleviate some of the workforce challenges for healthcare providers. The unemployment rate for RNs increased to 2.1% in 2024 from less than 1% reported in 2022, suggesting there are more licensed RNs who are available to fill job openings. Nationally, 2.5% of RNs are unemployed and seeking work.
- Approximately 87% of licensed RNs were working in the field in 2024, mostly unchanged from two years prior.
- The median age of RNs in Montana fell to 43.9 years old in 2024, suggesting older workers continue to retire and are being replaced by a younger generation. Montana has a younger RN workforce than the national average.
- About 23% of employed RNs said they plan on retiring or otherwise leaving the field in the next five years, down from 26% reported in 2022. Approximately 40% of RNs nationally are expected to leave the profession within the next five years.
- 78% of Montana's RNs hold a bachelor's degree or higher as their highest level of nursing education, higher than the national average of 73%. Montana RNs are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree than the national average, less likely to hold a master's degree, and equally likely to hold an associate degree.

- There is an increase in RNs attaining higher education after their initial degree. 10% of RNs beginning their career with a bachelor's degree have also received their master's degree, higher than the 4% reported in 2020. 38% of RNs who started working with an associate degree now hold a bachelor's degree or higher – six percentage points higher than the rate reported in 2020.
- The median income for associate degree and bachelor's degree RNs is similar, at \$71,000 and \$70,000, respectively. RNs holding a master's degree earn a median income of \$99,000, higher than associate and bachelor's degree RNs.
- RN median incomes grew 6% over the last two years, relatively slow growth compared with average wage growth across all Montana industries (10%).
- Overall well-being improved over the last two years, with fewer RNs reporting increased workloads or poor mental health. However, challenges remain as stress, workload, and understaffing are commonly cited concerns reported by RNs planning to leave the occupation.
- Multistate licensing can help overcome workforce shortages in nursing by allowing employers to hire from outside the state. 66% of Montana's licensed RNs hold a multistate license, compared with 36% nationally.
- American Indian nurses are underrepresented in Montana, making up about 1% of all RNs in the state compared to 6% of the total population.

### **Licensed Practical Nurses**

- The number of licensed LPNs continued to decline from 2,300 in 2022 to 2,200 in 2024. Retirements exceeded the number of new licenses over the last two years, leading to an overall decline in the number of LPNs in Montana.
- The share of unemployed LPNs has declined steadily, from 2.3% in 2020 to less than 1% in 2024, suggesting there are fewer licensed LPNs who are available to fill job openings. Nationally, 3.9% of LPNs say they are unemployed and seeking nursing work.
- Most (79%) licensed LPNs are working in nursing, up from 76% in 2022. In Montana, LPNs are less likely to work in nursing and more likely to be retired or work in other fields than LPNs nationwide.
- Montana's LPNs are older than the national average, with a higher percentage estimated to retire within the next five years. About 25% of Montana LPNs plan to retire in the next 5 years, compared to 19% of LPNs nationally.
- The median age of LPNs in Montana was 54 years old in 2024, mostly unchanged over the last four years.
- Montana LPNs are less likely than LPNs nationwide to leave the profession for reasons excluding retirement. About 12% of Montana LPNs plan to leave the profession over the next ten years for non-retirement reasons.
- 65% of Montana LPNs hold a certificate or diploma as their highest level of nursing education followed by an associate degree (34%). Only 11% of LPNs nationwide have attained an associate degree in nursing, while the rest have a certificate or diploma.

- LPNs work in a variety of different settings. The most common places for LPNs to work are in ambulatory care (19%) or nursing home/extended care (17%). Only about 10% of LPNs report working in a hospital.
- The share of LPNs working in nursing homes and extended care facilities has fallen by nine percentage points over the last two years.
- The median income for an LPN was \$54,000, up 15% from 2022. This is fast growth relative to other Montana industries.
- LPNs' overall well-being improved over the last two years, with fewer LPNs reporting increased workloads or poor mental health. However, challenges remain as stress, workload, and understaffing are commonly cited concerns reported by LPNs planning to leave the occupation.
- Multistate licensing can help overcome workforce shortages in nursing by allowing employers to hire from outside the state. 92% of Montana's LPNs hold a multistate license compared with 33% nationally.
- American Indian nurses are underrepresented in Montana, making up about 2% of all LPNs in the state compared to 6% of the total population.

## About the Survey

The National Nursing Workforce Survey, conducted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and the National Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers, is a national-level survey that is focused on providing an overview of the nursing workforce. The survey is sent out to a random sample of individuals that hold either an active registered nurse (RN) license or an active licensed practical/vocational nurse (LPN/LVN) license. In Montana, 3,112 RN licensees were mailed a survey, and 694 responded. Of the 2,149 Montana LPN/LVN licensees that were mailed a survey, 443 responded. This analysis focuses on the responses from Montana licensees.

This analysis weighted the Montana data by Montana's age distribution to appropriately represent the state's nursing population. The national results are also weighted, with those calculations based on the U.S. state, age, and gender distribution.

The NCSBN is conducted about every two years, with results from the 2015-2024 datasets comparable across time. This facilitates trend analysis, and it can help understand the supply of nurses over time. MTDLI analyzed results from the 2015, 2020, 2022, and the 2024 survey. The responses were collected as follows:

- 2024 survey: responses collected between March 25, 2024 and December 31, 2024.
- 2022 survey: responses collected between April 11, 2022 and September 30, 2022.
- 2020 survey: responses collected between February 19, 2020 and June 30, 2020.
- 2015 survey: responses collected between July 2015 and September 2015.



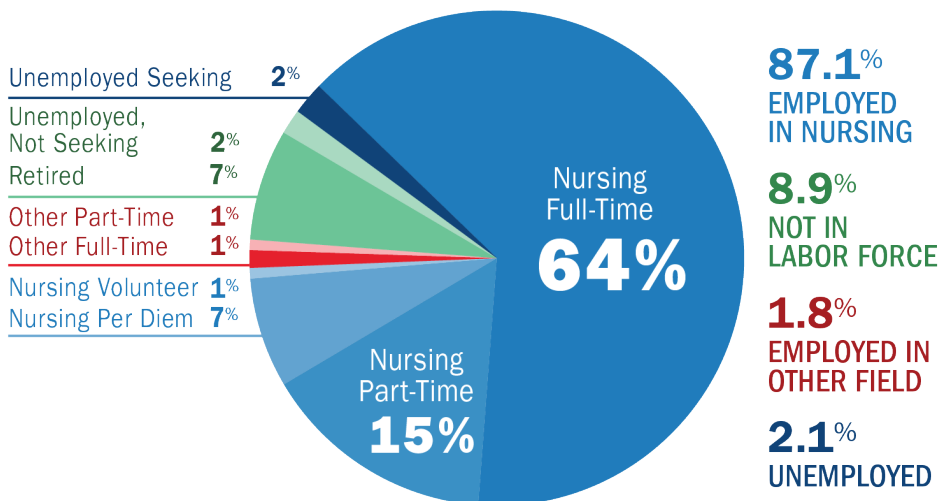
# REGISTERED NURSES

## Employment Status

There were over 23,000 licensed RNs in Montana in 2024, an increase of about 3,000 RNs since 2022. Most licensed RNs work in nursing. The NCSBN survey indicates approximately 87% of RNs are working in the field, and 64% are working full-time, similar to survey results from 2022. Compared to the national average, Montana has a higher share of part-time nurses and a lower share of full-time nurses.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, the employment distribution of Montana RNs resembles the national nursing workforce. Figure 1 shows the employment status of licensed RNs in Montana.

