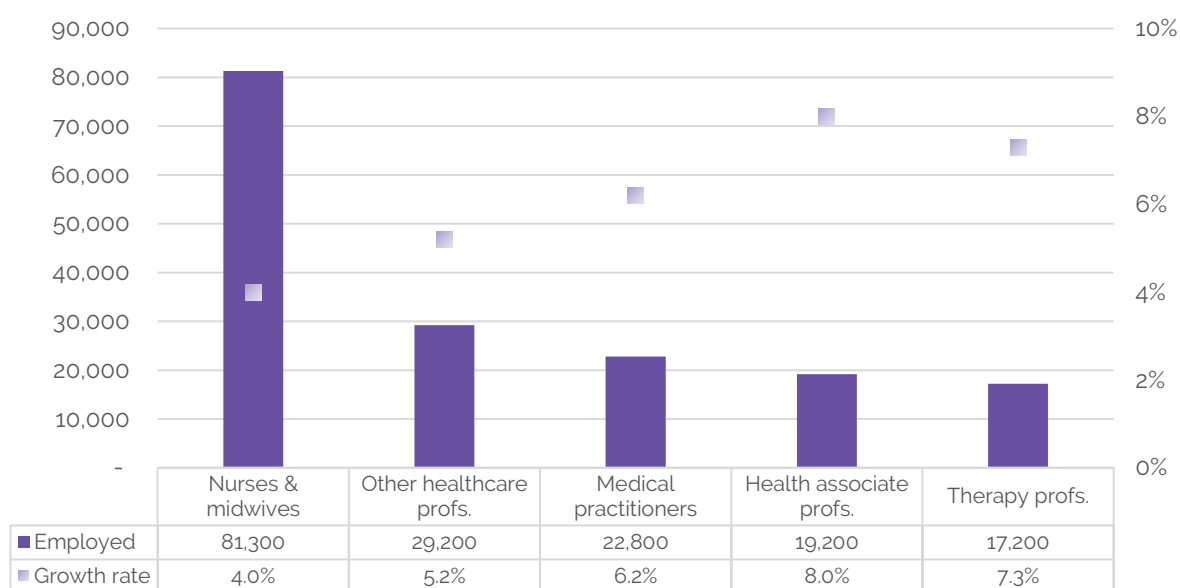


10.4 Healthcare Occupations

Figure 10.4 Annual Average Employment (2024) & Annual Average Growth Rates (2019-2024)



Overall employment	169,800
Share of total workforce	6.0%
Main sectors of employment	87% - Health sector 7% - Wholesale & retail
Employment growth	+38,100 between 2019 and 2024 +5.2% on average annually (compared to +3.4% for total workforce)

2024	% Female Q4	% Full-time Q4	% Aged 55 years & over Q4	% Irish citizens Q4	% Third level graduates Q4	Number of new employment permits	Recruitment Agency Survey
Medical practitioners	48%	91%	...	67%	99%	1,689	✓
Therapy profs.	78%	69%	...	82%	99%	120	
Nurses & midwives	91%	82%	16%	69%	98%	5,107	✓
Other healthcare profs.	75%	85%	[16%]	92%	95%	331	✓
Health associate profs.	78%	69%	...	91%	71%	16	
Overall total	79%	81%	16%	77%	95%	7,263	

Source: SLMRU (SOLAS) analysis of CSO (LFS) data, DETE, and SLMRU Recruitment Agency Survey (RAS)

Numbers in square brackets should be treated with caution; an ellipsis (...) denotes numbers too small to report

Overall Outlook for these Occupations

Employment has grown annually for healthcare occupations since 2020, with an additional 38,000 persons employed over the five-year period examined. Almost four-fifths of those employed were women, and the share aged 55 years or over was below the national average. Employment permits continued to be a key source of skills for these roles, with healthcare occupations accounting for 22% of all new employment permits issued in 2024, an increase of 769 on the previous year.

A number of recent ESRI reports have pointed to an increasing demand for healthcare services: projections of a 40% rise in inpatient bed capacity by 2040 will lead to further substantial demand for healthcare staff, particularly in urban and ageing regions,¹ while the demand for GP consultations is forecast to increase by at least 23% for the same time period, driven primarily by population growth.² The continued implementation of the Sláintecare Action Plan will also see an increased demand for services particularly in the community setting. The recently launched Education Plan 2025 details the establishment of an Education Therapy Service which includes the recruitment of 90 occupational and speech therapists for special schools for the 2025/2026 school year with a plan to roll-out to mainstream schools in the future.³ All of these point to continued demand for healthcare occupations in the coming years. The annual survey of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) highlighted the belief among the majority of members that current staffing levels and skill mix were inadequate to meet clinical and patient demands.⁴

In recent years, the number of health and welfare related awards has been rising, with a 4% increase between 2019 and 2023, particularly relating to NFQ level 9/10 awards (nearly 2,000 additional awards). While there were increases in the number of awards between 2022 and 2023 in the detailed fields of medicine, dental studies and pharmacy, the number of nursing/caring awards declined by more than 700 (largely at NFQ levels 8-10), although much of the decline related to continuing education (certs/diplomas) for already qualified nurses (e.g. infection control, nursing management). To address issues with skill supply, over €130 million has been allocated to expand healthcare education, including new medical, pharmacy, dental, and GP training programmes, with a focus on rural and remote care.⁵ The annual intake of doctors into the GP training programme has increased by approximately 80% from 2019 to 2024, with 350 new entrant training places made available from 2024⁶. Education and training places for health and social care professional roles (especially therapy related) are set to increase from 2025,⁷ an additional 325 places will be introduced in 2025, with further increases in subsequent years. This increase in supply from the education/training system will go some way towards alleviating growing demand for these roles.

