

February 2021

# Labor Market Analysis

## Physical Therapist Assistants



California  
Community  
Colleges



Prepared by the Central Valley/Mother Lode Center of Excellence

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**COVID-19 Statement:** This report includes employment projection data by Emsi. Emsi’s projections are modeled on recorded (historical) employment figures and incorporate several underlying assumptions, including the assumption that the economy during the projection period will be at approximately full employment or potential output. To the extent that a recession or labor shock, such as the economic effects of COVID-19, can cause long-term structural change, they may impact the projections. At this time, it is not possible to quantify the impact of COVID-19 on projections of industry and occupational employment. Other measures such as unemployment rates and monthly industry employment estimates will reflect the most recent information on employment and jobs in the state and, in combination with input from local employers, may help validate current and future employment needs as depicted here.

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# Summary

Please note the COVID-19 statement on page 2 when considering this report's findings.

This study conducted by the Central Valley/Mother Lode Center of Excellence examines labor market demand, wages, skills, and postsecondary supply for physical therapist assistants. Two related occupations were identified for Bakersfield College: 31-2022, Physical Therapist Aides and 31-2021, Physical Therapist Assistants.

## Key findings:

- **Occupational demand** — Nearly 850 workers were employed in jobs related to physical therapist assistants in 2019 in the South Central Valley/Southern Mother Lode (SCV/SML) subregion. The largest occupation is physical therapist aides with 513 workers in 2019, a projected growth rate of 6% over the next five years, and 62 annual openings.
- **Wages** — Physical therapist assistants earn the highest entry-level wage, \$26.83/hour in the subregion and \$24.73/hour in the region.
- **Employers** — Employers with the most job postings in the subregion are Adventist Health, Feldcare Connects, and Acestack LLC.
- **Occupational titles** — The most common occupational title in job postings in the subregion is physical therapist assistants. The most common job title is physical therapist assistant.
- **Skills and certifications** — The top baseline skill is communication, the top specialized skill is physical therapy, and the top software skill is Prognosis. The most in-demand certification is basic life saving.
- **Education** — A high school diploma and short-term on-the-job training are typically required for physical therapist aides, while an associate degree is the typical entry-level education for physical therapist assistants.
- **Supply** — Analysis of postsecondary completions in the region shows that on average 23 awards were conferred in the Central Valley/Mother Lode region each year.

Based on a comparison of occupational demand and supply, there is an undersupply of 91 trained workers in the subregion and 168 workers in the region. The Center of Excellence recommends that Bakersfield College work with the Healthcare Regional Director, the college's advisory board, and local industry in the expansion of programs to address the shortage of physical therapist assistants in the region.

# Introduction

The Central Valley/Mother Lode Center of Excellence was asked by Bakersfield College to provide labor market information for physical therapist assistants. The geographical focus for this report is the South Central Valley/Southern Mother Lode (SCV/SML) subregion, but regional demand and supply data has been included for broader applicability and use.

The average living wage for a single adult in the South Central Valley/Southern Mother Lode (SCV/SML) subregion is \$10.30/hour.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis of the program and occupational data related to physical therapist assistants resulted in the identification of applicable occupations. The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System codes and titles used in this report are:

- 31-2022, Physical Therapist Aides
- 31-2021, Physical Therapist Assistants

The occupational titles, job descriptions, sample job titles, and knowledge and skills from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and O\*NET OnLine are shown below.

## **Physical Therapist Aides**

**Job Description:** Under close supervision of a physical therapist or physical therapy assistant, perform only delegated, selected, or routine tasks in specific situations. These duties include preparing the patient and the treatment area.

**Knowledge:** Customer and Personal Service, Therapy and Counseling, Education and Training, English Language, Medicine and Dentistry

**Skills:** Active Listening, Social Perceptiveness, Coordination, Monitoring, Service Orientation

## **Physical Therapist Assistants**

**Job Description:** Assist physical therapists in providing physical therapy treatments and procedures. May, in accordance with state laws, assist in the development of treatment plans, carry out routine functions, document the progress of treatment, and modify specific treatments in accordance with patient status and within the scope of treatment plans established by a physical therapist. Generally, requires formal training.