**About 2%**  
of licensed RNs  
are unemployed  
and seeking work.

**Figure 1. Employment Status of Licensed RNs in Montana, 2024**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI.

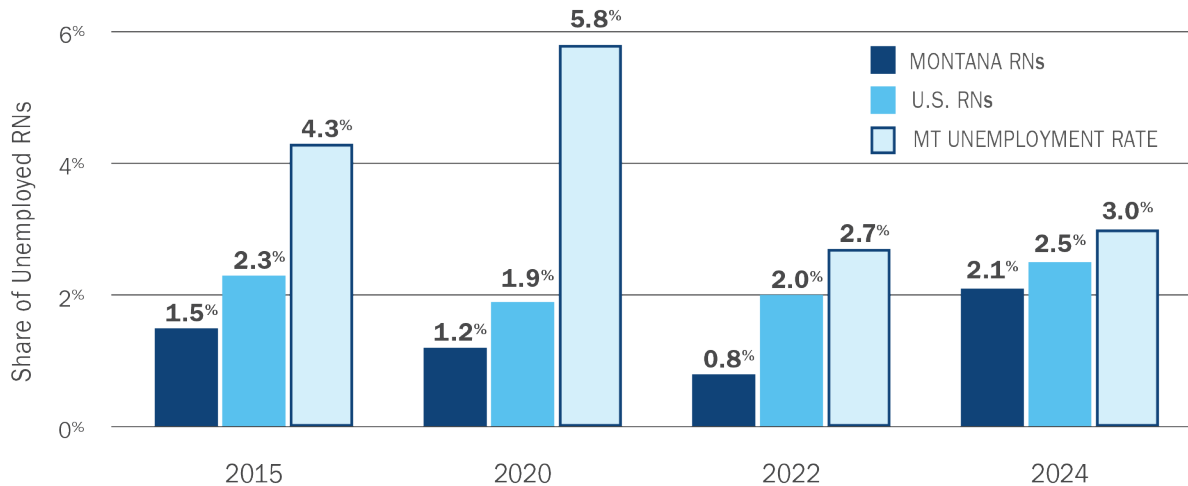
About 2% of Montana RNs are unemployed and seeking work as a nurse. This share is higher than in 2022 when less than 1% of Montana RNs were unemployed, and it is now closer to the national rate of 2.5%, as shown in Figure 2. A higher unemployment rate means a larger pool of RN applicants and helps employers recruit qualified workers, although the unemployment rate for nurses is still low. Montana has had historically tight labor markets in the past few years, with employers across all industries struggling to find qualified workers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nationally, 69% work full-time and 11% of RNs work part-time.

<sup>2</sup> MTDLI. Labor Day Report. 2025.



**Figure 2. Share of RNs who are Unemployed and Seeking Work as a Nurse**



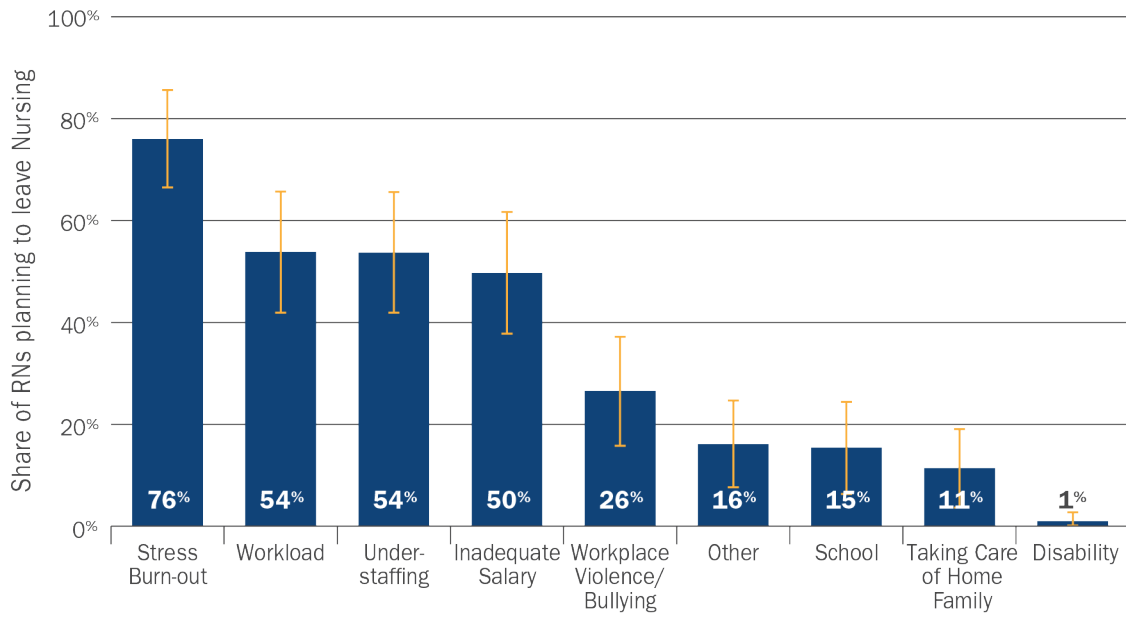
Source: NCSBN 2024, 2022, 2020, and 2015 Survey and LAUS 2024 compiled by MTDLI.

Eleven percent of licensed RNs are either working in other fields or not participating in the labor force. This reflects a one percentage point decline from 2022 as RNs become more engaged in the nursing workforce. There are many reasons an individual may choose not to work, including retirement, caring for family, or attending school. Most are retired (7% of all licensed RNs). Family commitments, like caring for children or adults with illnesses or disabilities, were the second most common reason for not actively seeking work. By maintaining their RN license, these individuals remain available to rejoin the nursing workforce in the future should they choose to do so.

Despite this increased labor force engagement and the growing share of unemployed RNs, tight labor markets persist. These tight labor markets highlight the importance of workforce retention and responding to workforce challenges. Montana RNs planning to leave the occupation for non-retirement reasons most commonly cite stress and burn-out (76%), workload (54%), understaffing (54%), and salary (50%) as reasons they plan to leave the profession.<sup>3</sup> Figure 3 shows the reasons RNs give for planning to leave the nursing workforce for non-retirement reasons over the next five years.

<sup>3</sup> Nationally, these four concerns were also the most common non-retirement reasons to leave the workforce.

**Figure 3. RN Reasons for Planning on Leaving the Nursing Workforce**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

## Age Demographics

The median age of Montana RNs continued to fall in 2024, suggesting retiring RNs are being replaced by a younger generation. The median age of Montana RNs was 43.9 years old in 2024, falling from 48.5 years in 2015. Montana RNs are younger than the RN workforce nationally. The median age for RNs across the county was 50 years old in 2024.

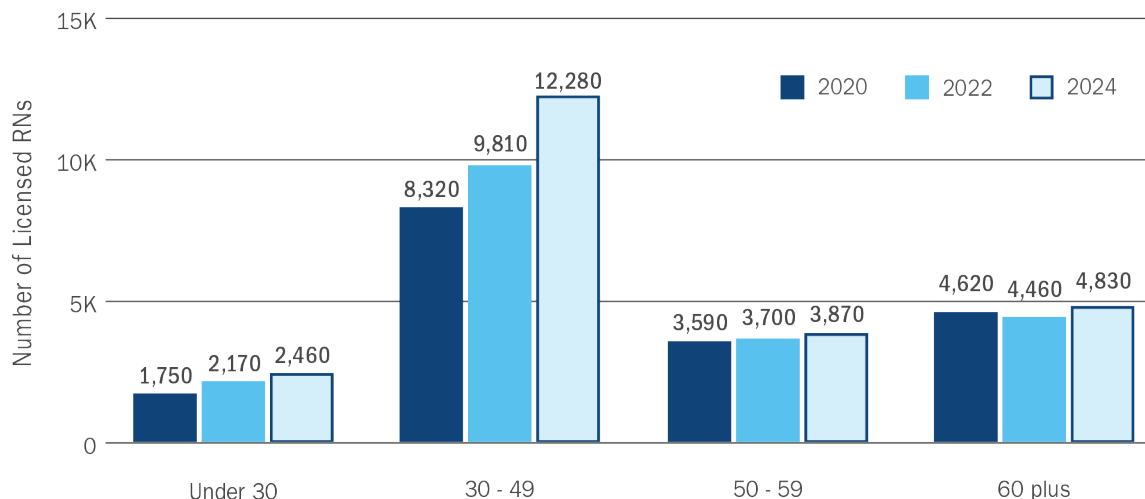
The number of younger RNs grew significantly in Montana over the past two years. There were 12,300 RNs between age 30 and 49 in 2024, up 25% since 2022. The number of RNs under the age of 30 also increased over the last two years, as shown in Figure 4. The number of RNs nationwide in these age categories declined over the last two years.<sup>4</sup> Part of this growth is related to migration. Migration into Montana was elevated post-covid, with most of the migration-related population growth being attributed to younger adults.<sup>5</sup> The substantial increase in internationally-educated nurses has also caused growth in this age category.

**23%** of RNs say they plan on retiring or leaving the nursing profession in the next 5 years.

<sup>4</sup> Nationwide, there were 2.2 million RNs under the age of 50 in 2024, down from 2.4 million in 2022.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Estimated Components of Resident Population Change. U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2019-2023 5-year estimates. Dashboard available for further analysis: <https://lmi.mt.gov/Home/population-migration>.

