WES GLOBAL TALENT BRIDGE

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CAREER PATHWAYS IN ALLIED HEALTH:

Using Your International Education in the U.S.

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INTRODUCTION

Immigrating to the United States is an opportunity to use your international training to either advance in your field or pursue a new career that builds on your education and experience. Because many allied health careers involve obtaining a license or certification—a process that can be costly and time-consuming—it is especially important to fully consider your options.

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The Pathways Guide at a Glance

If you have completed your education in another country and are now starting your career in the United States, you will need to understand to what extent you meet the academic requirements of your chosen career.

- The **Gaining Recognition for Your International Education** section (p. 9) will explain how to determine the U.S. equivalency of your international degree to help you explore career pathways in allied health and other fields.
- The **Educational Pathways in the Field of Allied Health** section (p. 11) provides examples of careers in allied health that may match your qualifications.
- If you want to continue your allied health career in the United States, you may need to obtain a U.S. license to practice. See the **Licensing and Certification Requirements in Allied Health** section (p. 23).
- Not all internationally trained allied health professionals decide to pursue an allied health-related license or certification in the United States, either because of the time and expense involved, because they want to pursue a different career. See the **Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers** section (p. 24).

Let's get started!

Strategies for Success

Ask Lots of Questions

While you may have a strong idea of what your career will be in the United States based on the professional experience you already have, establishing yourself in a new country is a chance to reach new goals and possibilities. Analyzing your career options in the U.S. can be challenging, but by remaining flexible you can use the education and experience you already have to take steps to succeed in the U.S.

As you research your options, ask yourself:

- What are my short term and long term employment goals?
- What options are available to me based on my skills and qualifications?
- What are the steps and requirements in terms of time, costs, and additional training to pursue my goal?
- Who can I talk to about my options?

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Make a Plan

After you've explored some of the career options available to you in the United States, it is time to make decisions and come up with a plan. In the U.S., developing your career path requires a life-long commitment to learning, networking, and taking risks.

A successful plan includes realistic steps and time frames for completion. Your plan should also make it possible for you to work towards multiple goals at once and allow for some setbacks along the way. It will take patience to reach your goals and it is normal to change your mind or adapt to new circumstances as you move forward.

Think about the steps it will take to reach your goal. A clear goal-oriented plan may look something like this:

GOAL: Improve my language skills.

STEPS TO GOAL:

- Take an English language course that suits my needs.
- Meet with an English language conversation partner weekly.
- Learn medical terminology and professional language in my field.
- Read the newspaper every day.

You can use the SMART Goal Worksheet (p. 29) to guide you as you outline your plan.

Take Initiative

While your **academic and professional credentials** are very important in your professional success, so are skills like your communication style, English language level, and ability to adapt to U.S. workplace culture. **Networking** with healthcare professionals you know, meeting professionals in the field, joining a professional association, attending conferences, and volunteering in a hospital or clinic are great ways to practice the skills you will need to succeed in your job.

Finding meaningful work as an immigrant can take time and you may face challenging obstacles. Although many factors are out of your control, try to remain flexible, be persistent, and take initiative. As you explore this guide, you will find a number of helpful resources to support you.

GLOSSARY

Academic and professional credential: The degree, diploma, certification, or license you receive when you complete a program, pass examinations, or meet a set of requirements.

Networking: Interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career.

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YOUR CAREER PATHWAY IN THE UNITED STATES

Like many immigrants, you may initially struggle to gain entry into your professional field in U.S. While you may have adequate knowledge or experience, the challenge often occurs in translating your skills and qualifications in a way that local employers will value and understand. You may also need further education and training, an understanding of your local labor market, and knowledge of how to navigate your options to choose a **career pathway**.

Your career pathway is made up of the educational and professional decisions that will open doors to new opportunities. Education and training are the building blocks of your career—with the skills you acquire, you can earn promotions and take on additional professional responsibilities.

To start thinking about your career options, you will need to understand the difference between regulated and non-regulated professions.

Understanding Regulated Professions

Each state decides which professions it will regulate and what level of formal education or training is required for entry into the field. In the United States, specific authorities or regulatory bodies are responsible for recognizing professional credentials required for state licensing. Since the time and cost associated with licensing varies by state, contact the relevant regulatory body before deciding to proceed with licensing. In this guide, careers usually requiring licensure are clearly marked – but again, this varies from state to state.

Understanding Non-Regulated Professions

Some occupations in the United States are either internally regulated by professional associations, or are entirely non-regulated. However, although less strict than **regulated professions**, certain standards of professional practice or **designations** might still be preferred by employers and professional associations in non-regulated professions. You can demonstrate that you meet these standards through a certification process linked to training programs provided by employers or community colleges.

GLOSSARY

Career pathway: A series of connected education and training programs that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in an industry or occupation.

Regulated professions: Professions that require a license or certification.

Designation: A title earned by an individual through a certification process.

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Can I work as an allied health professional in the United States?

The healthcare industry in the U.S. is highly regulated to protect public health and safety. That means that most healthcare occupations in the U.S. require either a license or **certification** to practice.

The allied health license you may have from your home country is not valid in the U.S. Internationally trained allied health professionals need to meet the same requirements as those educated in the U.S.

In this guide, occupations that require a state certification or licensure process are clearly marked.

Many internationally trained professionals decide not to pursue employment in regulated professions due to the challenges of **relicensing**. The healthcare field provides access to less-regulated employment opportunities in both clinical and non-clinical capacities, often with voluntary certification.

If you decide against relicensing as an allied health professional in the United States, you can still work in the field of allied health in a non-regulated occupation. Some related careers are discussed in the **Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers** section of this guide (p. 24).

