

**MINUTES**  
**New Hampshire State Commission on Aging**  
**Monday, November 15, 2021 10:00 a.m.-noon**  
**NH Employment Security, 45 S. Fruit St., Concord**

**Present in person:** Polly Champion, Chair; Carol Stamatakis, Vice Chair; Roberta Berner, Clerk; Rep. James MacKay; Richard Lavers, NHES; Wendi Aultman, DHHS; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Lynn Lippitt, NH Housing Finance Authority; Sunny Mulligan Shea, DOJ; Appointed by the Governor: Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Suzanne Demers  
Rebecca Sky, Executive Director

**Present via teleconference:** Sen. Ruth Ward; Rep. Charles McMahon; Patrick Herlihy, DOT; Elizabeth Bielecki, DOS; Daniel Marcek, Kristi St. Laurent, Harry Viens

**Absent:** Janet Weeks, DOL; Ken Gordon, Susan Emerson, Susan Ruka, Rev. Susan Nolan

**Presenters:** Rich Lavers and Brian Gottlob, NH Department of Employment Security; Gayle Davis, co-owner, Senior Helpers of Southern New Hampshire; Brendan Williams, President & CEO, NH Health Care Association; Gina Balkus, CEO, Home Care, Hospice & Palliative Care Alliance of NH

**Guests present via teleconference:** 21 members of the public (Cheryl Steinberg, John Wilson, Heather Carroll, Beth Todgham, Jennifer Rabalais, Richard Danford, Laurie Duff, Martha McLeod, Arnold Newman, Jennifer Throwe, Carole Boutin, Beverly Cotton, Joan Marcoux, Kris Hering, Laura Davie, Dawn McKinney, Roxie Severance, Darlene Cray, Doug McNutt, Caitlin Sullivan, and a Closed captioning service provider.

**I. Welcome, Attendance, Review of Minutes**

Chair Polly Champion provided an overview of the agenda and welcomed the Commission members and guests to the meeting. Today's meeting was held concurrently in person at the NH Employment Security offices and via teleconference.

Clerk Roberta Berner took attendance, noting which Commission members were attending in person or remotely. With only 11 Commission members attending in person, a quorum was not present, so the vote on the October minutes was postponed.

**II. Workforce Gaps and Challenges**

Chair Champion introduced the topic of workforce gaps, particularly in the field of long-term care, as an issue of concern for the Commission. She then introduced the presenters.

**A. Rich Lavers and Brian Gottlob, NH Department of Employment Security (NHDES)**

*(PowerPoint: Labor Market Trends in the NH Economy and in Skilled Nursing Facilities, Continuing Care & Retirement Facilities, and Home Health Care Industries – attached at end of minutes.)*

Brian Gottlob's presentation focused on data and trends within the long-term care sector. He said that workforce problems cut across every sector in the economy, but that the long-term care sector has its own unique challenges.

In New Hampshire, the pandemic resulted in a large number of people out-of-work—but in a rebound this year, at least three-quarters of the jobs lost in 2020 are back. Overall, job openings are at record highs in the state and are proportionately higher than in the United States overall as well as in neighboring states.

In the field of long-term care, the jobs are available, but the workforce has shrunk. From 2015 to 2021, there has been an overall decrease of 10 percent in the long-term care workforce with a 17 percent

decrease in skilled nursing facilities. The decrease in the workforce has occurred just as the increase in the state's older population is taking place.

Across the entire workforce, the downturn is most marked in workers aged 25 to 54. With the long-term care workforce comprised 80 percent of women, a significant cause of the downturn is a lack of childcare or other family care issues. Because this sector competes with other health care organizations for some of the same occupations (nursing assistants, LPNs, RNs), wage rates in long-term care also can be a challenge.

The home health care workforce in New Hampshire is 89.2 percent female; continuing care and retirement facilities' workforce is 79.8 percent female; and skilled nursing facilities' is 79.1 percent female. Across all sectors, women comprise 49.8 percent of the workforce in the state. In addition, the long-term care workforce has a higher percentage of older workers (ages 45 to 65+), so the sector will likely be experiencing more retirements just at the point when there is increasing demand.