**Figure 4. Age of Licensed RNs in Montana**

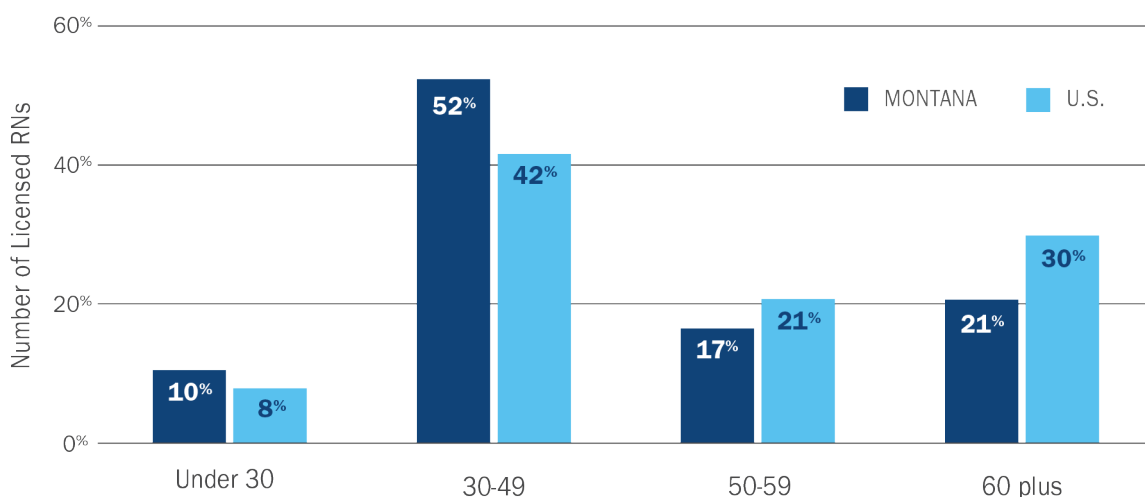


Source: MTDLI licensure data. Number of active licenses in January of each year.

Although there was a nationwide exodus of RNs over 50 immediately following the covid pandemic, many returned to the workforce by 2024. Across Montana and the U.S., there were more licensed RNs age 50 and older in 2024 than there were in 2020. The exodus and return of RNs was more pronounced nationwide than in Montana. Nationally, there was a 15% decline in licensed RNs age 50 and older between 2020 and 2022, compared to a 1% decline in Montana.

Because of these demographic shifts, Montana now has a smaller share of nurses over age 50 (37%) compared to the U.S. average (51%). While a younger workforce alleviates retirement concerns, it also suggests less experience. The median number of years licensed is 14 for Montana compared with 17 nationwide. Figure 5 shows the age distribution of Montana RNs compared with the U.S. distribution.

**Figure 5. Age Distribution of Licensed RNs in Montana and U.S. in 2024**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey. Montana estimates compiled by MTDLI using licensure data. Includes number of active licenses in Jan. 2024.



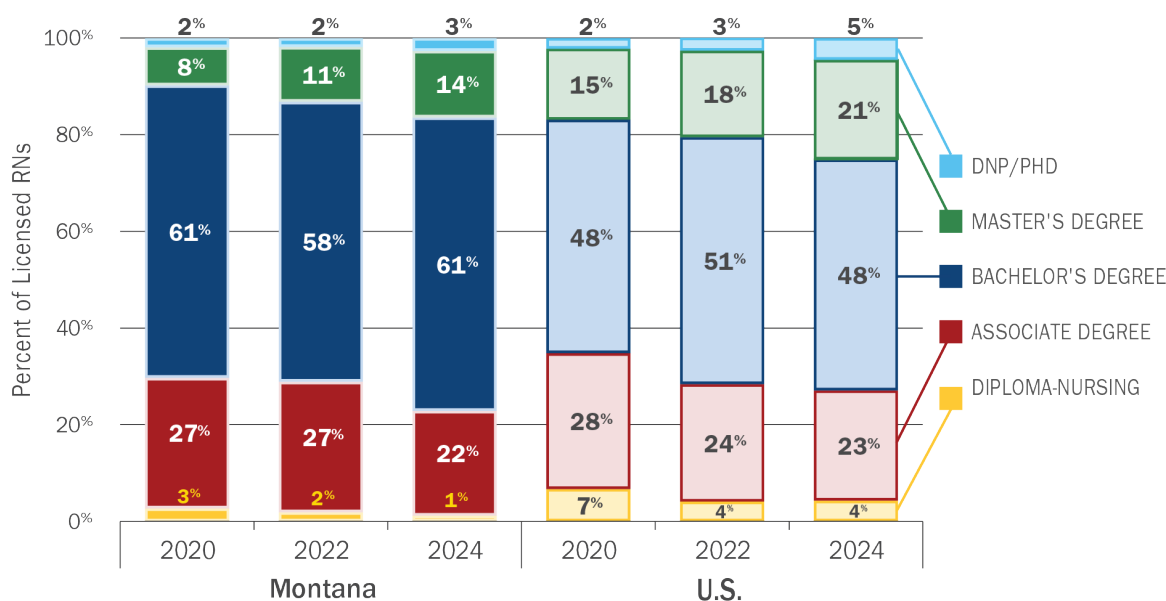
An aging workforce and increased retirements are drivers of workforce shortages across all occupations. Montana’s relatively young nursing workforce has helped mitigate these concerns. In 2024, 13% of Montana RNs employed in nursing reported they plan to retire in the next 5 years and another 10% plan to leave the occupation for other reasons. Nationally, 22% of RNs employed in nursing plan to retire, while another 18% expect to leave for other reasons.

## Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of Montana’s RN workforce has been increasing over the last five years. Master’s degrees are becoming more common while associate degrees are declining in popularity. Since 2020, the percentage of Montana RNs with a master’s degree has risen from 8% to 14%. Associate degree trained RNs now only comprise 22% of the state’s RN workforce, compared to 27% in 2020. Figure 6 shows the educational attainment of registered nurses in Montana and nationally since 2020.

The share of RNs with master’s degrees increased to **14%** in 2024.

**Figure 6. Highest Nursing Degree Earned by RNs in Montana and U.S., 2020 to 2024**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024, 2022, and 2020 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Montana estimate includes licensed RNs currently practicing in Montana.

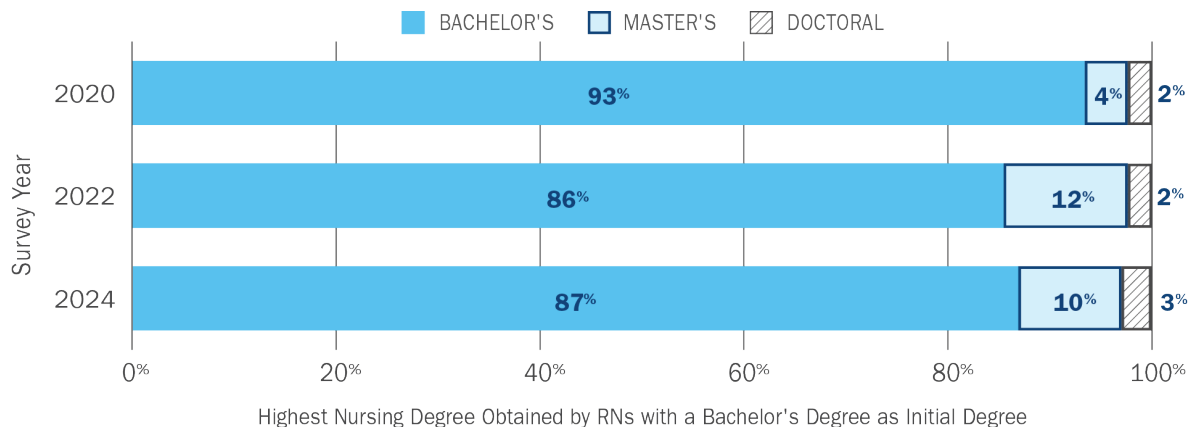
Most RNs in Montana and nationwide hold a bachelor’s degree or higher as their highest level of nursing education. Approximately 78% of Montana RNs hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 73% nationwide. Bachelor’s degrees remain the most common degree held by Montana RNs (61%), followed by associate degrees, and then master’s degrees. Montana RNs are more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree than nurses nationwide, and equally likely to hold an associate degree. While master’s degree attainment is becoming more common for the state’s RN workforce, Montana RNs remain less likely to hold a master’s degree than the national average.