GLOSSARY

Certification: A voluntary credentialing process by a non-governmental, private professional association.

Relicensing: Having to meet licensing requirements in the United States, even if you have a license from another country.

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ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Allied health is a broad category of healthcare that encompasses everything that is not part of the medicine, nursing, or pharmacy fields. Allied health professions focus on providing a wide variety of care to individuals, families, and communities—either through direct patient contact, or through administrative, technical, or laboratory work.[1]

Allied health professionals have a vital role in multi-disciplinary health-care teams, with special areas of responsibility. Depending on their level of training, allied health professionals use technical, clinical, or managerial skills. They practice in different settings like hospitals, schools, and clinics; and they can specialize in caring for particular kinds of patients, such as children, the elderly, or patients with special needs.

Working as an Allied Health Professional in the United States

An allied health professional's roles and responsibilities in the United States may be different than in other countries. Internationally trained allied health professionals need to meet the same requirements as their U.S.-educated counterparts, so even if you have many years of experience, you must obtain a new license in the U.S. if you plan to work in a regulated allied health profession.

In the U.S., each state/territory regulates the practice of health care professionals and establishes its own set of requirements and **scope of practice** concerning professional licensure.

Internationally educated allied health professionals can obtain licenses in the U.S., although it can be a costly and time-consuming process.

For example, to register as an occupational therapy assistant in New York in 2019, you would have to pay an initial application fee of $515 for the Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) exam,[2] a licensure fee of $147, and a limited permit fee of $70.[3]

The costs associated with relicensing change over time and vary depending on your state, so check what the specifics are for your location.

GLOSSARY

Scope of practice: The procedures, actions, and processes a practitioner is permitted to undertake in keeping with the terms of their professional license.

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Since allied health requirements vary by state/territory, and because allied health is a broad field, consider these key points:

- Each state/territory in the U.S. is responsible for the licensure of allied health professionals within that jurisdiction. State-specific licensure information can be found by visiting the state government website relevant to your specific profession, or on the websites of some professional associations. For example, here is a **list of state boards for occupational therapy** from the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT).
- Some states, like **Massachusetts**, provide a central webpage with directions on applying for licensure for regulated allied health professions, from athletic trainer to physical therapist assistant. The professions regulated by each state/territory can vary widely.

Roles and Responsibilities

Because allied health is a broad designation and covers a lot of ground, there is no main designation for an allied health professional.

Allied health professions are generally sorted into three groups: direct patient care professions, such as physical therapist or surgical assistant; health education and administration professions; and diagnostic professions, such as radiographer and laboratory technician.[4]

The responsibilities of an allied health professional are determined in large part by the group the particular profession falls into. In the U.S., a sampling of what allied health professionals might be responsible for could include:

- Working with a variety of patients from pediatric to geriatric, or specializing in one area such as counseling, medical billing, or medical diagnostics.
- Operating medical devices and machinery.
- Managing a medical office, including patient data management, scheduling, and insurance billing.
- Observing and recording patient behavior and vital statistics.
- Consulting with physicians and other health care practitioners on treatment plans and options.

Understanding Job Titles

The roles and responsibilities of allied health professionals are highly dependent on areas of expertise and experience. For example, when searching for employment as an allied health professional, you may see job postings with the following titles:

- Phlebotomist
- Dental Assistant
- Nutritionist
- Cardiographic Technician
- Speech Language Pathologist

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- Respiratory Therapist
- Paramedic
- Genetic Counselor
- Health Educator
- Health Administrator

You can read more about academic and professional credentials in the Educational Pathways in the Field of Allied Health section of this guide (p. 11).

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GAINING RECOGNITION FOR YOUR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Your education is the foundation of your career. Although there may be challenges to using your international credentials in the United States, you do not have to start over. For an internationally trained professional, exploring career pathways begins with an understanding of the value of the education you received in your home country.

Obtaining an **international credential evaluation** is often the first step an immigrant takes to gain access to educational and employment opportunities in the U.S. A credential evaluation helps you gain recognition for your previous studies by considering your country's educational system, the status of the institution you attended, the content of the program, and any entry and graduation requirements.

A credential evaluation compares the education you received in your country to a similar degree or diploma in the United States and provides a **degree equivalency**.

In the United States, employers, licensing boards, and universities use credential evaluations to judge the quality and level of your academic achievements in comparison to U.S.-educated candidates.

- Universities, for example, use the information to make admissions decisions and to award transfer credit or advanced standing in a program.
- Employers and licensing boards refer to credential evaluations to evaluate whether or not you meet their academic requirements.

Unlike many other countries, the U.S. does not have a national education ministry to evaluate international degrees. As a result, some academic institutions and state licensing boards—and nearly all employers—rely on agencies like **World Education Services** (WES) to examine official documents. Others perform their own evaluations or use preferred agencies.

Before requesting a credential evaluation from any agency, contact the institution that needs the evaluation to understand their requirements. These institutions are responsible for the final recognition decision.

GLOSSARY

International credential evaluation: An expert analysis of a international degree or diploma.

Degree equivalency: The extent to which a degree or diploma earned abroad compares to a similar U.S credential.

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If you are exploring a new career, it may be helpful to have an idea of the U.S. equivalency of your international credentials.

WES allows you to preview the U.S. equivalency of your highest completed degree by using the **WES free equivalency tool**.

Note: This preview does not replace a formal credential evaluation that may be needed for official purposes.