Rich Lavers talked about the impact of the pandemic on the state's workforce. In spring of 2020, NHDES was handling as many as 120,000 unemployment filings in a single week. Four weeks of filings in spring 2020 exceeded all unemployment filings for the entire prior year. Now, filings are down to approximately 2,400 per week—the lowest within the past 20 years. Unemployment in the state is at approximately 3 percent, and employers across all sectors are struggling to find employees. A stipend instituted last year to retain long-term care workers helped significantly while it was in place.

NHDES' most recent weekly data show that the department handled unemployment claims from just 57 people within the long-term care sector in that week. Lavers said that New Hampshire is experiencing one of the fastest declines in available workforce, compared to the rest of the country. The department is holding regional virtual job and resource fairs with the community college system, promoting jobs to those who were unable to complete their community college work, and making the job search portal easier with specific sections set up for the long-term care sector.

Lavers then discussed requirements for workers to have received the COVID-19 vaccine vis-à-vis their eligibility for unemployment benefits. Employers are allowed to enact reasonable requirements based on their sector, and in the long-term care sector which provides services to a vulnerable population, vaccination requirements are considered reasonable. If a worker in the long-term care sector lost her or his job because of refusal to be vaccinated, unemployment benefits may not be available. The requirement, Lavers said, is likely to have an impact on the sector which is already struggling for workforce.

**B. Gayle Davis, co-owner, Senior Helpers of Southern New Hampshire, home care services provider**

Gayle Davis and her husband, Dwight, own a seven-year old non-medical home care agency that serves Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham and Strafford Counties. The agency has experienced consistent growth. For example, in a recent four-day period, the agency had 24 new inquiries from potential clients. And while they've had strong interest from job applicants, success in competing for hires has been limited. Year-to-date, the agency has had 310 applicants and hired 53 for positions – 17%. She said they offer hourly wages on par with or exceeding health care providers and multiple benefits, including health care, vision, and dental insurance; a 401-k plan with employer match; profit sharing; educational scholarships and apprentice programs. Staff retention is solid, she added, exceeding 80% with 20 employees with a tenure over 3 years.

Davis had several suggestions for improved recruitment and retention of workers in the long-term care system:

- Remove state aid income restrictions for workers in high-demand jobs;
- Increase monthly child care support for single mothers;
- Incentive landlords and builders to make available affordable housing; (tax credits or deferments)
- Develop more transportation options (e.g., develop program for employers that purchase cars for employees (who then repay the employer's interest free loan through payroll deductions) offering employer tax credits towards their business profits taxes);
- Have the Department of Nursing *sic* [Office of Professional Licensure and Certification] recognize licensure from other states and countries so that potential employees can get to work right away in New Hampshire.

She applauded Manchester Community College for its innovative program to assist international students to enter the healthcare workforce. (program involved ESL for Healthcare, LNA Apprenticeship Program, followed by WorkReadyNH support.)

**C. Brendan Williams, President & CEO, NH Health Care Association**

Brendan Williams began by saying that the pandemic had exacerbated a staffing issue that was already challenging in skilled nursing facilities. Occupancy has had to be reduced because of the need for quarantine space but primarily because of the acute staffing issues. The state's long-term care facilities are turning away new residents, including those ready to be discharged from hospitals. With the lower occupancy rate, the percentage of residents on Medicaid has increased. In response to a question, he said that now 66 percent of nursing home residents in the state are on Medicaid compared to 60 percent pre-pandemic.

