

Hardest-to-Fill Healthcare Roles

Where U.S. healthcare employers will struggle most to fill a role, scored by the ReqRadius engine for 23 occupations in the 80 largest healthcare metros.

1,827

role and metro pairs
scored, 0 to 10

216 (12%)

rated Hard (7 or higher)

56

of the Hard pairs are in
California, the most of
any state

2.7

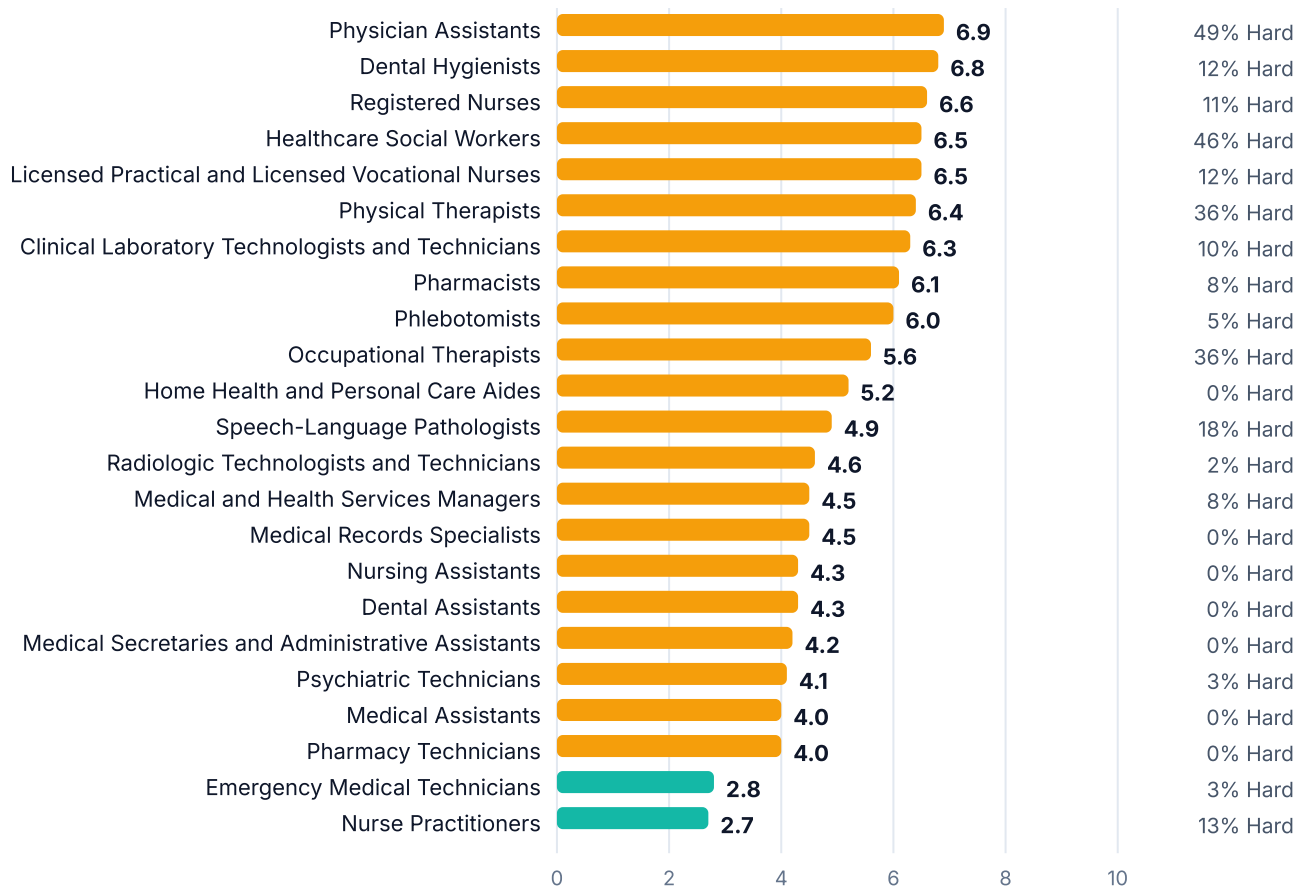
median for nurse
practitioners, the lowest
of all 23 roles

Key findings

- **Physician Assistants** (6.9), **Dental Hygienists** (6.8) and **Registered Nurses** (6.6) have the highest median scores across the 80 metros.
- Physician assistants are Hard in 39 metros, more than any other role. Healthcare social workers follow with 36.
- 9 of the 10 metros with the highest average score are in California. Bakersfield leads at 6.0.
- Pharmacists score 6.1 at the median; pharmacy technicians score 4.0.