Many regulated professions in the U.S. require you to have your international degree evaluation conducted by a professional association or preferred provider. If you are applying for a license or certification, always remember to check with your state's licensing board and/or educational institution to ensure that a WES evaluation is recognized and accepted. If so, you can apply for a WES Credential Evaluation.

Watch the* WES Credential Evaluation & Recognition video *to learn more about credential evaluation.

Advanced Standing and Transfer Credit

If you are applying to an academic program, you may be eligible for advanced standing or transfer credit for previous education.

- Advanced standing: This means you may be allowed to skip prerequisites for admission into a course, or not repeat a required course, reducing the time to complete a degree.
- Transfer credit: This means that your previous education is counted toward the total number of credits required for the degree.

For internationally educated individuals, advanced standing and transfer credit is usually determined at the time of application through an international credential evaluation.

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EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS IN THE FIELD OF ALLIED HEALTH

Once you know the value of your international degree, you can use the information in this section to move forward in your career.

Allied health is a growing and rewarding field that offers many exciting career options. In this section you will find some examples of allied health careers that you may be qualified for, including their key roles and responsibilities and where further education may be helpful. You will also find information on how to meet the academic requirements for some popular allied health careers.

There are many ways to enter the allied health field. Some internationally trained allied health professionals gain U.S. experience in entry-level professions as they pursue licensing and certification. Others begin by enrolling in degree programs to gain access to higher-level jobs.

Many allied health careers require only vocational training or a post-secondary certificate, rather than a full two-year associate degree. These careers require a smaller investment of time and money into your re-education, but often have lower salaries and may offer fewer opportunities for professional advancement.

HELPFUL TIPS

Research shows that immigrants who add a U.S. degree or certification to their international education and training are more likely to progress faster in their careers.

A career pathway is a series of "stackable credentials"—achievements that build on each other based on continuing education, specialization, and certification to allow you to move up a career ladder.

Because allied health is such a broad and varied field, the following sections of this guide will include a spectrum of examples rather than comprehensive information on all possible allied health careers. See **Appendix A** (p. 32) for links to resources with more comprehensive information on the wide variety of allied health career paths.

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POST-SECONDARY CERTIFICATE

Phlebotomist

- Draw blood for purposes of medical testing, blood donation, or research.
- Calm patients and donors who are nervous about having their blood drawn.
- Record patient/donor information and maintain equipment

***California, Louisiana, Nevada, and Washington require certification of phlebotomists. Although certification is not required in other states/territories, most employers prefer candidates who have earned a voluntary Phlebotomy Technician certification such as those offered by:* National Center for Competency Testing, National Healthcareer Association, American Society for Clinical Pathology, National Phlebotomy Association, American Medical Technologists.**

Massage Therapist

- Determine the source of clients' muscle pain and tension.
- Relieve that pain and tension through manual manipulation of the client's muscles and other soft tissues.

45 states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapy through licensure and/or certification. Cities/towns in those states that do not regulate may have regulations at the local level.

Medical Assistant

- Perform a variety of administrative and clinical tasks, such as taking and recording patient medical history, checking patients' heart rate and blood pressure, and assisting doctors during physical exams.
- In some states, may administer medications or injections to patients.
- May work in doctor's offices, hospitals, or other healthcare facilities.

Certification not required.

Optician

- Measure customers' eyes and faces for a proper eyeglasses fit, and help them choose the appropriate style for their needs. Adjust eyewear once it is ready.
- Write work orders for ophthalmic laboratory technicians to fill customers' eyeglass or contact lens prescriptions.
- Perform administrative tasks such as keeping sales records, tracking customer prescriptions, and ordering inventory.

***Licensure required in about half of all states/territories. Contact your* state opticianry board *for information on local requirements. Voluntary certification is offered by* The American Board of Opticianry (ABO) and National Contact Lens Examiners (NCLE).**

ASSOCIATE DEGREE

Paramedic

- Respond to emergency calls, and assess patient condition and perform emergency medical procedures in the field.
- Unlike Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), paramedics may also administer medications and operate complex medical equipment, such as EKGs.
- Safely transport patients to hospital – usually in an ambulance, but sometimes by helicopter or airplane.
- Document observations of patient condition and what treatment was provided, and communicate these with doctors and nurses upon arrival at hospital.
- Must already be EMT certified in order to begin paramedic training. Certification is by state/territory, rather than through a national association, although many states accept the **National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT)** certification.[5]

Licensure required.

Surgical Assistant

- Prepare operating rooms for surgery, including preparation of surgical equipment, checking that equipment is in working order, and ensuring that supplies are sufficient and available.
- Prepare patients for surgery.
- Assist doctors during surgery.
- Regulation of surgical assistants varies widely by state/territory. Some require licensure, some require certification, and some require registration.[6] Even in states/territories where no credentialing is required, voluntary certification is recommended.

Certification is available through the* American Board of Surgical Assistants (ABSA), *the* National Surgical Assistant Association (NSAA), *and the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA), which offers* Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) *and* Certified Surgical First Assistant (CSFA) *credentials.

- There may be alternative processes to obtaining certification depending on your state/territory. You may wish to check with the appropriate board for more information.

Case Study: Lida

Lida Khorasani is a surgical assistant from Iran with a degree from Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, who immigrated to the U.S. four years ago. She spoke no English upon her arrival in Portland, Maine; and living with her nephew's family who all speak Farsi, has had little opportunity to practice. With only basic English, Lida was unable to seek work as a surgical assistant, and considered herself fortunate to find a job as a home health care aide. But the pay was low and Lida missed the excitement and intellectual stimulation of working in a hospital environment. The irregular scheduling demands of Lida's job made it impossible for her to attend local ESL classes, so she signed up for an online course that she could attend during the little available time she had. She was able to make enough progress during the year to be able to sign up for a Medical English course. She also found a new job with more regular hours so that she could start volunteering at a local hospital, which allowed her to make connections in her local medical community and become more confident in her medical English. Her hard work is paying off: Lida has just been accepted to the surgical technologist training program at that same hospital—a program that will only take one year (compared to a two-year associate degree to qualify for surgical assistant jobs). Although she will not have the same level of professional responsibility that she had as a surgical assistant in Iran, Lida is excited at the prospect of getting back into the operating room and working as part of a surgical team again.

