
The Impact of the Coronavirus on Licensed Healthcare Workforce Unemployment in Virginia: Differences by Primary Work Setting

Healthcare Workforce Data Center

August 2021

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Licenseses in six healthcare profession groups voluntarily participated in the surveys used in this report. Without their efforts the work of the center would not be possible. The Department of Health Professions, the Healthcare Workforce Data Center, and the different licensing boards express our sincerest appreciation for their ongoing cooperation.

Thank You!

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This is the third in a series of reports which examine the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the licensed healthcare workforce in Virginia. The first report in this series titled *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Licensed Healthcare Workforce Unemployment in Virginia*¹ examined trends in the state as a whole for each healthcare profession. A subsequent report titled *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Licensed Healthcare Workforce Unemployment by Region*² examined regional differences in underemployment and unemployment rates for licensed healthcare professions in Virginia. The current report selects six healthcare professions with some of the highest unemployment rates in Virginia during the initial pandemic period and explores how their underemployment and unemployment rates vary in different primary work settings.

The coronavirus pandemic has had significant impacts on the healthcare industry. One impact was that hospitals and patients postponed elective procedures and practitioner visits in the early part of 2020. With the increases in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations recently, some states have asked hospitals and healthcare centers to postpone elective procedures once again. Although Virginia has not made this decision, looking at the impact of the 2020 postponement of elective procedures, practitioner visits, and the pandemic generally on healthcare professionals' underemployment and unemployment will help to predict the possible impact of such a decision for different healthcare professionals in different healthcare settings.

Using licensees' survey data in selected professions, this report examines three indicators: past year underemployment, past year involuntary unemployment, and current involuntary unemployment, for dentists and dental hygienists (data collected in March 2021) and occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapists, and physical therapy assistants (data collected in December 2020). Specifically, this paper focuses on these healthcare professionals' rate of reporting underemployment and unemployment in some of the most common workplace settings: solo private practice, group private practice, hospital-based practice (outpatient and inpatient), long-term care facility practice (nursing homes and assisted living facilities), outpatient rehabilitation facility practice, home health, and other healthcare settings. The following table shows the distribution of the professionals by primary work setting.

Primary Work Setting by Profession

	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Occupational Therapists	Occupational Therapy Assistants	Physical Therapists	Physical Therapy Assistants
Solo private practice	2,507	2,681	98	19	470	89
Group private practice	787	622	268	46	1,135	219
Hospital	64	21	734	78	1,429	321
Long-term care	8	N/A	131	124	143	205
Outpatient rehabilitation	N/A	N/A	315	58	994	526
Home health	N/A	N/A	461	205	834	695
Other	615	682	1,752	922	1,554	987

¹ http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/Coronavirus_Impact_Healthcare_Unemployment.pdf

² http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/Regional_Coronavirus_Unemployment.pdf

	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Occupational Therapists	Occupational Therapy Assistants	Physical Therapists	Physical Therapy Assistants
Total	3,981	4,006	3,759	1,452	6,559	3,042

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Past Year Underemployment

Past year underemployment captures whether survey respondents had a part-time or temporary position but would have preferred a full-time/permanent position in the one-year period before they completed their survey. Past year underemployment varied considerably between settings; the overall rate for each profession conceals these differences. Some of the key findings regarding past year unemployment include:

- Dentists working in group private practices and other settings reported higher rates of past year underemployment compared to those working in hospitals and solo private practices.
- Occupational and physical therapists working in hospitals reported the lowest rates of past year underemployment.
- By contrast, dental hygienists working in hospitals reported the highest rate of underemployment.
- Occupational therapists working in group private practices and outpatient rehabilitation centers had the highest underemployment rates.

