

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)

A few months of training to a job every hospital and nursing home in the country is short of. Hard, physical, human work, and the pay is modest.

TYPICAL PAY

\$42,260

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$34k to \$52k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Nursing homes, hospitals, assisted living, rehabilitation units, home c...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development certificate)** Grades 11 and 12
Most programs want one. Some accept you at 16 or 17 with parental consent.
- 2 State approved training program** 4 to 16 weeks
Classroom plus supervised clinical hours in a real facility. Offered by community colleges, nursing homes, the Red Cross and some high schools.
- 3 Competency exam** 1 day
A written test and a skills test where an examiner watches you do things like transferring a patient safely.
- 4 State registry** Weeks
You go on your state's nurse aide registry. Employers check it, and that listing is what makes you certified.
- 5 First job** Ongoing
Usually a nursing home, sometimes a hospital. Expect to be looking after eight to twelve residents on a shift.

Pros and cons

- + Working within a few months, for almost no tuition
- + Jobs in every town, and always hiring
- + The clearest first step into nursing there is, often with tuition help
- The pay is low for how hard the work is
- Too many residents per aide, in most places, most days
- Back and shoulder injuries are common and career ending

Good to know

The registry, not a license, makes you certified

There is no national certificate for this job. Each state keeps a nurse aide registry, and being listed on it is what lets a nursing home employ you. Move states and you apply to be added to the new one.

Two similar jobs, two different wage lines

The government counts nursing assistants and personal care aides separately. The work overlaps, but the certified nursing assistant line has a median about \$6,000 a year higher. Read the job title on an ad...

Optional boosts

Patient care technician. Medication aide. Restorative or rehabilitation aide. Dementia care training.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Personal Care Aides (31-1122.00)

My Next Move: Nursing Assistants (31-1131.00)

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services: nursing home certification and compliance

National Council of State Boards of Nursing

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/nursing-assistant>



Scan for the full clicker