**Knowledge:** Customer and Personal Service, Therapy and Counseling, English Language, Education and Training, Psychology

**Skills:** Active Listening, Monitoring, Social Perceptiveness, Speaking, Active Learning

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<sup>1</sup> The term "living wage" in Center of Excellence reports is calculated by averaging the self-sufficiency wages from the Insight Center's California Family Needs Calculator for each county in the subregion: <https://insightccd.org/tools-metrics/self-sufficiency-standard-tool-for-california/>.

# Occupational Demand

The South Central Valley/Southern Mother Lode subregion employed 849 workers in physical therapist assistant occupations in 2019 (Exhibit 1). The largest occupation is physical therapist aides with 513 workers in 2019. This occupation is projected to grow by 6% over the next five years and has the greatest number of projected annual openings, 62.

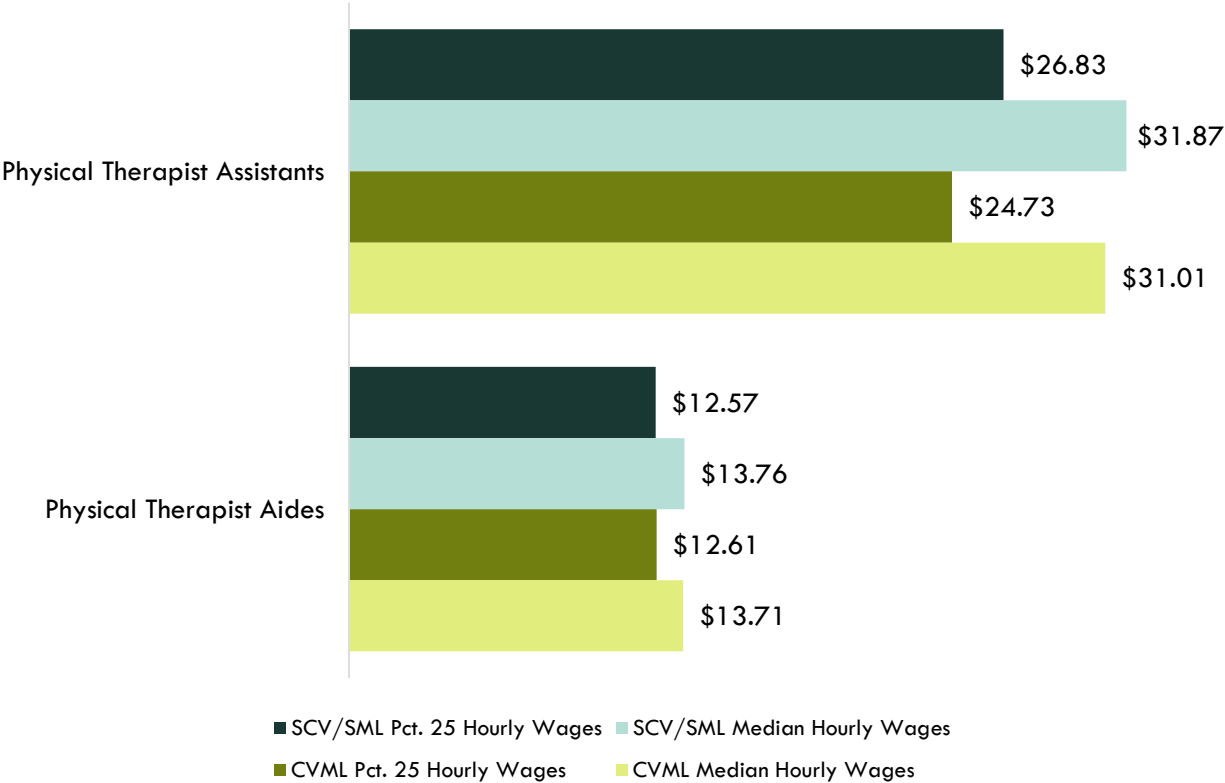
**Exhibit 1. Physical therapist assistant employment and occupational projections in the SCV/SML subregion**