New Hampshire's skilled nursing facilities compare favorably with other states for vaccination rates: 89 percent of staff and 94 percent of residents are currently vaccinated. NH Health Care Association does not oppose a vaccine mandate for staff but would like to see additional staffing resources implemented. The staffing situation in the state is worse here than nationally and is at a more critical level than any other sector of the economy--"Not for lack of trying to attract and retain staff," Williams said. As an example, he noted that the Hillsborough County Nursing Home is currently down more than 100 positions yet its rate of pay for an LNA is from \$15.50 to \$24.83 per hour. (*In a later note in the chat box, he said that the Nursing Home has a waiting list of 129 individuals for placement and 89 full-time vacancies listed.*) Recruiting and retaining staff for laundry and dietary departments of nursing homes also is difficult, with facilities competing with fast food restaurants and the hospitality industry.

Williams said that the nursing home sector is grateful for support from the state and noted specifically that the CARES Act helped with retention of staff.

In response to a question about what is happening with nursing home-eligible people who can't find placement in a nursing home, Williams said that they are getting backed up in hospitals and sometimes being discharged to out-of-state facilities. He is concerned that given the stressors, some nursing homes may close or be sold to commercial buyers.

**D. Gina Balkus, CEO, Home Care, Hospice & Palliative Care Alliance of NH**

Gina Balkus said that in her 10 years as CEO of the membership agency, the staff shortage is more dire than she has ever seen. Last year's (12/2020) survey of members showed that the home care, hospice, and palliative care agencies had a 30 percent vacancy rate with a turn-over rate of 34 percent for RNs, 51 percent for LNAs, and more than 40 percent for personal care workers. She anticipates that the 2021

survey will show a much higher turn-over rate, particularly for staff in the 45-64 age range. She said that agencies report retirements occurring at an unprecedented rate, with staff exhausted and burned out.

When a home care agency receives a Medicare referral, it must begin services within 48 hours. Balkus said that in an increasing number of cases, the agency cannot meet the timeframe or determines that the individual's needs are too complex, so declines those patients or asks for a delay in the referral, and thus, the care.

Within the Medicaid Choices for Independence (CFI) program, agencies report that they cannot meet the need for services and are declining new patients or limiting the number of visits per week per client. To add to the problem, the CFI reimbursement rates are inadequate to cover the cost of wages, mileage reimbursement, supervision, and worker's compensation insurance.

Balkus said that while agencies are grateful for CFI rate increases passed in the last Legislative session, those increases are not enough. She said that the rates need to go up 30 percent or more to allow CFI providers to compete with private pay providers. "We don't want to seem ungrateful, but it's just not enough. A lot of catch-up needs to be done," Balkus said. CFI reimbursement rates are currently \$21.60 for homemaker services, while \$28.50 is the market rate, for example. The state's Title XX (Social Services Block Grant) and Title III (Older Americans Act) homemaker rate also is higher than the CFI rate. The stipend put into effect in 2021 was helpful for agencies to retain workers and encourage them to pick up more shifts—however, some agencies couldn't afford to accept the stipend because the funds went directly to the workers, but the agencies' resulting FICA and workers' compensation costs went up without subsidy.

Rich Lavers asked if the cost of training staff was an issue for agencies and skilled nursing facilities. Balkus said that paying staff for training time was an issue. Williams said that nursing homes can be reimbursed for training.

Heather Carroll noted that the state has 26,000 residents with dementia and that 48 percent of nursing home residents have dementia. Williams said that the percentage rises to 60 percent for long-term residents of nursing homes.

Chair Champion thanked the presenters for sharing their deep knowledge of the current workforce situation in LTSS and LTC. There will be much work to be done to address the long-standing and newly exacerbated issues. The Commission plans to revisit potential actions in January.

### **III. Updates**

- Instead of a regular monthly meeting in December, the Commission is holding an educational session on navigating the legislative process on December 13.
- Appointments of three recommended individuals (Beth Todgham, Laurie Duff, Doug McNutt) to the Commission remains pending at the Governor's Office.
- Chair Champion and attendees applauded the first issue of the newsletter, the Commission-sponsored successor publication to EngAGING NH's newsletter. Chair Champion thanked Beth Todgham for her outstanding work as volunteer editor. The contest to name the newsletter has a December 15 deadline. The Commission webpage has a place to sign up to be put on the newsletter distribution list.