Registered nurses in Montana are more likely to pursue higher education after entering the workforce than they were in 2020. In 2024, 13% of RNs who began their career with a bachelor’s degree attained a master’s degree or higher – compared to only 6% in 2020. Similarly, 38% of RNs who started working with an associate degree now hold a bachelor’s degree or higher – six percentage points higher than the

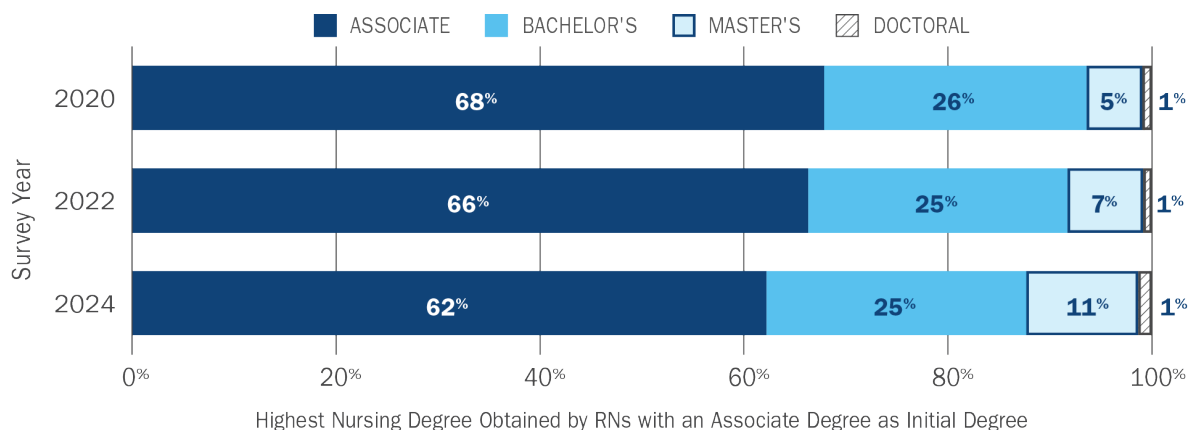
rate reported in 2020. The increased prevalence of continuing education among Montana’s registered nurses has driven an overall increase in the educational attainment of the RN workforce over the last four years. The academic progression of Montana RNs beginning their career with a bachelor’s degree and associate degree are shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Of the RNs beginning their career with an associate degree, an estimated **38%** have since achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher.

**Figure 7. Academic Progression of RNs with a Bachelor’s Degree as Initial Nursing Degree**



**Figure 8. Academic Progression of RNs with an Associate Degree as Initial Nursing Degree**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024, 2022, and 2020 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Includes licensed RNs currently practicing in Montana.

In addition to continuing education and academic progression, the natural churn of the workforce is also contributing to higher levels of education for RNs. Younger RNs are more likely to begin their career with a bachelor’s degree and less likely to begin with an associate degree relative to older RNs. As older workers retire, younger workers beginning their career with a higher level of education replace them. In Montana, 17% of RNs under age 30 hold an associate degree or diploma as their highest level of education, compared with 29% over age 50.

## Occupation and Wages

Most RNs in Montana work as staff nurses (67%). Staff nurses are primarily employed in a hospital setting (66%). The number of staff nurses working in a nursing home or extended care facility has fallen over the last four years. Only 3% of RN staff nurses worked in nursing homes or extended care facilities in 2024, compared to 7% in 2020. The median wage for a staff nurse was \$70,000 in 2024, regardless of whether the RN held an associate or bachelor's degree. Staff nurses with a master's degree in registered nursing earned slightly more – reporting \$78,000 annual median wage. Figure 9 shows the top occupations and wages of Montana's licensed RNs by educational attainment.

**Figure 9. Occupation and Wages of Licensed RNs in Montana by Highest Degree**

	ASSOCIATE RN	BACHELOR'S RN	MASTER'S RN
Median Wage	\$71,000	\$70,000	\$99,000
Top 4 Occupations (% Employed) Median Wage	Staff Nurse (73%) \$70,000	Staff Nurse (80%) \$70,000	APRN (52%) \$116,000
	Other Health Related (11%) \$66,000	Case Manager (5%) \$80,000	Staff Nurse (15%) \$78,000
	Case Manager (7%) \$80,000	Other Health Related (5%) \$60,000	Nurse Manager (8%) \$110,000
	Nurse Manager (3%) \$89,000	Nurse Manager (4%) \$90,000	Nurse Faculty (6%) \$80,000

Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Includes licensed RNs currently practicing in Montana. The job title Other Health Related was a response option for the related NCSBN question, with no clarity on what it may include.

**Associate and bachelor's degree RNs earn similar median wages near \$70,000. RNs with a master's degree report a median income of \$99,000.**

Although wages typically increase with education levels in most occupations, associate and bachelor's trained RNs report similar median incomes. Bachelor's trained RNs report a median income of \$70,000 and associate trained RNs report \$71,000. There are three reasons for similar wages. First, RNs with an associate degree tend to be older, and likely have more work experience. The median age for RNs with an

associate degree is 46 compared with 40 for RNs with a bachelor's degree. Second, low unemployment and high demand for nursing results in all nurses being paid similarly, regardless of education. Lastly, associate and bachelor's trained RNs typically hold the same license type and therefore have the same scope of practice.

An income premium does exist for master's degree attainment among RNs. The median income for RNs holding a master's degree is \$99,000 – 41% higher than the median for bachelor's degree holders. This wage premium has likely driven much of the increase in master's degree attainment among RNs over the last four years. Within the same occupation, master's degree trained RNs earn between \$8,000 and \$20,000 more than bachelor's degree RNs.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wage premium estimate includes occupations reported in Figure 9.

Over half (52%) of master's degree RNs work as an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN). APRN's report the highest median wage among registered nurses, earning \$116,000 in 2024. Increased educational and licensing requirements drives the wage increase for APRNs relative to other RN careers. More registered nurses have pursued a career as an APRN over the last four years. RNs working as APRNs increased from 4% in 2020 to 10% in 2024.

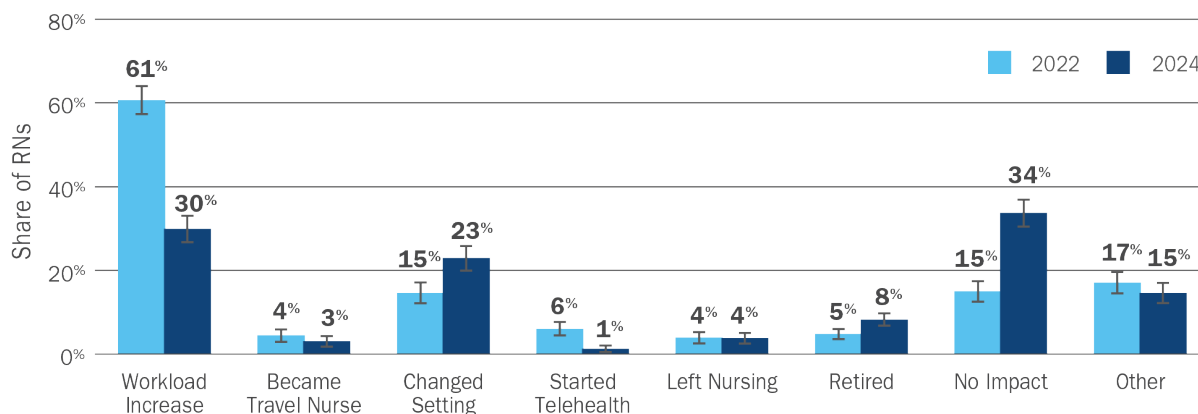
Montana RNs reported relatively slow income growth from 2022 to 2024. Reported median income was \$74,000 in 2024, up 6% from 2022. This is slower income growth than RNs nationwide (10%), and slower than wage growth across all Montana jobs (10%). Income growth for RNs varies by occupation. RNs working as staff nurses experienced the fastest wage growth of all RN occupations, at 8% over the two years. APRN wages grew by 4% over the two years. Inadequate salary is one of the primary reasons RNs give for planning to leave the occupation over the next five years.

## Workload/Mental Health

The 2024 NCSBN survey suggests improved overall well-being among Montana RNs over the past two years. However, challenges remain as stress and burn-out, workload, and understaffing are primary reasons RNs plan to leave the occupation.

Figure 10 shows how employment conditions have changed for RNs over the last two years. Fewer nurses reported an increase in their workload on the 2024 survey compared to the 2022 survey. Only 30% of RNs indicated they had an increase in their workload over the last two years, down from 61% of nurses on the 2022 survey. The 2024 survey also indicates more employment stability over the last two years. About one-third of RNs said they had no change in their employment conditions over the last two years, up from 15% reported in the 2022 survey.

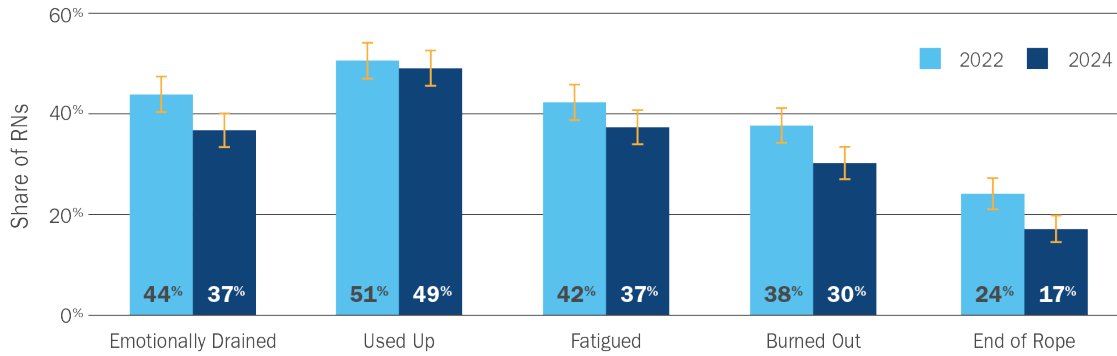
**Figure 10. How Has Employment Changed in the Last Two Years - Montana RNs**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 and 2022 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

In 2024, fewer RNs often felt emotionally drained, fatigued, burned out, or at the end of their rope compared with 2022. While these responses mark improved mental health over the two-year period, the share of RNs with mental health struggles remain relatively high. Figure 11 shows the share of Montana RNs responding that they feel specific emotions at least a few times a week. RNs were specifically asked how often they feel: emotionally drained from work; used up at the end of the workday; fatigued when they get up to face another day on the job; burned-out from work; and like they are at the end of their rope.

