Growth and Decline in Selected Healthcare Occupations Active in the South Carolina Workforce: 2009/10 - 2019/20
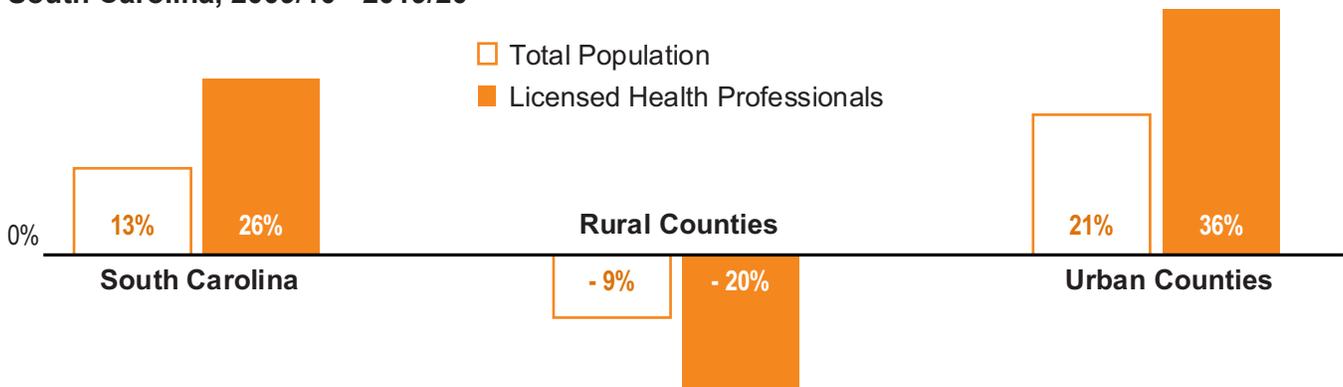
Introduction

Examining trends in the number of health professionals at the state level is important, but can mask issues of local and regional distribution. Understanding rural/urban differences can help policymakers, researchers, educators, employers and funders identify nuances of workforce supply and demand. A comprehensive understanding of state workforce needs enables stakeholders to develop more effective strategies, policies and funding by prioritizing areas where they are needed the most.