Occupation	2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	5-Year Change	5-Year % Change	Annual Openings
Physical Therapist Aides	513	542	29	6%	62
Physical Therapist Assistants	336	405	69	20%	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>947</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>114</b>

# Wages

Exhibit 2 compares the entry-level and experienced wages of the physical therapist assistant occupations. Physical therapist assistants earn the highest entry-level wage, \$26.83/hour in the subregion and \$24.73/hour in the region.

**Exhibit 2. Entry-level and experienced wage comparison in the SCV/SML subregion and region**



# Job Postings

There were 140 job postings for the two occupations in the SCV/SML subregion from April 2020 to January 2021.<sup>2</sup> The employers with the most job postings are listed in Exhibit 3.

## Exhibit 3. Top employers of physical therapist assistant occupations by number of job postings

Employer	Job Postings	% Job Postings
Adventist Health	11	10%
Feldcare Connects	8	7%
Acestack LLC	4	4%
Focus	4	4%
Vibra Healthcare	4	4%
Continuum Rehab Group	3	3%
Pro Pt	3	3%
Biomechanics Physical Therapy	2	2%
Bridge Home Health Hospice	2	2%
Brighton Rehabilitation	2	2%

Exhibit 4 shows how job postings for the targeted occupations in the SCV/SML subregion are distributed across two O\*NET OnLine occupations. The occupational title physical therapist assistants is listed in 108 job postings. Note how this occupational title dominates the job posting results. Common job titles in postings include physical therapist assistant in 30 job postings, physical therapy aide in 18 job postings, and physical therapist assistant for home health in eight job postings.

## Exhibit 4. Top occupational titles in job postings for physical therapist assistants

Occupational Title	Job Postings	% of Job Postings
Physical Therapist Assistants	108	77%
Physical Therapist Aides	32	23%

## Salaries

Exhibit 5 shows the “Market Salaries” for physical therapist assistant occupations that are calculated by Burning Glass which uses a machine learning model built off of millions of job postings every year, and accounts for adjustments based on locations, industry, skills, experience, education requirements, among other variables.

## Exhibit 5. Salaries for physical therapist assistant occupations

Market Salary Percentile	Salary Amount
10th Percentile	\$25,320
25th Percentile	\$36,312
50th Percentile	\$50,800
75th Percentile	\$55,929
90th Percentile	\$59,708

<sup>2</sup> Other than occupation titles and job titles, the categories below can be counted one or multiple times per job posting, and across several areas in a single posting. For example, a skill can be counted in two different skill types, and an employer can indicate more than one education level.

## Education

Of the 140 job postings, 32 listed an education level preferred for the positions being filled. Of those, 59% requested high school or vocational training, and 41% requested an associate degree (Exhibit 6). A job posting can indicate more than one education level. Hence, the percentages shown in the chart below total more than 100%.