**Figure 11. Share of Registered Nurses with Described Feeling at Least a Few Times a Week**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 and 2022 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

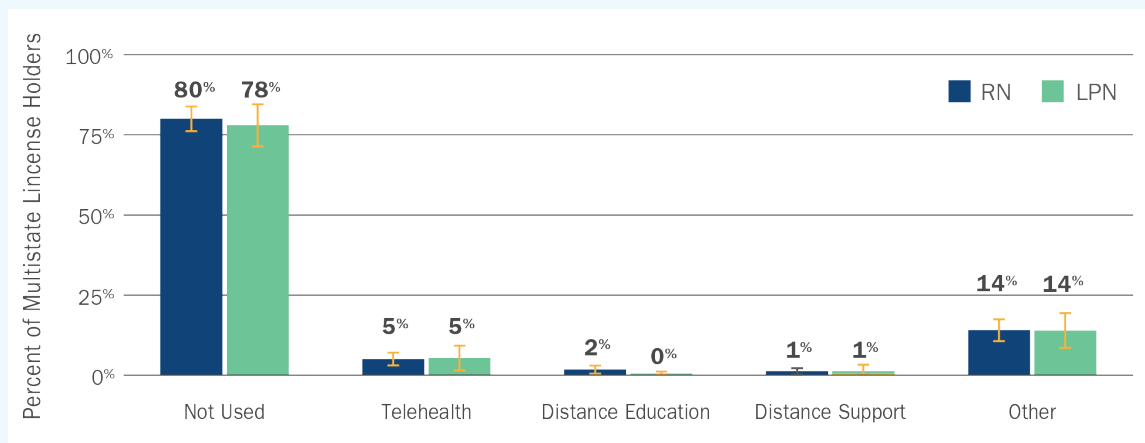
## Increasing the Supply of Nurses through Nursing Licensure Compact

Montana implemented the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) on October 1, 2015, allowing nurses who are both licensed in Montana and claim Montana as their primary residence to practice in any of the 39 states and 2 territories that are part of the NLC without obtaining a license in each of those states. According to the MTDLI, 66% of Montana's RNs and 92% of Montana's LPNs hold a multistate license. Nationally, 36% of RNs and 33% of LPNs hold a multistate license.

Questions about multistate licenses were added to the NCSBN survey in 2020. According to the survey, 62% of Montana's licensed RNs who are actively employed in nursing report holding a multistate license, similar to the actual share. About 49% of Montana's LPNs actively employed in nursing report holding a multistate license, higher than the 2022 share of 40%. However, LPN survey results continue to be lower than the actual number of nurses with multistate licenses, suggesting LPNs may be unaware of this benefit.

Both RNs and LPNs were asked how they used their multistate license. About 80% of RNs and LPNs with a multistate license responded they have not used their license, higher than national survey results of 62% for RNs and 72% for LPNs. Figure 12 describes how RNs and LPNs have used their multistate license.

**Figure 12. RN and LPN Multistate License Use**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

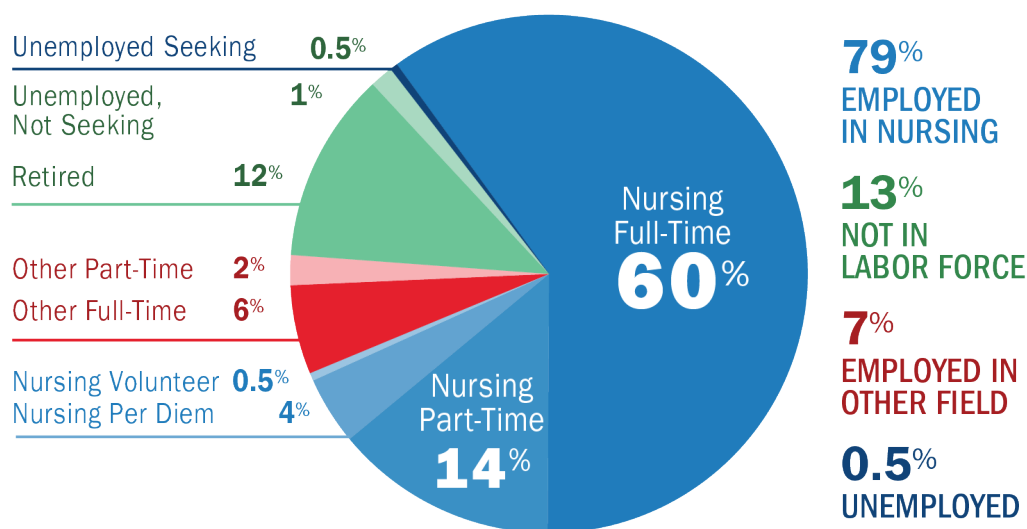


# LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES

## Employment Status

The number of LPNs continued to fall over the last two years, decreasing from 2,300 in 2022 to 2,200 in 2024.<sup>7</sup> As a result, a higher share of LPNs was needed to meet the demand for practical nurses. About 79% of LPNs work in nursing, up from 76% in 2022. Montana LPNs are less likely to work in nursing than the national average (89%). The employment status of LPNs in 2024 is shown in Figure 13.

**Figure 13. Employment Status of Licensed Practical Nurses in Montana**



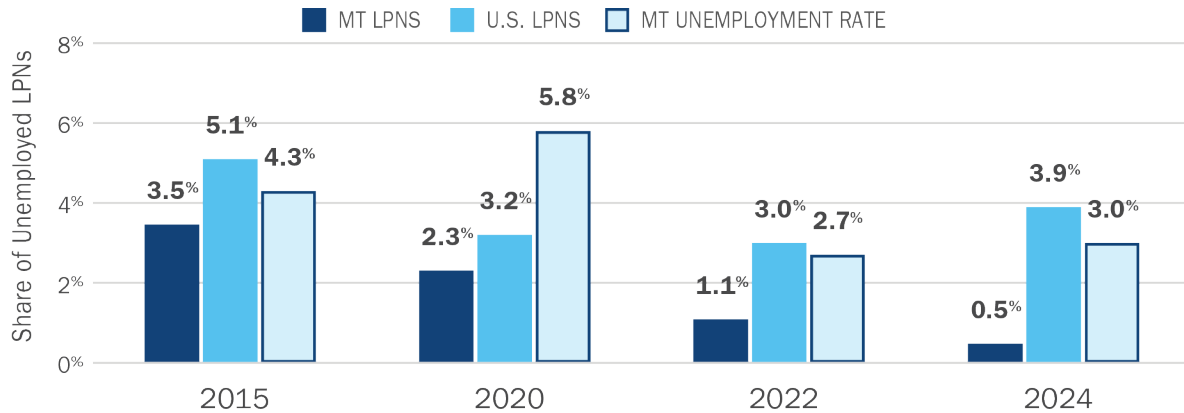
Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey, compiled by MTDLI.

Less than 1% of Montana LPNs are unemployed and actively seeking work, a much smaller share than the 3.9% reported across the U.S. and less than the rate reported for Montana RNs. This extremely low unemployment rate combined with fewer licenses suggests recruitment challenges for employers. Employers attempting to recruit LPNs actively seeking a nursing job will likely find very little interest. Figure 14 shows Montana's declining share of unemployed LPNs compared with the national average and Montana's unemployment rate.

<sup>7</sup> MTDLI licensure data comparing licensees active in January 2024.