¹ ESRI (2025) [Projections of national demand & bed capacity requirements for public acute hospitals in Ireland, 2023–2040](#)

² New ESRI report projects that demand for GP consultations will increase by at least 23 per cent by 2040 | ESRI

³ Minister McEntee and Minister of State Moynihan publish Education Plan 2025

⁴ www.inmo.ie/News-Campaigns/Details/staffing-deficits-compromising-health-of-nurses-midwives-and-patients

⁵ DHERIS (2024) [Minister O'Donovan announces major increase in healthcare places across Ireland](#)

⁶ PQ General Practitioner Services Dáil Éireann Debate, Thursday - 29 May 2025

⁷ DFHERIS (2025). [Government approves major expansion in Health and Social Care Profession training places](#); Subject areas comprise physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, radiation therapy, radiography, podiatry, social work, medical science, and dietetics.

Occupation	Economic summary
Medical practitioners Skills shortage: Medical practitioners	The annual average employment growth over the five-year period was above average for medical practitioners, with almost 6,000 additional persons employed since 2019. The gender split was broadly in line with the national average, whereas, at 33%, the share of non-Irish citizens employed was above average. Almost 1,700 new employment permits were issued for roles including senior house officers, registrars, GPs and in emergency medicine. Mentions of difficult-to-fill vacancies in the Recruitment Agency Survey were for those in psychiatric and emergency medicine and GPs. The share of OJAs for medical practitioners (as a share of all healthcare-related OJAs) increased from 11% to nearly a fifth between 2023 and 2024. Issues with sourcing GPs has been particularly highlighted. There has been an increase in the annual intake of doctors into the GP training programme, with 350 new training places made available in 2024.⁸ The Programme for Government commits to increasing the number of GPs through both international recruitment and increasing the number of training places.⁹ Our population growth and ageing population will lead to increased demand for medical practitioners across services and shortages are expected to persist.
Therapy profs. (e.g. occupational, speech & language, physiotherapist) Shortage: Inconclusive	Employment in this occupation has been growing annually since 2022, with an additional 1,200 persons employed since 2023. Over three-quarters of those employed were women and almost a third were working part-time. Employment permits issued spanned various therapist roles (e.g. physio, occupational, speech & language) and chiropractors. The delivery of Sláintecare, particularly in terms of community care and mental health services, will require additional staffing in these occupations as will the Education Therapy Service outlined above. The number of awards relating to therapy and rehabilitation have remained stable in recent years, at approximately 1,200 awards annually between 2019 and 2023; with enrolments levels largely unchanged in recent years, output is not expected to increase in the short-term. A new tertiary occupational therapy degree was announced in May 2025, although the number of places is unlikely to be sufficient to meet demand. Although demand is evident, the numbers employed in each of the therapy categories are too small to allow for detailed analysis and to determine the extent to which shortages exist. A new workforce plan, as detailed in the Programme for Government, will help to determine the extent to which shortages are occurring in these roles.
Nurses & midwives Skills shortage: Nurses	At over 80,000 persons employed, this is one of the largest occupations in the economy (after sales assistants). The annual average employment growth rate over the five-year period was above average, but employment declined by 1,800 persons since 2023. The majority of nurses employed were women and 31% of those employed were non-Irish citizens. Despite the decline in employment, there was a relatively high volume of jobs advertised online (Eurostat/CEDEFOP) and of posts notified to DSP for nurses; difficult-to-fill vacancies in the Recruitment Agency Survey included for staff nurses and nurse managers. The high volume of recent job hires and employment permits (the highest number across all occupations), with no employment growth suggests that a significant level of job roles filled were most likely replacing those who had exited the occupation. The number of student enrolments across HEA funded institutions for level 8 honours degree courses in nursing and midwifery was steady at around 7,600 in 2021/22 and 2022/23, although increasing from 7,000 enrolments in 2018/19 (HEA). Along with increasing the number of training places for nurses, the government are committed to increasing the number of Advance Nurse Practitioners and the expansion of other services will increase the demand for nurses. The ESRI report detailed above, also highlights the need for increased general practitioner nurses to meet the needs of a

⁸ [thejournal.ie-investigates GP crisis](#)

⁹ [programme-for-government-securing-irelands-future.pdf](#)

	growing population. Demand and shortages of nurses is expected to persist, particularly if issues with retention continue.
Other healthcare profs. (e.g. dentists, pharmacists, psychologists, radiographers, opticians & health services managers) Shortage: Inconclusive	Employment levels have fluctuated over the five-year period, with numbers employed in 2024 broadly in line with that of 2021. Three-quarters of persons employed were women, with a lower than average share who were non-Irish citizens. New employment permits were issued across a range of job titles including radiographers, cardiac physiologists, dieticians, audiologists, pharmacists, dentists, optometrists, and psychologists. There was a fall in the share of OJAs for this occupation between 2023 and 2024, mostly related to a fall in health services and public health managers and directors. Although demand is evident and the Government is committed to increase training places and recruitment for many of these roles, the extent to which shortages are occurring is difficult to determine due to the relatively small number of persons employed in each speciality. A workforce plan for the healthcare sector should assist in shedding further light on the issues facing this occupation.
Health associate profs. (e.g. pharma /medical technicians, dental nurses, paramedics, dispensing opticians)	Despite strong employment growth over the five-year period, levels have remained fairly stable since 2022. Most (78%) employed are female, most are Irish citizens and 31% were employed in part-time roles. At 56%, this occupation had the lowest share employed in the health sector with employment also in wholesale and retail and industry. A small number of new employment permits were issued for dental hygienists, prosthetists and orthotists. There was a relatively large share of OJAs for this occupation, primarily for health associate professionals n.e.c. but also a small share for medical & dental technicians. The available data sources do not currently point to issues with sourcing suitably qualified personnel for these roles.