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Diagnostic Medical Sonographer and Cardiovascular Technologist

- Operate diagnostic imaging equipment.
- Ensure that images or test results are of sufficient quality and adequately cover areas required for accurate diagnosis.
- Read and interpret diagnostic information in order to summarize results for physicians.
- Regularly maintain imaging equipment, and prepare it for each use.
- While one-year certificate programs are available, most employers prefer to hire candidates with an associate or even a bachelor's degree.

Licensure of sonographers and other medical imaging professionals is currently required in only four states: New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Oregon.[7] However, it is possible that more states will continue to pass licensure requirements in the coming years.

Certification not required, but most employers prefer to hire candidates with a professional certification, as many insurance companies and Medicare will only pay for procedures performed by certified technicians. Certifications are available from the* American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonographers, Cardiovascular Credentialing International, *and* American Registry of Radiologic Technologists.

- ***Because certifications are so specific (i.e. breast sonography), many technicians hold more than one, which gives them a wider variety of professional opportunities.***

Many employers also prefer to hire candidates with Basic Life Support (BLS) certification, which is available from a number of vendors and organizations.

Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technician

- Prepare specimens (bodily fluids including blood and urine, or tissue samples) for testing.
- Test specimens, for diagnostic purposes. Record whether findings are normal or abnormal.
- Perform less complex tests than laboratory technologists, usually by operating automated machinery.
- Eleven states plus Puerto Rico require licensure of laboratory personnel: California, Hawaii, Florida, New York, North Dakota, Tennessee, Louisiana, Nevada, West Virginia, Montana, and Georgia.[8] Licensure requirements vary by state/territory, but most require certification in order to obtain licensure.

Certification not required (unless for purposes of obtaining licensure), but many employers prefer to hire candidates with a professional credential. Certification is available through the* American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) *and* American Medical Technologists.

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Medical Records and Health Information Technician

- Electronically sort and maintain data on patients' health, while keeping it both accessible and secure.
- Take note of patient outcomes for quality assurance.
- Use classification software and assign appropriate clinical codes to allow medical data to be sorted and searched for insurance reimbursement and statistical analysis.
- While you may be able to find work with just a post-secondary certificate, some employers prefer to hire candidates who have an associate degree.

Certification may be required, depending on job responsibilities and location. Many states and facilities require cancer registrars to obtain a* Certified Tumor Registrar (CTR) *credential. A more general option for professional certification is the* Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) *credential.

BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologist

- Test specimens (bodily fluids including blood and urine, or tissue samples) for diagnostic purposes. Record whether findings are normal or abnormal.
- Perform more complex tests than laboratory technicians, often manually.
- Report findings to physicians.
- Supervise laboratory technicians.
- Eleven states plus Puerto Rico require licensure of laboratory personnel: California, Hawaii, Florida, New York, North Dakota, Tennessee, Louisiana, Nevada, West Virginia, Montana, and Georgia.[9] Licensure requirements vary by state/territory, but most require certification in order to obtain licensure.

Certification not required (unless for purposes of obtaining licensure), but many employers prefer to hire candidates with a professional credential. Certification is available through the* American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) *and* American Medical Technologists*.

- Medical lab scientists with international training can directly apply for the ASCP certification after obtaining a credential report (without obtaining an Associate degree). These route are available through the **ASCP Board of Certification**.

Respiratory Therapist

- Examine patients with breathing or cardiopulmonary issues, and perform diagnostic tests on them.
- Help physicians develop appropriate treatment plans.
- Administer a variety of treatment protocols, from medication to physiotherapy.

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- Educate patients and their families on the proper way to take medications and care for/use necessary equipment.
- While you can find work as a respiratory therapist with just an associate degree, many employers prefer to hire candidates with a bachelor's degree.
- Licensure required in every state but Alaska, plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. Licensure requirements vary by state, but generally include a requirement that candidates hold a professional certification.[10]

***Certification required in states/territories that require it for purposes of obtaining licensure. Certification available from the* National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC).**

Dietician/Nutritionist

- Assess patients' nutritional needs
- Educate patients on how to adjust their food intake and nutrition in order to improve their general health, or to manage a health condition.
- Help patients develop meal plans that support their goals, while working within the constraints of their budgets and food preferences.
- Monitor patients' progress and adjust nutrition plans as necessary.
- May specialize in working with certain populations, such as adolescents, or in managing certain diseases, such as diabetes or celiac.
- After graduation, most dieticians and nutritionists complete an internship consisting of several hundred hours of supervised training. 1,200 hours are required in order to be eligible for the **Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)** certification, which many employers require.

Forty-seven states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia require licensure and/or certification.[11]

Recreational Therapist

- Assess patients' needs based on a variety of factors, including patient observation, test results, medical records, and consultation with the patients themselves, their families, and their healthcare teams.
- Design and implement recreation-based treatment programs to support people with physical, intellectual, or emotional disabilities, or who are recovering from injury or illness.
- Take patients' needs and interests into account when developing treatment plan. May employ a variety of recreational activities to treat patients, including fine arts (music, painting, dance), movement (organized sports and games), water therapy, animal-assisted therapy, and social outings.

