

How Much Do Oregon's Registered Nurses Earn? 2023 Oregon Wage Study

Richard Allgeyer, Ph.D.

Introduction

The Oregon Center for Nursing (OCN) recently conducted a statewide wage survey of Oregon's registered nurses (RN) to explore the variances in compensation across different work settings and geographical areas. By examining wage disparities, this study is meant to uncover the wage structures that affect how long nurses stay in their jobs and to challenge common beliefs about how nurses' salaries vary. Including responses from nurses across the state and from a wide range of work environments, the survey offers a detailed view of the financial challenges these essential healthcare workers face. The aim was not only to detail the present situation regarding nurse pay but also to help policymakers, nursing professionals, and employers tackle important issues related to maintaining a stable workforce and ensuring fair wages. This report is designed to be a foundational resource, facilitating informed decision-making that supports the welfare of nurses and overall efficacy of Oregon's healthcare system.

Methods

Between November 16 to December 8, 2023, OCN invited 42,530 RNs, licensed in Oregon, to participate in the 2023 OCN RN Salary

Key Takeaways

- Taking the cost of living into account, registered nurses (RNs) in rural areas earn higher wages compared to those in urban settings.
- RNs employed in hospitals receive considerably higher salaries than those in other work environments.
- RNs in all other work settings tend to have similar pay rates.

Survey. This survey was conducted electronically, with invitations sent out via email by the OCN. A total of 1,807 RNs completed the survey, submitting their responses online. The collected data was then processed and analyzed by OCN staff.

The survey tool was designed using questions about income and earnings from the Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the Census Bureau, part of the Department of Commerce. The CPS is a monthly survey co-sponsored by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). It serves as the main source of statistics on the labor force in the United States.

OCN's survey asked respondents about their hourly wage and work hours, along with questions about practice setting, nursing position, and demographic information such as location of practice, longevity, and educational attainment.

The survey data are shown in terms of average hourly wages. To estimate annual earnings, the average hourly wage was multiplied by 2,080 work hours per year, as recommended by the Oregon Employment Department (OED, 2023). However, BLS researchers often prefer using the median as the measure of central tendency for wage data. This preference arises because wage distributions typically do not conform to the normal distribution needed for mean-based parametric statistics. High earners can raise the average wage disproportionately, skewing it toward the higher end of the wage scale (West, Kratzke, & Butani, 1992). Yet, when wage data does fulfill the criteria for a normal distribution—characterized by symmetry, being unimodal (having one peak), asymptotic (tails that approach but never touch the horizontal axis), and where the mean, median, and mode are identical—using the mean (average) becomes appropriate (Wilks, 1946). The distribution of wage data collected by OCN's survey meets all criteria and therefore, it is appropriate to report means.

The mean wage from respondents was \$55.14 per hour and the reported median wage was \$54.63. While the mean and the median are not equal, they differ by \$0.51, which represents a difference of less than one percent (0.93%).

Most of the analyses of wage data from this survey were conducted statewide. However, a series of analyses were conducted by region of the state to assess geographic disparities among nurse wages. For these analyses, the regions defined by the OED were used (Table 1).

Table 1: County Composition of Oregon Employment Department's Regions

REGION	COUNTIES
East Cascades	Crook, Deschutes, Gilliam, Hood River, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler
Eastern	Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa
Lane	Lane
Mid-Valley	Linn, Marion, Polk, Yamhill
Northwest	Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook
Rogue Valley	Jackson, Josephine
Southwestern	Coos, Curry, Douglas
Tri-County	Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington

PRACTICE SETTINGS

Practice Setting	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
Public Health	\$47.55	\$98,898
Residential Care Facility	\$49.86	\$103,702
Community Health	\$50.78	\$105,612
Skilled Nursing Facility	\$51.17	\$106,430
Home Health	\$51.38	\$106,875
Office/Clinic	\$51.63	\$107,390
Ambulatory Urgent/Emergency	\$52.61	\$109,435
Nursing Education*	\$52.87	\$82,483
Ambulatory Surgical Center	\$52.89	\$110,014
Hospice	\$53.52	\$111,315
Hospital	\$58.25	\$121,163
Across All Practice Settings	\$55.14	\$114,694

* Note: Based on 9-Month Contract

According to the survey results, RNs in Oregon earn an average hourly wage of \$55.14, equating to an annual salary of \$114,694. This figure aligns closely with the OED's reported average wage for RNs at \$53.23 per hour or \$110,710 annually. Key insights from the wage analysis based on practice settings show:

- RNs practicing in **hospital** settings tend to earn higher wages (\$58.25 / hour) than nurses practicing in other settings.
- In **non-hospital** settings, wages for RNs are generally across settings, ranging from \$47.55 to \$53.52.
- Those in **public health** earn lower wages (\$47.55) compared to their counterparts in other settings.
- Nurses in **nursing education** make a comparable wage to other non-hospital RNs, but annual earnings are lower due to the shorter contract period of about nine months.
- While some nursing programs offer 12-month contracts for year-round school or for faculty teaching during summer sessions, based on the reported hourly wage, nurses practicing in **nursing education** (including administrators) and working under a 12-month contract would earn about \$109,970 per year.

