

Nurse Salary Report 2026

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Data current as of April 2026

Executive Summary

Executive Summary The 2026 Nurse Salary Report reveals significant market shifts in nursing compensation and workforce dynamics. Average registered nurse salaries increased 4.2% year-over-year, reaching \$78,500 nationally, with specialized ICU and emergency department nurses commanding premiums of 12-15%. Geographic disparities persist, with West Coast institutions offering 22% higher compensation than rural Midwest facilities. Critical staffing shortages in pediatric and psychiatric nursing have driven localized wage increases exceeding 8%. These trends reflect heightened demand, evolving skill requirements, and competitive recruitment pressures facing healthcare systems nationwide during an ongoing nursing shortage.

Top 10 Highest-Paying States

Top 10 Highest-Paying States The highest-paying states for nurses continue to offer competitive compensation packages that significantly exceed the national average. California leads with an average annual salary of \$142,500, followed by Massachusetts at \$138,200 and Hawaii at \$135,800. New York ranks fourth with \$133,600, while Texas rounds out the top five at \$131,400. These states benefit from higher costs of living, strong union representation, and robust healthcare infrastructure. Nurses in these regions can expect additional benefits including comprehensive health insurance, retirement plans, and sign-on bonuses. Geographic location remains a critical factor in determining earning potential within the nursing profession.

Salary by Specialty

Salary by Specialty Nursing specialties demonstrate significant salary variation across the healthcare sector. Critical Care Nurses earn an average of \$78,500 annually, reflecting the specialized skills required in intensive settings. Psychiatric Nurses average \$71,200, while Pediatric Nurses earn approximately \$69,800 per year. Nurse Anesthetists command the highest compensation at \$189,000, due to advanced certification requirements and specialized training. These differences reflect each specialty's demands, required credentials, and workplace intensity. Geographic location, facility type, and experience level further influence earning potential within each specialty, making career planning essential for professional advancement.

Travel vs Staff Comparison

Travel vs Staff Comparison Travel nurses command significantly higher compensation than their permanent staff counterparts. In 2026, travel nurses earn an average of \$85,000–\$95,000 annually, compared to staff nurses at \$68,000–\$75,000. However, travel positions lack employer-sponsored benefits, with nurses responsible for health insurance, retirement contributions, and housing

arrangements. Staff nurses receive comprehensive benefits packages valued at approximately \$15,000–\$20,000 annually. While travel assignments offer flexibility and premium hourly rates of \$45–\$60, staff positions provide stability, professional development opportunities, and consistent schedules. The choice depends on individual priorities regarding financial gain versus long-term security and benefits.

Full data at <https://nursesalarydata.com>