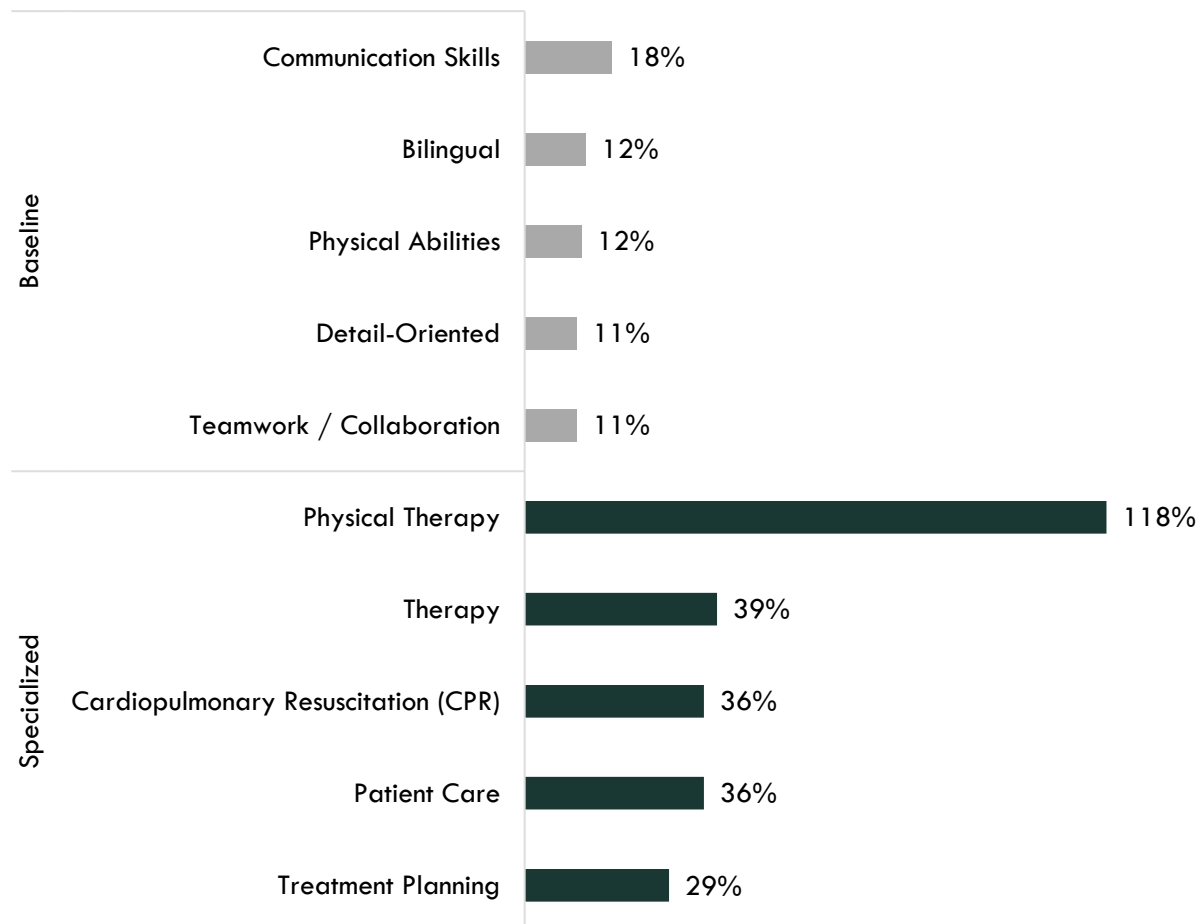
**Exhibit 6. Education levels requested in job postings for physical therapist assistant occupations**

Education level	Job Postings	% of Job Postings
High school or vocational training	19	59%
Associate degree	13	41%

## Baseline and Specialized Skills

Exhibit 7 depicts the top baseline and specialized skills for the targeted occupations. The three most important baseline skills are communication, 18% of job postings, bilingual, 12%, and physical abilities, 12%. The top three specialized skills are physical therapy, 118% of job postings, therapy, 39%, and CPR, 36%.

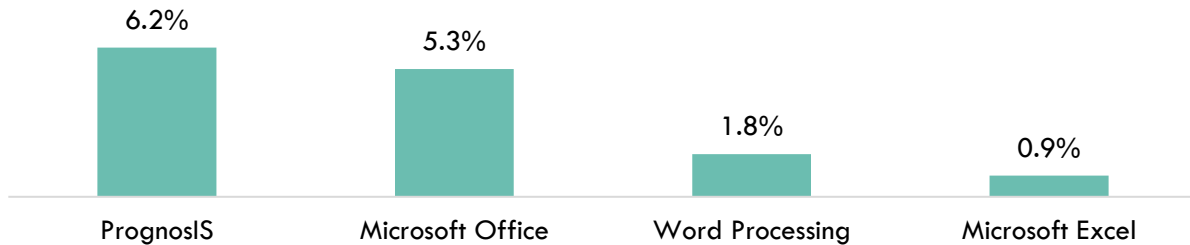
**Exhibit 7. In-demand physical therapist assistant baseline and specialized skills**



## Software Skills

Analysis also included the software skills most in demand by employers. PrognosIS and Microsoft Office were the top two software skills identified in job postings (Exhibit 8).