National ranking: median hiring difficulty by role

Median engine score across 80 metros. Right column: share of metros rated Hard. ■ Hard 7+ ■ Elevated 4 to 7 ■ Standard under 4



The 15 hardest role and metro pairs

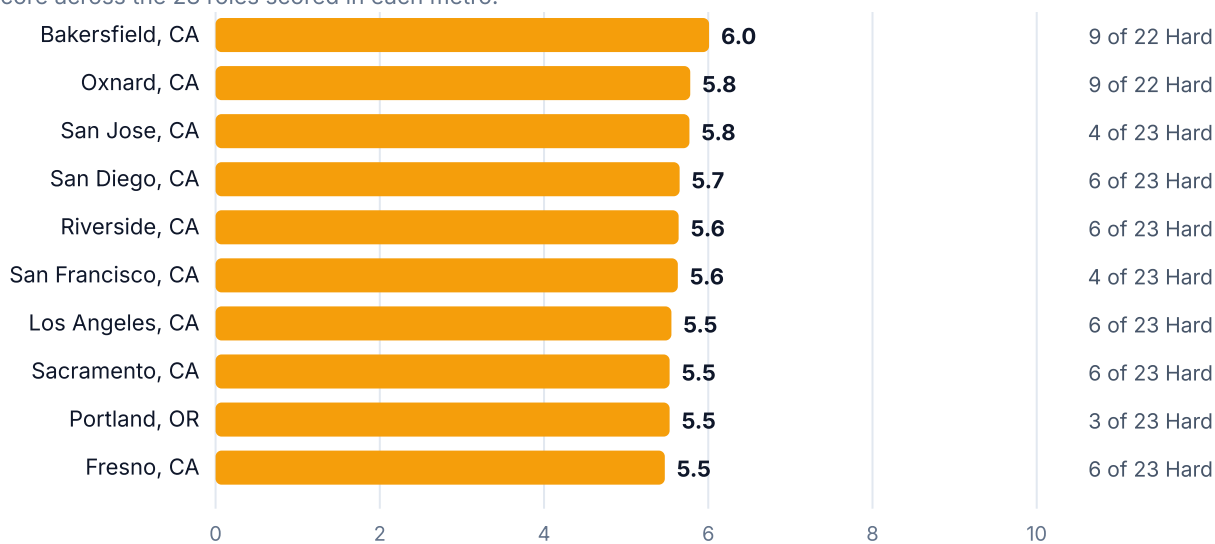
Same list rule as the weekly ReqRadius edition: at most 2 entries per state and 3 per role. Ties are ordered by metro healthcare employment.

#	Role	Metro	Score	Location quotient	Metro jobs	Median pay
1	Healthcare Social Workers	McAllen, TX	7.7	0.93	330	\$60.1K
2	Physician Assistants	McAllen, TX	7.7	1.30	400	\$131.9K
3	Physical Therapists	Albuquerque, NM	7.7	1.00	690	\$103.5K
4	Physician Assistants	Dayton, OH	7.7	1.32	510	\$138.4K
5	Pharmacists	Little Rock, AR	7.7	1.38	1,020	\$136.7K
6	Physician Assistants	Little Rock, AR	7.7	0.92	340	\$109.1K
7	Occupational Therapists	Baton Rouge, LA	7.7	1.01	430	\$98.0K
8	Physical Therapists	Baton Rouge, LA	7.7	0.84	590	\$98.9K
9	Healthcare Social Workers	Boise City, ID	7.7	0.88	410	\$74.6K
10	Occupational Therapists	Knoxville, TN	7.7	0.65	290	\$94.5K
11	Nurse Practitioners	Bakersfield, CA	7.7	0.61	430	\$165.6K
12	Occupational Therapists	Bakersfield, CA	7.7	0.47	170	\$123.2K
13	Physical Therapists	North Port, FL	7.7	1.16	680	\$104.0K
14	Healthcare Social Workers	Bridgeport, CT	7.6	0.70	340	\$81.3K
15	Speech-Language Pathologists	Las Vegas, NV	7.5	0.72	960	\$104.5K

Location quotient under 1.00 means the metro has a thinner share of that workforce than the U.S. overall. Jobs and pay: BLS OEWS, May 2025.

Metros with the highest average score

Average engine score across the 23 roles scored in each metro.



Lowest averages: Worcester, MA (3.8), Boston, MA (3.9), Providence, RI (3.9).

Methodology

Every score in this report is the ReqRadius free check's city score for one occupation in one metro, scored at the metro's principal city. It is the same number a visitor gets from the free check and the same scale used on reqradius.com/hiring.

Factor	Weight	What it uses
Supply against demand	30	Licensed professionals with an NPI within 25 miles (CMS NPPES) against metro jobs (BLS OEWS). Where HRSA publishes a 2028 state supply and demand projection for the role, the engine uses it. Roles without an NPI taxonomy use the OEWS location quotient.
Location and rurality	16	USDA Rural-Urban Continuum Code of the county.
Role type	11	O*NET job zone of the occupation.

The weighted result is rescaled to 0 to 10. Under 4 is Standard, 4 to 7 is Elevated, 7 or higher is Hard. A paid Hiring Pack also weighs the employer's offer and how long the req has been open, so its score for the same role and city can differ.

Scope. Roles: the 25 healthcare occupations with the most U.S. employment in OEWS May 2025, minus postsecondary health teachers and medical scientists, which leaves 23. Metros: the 80 metros with the most healthcare employment. A pair appears only when OEWS publishes the metro wage and location quotient for it (1,827 pairs).

Sources

- Scores: ReqRadius engine city score, engine build v60h, HRSA supply calibration, scored October 4, 2026. Spot check against the live engine on October 8, 2026 matched (Registered Nurse, Denver, CO: 6.6).
- Employment, wages, location quotients: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025.
- Practitioner supply: CMS National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES), retrieved September 14, 2026.
- Supply projections: HRSA National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, 2028 state projections, where published.
- Rurality: USDA ERS Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. Role type: O*NET job zones.
- Full methodology: reqradius.com/hiring/methodology

Check your own role and city. The free check scores any healthcare role in any U.S. city in about a minute: reqradius.com/free
Weekly list and archive: reqradius.com/hardest-to-fill

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