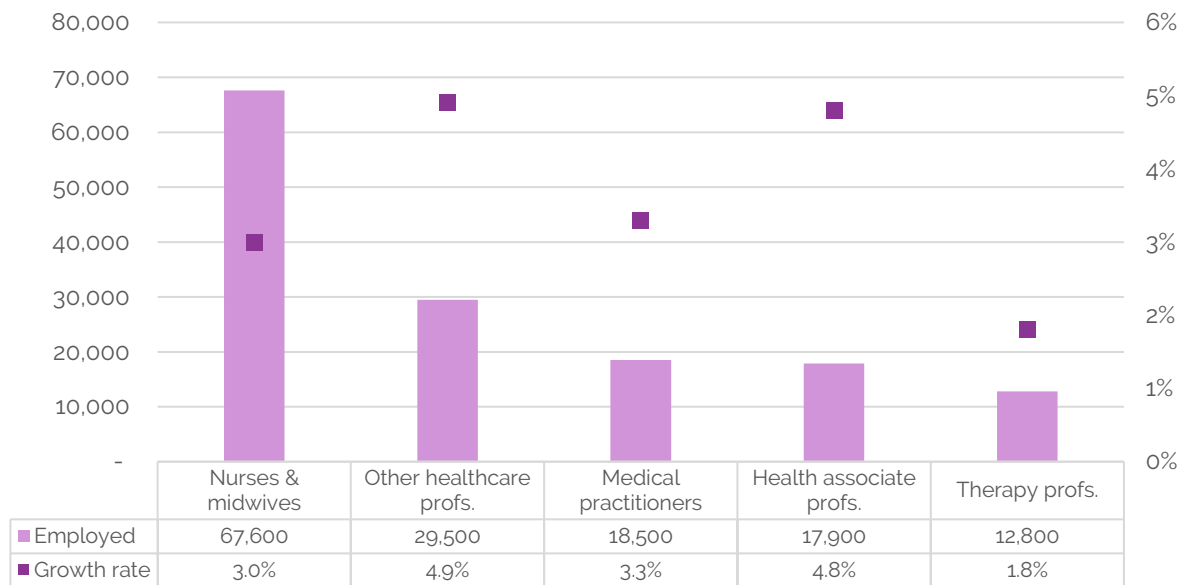


10.4 Healthcare Occupations

Figure 10.4 Annual Average Employment (2022) & Annual Average Growth Rates (2017-2022)



Overall employment	146,300
Share of total workforce	5.7%
Main sectors of employment	88% - Health sector
Employment growth	+23,000 between 2017 and 2022 +3.5% on average annually (compared to +3.0% for total workforce)

2022	% 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	44%	87%	[22%]	71%	100%	2,162	✓
Therapy profs.	89%	[69%]	...	95%	99%	53	
Nurses & midwives	91%	80%	17%	69%	95%	3,837	✓
Other healthcare profs.	69%	82%	[25%]	82%	95%	323	✓
Health associate profs.	76%	68%	...	82%	70%	23	
Overall total	78%	79%	19%	75%	93%	6,398	

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 growth over the five-year period for healthcare occupations was slightly above the national average although growth between 2021 and 2022 was particularly strong, with an additional 15,000 persons employed. Employment permits continued to be a significant source of skills for these occupations with 6,400 new permits issued in 2022.

The Sláintecare Action Plan 2023 details progress made in 2022 in addressing staffing needs, such as the recruitment of 2,400 healthcare workers for the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme and the agreement for additional undergraduate places in medicine from September 2022; the report estimates that there were an additional 17,298 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff working in health services since January 2020, including an additional 4,592 nurses and midwives, 2,654 health and social care professionals, and 1,758 doctors and dentists. Budget 2023 allocated a record €23.4 billion for the health sector; the additional services announced will require further staffing, with future recruitment of 6,000 persons announced. A 2022 ESRI report estimated that the healthcare workforce (e.g. doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants, various therapists) will need to grow by between 1.7% and 2.1% or by between 12,400 and 15,500 WTE posts on average annually for the forecast period to 2035 in order to meet recruitment demands in acute hospitals alone arising from a number of factors (including the implementation of Sláintecare).¹ The number of training places for many healthcare occupations is expected to increase strongly in the coming years, particularly for nursing, medicine, and therapy related courses, which may go some way in alleviating current issues with sourcing many of the healthcare occupations.