This brief shows how the number of licensed health professionals actively practicing within South Carolina changed statewide and in the state's rural and urban counties between 2010-2020 (nurses and physician assistants) or 2009-2019 (all other professions).
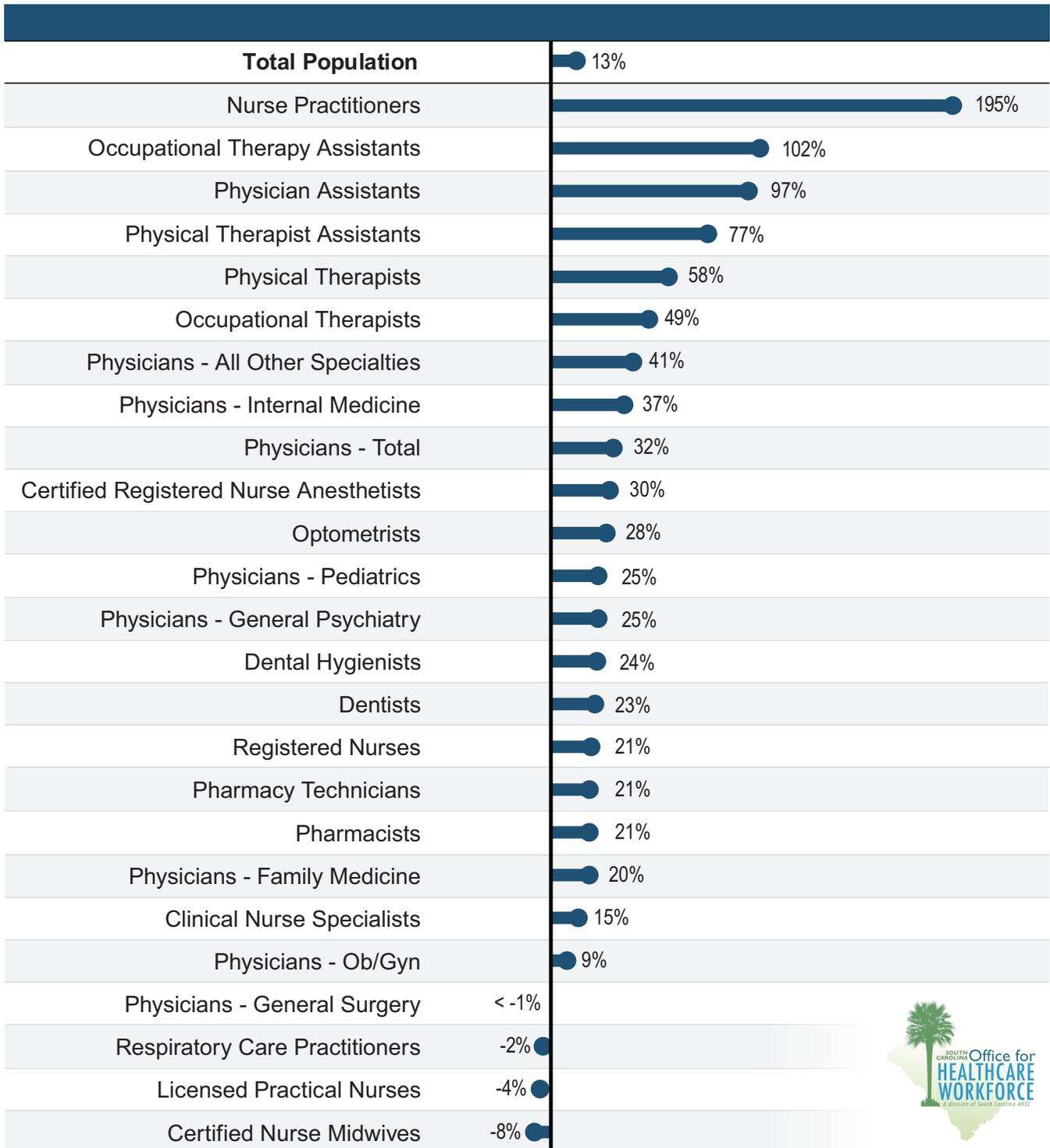
Key Findings

- The number of health professionals in rural counties decreased by 20%, faster than the rural population, which decreased by 9%.

- The overall number of health professionals grew statewide (26%) and in urban counties (36%), faster than the total population, which increased by 13% statewide and by 21% in urban counties.

- Four professions — respiratory care practitioners (-49), licensed practical nurses (-377), certified nurse midwives (CNMs, -7) and general surgeons (-1) — declined in number statewide.

- The supply of nurse practitioners (NPs, 195%), occupational therapy assistants (OTAs, 102%), and physician assistants (PAs, 97%) grew most rapidly. In terms of sheer numbers, registered nurses (7,540), physicians (3,143) and NPs (2,978) increased the most.

- In rural counties, only NPs, OTAs, physical therapist assistants, clinical nurse specialists and PAs grew.

- In urban counties, CNMs were the only profession to decrease in size.

Figure 1. Percent Change in Total Population and Selected Licensed Health Professionals, South Carolina, 2009/10 - 2019/20