Past Year Underemployment by Primary Work Setting and Profession

	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Occupational Therapists	Occupational Therapy Assistants	Physical Therapists	Physical Therapy Assistants
Solo private practice	3%	7%	19%	21%	8%	8%
Group private practice	6%	4%	15%	33%	13%	9%
Hospital	2%	10%	4%	17%	6%	10%
Long-term care	0%	N/A	14%	12%	14%	13%
Outpatient rehabilitation	N/A	N/A	6%	29%	10%	12%
Home health	N/A	N/A	11%	18%	7%	12%
Other	18%	5%	5%	9%	20%	10%
Total	3%	5%	6%	12%	7%	9%

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Past Year Involuntary Unemployment

Past year involuntary unemployment captures whether survey respondents have been involuntarily unemployed at any time in the one-year period before they completed their survey. In previous years, this indicator previously ranged from 0% to 3% for all professions but rose to a high of 37% for dental hygienists. However, that 37% is the average across settings and, as seen in the next table, past year unemployment was as high as 49% for dental hygienists working in solo and group private practices. Other significant findings about past year involuntary unemployment include:

- Dentists in long-term care settings had the highest past year unemployment rate, 63%. Over 30% of those who worked in solo and group private practices also were unemployed at some point in the year before the survey.
- Occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapists, and physical therapy assistants who worked in solo and group private practices had some of the highest past year unemployment rates.
- Physical therapists working in long-term care settings reported the highest past year unemployment rate.

Past Year Unemployment by Primary Work Setting and Profession

	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Occupational Therapists	Occupational Therapy Assistants	Physical Therapists	Physical Therapy Assistants
Solo private practice	31%	50%	26%	21%	17%	22%
Group private practice	34%	49%	16%	26%	17%	24%
Hospital	3%	0%	12%	10%	14%	20%
Long-term care	63%	N/A	12%	10%	22%	15%
Outpatient rehabilitation	N/A	N/A	11%	12%	18%	22%
Home health	N/A	N/A	9%	11%	11%	13%
Other	13%	24%	8%	12%	12%	21%
Total	20%	37%	9%	12%	13%	17%

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Current Year Unemployment

Finally, **current involuntary unemployment** captures the percent of survey respondents who were involuntarily unemployed when completing their survey. The total rates for each profession showed that some of the effects of the pandemic may be easing. However, these rates conceal significant variations between different work settings. For the six professions, the current year unemployment rates for those working in solo private practices and hospitals are equal or less than the total rates. Although the current unemployment rates in solo private practice and hospital settings suggest that these settings have recovered from the effects of the pandemic, the same cannot be said of group private practices for occupational and physical therapy assistants. Other significant findings about current involuntary unemployment include:

- Occupational therapy assistants in outpatient rehabilitation centers have a current unemployment rate of 7%, considerably higher than the 3% across all settings.
- Dental hygienists and physical therapy assistants in other settings reported the highest current unemployment rates.

Current Year Unemployment by Primary Work Setting and Profession

	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Occupational Therapists	Occupational Therapy Assistants	Physical Therapists	Physical Therapy Assistants
Solo private practice	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%
Group private practice	1%	0%	1%	6%	1%	4%
Hospital	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Long-term care	14%	N/A	0%	1%	0%	4%
Outpatient rehabilitation	N/A	N/A	1%	7%	1%	3%
Home health	N/A	N/A	1%	2%	0%	2%
Other	3%	6%	2%	3%	2%	5%
Total	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%	3%

Source: Va. Healthcare Workforce Data Center

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has had tremendous impact on healthcare professions. The impact appears to vary both by profession and by the primary work setting of the different professions. For certain professions, some work settings have recovered but not others. Generally, hospitals seem to have recovered from the effects of the pandemic. Home health care settings also seem to be less affected or to have recovered with regards to unemployment; in most instances, the underemployment and unemployment rates for professionals working in home health settings are lower or the same as the rate across all settings. In the few cases in which it was higher, it was still not the setting with the highest rates. Although both solo and group private practices were considerably affected by the pandemic, solo private practices seem to have recovered whereas group private practices appear to still be struggling for certain professions. With the recent surge in the coronavirus pandemic, it is critical to identify healthcare work settings that may need additional support for their employees struggling with underemployment and unemployment. It is also important to ensure that the healthcare work settings that have recovered do not regress; all efforts are needed to help all Virginia's healthcare workforce settings recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.