Occupation	Economic summary															
Medical practitioners Skills shortage: Medical practitioners	<p>The annual average employment growth for medical practitioners was slightly above average over the five-year period, with strong growth between 2021 and 2022. Almost 30% of those employed in this occupation were non-Irish citizens, with employment permits still acting as a source of supply of skills; over 2,100 new permits were issued in 2022 across a range of specialities. Supply from the third level education system is set to expand by 200 additional places by 2026 (beginning with an increase of 60 places each in 2022 and 2023). Given the duration of medical training, however, this increased supply is not expected to have an impact on the labour market in the short-to-medium term. Issues in relation to GPs are being addressed with an announcement that the number of GP training places will be increased to 350 in 2024 from 258 in 2022 and an expansion of the non-EU GP Training Scheme from 50 to 250 by the end of 2024.² However, the increasing demand for medical practitioners as a result of factors such as the roll-out of the Sláintecare Action Plan, the ageing population and the tackling of the lengthy waiting lists (exacerbated as a result of COVID-19) will result in continued shortages for this occupation.</p>															
Therapy profs.	<p>Employment growth was below average for therapy professionals, with levels in 2022 remaining below that of 2020. Although LFS data does not allow for a detailed breakdown of employment in this group, Census data for 2016 and 2022 shows detailed employment as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CSO Census</th> <th>2016</th> <th>2022</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Physiotherapists</td> <td>3,362</td> <td>4,372</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Occupational therapists</td> <td>1,929</td> <td>2,765</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Speech and language therapists</td> <td>1,301</td> <td>1,811</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Therapy professionals n.e.c.</td> <td>2,590</td> <td>4,002</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Despite the lack of overall employment growth in recent years, issues with recruitment resulted in a number of therapist roles (occupational, physiotherapists and speech and language) being added to the Critical Skills Employment Permit List in June 2022. A total of 53 new permits were issued in 2022, primarily for physiotherapists with a small number for occupational and speech & language therapists. The delivery of the Sláintecare report, particularly in terms of community care and mental health services, will require additional staffing in these occupations and, while a combined total of 100 additional training places are planned for occupational, physio, and speech/language therapists in Ireland and Northern Ireland's education system, given the duration of training programmes, recruitment difficulties for these posts are unlikely to ease in the short-to-medium term. However, as employment levels are not increasing and the data does not allow for detailed analysis, it is not possible to determine if shortages exist for this occupation at present.</p>	CSO Census	2016	2022	Physiotherapists	3,362	4,372	Occupational therapists	1,929	2,765	Speech and language therapists	1,301	1,811	Therapy professionals n.e.c.	2,590	4,002
CSO Census	2016	2022														
Physiotherapists	3,362	4,372														
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¹ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS147.pdf>

² <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/06/02/number-of-gp-training-places-to-be-ramped-up-in-bid-to-tackle-workforce-and-workload-crisis/>