***Licensure not required, but many employers require a* Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) *credential. Activity-specific, optional certifications can also be earned from specialty organizations such as the* Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT) *or the* Aquatic Therapy and Rehab Institute (ATRI).**

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Case Study: Adnan

Adnan Atiyeh is a 38-year-old occupational therapist with a degree from Damascus University. He fled the increasing violence in Syria with his wife and children in 2012 and was resettled in Michigan along with many other Syrian refugees. Adnan had the advantage of already speaking proficient English, so he hoped to immediately pursue licensure as an occupational therapist upon his arrival in the U.S. However, Adnan quickly learned that to take the exam, he would need far more detailed documentation of his education than his university could provide in the midst of war. Adnan was forced to accept that he would not be able to simply pick up his career where he had left it in Syria, but decided that it was worth it to start his occupational therapy education over again so that he could qualify for licensure. It took some time, but he was ultimately able to obtain an official transcript from his university, which was enough for him to apply for a credential evaluation so he could apply to U.S. occupational therapy master's programs. In the meantime, his work experience specializing in geriatrics back in Syria allowed him to find employment as a recreational therapist at a nursing home, as Michigan does not require licensure or certification for recreational therapists. Adnan enjoys the work and is now working hard in his master's program so that he can return to occupational therapy as soon as possible.

Medical and Health Services Manager/Healthcare Administrator

- Direct strategy and implementation of healthcare services for an entire medical facility, a specific department, or a private practice.
- Stay informed of changes in healthcare regulations and technology, and adapt services and policies accordingly.
- Supervise staff.
- Manage the finances of the facility/department.
- Coordinate and collaborate with senior medical staff and department heads.
- While you can find work with just a bachelor's degree, some employers may prefer a master's degree.

Licensure and certification requirements vary by location and type of facility; for instance, all states require that nursing home administrators be licensed, and some require licensure for administrators of assisted living facilities. Other than these two types of facilities, most do not require licensure.

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- Certification is not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment. Some available certifications include **Certified Medical Manager (CMM)**, **Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA)**, and **Certified Nursing Home Administrator (CNHA)/Certified Assisted Living Administrator (CALA)**.

MASTER'S DEGREE

Many master's and doctoral programs for allied health professions only require three years of undergraduate study, rather than a full four-year bachelor's degree (although those same programs may still give preference to applicants who have completed all four years). Some universities also offer combined bachelor's and master's or doctoral programs, which allow students to complete both an undergraduate and a graduate degree together in a shorter span of time than it would take to complete each one individually. Contact the school you are interested in attending to find out about their specific requirements.

Occupational Therapist

- Evaluate patients' medical history, assessing their conditions and needs by asking questions, performing tests, and watching them perform specific tasks.
- Design and implement treatment programs to support people with physical, intellectual, or emotional disabilities, or who are recovering from injury or illness, in the activities of daily living.
- Evaluate patients' everyday environments (home, school, work), and identify potential improvements to those environments that could ease the patients' difficulties with related tasks.
- Educate patients' families, schools, and employers regarding patients' recommended care and accommodations.
- Suggest assistive equipment that could help patients, such as wheelchairs or adaptive eating tools, and educate them in the proper use of said equipment.

Licensure *required.*

- Voluntary post-licensure **board and specialty certifications** denote a high level of expertise in a specific field, such as gerontology or feeding, eating, and swallowing.

Speech-Language Pathologist

- Evaluate patients' difficulties with speech, language, or swallowing.
- Design and implement treatment programs to support patients' needs and goals.
- Educate patients' families on how best to help their loved ones deal with their communication and swallowing disorders.
- May specialize in treating a certain age group, or in treating people with a specific condition, such as those recovering from a stroke.

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Every state regulates the practice of speech language pathologists, either through licensure or registration.

- Certification is not required except in cases where it is a **mandatory part** of obtaining licensure. However, many employers prefer to hire candidates who hold a **Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP)**.

Anesthesiologist Assistant

- Work under the supervision of a licensed anesthesiologist.
- Through patient history and testing, evaluate patients' physical condition as it relates to the anesthesia care plan.
- Prepare patients for anesthesia by assisting with preliminary procedures such as catheterization.
- Ensure that anesthesia equipment is in good working order, and calibrate it before each use.
- Administer anesthesia, and monitor and adjust it as necessary throughout each procedure.

Licensure required in 15 states plus Guam; two states (Michigan and Texas) allow anesthesiologist assistants to work by "physician delegation," or at the discretion of the supervising anesthesiologist. Anesthesiologist assistants can also work at any Veterans Affairs hospital that uses the TRICARE insurance program.[12]

  - Licensure generally requires **certification**.
  - This is an emerging career, and not currently available in all states/territories. However, the demand for anesthesiologist assistants is growing rapidly, so it is a career worth considering depending on your **location**.

Orthotist and Prosthetist

- Design and create orthopedic and prosthetic devices based on physicians' prescriptions and patients' specifications (orthopedic devices being supportive equipment like joint braces, and prostheses being artificial body parts such as an artificial replacement leg).
- Teach patients how to use their devices, and how to properly care for them.
- Adjust devices to achieve ideal fit, and repair or replace them as necessary.
- After graduating with a master's degree, orthotists and prosthetists must complete a one-year training **residency**. Those who wish to become certified in both orthotics and prosthetics must either complete separate one-year residencies in each discipline, or a special 18-month combined residency program.

Licensure required in 15 states, certification required in an additional two states.[13] Even in states where it is not required, many employers prefer to hire candidates who hold certification.