**Figure 14. Share of Unemployed LPNs who are Seeking Work as a Nurse**

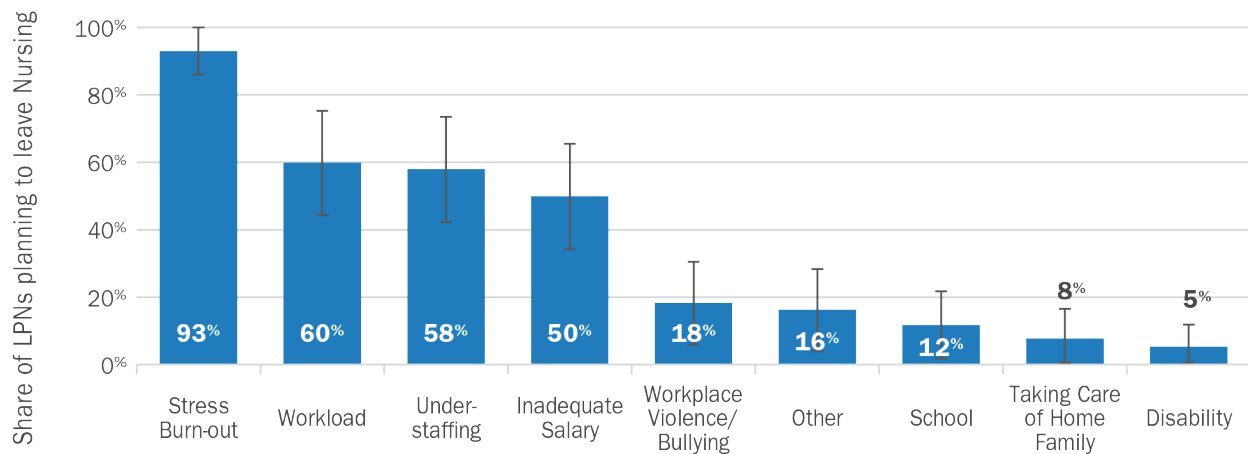


Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024, 2022, 2020, and 2015 Survey and LAUS 2024 compiled by MTDLI.

However, Montana has a high share of LPNs who are either not in the labor force or are working in other fields (21%). This low labor force engagement by Montana LPNs provides a recruitment opportunity for Montana employers. By maintaining licensure, these individuals remain available to rejoin the nursing workforce if desired. About 12% of LPNs are retired, 7% are working in non-nursing fields, and 1% are unemployed and not seeking work.<sup>8</sup> The most common non-retirement reason LPNs are unemployed and not seeking employment is family commitments.

A decline in licensure and extremely low unemployment for LPNs suggests workforce shortages persist in this field. Employers struggling to find qualified workers may try to recruit from the large pool of LPNs disengaged from the nursing workforce. Employers may also focus on retention efforts to keep qualified staff, which requires understanding workforce needs. Montana LPNs planning to leave the profession for non-retirement reasons indicate stress and burn-out (93%), workload (60%), understaffing (58%), and inadequate salary (50%) are the most common reasons for intending to leave the nursing workforce.<sup>9</sup> Figure 15 shows the reasons LPNs give for planning to leave the nursing workforce for non-retirement reasons over the next five years.

**Figure 15. LPN Reasons for Planning on Leaving the Nursing Workforce**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

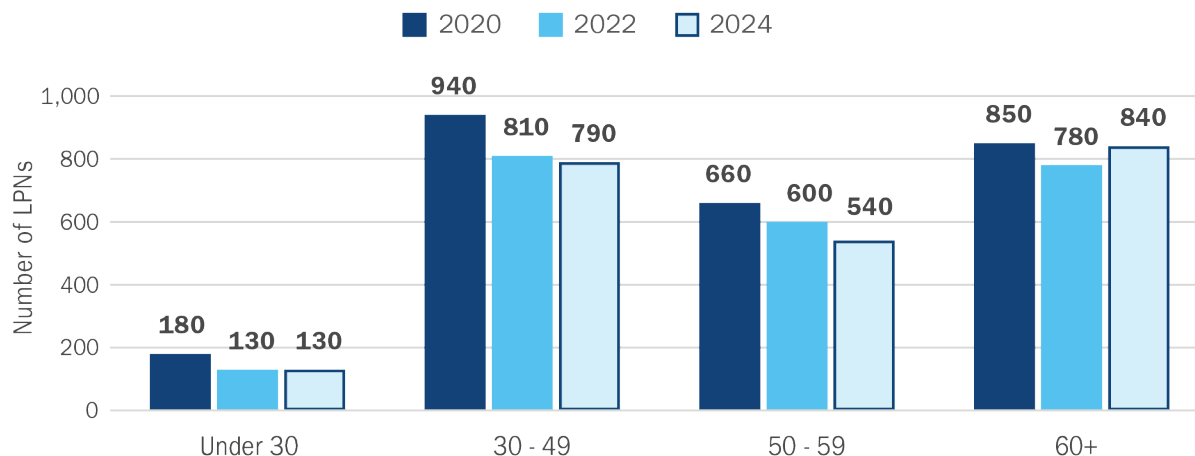
<sup>8</sup> Nationally, about 5% of LPNs are employed in a non-nursing profession and 6% are retired.

<sup>9</sup> Nationally, these four concerns were also the most common non-retirement reasons to leave the workforce.

## Age Demographics

The median age of Montana LPNs remained near 54 years in 2024, similar to the median age since 2020. Unlike RNs, in-migration has not increased the number of young LPNs in the state. The number of LPNs under 60 years old has declined over the last four years. The number of licensed LPNs by age is shown in Figure 16.

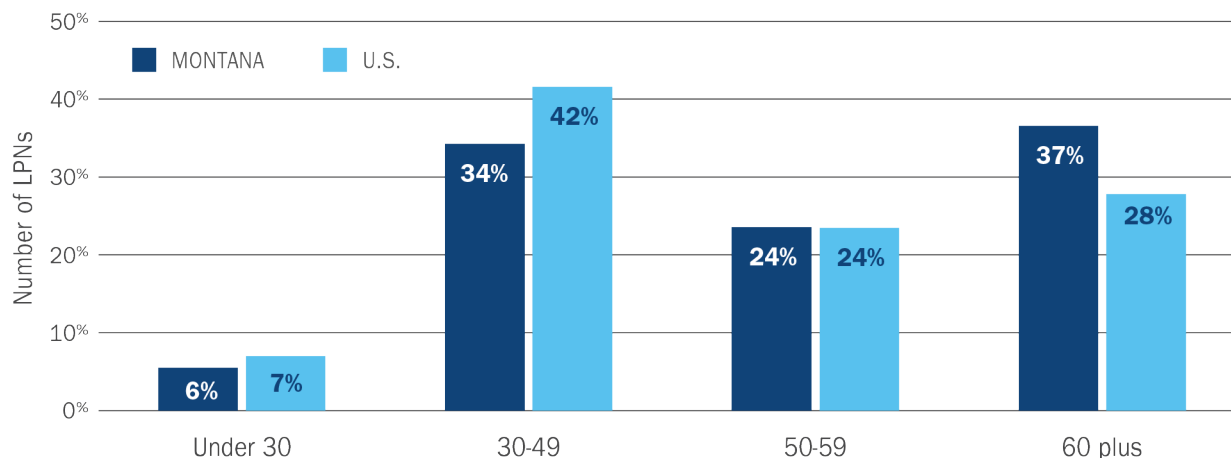
**Figure 16. Age of Licensed LPNs in Montana**



Source: MTDLI licensure data. Number of active licenses in January of each year.

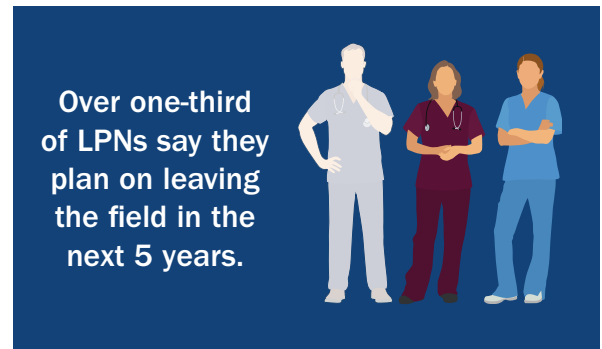
Montana LPNs are older than LPNs nationwide, with a significantly higher share of LPNs older than 60. An older workforce increases concerns regarding large-scale retirements without young workers to replace them. However, an older workforce indicates higher levels of experience. The median number of years licensed for Montana LPNs is 21 compared with 15 nationally. Figure 17 shows the age distribution of LPNs in Montana compared to the U.S.

**Figure 17. Age Distribution of Licensed LPNs in Montana and U.S.**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey. Montana estimates compiled by MTDLI using licensure data. Includes number of active licenses in January 2024.

Montana’s older LPN workforce raises concerns regarding large-scale retirements. The NCSBN survey suggests Montana LPNs are more likely than the national average to leave the workforce to retire, but less likely to leave for other reasons. Twenty-five percent of Montana LPNs reported plans to retire in the next 5 years, with another 12% planning to leave the nursing workforce for other reasons. Nationally, 19% of LPNs plan to retire in the next five years, with another 23% planning to leave for other reasons.

