

Massachusetts Nursing Career Pathway

Entry-Level & Direct Care Pathways

These roles reflect Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), MassHealth, and Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS) guidance. Program lengths and hour breakdowns represent current Massachusetts training norms; scope of practice is setting- and regulation-dependent.

O*Net Online: Find, search, or browse across 900+ occupations based on your goals and needs. Then use comprehensive reports to learn about requirements, characteristics, and available opportunities for your selected occupation.

<https://www.onetonline.org/>

Home Health Aide (HHA)

Primary Settings:

Home health agencies, hospice, community-based care

Program Length: 3–6 weeks

Total Hours: 75 hours minimum

Classroom: ~59 | Lab: Integrated | Clinical: 16

Oversight: MA DPH/CMS

Certification Required: Yes – Completion of a state-approved HHA training program

Average Starting Salary:

~\$35,000–\$45,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$500–\$1,500

Personal Care Attendant (PCA)

Primary Settings:

Private homes (MassHealth)

Program Length: Employer-directed

Total Hours: 4-hour required orientation

Classroom: 4 | Lab: 0 | Clinical: On-the-job

Oversight: MassHealth/Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Certification Required: No formal state certification required

Average Starting Salary:

~\$35,000–\$48,000

Estimated Program Cost:

Typically free to the employee; employer/fiscal intermediary provides required orientation

Personal Care Technician (PCT)

Primary Settings:

Hospitals, rehab, LTC

Program Length: 6–12 weeks

Total Hours: 80–120

Classroom: 40–60 | Lab: 20–30 | Clinical: 20–30

Oversight: Employer-based/DPH when CNA-embedded

Certification Required: Often CNA required/preferred

Average Starting Salary:

~\$38,000–\$50,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$1,500–\$5,000

Medication Administration Program (MAP)

Primary Settings:

Group homes, community residences

Program Length: 2–4 weeks

Total Hours: 14–16

Classroom: 10–12 | Lab: 2–4 | Clinical: Competency-based

Oversight: MA DPH

Certification Required: Yes (MAP certification)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$40,000–\$52,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$200–\$800

Certified Medication Aide (CMA)

Primary Settings:
LTC, assisted living

Program Length: 8 weeks

Total Hours: 60

Oversight: MA DPH/Facility Policy

Certification Required: Yes (CNA + additional certification)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$42,000–\$55,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$1,000–\$3,000

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-B)

Primary Settings:
EMS, ED, fire departments

Program Length: 3–5 months

Total Hours: 110 minimum

Classroom: ~60 | Lab: ~25 | Clinical: ~25

Oversight: MA OEMS (DPH)

Certification Required: Yes (National Registry + MA OEMS)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$45,000–\$60,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$1,500–\$5,000

Paramedic

Primary Settings:
EMS, advanced life support units, ED, critical transport

Program Length: 12–24 months

Total Hours: ~1,200–1,800

Classroom: 500–600 hours

Oversight: MA OEMS

Certification Required: Yes (National Registry + MA licensure)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$60,000–\$75,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$8,000–\$20,000

Community Health Worker (CHW)/Recovery Specialist

Primary Settings: Community agencies, behavioral health, public health, recovery programs

Program Length: 8–16 weeks

Total Hours: ~80–160

Oversight: MA DPH (CHW Board of Certification)

Certification Required: Optional but strongly recommended (MA CHW Certification)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$42,000–\$55,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$1,000–\$3,500
(often grant-funded)

Certified Nurse Aide (CNA)

Primary Settings: Long-term care facilities, hospitals, home health, community-based care

Program Length: ~4–12 weeks

Total Hours: 87

Classroom & Lab: ~50 | Clinical: ~25

Oversight: MA DPH (Nurse Aide Registry)

Certification Required: Yes (75-hour federal requirement + competency evaluation)

Average Starting Salary:

~\$32,000–\$40,000

Estimated Program Cost:

~\$500–\$2,000

Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP): Examples in Massachusetts

- Home Health Aide (HHA)
- Patient Care Technician (PCT)
- Personal Care Attendant (PCA)
- Medication Aide/MAP-certified staff
- Certified Nurse Aide (CNA)
- Companion aides (non-clinical support roles)



For more information, visit our webpage: ncwsma.org

Massachusetts Educational Pathways

Entry to practice-to-Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN)

Practical Nursing Certificate/Diploma

Primary Settings: Skilled nursing facilities, hospitals, clinics, rehab facilities, long-term care

Program Length: 10-12 months (full time) or 2 years (part time)

Total Hours: ~1,100–1,200 (minimum required is 1,080) (estimated program total)

Classroom & Lab: 540-600 | Clinical: 540-600 (minimum required clinical hours = 540)

Education Providers: Vocational technical schools, community colleges, hospital-based nursing schools

Licensure Exam: NCLEX-PN

Licensure Authority: MA Board of Registration in Nursing

LPN-to-RN (Associate Degree in Nursing – ADN)

LPN-to-ADN Advanced Placement/Bridge Program

Primary Settings (post licensure): Hospitals, long-term care, clinics, community health

Program Length: ~12–24 months (after prerequisites; varies by advanced standing)

Total Hours: ~2,000–2,500 total ADN hours*

Classroom & Lab: ~1,200–1,500 | Clinical: ~700–1,000

Education Providers: Massachusetts community college

Outcome: Eligibility for NCLEX-RN

Oversight: MA Board of Registration in Nursing

*Includes nursing coursework only; excludes general education prerequisites.