Genetic Counselor

- Assess patients' risk of inheriting or passing on genetic conditions.
- Provide resources and support to patients at risk of inheriting or passing on genetic conditions.

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- Prepare consultation reports for patients and their physicians explaining complex genetic information.
- Explain to patients about their options for genetic testing, as well as the potential risks, benefits, and limitations of the tests.

Licensure ***is currently required in 23 states.*** **Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC) certification** ***is not required except in cases where it is a mandatory part of obtaining licensure. However, many employers prefer to hire candidates who hold certification even in states where it is not required.***

Physician Assistant

- Take patients' medical histories.
- Examine patients, order diagnostic tests, and provide diagnoses.
- Treat patients' illnesses and injuries, including prescribing medicine, and educate patients and their families on appropriate care for medical conditions.
- Physician assistant master's degree programs often require that applicants already have some experience in patient care, generally from having worked as an EMT, paramedic, nurse, or nursing assistant. Sometimes, this experience requirement may also be fulfilled through volunteer work in a hospital or other medical setting.

Licensure required. All candidates must pass the **Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE)*****. Licensure laws require that all physician assistants work under the supervision of a licensed physician.***

DOCTORAL DEGREE

Audiologist

- Examine, diagnose, and treat patients with ear-related issues such as hearing and balance.
- Fit hearing aids.
- Educate patients and their families on alternative methods of communication, such as lip reading or assistive technology.

Licensure required.

- Certification may also be required by some states or employers. The **American Board of Audiology (ABA)** offers three different specialty certifications, and the **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)** offers an audiologist certification as well.

Physical Therapist

- Help ill or injured patients manage physical pain by teaching them how to improve their movement habits and by applying hands-on therapy.
- Study patients' medical history and all notes from nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professionals.

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- Diagnose patients' problems and produce customized plans of care, taking into account the patients' goals, expected timeline, and expected outcomes.
- Use a variety of therapies including exercise, stretching techniques, specialized equipment, and more to help alleviate patients' pain and increase their mobility and strength, as well as prevent further or future injury.

Licensure required, and passing the* National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) *is required for licensure in all states. Some states may also require a background check and an exam on the law related to the practice of physical therapy.

- Physical therapists who plan to pursue post-licensure board certification may wish to complete a one-year **residency** training program in their field of specialization. Board certifications are currently offered in: Acute Care, Cardiovascular & Pulmonary, Clinical Electrophysiology, Geriatrics, Neurology, Oncology, Orthopedics, Pediatrics, Sports, Women's Health, and Wound Management.

Optometrist

- Examine patients' eyes and related parts of the visual system.
- Diagnose and treat vision problems, as well as diseases and injuries of the eyes.
- Evaluate whether patients' eye/vision trouble may be a symptom of a larger health problem such as diabetes or hypertension.
- Prescribe eyeglasses or contact lenses, and sometimes medication.
- Perform minor surgeries on the eyes.

Licensure *required. Some states also require that candidates pass a clinical exam or an exam on the law related to the practice of optometry.*

- After completing their doctoral degree, optometrists may pursue a one-year residency training program in an area of specialization. A residency also fulfills one of the requirements for post-licensure board **certification**, should you decide to pursue this highest credential through the American Board of Optometry.

Chiropractor

- Assess patients' condition, and perform diagnostic tests.
- Treat patients' neuromusculoskeletal problems, which can involve nerves, bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments.
- Treatment may include spinal and joint adjustments, massage, ultrasound therapy, and heat/cold applications.

. **Licensure *required. Many states also require that applicants pass a background check and an exam on the law related to the practice of chiropractic.***

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LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS IN ALLIED HEALTH

This section of the guide provides general information on licensing to guide you as you move forward.

Licensure for Allied Health Professions

Allied health careers vary widely in their licensure and certification requirements. Generally, most allied health professions are regulated in at least some states/territories in order to protect public health and safety. In many cases, earning a professional certification is a required part of the licensing process. In cases where licensure is not required by law for a certain profession in a certain state/territory, it is likely that employers still show a strong preference for employees who hold voluntary certification.

Licensure is specific to the state/territory where you earn the license, and except in cases of interstate recognition/reciprocity, a license from one state will not be valid in another location. Certification, on the other hand, is generally (though not always) granted by national organizations, and recognized across state/territory borders throughout the U.S.

In the **Educational Pathways in The Field of Allied Health** section (p. 11), each profession listed indicates whether licensure and/or certification is required, and provides links to further information.

Licensing and certification take time. Make sure to plan sufficient time for this process.

Interstate Licensing Agreements: Working in Other States

Interstate licensing agreements, also referred to as reciprocity, are arrangements that allow a person licensed in one state/territory to have that licensure recognized in another state/territory. The details of such agreements vary by profession and location, but generally speaking, an allied health professional who is seeking to have their licensure recognized in another jurisdiction must apply to the new state/territory for recognition, and each state/territory will have its own criteria that must be met. Often, one of these criteria is a requirement that the applicant take an exam on the new state/territory's laws regarding the practice of that profession. Sometimes, a background check will also be required. For more specific information regarding your profession, contact the regulatory board for the state/territory in which you hope to seek reciprocity.

The information presented in this guide should not be considered exhaustive. It is always important to consult state licensing boards and professional associations for the latest and most authoritative guidance.

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TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND USING THEM IN RELATED OR ALTERNATIVE CAREERS

Transferable Skills

Many immigrants find that they may not be qualified for the same job they had in their home country because job titles and requirements in their field are different in the United States. On account of a lengthy licensing process or a need for immediate employment, they may pursue other options that use their training and experience.