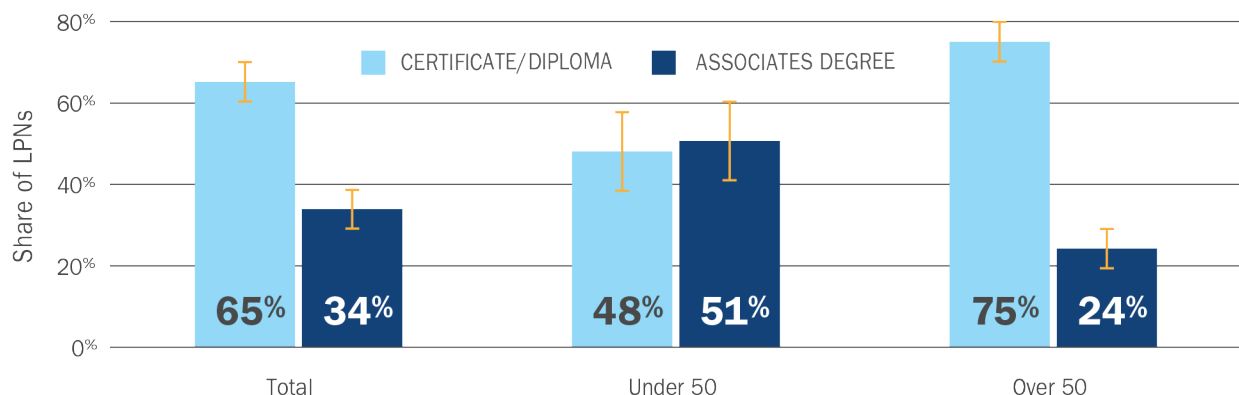


## Educational Attainment

Most LPNs in Montana hold a certificate or diploma as their highest level of nursing education (65%) followed by an associate degree (34%). Associate degrees are more common for Montana LPNs than the national average. Nationally, only 11% of LPNs have attained an associate degree while the rest have a certificate or diploma. A nursing certificate/diploma is the most common educational attainment and is considered the typical entry level requirement by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The share of Montana LPNs with an associate degree has increased since 2020.<sup>10</sup> Educational attainment increased for two reasons. First, younger LPNs are more likely to begin their career with an associate degree relative to older LPNs, as shown in Figure 18. As older LPNs with lower levels of education leave the workforce, younger LPNs with higher levels of education remain. Fifty-one percent of nurses under 50 have an associate degree compared with 24% of LPNs over 50. Second, academic progression increased over the last few years. Seven percent of LPNs beginning their career with a certificate or diploma later attained an associate degree, significantly higher than the 3% reported in 2020.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 18. Highest Nursing Education for Montana's LPNs by Age**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Includes licensed LPNs currently practicing in Montana. Error bars display 90% confidence intervals. Degrees are related to highest level of nursing education.

<sup>10</sup> 19% of LPNs had an associate degree in 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Analysis based on education related to nursing. About 54% of LPNs hold an associate degree or higher when including nursing and non-nursing degrees. 24% of LPNs beginning their career with a nursing certificate/diploma later attained an associate degree in any field.

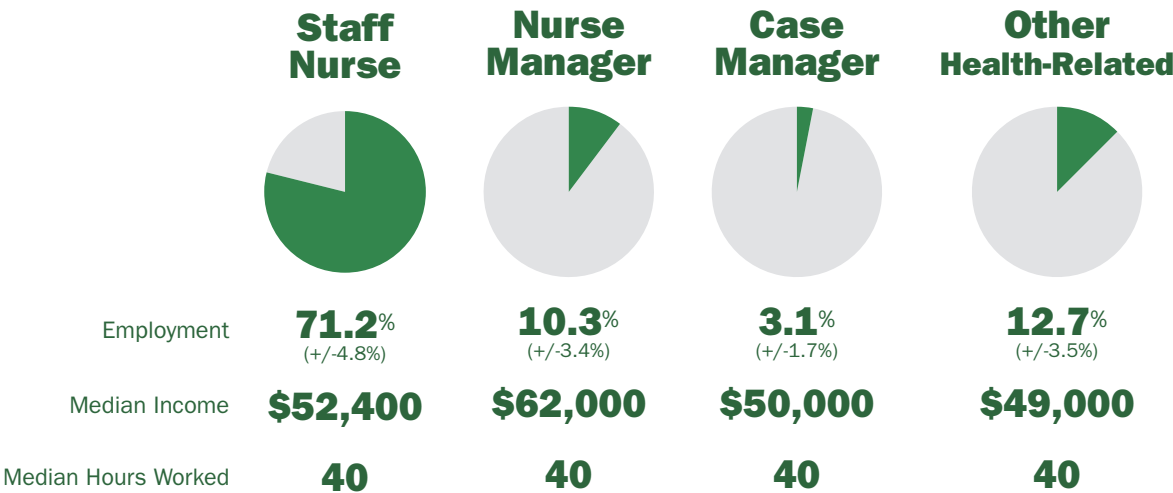
## Occupation and Wages

Most employed LPNs are working as staff nurses (71%), other-health related (13%), and nurse managers (10%). The share of LPNs employed as staff nurses declined from 79% in 2022. The share of LPNs working as nurse managers doubled from 5% in 2022 to 10% in 2024.

LPNs earned a median income of \$54,000 in 2024, up 15% from 2022. Licensed practical nurses experienced faster income growth than the rest of Montana's healthcare industry, and faster than the statewide average. Low unemployment and increased competition for LPNs has driven significant wage growth in the field. Despite rapid wage growth, inadequate income remains one of the primary concerns among LPNs contemplating leaving the workforce. Continued rapid income growth may be essential for retaining the LPN workforce.

Figure 19 shows the percentage of LPNs employed by occupation with the median income and hours worked. Nurse managers earn the most at \$62,000 per year, followed by staff nurses at \$52,400. All occupations reported the same median hours worked.

**Figure 19. Income and Hours Worked per Week of Primary Job for LPNs in Montana**



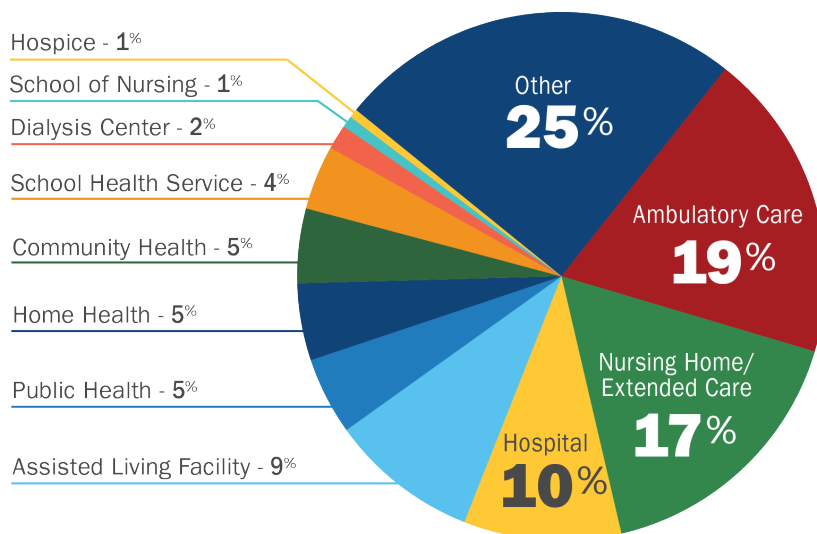
Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Includes licensed LPNs currently practicing in Montana. The Other-Health Related job title was a response to the NCSBN question, with no clarity of what those other job titles may be. Notes: Occupations with less than 10 responses are excluded.

While most RNs work in hospitals (54%), LPNs work in a variety of settings. The most common places for LPNs to work are in ambulatory care, nursing home/extended care, and other.<sup>12</sup> Fewer LPNs work in nursing homes and extended care facilities since the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup> LPN employment since 2020 has shifted into ambulatory care, which includes physician offices, community health centers, urgent care clinics, and other outpatient facilities. Figure 20 shows LPN employment by primary setting.

12 The category “other” was a response to the NCSBN question, with no clarity of what those other settings may be.

13 17% of LPNs worked in nursing homes/extended care facilities in 2024, down from 26% in 2020. 19% of LPNs worked in ambulatory care in 2024, up from 16% in 2020.