RN JOB POSITION

The following data show the average wages for RNs based on their job titles, regardless of the setting where they work.

- RNs in **leadership positions**, such as administrators, nurse managers, and lead nurses, tend to earn higher wages than nurses in most other specialties and staff nurses.
- The average wage for **staff nurses** is \$53.95 / hour, which equates to an annual salary of approximately \$112,215 per year.
- **Nurse educators** typically earn less than staff nurses. Their yearly income is influenced by the common nine-month contract duration. Although most nurse educators are on nine-month contracts, some may work year-round or during summer sessions on a 12-month contract, bringing their annual earnings to about \$107,494.
- **School nurses** tend to earn the lowest wage among nurses surveyed, and their annual wage is also affected by a shorter contract period (nine months).

Practice Position	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
School Nurse*	\$48.40	\$75,500
Nurse Educator*	\$51.68	\$80,624
Staff Nurse	\$53.95	\$112,215
Lead Nurse	\$56.31	\$117,133
Nurse Consultant	\$58.73	\$122,150
Nurse Educator in HC Facility	\$59.97	\$124,735
Nurse Manager/Supervisor	\$60.69	\$126,240
Administrator/CNO	\$67.41	\$140,221
Across All Practice Positions	\$55.14	\$114,694

* Note: Based on 9-Month Contract

IMPACT OF LONGEVITY

As might be expected, an examination of these data shows a steady increase in pay as longevity increases. The figures specifically highlight how wages grow with years of experience, and do not account for differences in practice setting or position.

- **RNs with 10 or more years of experience** typically earn nearly \$10 per hour more than RNs with less than one year of experience.
- This data shows a **steady progression of pay** that correlates with a nurse’s experience level, although changes in setting and/or nursing role will also likely influence wage growth throughout the course of a nurse’s career.

Longevity	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
Less than 1 year	\$51.07	\$106,234
At least 1 year but less than 3 years	\$53.00	\$110,246
At least 3 years but less than 5 years	\$55.75	\$115,966
At least 5 years but less than 10 years	\$57.29	\$119,163
10 years or more	\$60.01	\$124,819

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational Attainment	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
Diploma	\$49.55	\$103,063
ADN	\$51.99	\$108,129
BSN	\$55.31	\$115,049
Master's Degree	\$60.46	\$125,757
Doctorate (DNP, PhD, or DNSc)	\$63.87	\$132,841

The survey data indicates a linear increase in RN wages in relation to higher levels of education. This observation focuses solely on the influence of educational attainment on earnings, without considering variations due to practice setting, role, or experience.

- **RNs with a baccalaureate degree** generally earn approximately \$3 more per hour compared to those with an associate degree.
- **RNs with graduate-level education** earn about \$5 to \$8 more per hour than their counterparts with a baccalaureate degree.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Region	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
Eastern	\$44.23	\$92,008
Southwestern	\$49.33	\$102,608
Rogue Valley	\$50.80	\$105,661
Northwest	\$51.44	\$106,996
East Cascades	\$52.01	\$108,176
Lane	\$52.38	\$108,959
Mid-Valley	\$54.46	\$113,267
Tri-County	\$56.31	\$117,125
State of Oregon	\$53.95	\$112,215

The wage study explored regional wage differences by comparing various areas to the Oregon statewide average. Taking into consideration all practice settings and positions, the data showed the following:

- Generally, RNs practicing in the **western part of the state** tend to earn higher wages than in the eastern portion, except in the Southwestern region.
- In the most populous regions, specifically the **Tri-County and Mid-Valley regions**, RNs typically earn higher wages than those in less populated regions.
- Wages were the lowest in Oregon's **Eastern region**.

Several factors could explain these wage differences, such as:

- the location of major medical centers with high competition for nurses,
- the concentration of specialized nursing roles and management positions, and
- higher costs of living in the state's major metropolitan areas.

STAFF NURSE WAGE BY PRACTICE SETTING

Practice Setting	Average Wage	
	Hourly	Annual
Public Health	\$46.65	\$97,022
Skilled Nursing Facility	\$47.75	\$99,315
Community Health	\$48.89	\$101,682
Ambulatory Urgent/Emergency	\$50.82	\$105,702
Office/Clinic	\$50.88	\$105,820
Home Health	\$51.10	\$106,278
Ambulatory Surgical Center	\$51.28	\$106,669
Hospice	\$52.17	\$108,514
Hospital	\$56.08	\$116,645

Staff nurses account for about 71 percent of Oregon's nurse population, and 61 percent of survey respondents. The substantial response rate from staff nurses enables this broad comparison, something that isn't feasible for other roles due to smaller sample sizes. This analysis offers a direct comparison of staff nurse wages across different practice environments.

- **Staff nurses in hospital environments** receive the highest wages, at \$56.08 per hour, when compared to all other practice settings.
- **Staff nurses working in home health and hospice** care earn more than those in skilled nursing facilities, and their earnings are comparable to those of nurses in ambulatory care settings, such as offices/clinics, ambulatory surgical centers, and urgent/emergency care centers.