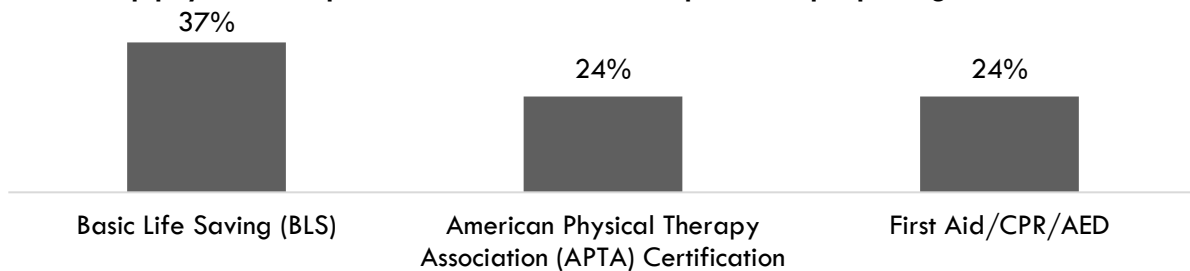
**Exhibit 8. In-demand physical therapist assistant software skills**



## Certifications

Of the 140 job postings, 67 contained certification data. Among those, 37% indicated a need for basic life saving. The next top certifications are American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Certification and First Aid/CPR/AED (Exhibit 9). (Due to the low number of job postings with certifications listed, the chart below may not be representative of the full sample.)

**Exhibit 9. Top physical therapist assistant certifications requested in job postings**



# Education, Work Experience & Training

A high school diploma and short-term on-the-job training are the typical entry-level education and training required for physical therapist aides. An associate degree is the typical entry-level education for physical therapist assistants (Exhibit 10).

**Exhibit 10. Education, work experience, training, and Current Population Survey results for physical therapist assistant occupations<sup>3</sup>**

Occupation	Typical Entry-level Education	Work Experience Required	Typical On-The-Job Training	CPS
Physical Therapist Aides	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Short-term	78.5%
Physical Therapist Assistants	Associate degree	None	None	62.8%

<sup>3</sup> "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/>.



# Supply

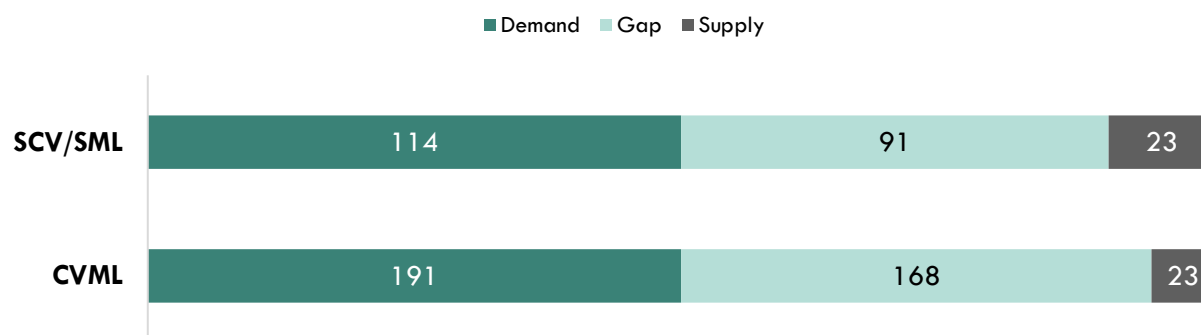
Analysis of program data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Data Mart included the TOP title: Physical Therapist Assistant. Analysis of the last three years of data shows that, on average, 23 awards were conferred in the Central Valley/Mother Lode region each year (Exhibit 11).