LPN-to-RN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing – BSN)

LPN-to-BSN Bridge/Accelerated Track

Primary Settings (post licensure): Hospitals (acute care), community health, leadership-track roles

Program Length: ~2.5–4 years total (depending on transfer credit and pacing)

Clinical Hours: Typically 700–1,000+ across the program

Education Providers: State universities, private colleges/universities

Licensure Outcome: NCLEX-RN

Registered Nurse (RN)

Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN)

Primary Settings: Hospitals, long-term care, outpatient clinics, community agencies

Program Length: ~2 years (post-prerequisites)

Total Program Hours: ~2,000–2,500

Classroom & Lab: ~1,200–1,500 | Clinical: ~700–1,000

Licensure Exam: NCLEX-RN

Licensure Authority: MA Board of Registration in Nursing

ADN-to-BSN (RN-to-BSN)

Primary Settings: Expanded roles in acute care, leadership, public/community health

Program Length: ~12–24 months

Clinical Hours: Often embedded or practice-based (varies by program)

Education Providers: State universities, private colleges

Transfer Alignment: MassTransfer A2B pathways (where applicable)

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)

Primary Settings: Hospitals, public health, leadership roles, specialty practice areas

Program Length (Total): ~4 years

Clinical Hours: ~700–1,000+

Education Providers: Public universities, private colleges

Licensure Exam: NCLEX-RN

Graduate Nursing Pathways

Master of Science in Nursing (MSN/MN)

Primary Settings: Education, leadership/administration, population & public health

Entry Requirement: Active, unencumbered RN license

Program Length: ~18 months–3 years (track-dependent)

Clinical/Practicum Hours: Track-specific (often 300–600+)

Common Focus Areas:

- Nursing Education
- Leadership & Administration
- Population/Public Health

Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN)

MA Authorized Roles:

- Nurse Practitioner (NP)
- Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM)
- Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)

Primary Settings: Hospitals, primary care, specialty practices, anesthesia services, women's health

Degree Required: MSN or DNP

Program Length: ~2–4 years depending on start and end point and on specialty

Clinical Hours: Typically 500–1,000+ (role-specific)

Certification: National board certification required

Licensure Authority: MA Board of Registration in Nursing

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)

Primary Settings: Advanced clinical practice, executive leadership, policy, academia

Entry Points: BSN-to-DNP or MSN-to-DNP

Program Length: ~3–4 years

Clinical Requirement: Extensive post-baccalaureate practicum

Capstone/Scholarly Project: Required

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Nursing

Primary Settings: Research, academia, policy, scholarly leadership

Program Length: ~4–6 years

Focus: Research methodology, theory development, knowledge generation

Outcome: Dissertation and research dissemination

Accelerated Academic Pathway Options in Massachusetts

- Accelerated ADN (Associate Degree RN) for healthcare-experienced applicants
- Traditional ADN (2-year RN) with accelerated sequencing options
- Accelerated BSN (ABSN) for second-degree students
- Direct-entry MSN (for non-nurses with a bachelor's degree)
- LPN-to-RN accelerated ASN programs
- LPN-to-BSN bridge programs (accelerated with advanced standing)
- PN-to-ADN "advance standing" internal bridge pathways (stacked within one institution)
- Direct entry/Accelerated MSN programs
- Direct entry/Accelerated DNP programs



Paying for Healthcare Training Programs (Massachusetts)

Public & Workforce Funding

- MassHire Workforce Boards (ITA funding for CNA, EMT, CHW)
- Free Community College/community college free tuition programs
- Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (employer partnerships)

Healthcare Employer-Sponsored Programs

- Hospital-based CNA/PCT training (often free with work commitment)
- Tuition reimbursement for employees (common in LTC & hospitals)

State & Grant Programs

- MA Behavioral Health Supports (CHW/Recovery training funding)
- Apprenticeship programs (expanded in healthcare roles)
- Massachusetts Career Ladder Program (Direct Skill Workers to LPN)

Federal Financial Aid

- Pell Grants (for eligible certificate and degree programs)
- FAFSA-based aid for ADN, LPN, and beyond

Loan Forgiveness/Pipeline Initiatives

- Nurse Corps (federal)
- MA State workforce initiatives (varies annually)
- Employer tuition payback programs