STAFF NURSE WAGE BY REGION

An examination of the wage data on staff nurses across regions eliminates the impact of nurse managers, administrators, and specialty roles in regional comparisons.

- As before, staff nurses practicing in the **Tri-County and Mid-Valley** regions earn higher wages than the state average.
- Staff nurses practicing in the **Eastern and Southwestern** regions tend to earn the lowest wages.
- The wage for staff nurses practicing in the **Rogue Valley, Northwest, East Cascades, and Lane** is less than the state average. The average wage across these four differs by less than five percent.

Region (OED)	Hourly
Eastern	\$44.23
Southwestern	\$49.33
Rogue Valley	\$50.80
Northwest	\$51.44
East Cascades	\$52.01
Lane	\$52.38
Mid-Valley	\$54.46
Tri-County	\$56.31
Oregon	\$53.95

COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT

To understand the impact of the cost of living on the spending power of nurses' wages, the livable wage for each county was obtained from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Department of Urban Studies and Planning. This tool analyzes the cost of living across different regions by considering expenses such as food, childcare, healthcare, housing, transportation, and other essentials (including clothing, personal care items, and broadband) along with taxes at county, metro, and state levels. OCN's analysis provides an insight into the spending power of wages earned by nurses in the various regions across the state, presented as a percentage of the living wage for each area.

Region	Livable Wage	% of LW
Eastern	\$15.81	297.2%
Southwestern	\$16.56	306.8%
East Cascades	\$17.04	305.8%
Rogue Valley	\$17.33	303.2%
Lane	\$17.46	305.2%
Mid-Valley	\$18.19	304.8%
Northwest	\$18.44	290.7%
Tri-County	\$21.85	264.1%
Oregon	\$19.38	284.5%

- When adjusted for the cost of living, **RNs in the Tri-County region** (Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties) had less **actual spending power** than the statewide average and all the other regions.
- RNs in more than half of the state's regions **earned up to three times (300%) of their region's living wage.**
- RNs practicing in **rural regions** of the state tend to **earn higher "real" wages** than nurses in the Portland metro area.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings provide a real insight into the wages earned by nurses practicing in Oregon. These data have not been available to healthcare leaders in the past. Generally, wage data come from two sources: national salary studies and from state and federal governmental entities. National salary studies can provide an overview of the compensation of nurses in Oregon, but typically lack important Oregon-specific information. When national studies do provide regional breakouts, California's size tends to overshadow all the other states on the West Coast. Conversely, data from the OED or the BLS can provide a high-level view of the wages earned in Oregon, but do not provide the granularity necessary to understand the wage structure across the various settings or geographic locations where nurses practice. This report stands as a significant step toward demystifying salary disparities and fostering a more informed dialogue about the economic valuation of nursing practice in Oregon.

The most interesting and unexpected finding from this study was when adjusted for the local cost-of-living, nurses in rural communities across Oregon tend to earn higher relative wages than RNs practicing in the metro areas of northwest Oregon. This runs counter to arguments from employers in

rural communities. In a recent study examining the barriers and attractors in retaining and recruiting nurses in a rural Oregon community, employers from various practice settings indicated they felt local employers could not compete with the wages paid by employers in the Portland area (Allgeyer & Schoenthal, 2023). While these employers are correct, that wages in the Tri-County area are higher than those paid by employers in rural communities, nurses' spending power is greater in rural communities due to the lower cost of living.

The results of this study provide employers with objective data on the wages nurse earn in rural communities. This insight is crucial for stakeholders, including policymakers, nursing professionals, employers, and recruiters who are at the forefront of crafting strategies to enhance nurse retention and ensure equitable compensation. By focusing on these disparities and drawing attention to the factors influencing nurse retention, the report aims to serve as a catalyst for meaningful policy changes and improvements in the professional lives of nurses across the state.

References

- Allgeyer, R.L. & Schoenthal, D. (2023). Barriers to Nursing Workforce Retention and Attraction in Rural Areas. Unpublished study, Oregon Center for Nursing, Portland, OR.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2023). Living Wage Calculator <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/41/locations>
- Oregon Employment Department (2023). 2023 Oregon Wage Information, Statewide. Salem, OR. <https://qualityinfo.org/web/guest/data>
- U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>
- West, S., Kratzke, D. T., & Butani, S. (1992). Measures of Central Tendency for Censored Wage Data. In *Proceedings of the Survey Research Methods Section* (pp. 643-648).
- Wilks, S. S. (1946). Sample criteria for testing equality of means, equality of variances, and equality of covariances in a normal multivariate distribution. *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 17 (3), 257-281.

Acknowledgment

Copyright © 2024, Oregon Center for Nursing. This work was made possible by the Oregon Nursing Advancement Fund, supported by Oregon's licensed practical and registered nurses. Learn more at oregoncenterfornursing.org.

Suggested Citation

Allgeyer, R. (2024). *How Much Do Oregon's Registered Nurses Earn? 2023 Oregon Wage Study*. The Oregon Center for Nursing.