**Exhibit 11. Postsecondary supply for physical therapist assistant occupations in the region**

TOP Title	Colleges	Associate Degree	Subtotal
Physical Therapist Assistant	Sequoias	23	23
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>

There is an undersupply of 91 physical therapist assistant workers in the SCV/SML subregion and 168 workers in the region (Exhibit 12).

**Exhibit 12. Physical therapist assistant workforce annual demand and supply in the SCV/SML subregion and region**



## Conclusion

The entry-level wages of the two occupations exceed the SCV/SML subregion’s average living wage. There were 140 job postings in the past year months for occupations related to physical therapist assistants in the subregion. Analysis of skills and certification requirements in job postings indicates:

- The top baseline skill is communication, and the top specialized skill is physical therapy.
- The top software skill is PrognosIS.
- The top certification is a basic life saving.

There is an undersupply of trained workers, a shortage of 91 in the SCV/SML subregion and 168 in the region.

## Recommendation

Based on these findings, it is recommended that Bakersfield College work with the Healthcare Regional Director, the college’s advisory board, and local industry in the expansion of programs to address the shortage of physical therapist assistants in the region.

# Appendix A: Methodology & Data Sources

## Data Sources

Labor market and educational supply data compiled in this report derive from a variety of sources. Data were drawn from external sources, including the Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems Data Mart and the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Below is the summary of the data sources found in this study.

Data Type	Source
Labor Market Information/Population Estimates and Projections/Educational Attainment	Economic Modeling Specialists, Intl. (EMSI). EMSI occupational employment data are based on final EMSI industry data and final EMSI staffing patterns. Wage estimates are based on Occupational Employment Statistics (QCEW and Non-QCEW Employees classes of worker) and the American Community Survey (Self-Employed and Extended Proprietors). Occupational wage estimates also affected by county-level EMSI earnings by industry: <a href="http://economicmodeling.com">economicmodeling.com</a> .
Typical Education Level and On-the-job Training	Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) uses a system to assign categories for entry-level education and typical on-the-job training to each occupation for which BLS publishes projections data: <a href="https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/educational-attainment.htm">https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/educational-attainment.htm</a> .
Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment Estimates	California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division: <a href="http://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov">labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov</a> .
Job Posting and Skills Data	Burning Glass: <a href="http://burning-glass.com/">burning-glass.com/</a> .
Additional Education Requirements/ Employer Preferences	The O*NET Job Zone database includes over 900 occupations as well as information on skills, abilities, knowledge, work activities and interests associated with specific occupations: <a href="http://onetonline.org">onetonline.org</a> .

## Key Terms and Concepts

**Annual Job Openings:** Annual openings are calculated by dividing the number of years in the projection period by total job openings.

**Education Attainment Level:** The highest education attainment level of workers age 25 years or older.

**Employment Estimate:** The total number of workers currently employed.

**Employment Projections:** Projections of employment are calculated by a proprietary Economic Modeling Specialists, Intl. (EMSI) formula that includes historical employment and economic indicators along with national, state and local trends.

**Living Wage:** The cost of living in a specific community or region for one adult and no children. The cost increases with the addition of children.

**Occupation:** An occupation is a grouping of job titles that have a similar set of activities or tasks that employees perform.

**Percent Change:** Rate of growth or decline in the occupation for the projected period; this does not factor in replacement openings.

**Replacements:** Estimate of job openings resulting from workers retiring or otherwise permanently leaving an occupation. Workers entering an occupation often need training. These replacement needs, added to job openings due to growth, may be used to assess the minimum number of workers who will need to be trained for an occupation.

**Total Job Openings (New + Replacements):** Sum of projected growth (new jobs) and replacement needs. When an occupation is expected to lose jobs, or retain the current employment level, number of openings will equal replacements.

**Typical Education Requirement:** represents the typical education level most workers need to enter an occupation.

**Typical On-The-Job Training:** indicates the typical on-the-job training needed to attain competency in the skills needed in the occupation.