The key to finding alternative paths to a fulfilling career is to identify your skills (what you know how to do), knowledge (what you know), competencies (what you are good at), and aptitudes (what is easy for you to learn) that can be useful in a related or alternative career. These **transferable skills** are essential for career success and will enable you to adapt to changing circumstances, especially when your education and experience are from another country.

As you identify your transferable skills, it can be helpful to think about the difference between *hard skills* and *soft skills*. Employers place great value on *soft skills*, such as your ability to communicate, lead others, organize projects, and work effectively on a team—skills you probably already use on a daily basis. You can also apply your more technical *hard skills*, such as computer skills, foreign language fluency, and understanding specialized vocabulary, to a completely different career.

Soft skills in particular depend on your ease and ability to communicate in English, which can be a challenge when it is not your first language. In order for your soft skills to benefit you in a U.S. job search, you must practice both your written and spoken English, and familiarize yourself with English terminology that is specific to your field. You may want to consider taking a course or obtaining self-study materials that will teach you the vocabulary specific to working in your industry. Some offerings for learning English for allied health are:

- Print:
    - Glendinning, Eric. **Professional English in Use: Medicine**. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
    - Glendinning, Eric and Beverly Holmström. **English in Medicine: A Course in Communication Skills**. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
        - Note: Although the books listed above are intended for non-native English speakers looking for work in the U.K., they do provide helpful resources for allied health professionals in the U.S.
    - Johannsen, Kristin L., et al. **English for Health Sciences**. Heinle ELT, 2006.

GLOSSARY

Transferable skills: Skills developed in one situation or occupation that can be transferred to another context.

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- Online Self-Study:
    - **English Health Train** is an online curriculum designed for ESL teachers to use with students in the classroom, but it can also be used as a curriculum for self-study. It consists of 320 hours of English activities in five major healthcare related themes, including 40 hours of web-based listening exercises.
    - **MedicalEnglish.com** offers both self-study and teacher-guided courses.
- Online Course:
    - **English for Healthcare** is an online curriculum designed for ESL teachers to use with students in the classroom, but it can also be used as a curriculum for self-study. It consists of 320 hours of English activities in five major healthcare related themes, including 40 hours of web-based listening exercises.
    - **Clinical Terminology for International and U.S. Students** is a 15-hour online course offered by the University of Pittsburgh.
    - **English for Medical Professionals** is an 8-hour course of one-on-one online tutoring via Skype.

Are you including your transferable skills on your résumé?

Allied health professionals typically have the following skills and expertise that could be applied to a different career:

- Monitoring, assessing, and evaluating complex situations.
- Managing multiple tasks simultaneously.
- Identifying goals and designing clear roadmaps for achieving them.
- Keeping detailed records.
- Collaborating with other professionals on an interdisciplinary team.
- Managing crises.

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Related and Alternative Careers in Allied Health

Why consider a different career?

Finding employment in a related or alternative job can:

- Open doors to new career possibilities.
- Provide income while you work toward your license.
- Grow your **professional network** in the United States.
- Help you gain American work experience.

If you have spent many years committed to an occupation, it is understandable to feel that your career—just like your relationships, hobbies, and beliefs—is a key part of your identity. It is not unusual to experience a sense of identity loss or failure at having to explore a **new career path**. In the United States, however, going back to school to switch careers is quite common.

Some of the careers described in this section require additional education or training. It is possible to find options that take only a few months, as well as more in-depth options that can take a year or more.

Related Careers

Related careers are jobs that are connected in some way to your previous profession. For example, if you were a physical therapist, then a related career might be working as a physical therapist assistant [https://www.apta.org/AboutPTAs/]. It is not the same career because you would no longer be the primary physical therapy provider and would have to work under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist, but it is related because you would still be working in the field of physical therapy and utilizing your professional knowledge and experience.

The field of allied heath encompasses a wide variety of careers, all of which are related to each other because they all relate to health care. If your previous career was an allied health profession, but you feel it may be too difficult or costly to pursue that same career in the U.S., then consider choosing a different career from the long menu of allied health professions – many of which require minimal investments of time and money in order to start practicing. This guide has chosen a variety of examples to highlight in the **Educational Pathways in the Field of Allied Health** section (p. 11), but a more comprehensive list of allied health careers is included in **Appendix A** (p. 32) at the end of this guide.

GLOSSARY

Professional network: Acquaintances with whom you stay in contact based on professional rather than personal connections.

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For example, if you were educated and worked as an occupational therapist before coming to the U.S., but a credential evaluation did not find your previous education to be equivalent to a U.S. occupational therapy master's degree, then you would have to earn a U.S. occupational therapy master's degree in order to become a licensed occupational therapist in the U.S. This would take 2-3 years of full-time study and may be quite expensive. If you were not willing or able to make that kind of investment of time and money into re-licensing, then you might choose to become a recreational therapist instead, or maybe a respiratory therapist or even a medical records technician—all related careers and any one of which would require far less time and money to achieve the necessary education and licensure or certification.

Examples of Alternative Careers

Alternative careers are careers outside of the field of healthcare in which you can use the skills and knowledge you gained as an allied health professional.

Consider these types of careers if you are interested in exploring a different career path.

Customer Service Representative

- Interact with customers, with the goal of resolving their questions or concerns to the mutual satisfaction of both the customer and your employer.
- Provide customers with information about your employer's products and services.
- Document the details of your interactions with customers, and how you ultimately resolved their concerns.
- May interact with customers face to face, over the phone, through email, or online via live chat.
- A high school diploma is sufficient, and on-the-job training is usually provided.

