

# Immigrants in Colorado's Workforce

Colorado is home to over [half a million immigrants](#), making up 9 percent of the state's population. Immigrants in the Centennial State are more likely to be working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts (83 percent vs 64 percent), making them more likely to be active in the labor force. They are working in some of the state's fastest-growing and most in-demand fields, including healthcare, education, and social work.

For Colorado to remain competitive and meet the critical workforce shortages in many of these fields, it will be crucial to implement policies that not only attract and retain immigrant talent that is complementary to the U.S.-born workforce, but that also build career pathways for the immigrants that already call the state home.

One way to achieve this goal is to expand access to occupational licenses for non-citizens. Colorado law currently prohibits many non-citizens from obtaining occupational licenses, certificates, and registrations in high-demand fields solely due to their immigration status. Senate Bill 21-077 would remove such barriers, thereby expanding economic opportunity for all residents and helping to meet the state's pressing workforce needs.

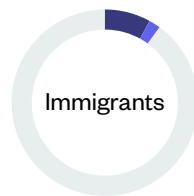
More than a dozen states have taken similar steps, including Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Nevada, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

## NURSING

Colorado is facing critical healthcare shortages that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and are expected to grow as the state's population ages. From 2007 to 2017, the proportion of Colorado's population over 65 increased by 55.7 percent, a rate only exceeded in Alaska and Nevada.<sup>1</sup> It is also one of 33 states that will face a shortage of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) by 2030, with a projected deficit of 2,100 nurses.<sup>2</sup> While immigrant nurses have helped fill many of these roles, this gap will only widen, especially as experienced nurses continue to retire and the need for bilingual and culturally competent care increases.

From 2015 to 2019, online job postings for Nurses<sup>3</sup> increased by

**+15.1%** ● → ●



The share of immigrants in occupations that require a nursing certificate or license grew from **8.3%** in 2014 to **9.3%** in 2018.

From 2014 to 2018, participation in nursing increased by

**+27.0%** among Immigrants

**+13.0%** among U.S.-born

From 2015 to 2019, Registered Nurses were the most popular job posting in nursing and increased by

**+12.6%** ● → ●

Licensed Practical Nurses & Licensed Vocational Nurses were also popular during that time and increased by

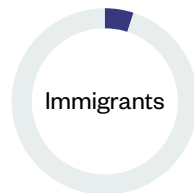
**+39.3%** ● → ●

## K-12 EDUCATION

A recent report<sup>4</sup> found that Colorado is facing a teacher shortage. Impacted fields include science, math, art and music education, early childhood education, English as a second language, special education, world languages, and career and technical education. But while demand for teachers continues to grow, especially in areas like English as a second language for limited English proficient students, districts are struggling to find licensed educators to meet demand. Immigrants are already playing a growing role in helping fill these positions, but as the shortage persists and more positions are being filled by temporary shortage mechanisms,<sup>5</sup> more must be done to address this issue.

From 2015 to 2019, online job postings for K-12 teaching positions<sup>6</sup> increased by

**+43.2%** ● → ●



From 2014 to 2018, the average share of immigrants in occupations that required an education certificate or license was **5.2%**.

From 2014 to 2018, participation in K-12 teaching positions increased by

**+20.6%** among Immigrants

**+29.3%** among U.S.-born

From 2015 to 2019, Middle School Teachers were the most popular job posting in education and increased by

**+51.3%** ● → ●

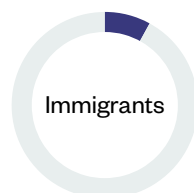
Other popular occupations include Elementary School Teachers and Secondary School Teachers.

## SOCIAL WORK AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

As Colorado's population continues to age and the state and cities grapple with their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness, incarceration, and the opioid crisis, the demand for social workers and behavioral health experts continues to grow. Despite this need, Colorado is projected to see shortages for behavioral health experts like psychiatrists and addiction counselors by 2030.<sup>7</sup>

From 2015 to 2019, online job postings for Social Workers & Counselors<sup>8</sup> increased by

**+174.7%** ● → ●



In 2018, the share of immigrants in social work and counseling occupations was **7.9%**.

The most popular occupations from the social work and counseling industry include Social Workers (including Healthcare Social Workers) and Mental Health Counselors.

Immigrants across the skills spectrum play a critical role in Colorado's workforce. As in-demand fields like healthcare, education, and social work continue to face a shrinking labor pool, immigrants will continue to care for, educate, and protect the state's future.

## ENDNOTES

---

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Administration on Aging (2018). 2018 Profile of Older Americans. Available at: <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2018OlderAmericansProfile.pdf>
- 2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (2017). National and Regional Supply and Demand Projections of the Nursing Workforce: 2014-2030. Available at: [https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/nchwa/projections/NCHWA\\_HRSA\\_Nursing\\_Report.pdf](https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/nchwa/projections/NCHWA_HRSA_Nursing_Report.pdf)
- 3 These positions listed nursing certificates as a requirement.
- 4 Teacher Shortage Areas Report (2020). U.S. Department of Education. Available at: <https://tsa.ed.gov/#/reports>
- 5 Colorado Educator Shortage Survey (2020). Colorado Department of Education. Available at: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/educatortalent/edshortage-surveyresults>
- 6 These positions listed educational certificates as a requirement.
- 7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis (2018). State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Behavioral Health Occupations: 2016-2030, Available at: <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/state-level-estimates-report-2018.pdf>
- 8 These positions listed social work or counseling certificates as a requirement.