Notes: This information includes licensed health professionals tracked by the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce that have an active license to practice and a primary practice location in a nonfederal setting in South Carolina. Rural counties are defined as counties in which 50% or more of the population lives outside of an urban area or urban cluster. **Sources:** SC Office for Healthcare Workforce, derived from data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and obtained from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office; DHEC SCAN, https://apps.dhec.sc.gov/Health/SCAN_BDP/tables/populationtable.aspx; US Census Bureau, Geography Division, data revised on March 26, 2012, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural/2010-urban-rural.html.
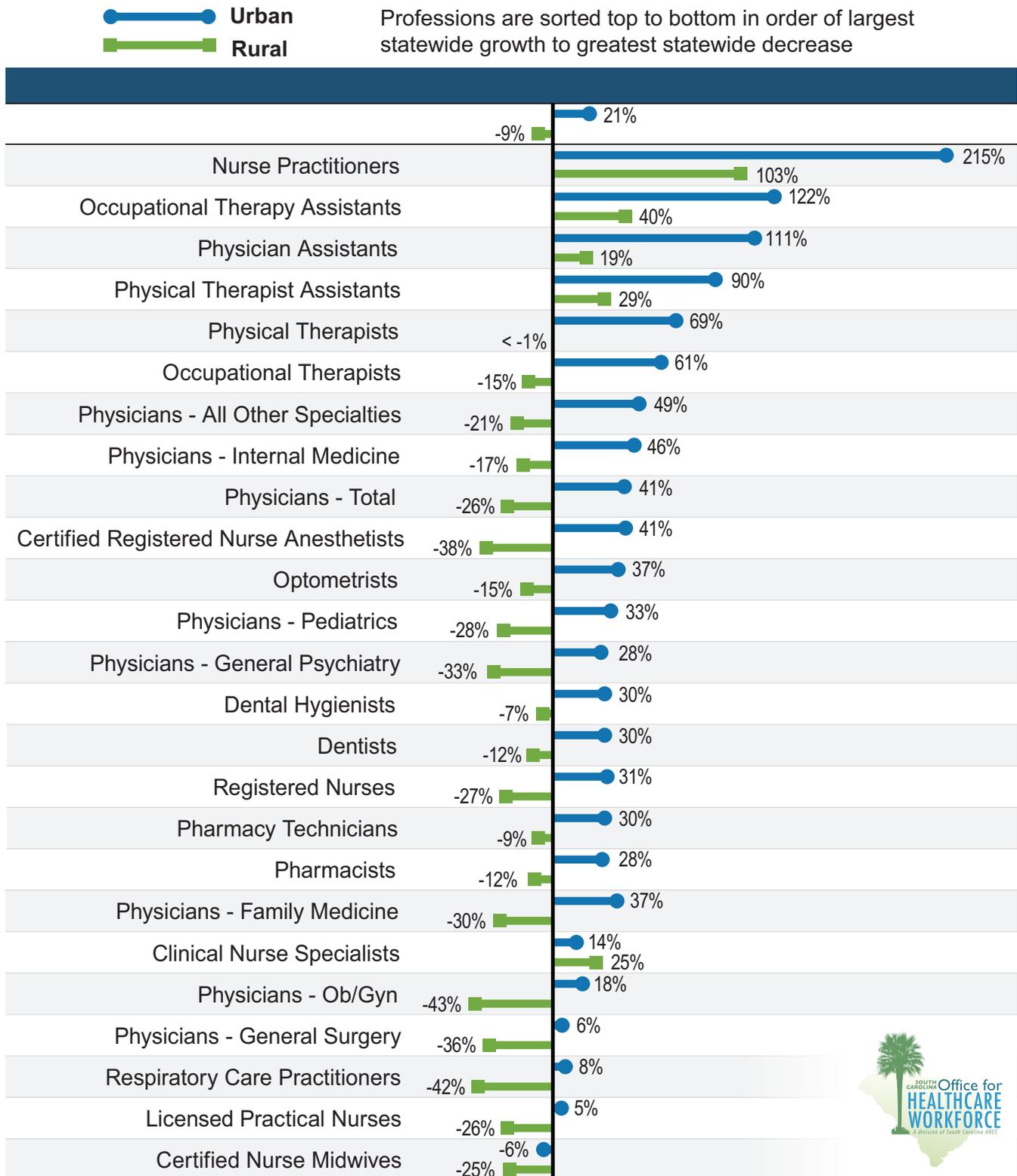
Figure 2. Overall Percent Change in the Number of Licensed Health Professionals Statewide, South Carolina, 2009/10 - 2019/20*

