

# MEDICAL ASSISTANTS in the SOUTH CENTRAL COAST REGION



Healthcare is one of the largest employers in California, providing a wide range of well-paying career opportunities for residents. In 2014, the Centers of Excellence partnered with the Health Workforce Initiative (HWI) and the California Hospital Association (CHA) on two healthcare surveys to **assess workforce needs** at both state and regional levels. The surveys targeted three healthcare sectors:

- **Hospitals** provide medical, diagnostic, and treatment services to inpatients and some outpatient services.
- **Ambulatory Healthcare Services** provide healthcare services to outpatients in settings such as offices of physicians, outpatient care centers, and laboratories.
- **Nursing and Residential Care Facilities** provide residential care combined with either nursing, supervisory, or other types of care as needed.

Statewide, 190 hospitals responded to the hospital survey and 1,600 clinics, labs and facilities responded to the ambulatory and residential care survey, providing an excellent sample to analyze healthcare workforce demand across the state and in several regions. The research focused on identifying: (1) labor market demand for key occupations in healthcare industries, (2) training supply supporting healthcare industries, and (3) key issues impacting supply and demand.

This report is one in a series of reports profiling healthcare occupations in the South Central Coast region of California, made up of San Luis Obispo County, Santa Barbara County, Ventura County and the northern part of Los Angeles County. There are eight occupational profiles in the series: certified nursing assistants, home health aides, licensed vocational nurses, medical assistants, medical coders, registered nurses, physician assistants and healthcare social workers.

## Labor Market Demand

In the South Central Coast region, there are approximately 2,230 medical assistant jobs in the ambulatory and long-term care subsectors. Over the next 12 months, employers in these subsectors will need to fill as many as 400 openings created by new job growth and replacement needs.

### Projected Employment for Medical Assistants<sup>1</sup>

Ambulatory & Residential Care Industries (n=80)	2014 Employment	12-Month Growth	Replacement Jobs	Total Openings (Growth + Replacements)
	2,231	93	305	398

California Hospital Association members that responded to the survey employ approximately 70 medical assistants. This sample does not include an estimate of total hospital employment because not all of the hospitals in the region participated in the survey.

### Current Employment for Medical Assistants<sup>1</sup>

Hospitals (n=17)	Current Employment*	Full-time Positions	Part-time Positions	Per Diem Jobs
	68	62	6	<5

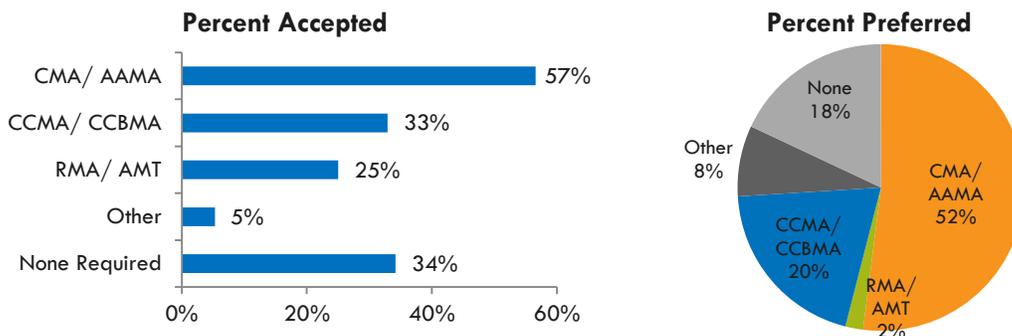
\*Ending headcount for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2013.

<sup>1</sup> Ambulatory/long-term care and hospital employment counts include full-time and part-time employment. Additional data on per diem employment for hospitals is totaled separately.

## Hiring Trends

In the ambulatory and long-term care survey, employers were asked about their hiring preferences. Two out of three employers require or accept certification when hiring new medical assistants or supporting existing staff. One third does not require or have a preference for certification.

- More than half (57%) accept the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) by American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA). Of these, 52 percent prefer this certification over all other certifications accepted by their organization.
- One-third accept the California Certified Medical Assistant (CCMA) by California Certifying Board of Medical Assistants (CCBMA). Twenty percent prefer this certification over all other certifications accepted by their organization.
- Twenty-five percent accept the Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) by American Medical Technologists (AMT). However, only two percent prefer this certification over all other certifications accepted by their organization.



## Difficulty Hiring

Four out of 10 employers in the ambulatory and long-term care subsectors reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level medical assistant positions. In the hospital setting, most reported no difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level positions. Minimum qualifications may include certification, communication and customer service skills.

### Ambulatory & Residential Care Employers



## Training Supply

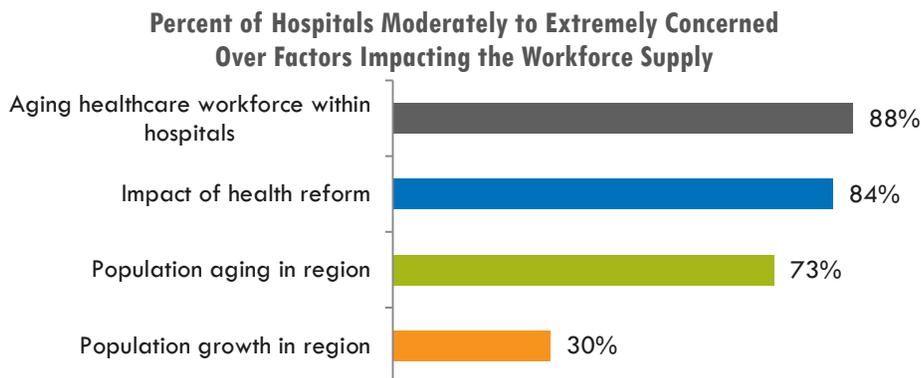
Thirteen education institutions offer medical assisting programs in the South Central Coast region.