Nurses & midwives

**Skills shortage:
Nurses**

The Slaintecare Action Plan 2023 highlights that an additional 4,592 nurses/midwives were employed in the health service since 2020; funding for an additional 149 posts for advanced nurse and midwife practitioners has also been secured. In addition, the Minister for Health has announced funding for 854 additional nursing posts.³ Over 3,000 new employment permits were issued for nurses in 2022, primarily for staff nurses. This reliance on supply from outside of Ireland has resulted in an increasing share of nurses who are non-Irish citizens (at over 30% in quarter 4 2022). Vacancies for nurses appeared frequently in the vacancy data in 2022 (both DSP and OVATE) and difficult-to-fill vacancies in the Recruitment Agency Survey included for staff nurses, theatre, ICU, oncology, nurse managers. Supply from the higher education system is expected to increase, with the announcement in Summer 2023 of an additional 208 places on nursing courses to be made available in Irish higher education institutions and a further 200 places reserved for students from the Republic of Ireland, to be delivered in Northern Ireland⁴. Nonetheless, given the duration of training programmes, demand for nurses is likely to continue to outweigh supply leading to a continued shortage, with replacement demand alone for such a large occupation contributing to continued job openings.

Other healthcare profs. (e.g. pharmacists, psychologists, dentists, radiographers, vets & health services managers)

Employment growth was above the national average for this occupation, although employment in 2022 were similar to 2021 levels. The CSO Census data shows that employment was spread across a large number of roles in 2022, with increases across all within this occupation since 2016.

CSO Census	2016	2022
Pharmacists	4,779	5,945
Health services/public health managers/directors	1,869	3,849
Psychologists	2,345	2,907
Veterinarians	1,898	2,491
Medical radiographers	1,811	2,368
Dental practitioners	2,073	2,289
Health professionals n.e.c.	1,087	1,686
Health care practice managers	1,336	1,616
Social services managers and directors	955	1,485
Ophthalmic opticians	839	996
Podiatrists	503	547

While the numbers employed have increased since 2016, for the most part, the supply from the education and training system has not, and plans to expand training will not have an impact on the potential supply to the labour market in the short-term, given the duration of training required.⁵ This has led to issues for a number of roles within this group; for instance, there is an increasing number of students opting to study veterinary medicine in Poland due to the lack of available places to study in Ireland.⁶ Psychologists and pharmacists were added to the employment permits Critical Skills list in June 2022 although new permits issued in 2022 primarily related to radiographers/sonographers, with a small number issued for dentists and pharmacists. With a quarter of those employed aged 55 years or older, replacement demand alone will create job opportunities in the coming years. Demand remains high across these occupations and issues with recruitment are occurring; however, as the numbers employed are too small across the roles for detailed analysis, evidence of shortages are difficult to determine.

Health associate profs. (e.g. pharma/ medical technicians, dental nurses, paramedics, dispensing optician)

Employment growth was strong for this occupation, particularly between 2021 and 2022. Census data shows that employment grew across all roles in this group between 2016 and 2022, with the strongest growth for pharmaceutical technicians.

CSO Census	2016	2022
Pharmaceutical technicians	3,844	4,894
Medical and dental technicians*	4,267	4,851
Paramedics	1,384	1,674
Health associate professionals n.e.c.	3,317	3,709

Note: no employment data for dental nurses in the Census
** Does not include laboratory technicians which are discussed in Section 10.1*

The number of online job adverts for pharmaceutical technicians grew strongly in 2022 (+14%); skills in demand included, among others pharmaceutical knowledge, the ability to provide customer service & advice, and business skills, such as product sales. A small number of employment permits were issued in 2022 for cardiac physiologists and paramedics. The available data sources do not signal any issues in relation to supply and demand for health associate professional occupations; however, if employment was to continue to increase, recruitment issues may emerge.

³ [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) - Minister Donnelly announces recruitment of an additional 854 nursing posts to implement safe staffing this year

⁴ [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) - Ministers Harris and Donnelly announce significant third level expansion for key healthcare and therapy areas

⁵ In Summer 2023, plans were announced to expand training in pharmacy (+15 places), podiatry (+25 places), clinical measurement science (+34), radiotherapy (+5), dentistry (+63) and veterinary medicine (+230) (www.gov.ie).

⁶ Why are there so many Irish vet students in Poland? ([rte.ie](https://www.rte.ie))