Profession	Percent Change
Total Population	13%
Nurse Practitioners	195%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	102%
Physician Assistants	97%
Physical Therapist Assistants	77%
Physical Therapists	58%
Occupational Therapists	49%
Physicians - All Other Specialties	41%
Physicians - Internal Medicine	37%
Physicians - Total	32%
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists	30%
Optometrists	28%
Physicians - Pediatrics	25%
Physicians - General Psychiatry	25%
Dental Hygienists	24%
Dentists	23%
Registered Nurses	21%
Pharmacy Technicians	21%
Pharmacists	21%
Physicians - Family Medicine	20%
Clinical Nurse Specialists	15%
Physicians - Ob/Gyn	9%
Physicians - General Surgery	< -1%
Respiratory Care Practitioners	-2%
Licensed Practical Nurses	-4%
Certified Nurse Midwives	-8%

Notes: This information includes health professionals with an active license to practice and a primary practice location in a nonfederal setting in South Carolina as of two months after the end of each profession's license renewal period. Physician counts include residents-in-training. *The figures in this chart are based on the difference in counts from 2010 to 2020 for nurses and physician assistants, and from 2009 to 2019 for other professions and total population.

Sources: SC Office for Healthcare Workforce, derived from data collected by the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and obtained from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office; DHEC SCAN, https://apps.dhec.sc.gov/Health/SCAN_BDP/tables/populationtable.aspx. Created 6/30/2022.

Figure 3. Percent Change in the Number of Licensed Health Professionals, Rural and Urban Counties, South Carolina, 2009/10 - 2019/20*

Urban ●━━━●
Rural ━━━

Professions are sorted top to bottom in order of largest statewide growth to greatest statewide decrease

Profession	Urban	Rural
Nurse Practitioners	21%	-9%
Occupational Therapy Assistants	215%	103%
Physician Assistants	122%	40%
Physical Therapist Assistants	111%	19%
Physical Therapists	90%	29%
Occupational Therapists	69%	< -1%
Physicians - All Other Specialties	61%	-15%
Physicians - Internal Medicine	49%	-21%
Physicians - Total	46%	-17%
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists	41%	-26%
Optometrists	41%	-38%
Physicians - Pediatrics	37%	-15%
Physicians - General Psychiatry	33%	-28%
Dental Hygienists	28%	-33%
Dentists	30%	-7%
Registered Nurses	30%	-12%
Pharmacy Technicians	31%	-27%
Pharmacists	30%	-9%
Physicians - Family Medicine	28%	-12%
Clinical Nurse Specialists	37%	-30%
Physicians - Ob/Gyn	14%	25%
Physicians - General Surgery	18%	-43%
Respiratory Care Practitioners	6%	-36%
Licensed Practical Nurses	8%	-42%
Certified Nurse Midwives	5% / -6%	-26% / -25%

Table 1. Numeric and Percent Change in the Number of Licensed Health Professionals, South Carolina, 2009/10 - 2019/20*