Degrees/Certificates Conferred (2013 awards)	CA Community Colleges – Associate Degree	CA Community Colleges – Certificate	Private Education – Associate Degree	Private Education – Certificate	2013 Total (All)
	8	40	46	766	860

This estimate is based on data reported to the California Community College Chancellor's Office Data Mart and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Higher education institutions are required to report completion data to NCES if they participate in any federal financial assistance program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act. Completion data not reported to the NCES or CCCCCO Data Mart were not included in the estimate.

## Supply Challenges

The healthcare sector is facing a variety of factors that may have a direct impact on the workforce supply. Across California, the majority of hospitals are concerned that health reform, the aging hospital workforce, and the aging population will have a significant impact on the state's ability to keep up with healthcare workforce demand. Healthcare reform is expanding coverage to thousands of uninsured residents, which is increasing demand for healthcare services across the board. The aging population will expand demand for certain types of services, creating additional need for skilled workers.



**MA Programs:  
South Central Coast Region**

**Community Colleges**  
Allan Hancock College  
Antelope Valley College  
Cuesta College

**Private Education Institutions**  
Career Care Institute  
Central California School  
CET-Oxnard  
CET-Santa Maria  
Charter College-Canyon Country  
Pacific Coast Trade School  
Santa Barbara Business College-Santa Maria  
Santa Barbara Business College-Ventura  
University of Antelope Valley  
Ventura Adult and Continuing Education

While these two factors will increase demand for new healthcare workers, the aging healthcare workforce within hospitals creates a need for replacement workers. In the hospital setting, this is not a critical issue in the medical assistant workforce. Seventy-one percent of medical assistants employed by hospitals fall within the age cohort of 25 to 45, which indicates that there is a sufficient pipeline of young workers entering the medical assisting field.<sup>2</sup>

## Employer Perspective

Most of ambulatory and long-term care facilities surveyed (72%) provide professional development (either in-house or sponsored training) for their MAs. Some of the options included competencies for HIPPA and OSHA; CPR updates, and computer training. Ambulatory and long-term care employers discussed the topics that community colleges could offer or improve upon to support professional development for their existing staff. The following suggestions were offered:

Offer	}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More training on electronic medical records, including ICD-10</li> <li>• Instruction on generational training</li> <li>• Additional phlebotomy courses</li> <li>• More courses overall, online and on-site</li> </ul>
Improve	}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate more hands-on components to curriculum (taking vital signs, patient histories, patient safety during position changes, etc.)</li> <li>• Expand customer service and interviewing skills into curriculum: oral communication, telephone etiquette, eye contact, friendliness.</li> <li>• Enhanced workplace communication skills (i.e. bedside manner and appropriate to scope of practice patient communication)</li> </ul>

**Sidebar Discussion**

What is the impact of the Affordable Care Act on the medical assisting workforce?

- 50% of ambulatory and long-term care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for medical assistants in response to the Affordable Care Act.
- 37% are not sure if they are making changes.

<sup>2</sup> Hospital Survey, statewide data.

## In Summary

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Key issues affecting supply and demand for medical assistants include:

### Ambulatory and Long-term Care

- Four out of 10 ambulatory and long-term care employers reported difficulty finding qualified applicants for entry-level medical assistant positions.
- The majority of ambulatory and long-term care employers require or accept certification when hiring medical assistants or supporting existing staff. The preferred certification is Certified Medical Assistant certification by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA).
- The majority of ambulatory and long-term care employers are not implementing changes to job duties and responsibilities for medical assistants in response to the Affordable Care Act.

### Hospitals

- Seven out of 10 medical assistants in the hospital setting fall in the age cohort of 25 to 45, indicating there is a sufficient pipeline of young workers entering the medical assistant field.
- Very few hospitals reported difficulty finding qualified MA applicants.

Community colleges can improve upon existing medical assistant programs by aligning curriculum with national certification standards. In addition, employers indicated that existing staff need customer service training. To address this issue from the onset, training providers should integrate customer service and communication skills (oral communication, telephone etiquette, eye contact, and appropriate to scope of practice patient communication) and integrate more hands-on components to curriculum (taking vital signs, patient histories, patient safety during position changes, etc).

## For More information

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This document and others are available to download at [www.coecc.net/health](http://www.coecc.net/health). For more information, contact:

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Health Workforce Initiative

**More about the Health Workforce Initiative:** The HWI provides education and training programs to meet emerging demands for healthcare industry workers; to determine needs, facilitate development of innovative solutions and to locate resources to implement planned responses; to evaluate and initialize health-related educational programs. More information about the Health Workforce Initiative is available at [www.ca-hwi.org](http://www.ca-hwi.org).



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