

Registered Nurse

The biggest health profession in the country. Two years of college can get you licensed, and the license works in most states.

TYPICAL PAY

\$97,550

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$69k to \$137k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, schools, home visits

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Biology, chemistry, algebra and English. Get a job or volunteer post inside a hospital or care home as early as you can, because admissions committees count it.
- 2 Pick your degree** 2 or 4 years
 An associate degree in nursing at a community college, or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) at a university. Both end in the same license. Many hospitals now prefer or require the bachelor's for new hires.
- 3 Clinical rotations** Built into the degree
 Supervised hours on real wards inside your program: medical, surgical, pediatric, obstetric and mental health. This is where you find out whether you can do the job.
- 4 Pass the national exam** 6 to 12 weeks after graduation
 The NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination) is computer adaptive: it gets harder when you answer well and stops when it knows enough. Most graduates pass first time.
- 5 License and first job** A few weeks to a few months
 Apply to the board of nursing in your state. Hospitals run new graduate residency programs of 6 to 12 months to get you onto a ward safely.

Pros and cons

- + Licensed and earning near six figures two years after high school
- + Jobs in every town, and the license travels between most states
- + Three-day working weeks are normal
- Nights, weekends and holidays, for years
- Short staffing means too many patients and real risk of mistakes
- People die in front of you and you go back to work

Optional boosts

CCRN (Critical Care Registered Nurse). CEN (Certified Emergency Nurse). Operating room training. OCN (Oncology Certified Nurse).

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Registered Nurses, wages and tasks
 NCSBN, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing
 NCLEX: fees and payment
 University of Texas at Austin School 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/registered-nurse>

Good to know

The exam stops when it is sure about you

The NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination) is computer adaptive. Each answer changes the difficulty of the next question, and the test ends as soon as it can tell with confidence whether you are...

The exam fee is about to jump

Registering for the national licensure exam costs \$200 today. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing has already voted that the fee rises to \$350 in the United States on February 1, 2027.



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