Administrative Assistant

- Perform routine administrative tasks to support office staff, including filing, preparing reports and other documents, and maintaining databases.
- Manage office communications, including phone, mail, fax, and email.
- Handle office scheduling, including external appointments and internal staff meetings.
- A high school diploma is sufficient for entry-level positions if you have experience using standard office computer software. Higher level positions may require a bachelor's degree.

Medical Sales Representative

- Provide physicians and hospitals with information and customer service to purchase new medical devices, products and supplies.
- Requires the ability to make presentations and to manage a region or caseload of clients.
- Educational requirements vary and on-the-job training is usually provided.

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Health Insurance Claims Specialist

- Apply knowledge of medical terminology and diagnostic coding to process medical insurance claims and resolve billing issues.
- A high school diploma is sufficient, but employers typically prefer to hire candidates with bachelor's degrees.

Technical Writer

- Prepare instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles, and other resources to clearly communicate complex information.
- Work in a variety of industries.
- A college degree is usually required, as well as experience or expertise in a specific subject.

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SMART GOAL WORKSHEET

Now that you have reviewed this guide, the next step is to think about your career plan.
We recommend using Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Based (SMART) goals.
You can use this SMART goal template to help you identify your next steps.

GOAL	SPECIFIC	MEASURABLE	ACHIEVABLE	RELEVANT	TIME-BASED
What do you want to achieve?	Who? What? Why? Where? When?	How much? How often? How many?	Can it be done?	Is it relevant to your ultimate vision?	When?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN THE FIELD OF ALLIED HEALTH

You can explore the following helpful resources for more information on education, employment, licensing, and financial assistance to pursue a career in the field of allied health.

Educational Resources

- ExploreHealthCareers.org, a website devoted to information about allied health careers, maintains a **webpage on educational resources**. Their **State Resources for Health Career Education** page also includes many links to educational and training resources.
- The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) offers an **allied health program search tool**, searchable by profession, location, and degree level. NOTE: the database only includes programs for 28 allied health professions.
- **AllAlliedHealthSchools.com** is a website devoted to educational programs for allied health careers. It includes a multi-step program search tool, which is searchable first by career, and then refined by location vs. online degree, and degree level.
- The **Allied Health Centralized Application Service (AHCAS)** allows you to apply to many different schools with one application. The AHCAS only includes programs in radiologic & imaging sciences, laboratory sciences, and respiratory therapy.

Career/Employment Resources

- **ExploreHealthCareers.org** offers comprehensive information about a wide variety of health careers, including a **"career explorer" tool** searchable by number of years of education you are willing to pursue and minimum salary you want to earn, a page with **state-specific career resources**, and a **job search tool**. NOTE: jobs database includes all health careers, including doctor, nurse, and pharmacist, not just allied health careers.
- **The Welcome Back Initiative** helps internationally trained health professionals re-enter their careers in the United States. There are 10 Welcome Back Centers across the U.S.
- **HospitalRecruiting.com** is a healthcare jobs website with a page devote to allied health **job listings**, as well as a **career resources blog**.
- Allied Health Job Café has **job listings** searchable by specialty, location, and experience. They also offer online virtual **career fairs**, and maintain a **career resources page** with sections devoted to healthcare news, law, career trends, technology, and licensure/ certification.
- **AlliedHealthCareers.com** is a job search tool searchable by location, industry, or career.
- **ResumeOK.com** provides resume examples, templates, and advice for healthcare professionals such as **medical assistants** and **radiologic technologists**. You cannot search by "allied health," so you must type your specific profession into the search bar.

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Licensing Resources

- Contact the Department of Health for your state/territory to find out the licensure/ certification requirements for your specific career and location.
- Check specific national credentialing bodies like the **Accredation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)** for nutritionists or the **American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP)** for laboratory technicians.

Financial Resources

- The Office of the U.S. Department of Education provides **resources for eligible non-U.S. citizens**.
- The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation maintains a list of **Education and Training Scholarships for New Americans**. Some are specific to Maryland residents, but many are open to applicants living anywhere in the U.S.

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APPENDIX A: ALLIED HEALTH CAREERS

The following links provide more information on the career options that are included under the umbrella of allied health. Definitions of what is included can vary from one organization to another.

- The Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions (ASAHP) provides a fairly comprehensive list of allied health professions in **Table 1. Allied Health Professions**.
- The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) provides detailed **profession description and certification information** for 32 different allied health careers.
- **ExploreHealthCareers.org** has information on many different allied health careers, but not all of them are listed under the "allied health" heading, so be sure to look under all of the categories (such as "Nutrition Dietetics" and "Speech Language Hearing") linked on their homepage.
- **The Health Professions Network (HPN)** has detailed descriptions of 43 allied health professions, including information on education/training, licensing/certification, salary, and employment outlook.
- The National Institutes of Health maintain a website called MedlinePlus.gov, which has a fairly comprehensive **list of allied health occupations**.

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WES GLOBAL TALENT BRIDGE

Our Expertise. Your Success.

wes.org/partners/global-talent-bridge

gtb@wes.org

WES Global Talent Bridge is a program dedicated to helping skilled immigrants fully utilize their talents and education in the United States. Global Talent Bridge joins with institutional partners and community organizations to help skilled immigrants leverage their training, achieve their professional goals, and contribute their talents to their full potential.

Global Talent Bridge provides technical assistance, staff training and specialized resources to community organizations, adult education programs, government agencies and academic institutions so they can better support, advise and integrate highly-qualified immigrants. It also conducts research and policy advocacy efforts to advance opportunities for skilled immigrants at the local, state and national level.

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