Profession	South Carolina				Rural Counties				Urban Counties			
	2009/10	2019/20	% Change	# Change	2009/10	2019/20	% Change	# Change	2009/10	2019/20	% Change	# Change
Total Population	4,561,242	5,148,714	13%	587,472	1,192,320	1,082,755	-9%	-109,565	3,368,922	4,065,959	21%	697,037
Physicians												
Total	9,904	13,047	32%	3,143	1,346	997	-26%	-349	8,558	12,050	41%	3,492
Family Medicine	1,650	1,984	20%	334	401	279	-30%	-122	1,249	1,705	37%	456
General Internal Medicine	1,166	1,596	37%	430	163	135	-17%	-28	1,003	1,461	46%	458
Ob/Gyn	552	604	9%	52	74	42	-43%	-32	478	562	18%	84
Pediatrics	727	908	25%	181	96	69	-28%	-27	631	839	33%	208
General Psychiatry*	452	564	25%	112	24	16	-33%	-8	428	548	28%	120
General Surgery	441	440	0%	-1	67	43	-36%	-24	374	397	6%	23
All Other Specialties*	4,916	6,951	41%	2,035	521	413	-21%	-108	4,395	6,538	49%	2,143
Nurses												
Registered Nurses	36,213	43,753	21%	7,540	6,316	4,611	-27%	-1,705	29,897	39,142	31%	9,245
Certified Nurse Midwives	84	77	-8%	-7	12	9	-25%	-3	72	68	-6%	-4
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists	923	1,204	30%	281	128	80	-38%	-48	795	1,124	41%	329
Clinical Nurse Specialists	60	69	15%	9	4	5	25%	1	56	64	14%	8
Nurse Practitioners	1,525	4,503	195%	2,978	269	547	103%	278	1,256	3,956	215%	2,700
Licensed Practical Nurses	9,089	8,712	-4%	-377	2,597	1,910	-26%	-687	6,492	6,802	5%	310
All Other Professions**												
Dentists	2,002	2,463	23%	461	314	275	-12%	-39	1,688	2,187	30%	499
Dental Hygienists	2,224	2,754	24%	530	370	345	-7%	-25	1,854	2,409	30%	555
Occupational Therapists	1,069	1,594	49%	525	164	140	-15%	-24	905	1,454	61%	549
Occupational Therapy Assistants	462	935	102%	473	109	153	40%	44	353	782	122%	429
Optometrists	430	551	28%	121	72	61	-15%	-11	358	490	37%	132
Pharmacists	4,111	4,955	21%	844	797	705	-12%	-92	3,314	4,250	28%	936
Pharmacy Technicians	5,962	7,199	21%	1,237	1,395	1,263	-9%	-132	4,567	5,936	30%	1,369
Physical Therapists	2,021	3,202	58%	1,181	299	298	0%	-1	1,722	2,904	69%	1,182
Physical Therapist Assistants	1,083	1,920	77%	837	227	293	29%	66	856	1,627	90%	771
Physician Assistants	679	1,338	97%	659	103	123	19%	20	576	1,215	111%	639
Respiratory Care Practitioners	2,188	2,139	-2%	-49	460	265	-42%	-195	1,728	1,874	8%	146

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Data and Limitations

Data Sources

Licensure data were obtained from the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA), the official repository of data collected by the state's licensing boards under the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (LLR).

Population data for 2009 and 2019 are from DHEC SCAN, https://apps.dhec.sc.gov/Health/SCAN_BDP/tables/populationtable.aspx.

Rural counties are defined as counties in which 50% or more of the population lived outside of an urban area or urban cluster in the 2010 Census. Source: US Census Bureau, Geography Division, revised March 26, 2012, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural/2010-urban-rural.html.

Data Notes

It is important to consider the relative size of an occupation when measuring percent change. For example, RNs and pharmacists grew at the same rate of 21% statewide, but the number of RNs increased by 7,560 and the number of pharmacists increased by 844.

The information in this analysis includes health professionals with an active license to practice and a self-reported primary practice location in a nonfederal setting in South Carolina as of two months after the end of each profession's license renewal period. The effective years for nurses and physician assistants are 2010 and 2020, and 2009 and 2019 for all other professions. Physician counts include physicians who have completed residency or are still in residency training, and are based on self-reported primary specialty. Nurses employed in federal settings are included in 2020 due to changes in how the South Carolina Board of Nursing collected that information in 2020.

Limitations

The data presented here provide a snapshot in time and are only current as of the date of renewal.

Most of the data reported for 2019 and 2020 were collected prior to COVID-19. The 2020 nurse licensure renewal period was extended through September 2020; however, the majority of nurses renewed their license by the end of April 2020. Because of the ways the pandemic has disrupted health care and health employment patterns, caution should be used in interpreting the data in this report for current workforce needs.

South Carolina participates in the enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (eNLC, or "Compact"), which allows RNs with a multi-state license to practice in another Compact state without obtaining additional licenses or registrations. Since they are not required to register with the South Carolina Board of Nursing, Compact nurses licensed in a home state outside of South Carolina are not captured in the licensure data.

The South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce started tracking social workers in 2017 and psychologists in 2020. As older data are not available for comparison, these professions are excluded from this analysis.

Suggested Citation

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