**Figure 20. LPN Primary Employment Setting, 2024**



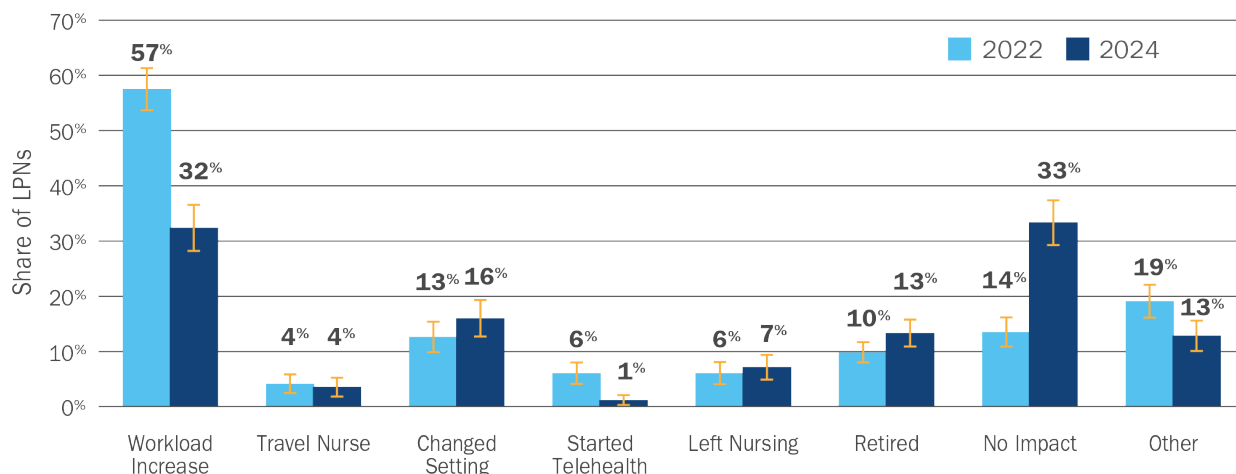
Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Includes licensed LPNs currently practicing in Montana

## Workload/Mental Health

The 2024 NCSBN survey suggests improved overall well-being among Montana LPNs over the past two years. However, challenges remain as stress and burn-out, workload, and understaffing are primary reasons LPNs plan to leave the occupation.

Figure 21 shows how LPNs' employment conditions have changed over a two-year period. Thirty-two percent of LPNs reported an increase in their workload since 2022. Workload increases were less common among LPNs than they were from 2020 to 2022. About one-third of LPNs said they had no impact on their employment over the last two years, a sign of stability after only 14% reported no impact on the 2022 survey.

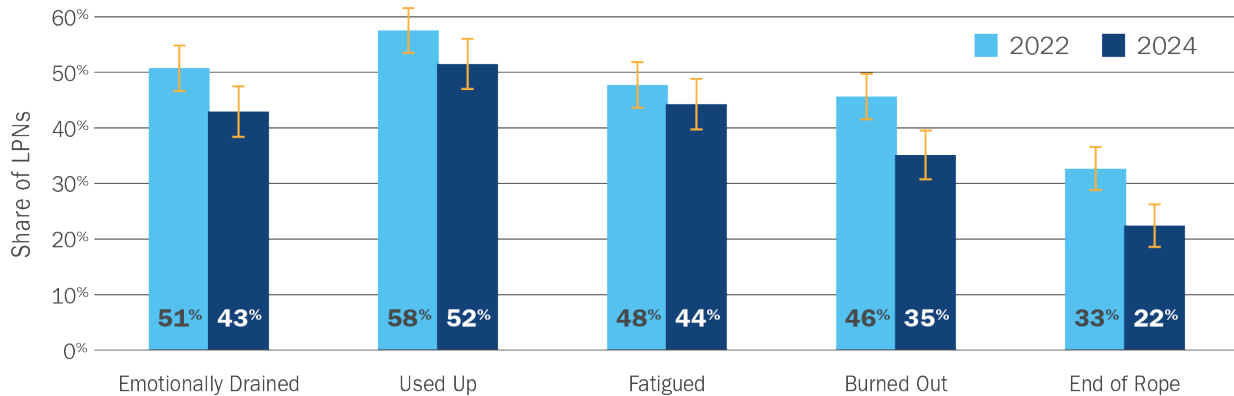
**Figure 21. How Has Employment Changed in the Last Two Years - Montana LPNs**



Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2022 and 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

Fewer LPNs reported often feeling emotionally drained, used up, fatigued, burned out, or at the end of the rope compared to LPNs in 2022. This suggests improved mental health over the last two years. However, the share of LPNs reporting these challenges is still relatively high. Figure 22 shows the share of LPNs reporting certain feelings at least a few times a week. This includes how often LPNs feel: emotionally drained from work; used up at the end of the workday; fatigued when they get up to face another day on the job; burned-out from work; and like they are at the end of their rope.

**Figure 22. Share of Licensed Practical Nurses with Described Feeling at Least a Few Times a Week**

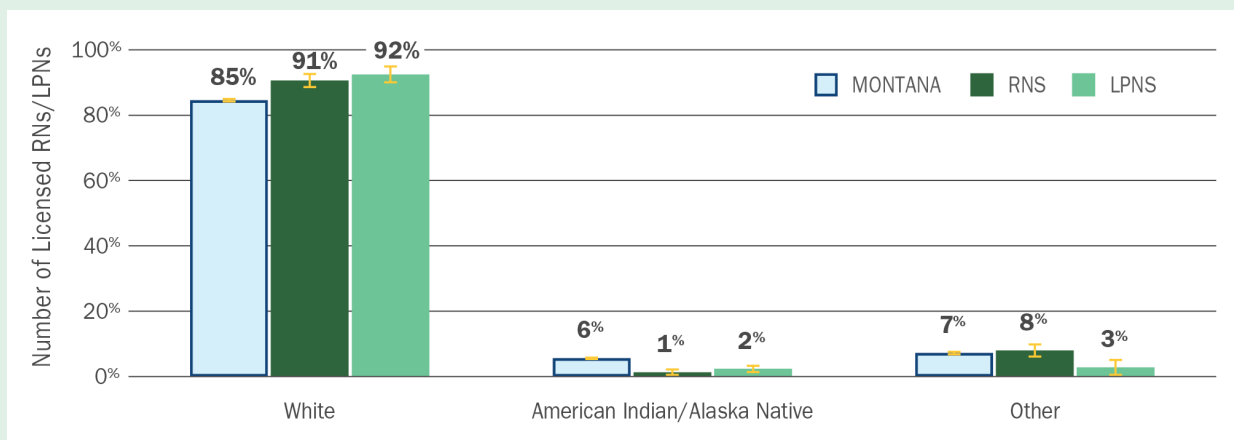


Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2022 and 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Notes: Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

## Diversity Among Nurses in Montana

Results from the survey suggest that the racial composition of the nursing workforce is different from the racial composition of the state. Ninety-one percent of registered nurses and 92% of licensed practical nurses are white, compared to 85% of Montana's population. American Indian's comprise 5.6% of the state's population, but only 1% of the nursing workforce. Results are in Figure 23. The racial disparity indicated by the survey suggest that schools and health centers may wish to consider programs to increase recruiting of American Indians into nursing professions.

**Figure 23. Racial Composition of RNs and LPNs compared with Montana**



Note: More than one race included in "All Other" group. Error bars display 90% confidence intervals.

Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) 2024 Survey compiled by MTDLI. Montana racial composition from the 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.



## Conclusion

The NCSBN survey continues to provide critical insight into the nursing workforce during a time when an aging population and strong in-migration has generated significant demand for healthcare services in Montana. While migration helped grow the supply of younger RNs, the number of LPNs continues to fall. Meanwhile, the survey indicates sustained shortages of both RNs and LPNs. Low unemployment leaves few licensed nurses available to take new or unfilled jobs, and nearly one-quarter of RNs and over one-third of LPNs plan on retiring or leaving the field in the next five years. Recruitment and training of nurses continues to be essential.

Retaining nurses may require attention towards wages, workloads, and the mental well-being of the existing workforce. Median income increased by 6% for RNs, a relatively small increase as RN license growth mitigated competition for workers. Median income increased by 15% for LPNs as unemployment remains near zero and competition for workers remains strong. RNs and LPNs both reported improved overall well-being in 2024, with fewer reporting increased workloads and poor mental health compared with the 2022 survey. However, challenges remain as stress, workloads, understaffing, and salaries are primary reasons nurses plan to leave the workforce.

Changing age demographics is important to monitor as it significantly impacts the number of nurses available and the level of experience and education of the nursing workforce. Strong migration into the state helped increase the supply of younger RNs, helping to mitigate retirement concerns. Compared with the national average, Montana now has a higher share of RNs under age 50, with fewer reporting plans to retire or leave the nursing workforce. Montana RNs continue to become more highly educated, with a growing share attaining a bachelor's degree or higher, particularly for master's degree attainment. The number of LPNs continued to fall in 2024, and there are not enough young LPNs to replace retiring LPNs. Montana LPNs are older than the national average, and about 37% plan to leave the workforce in the next five years, slightly less than the national share. Montana LPNs educational attainment continues to increase.

The NCSBN survey continues to provide critical information on the status of the nursing workforce in Montana. Understanding the demographic and educational trends of nurses in the state, as well as their engagement in the labor force, will help continue to build Montana's healthcare sector.