### **IV. Adjournment**

Chair Champion adjourned the meeting at 11:55 a.m.

# Labor Market Trends in the New Hampshire Economy and in Skilled Nursing Facilities, Continuing Care and Retirement Facilities, and Home Health Care Industries

Presentation to:  
 New Hampshire Commission on Aging  
 November 15, 2021

Richard Lavers, Deputy Commissioner

NH Dept. of Employment Security &

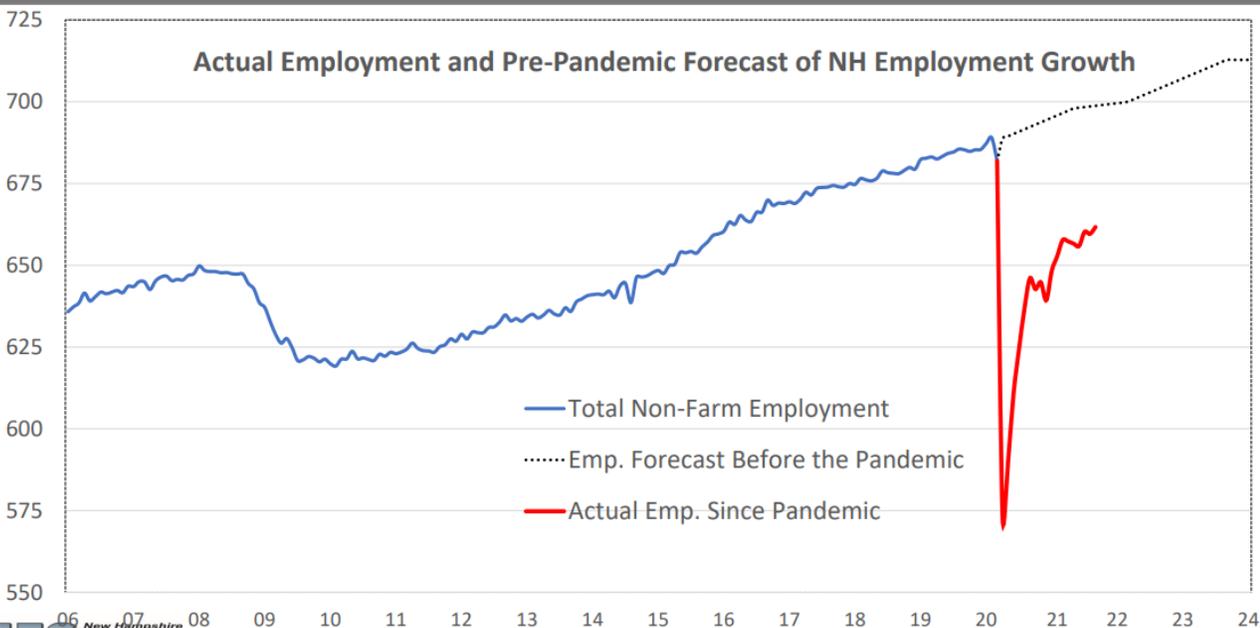
Brian Gottlob, Director

NH Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau

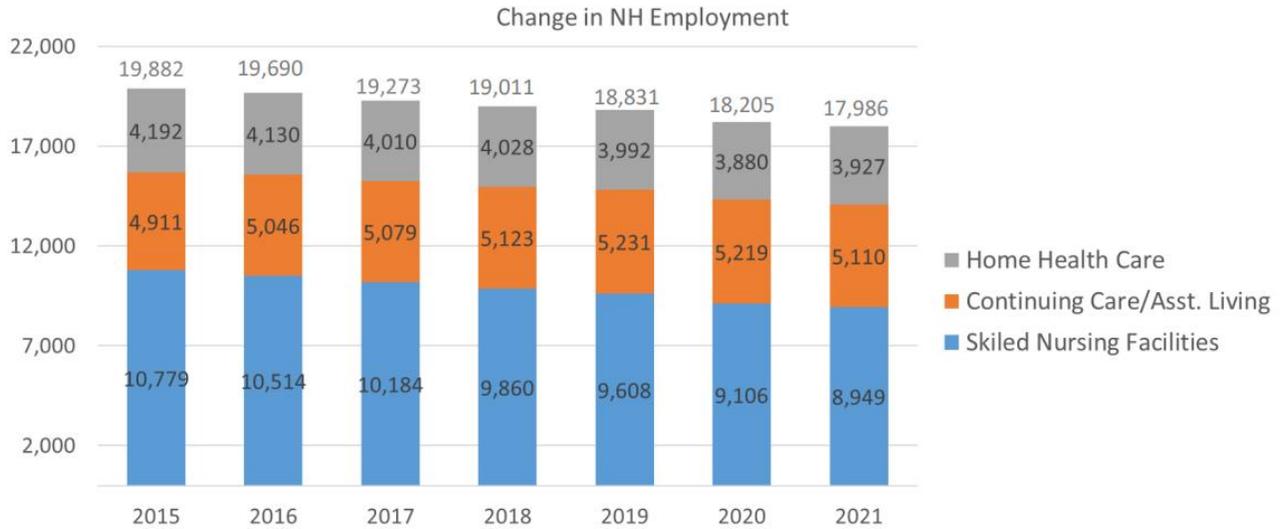
NH Dept. of Employment Security



NH Has Recovered About Three-Quarters of Jobs Lost (But BLS is Undercounting NH Employment). It Will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Half of 2022 Before All Jobs are Recovered and Another Year to Return to Trend Growth

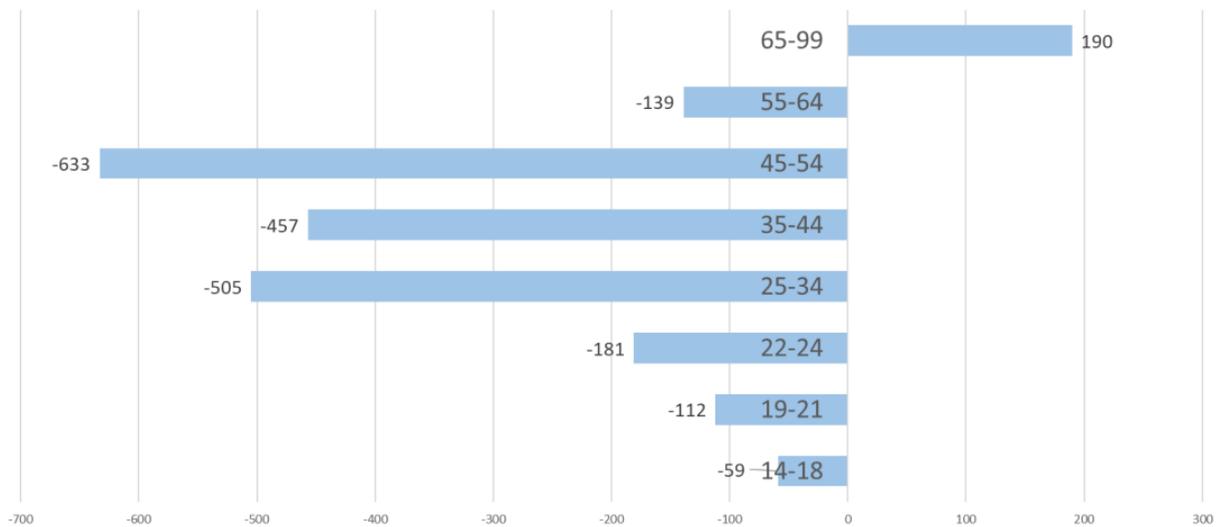


## Demand for Services to Older Residents is Rising but the Workforce in Key Industries is Shrinking (10% Overall but 17% in Skilled Nursing Facilities)

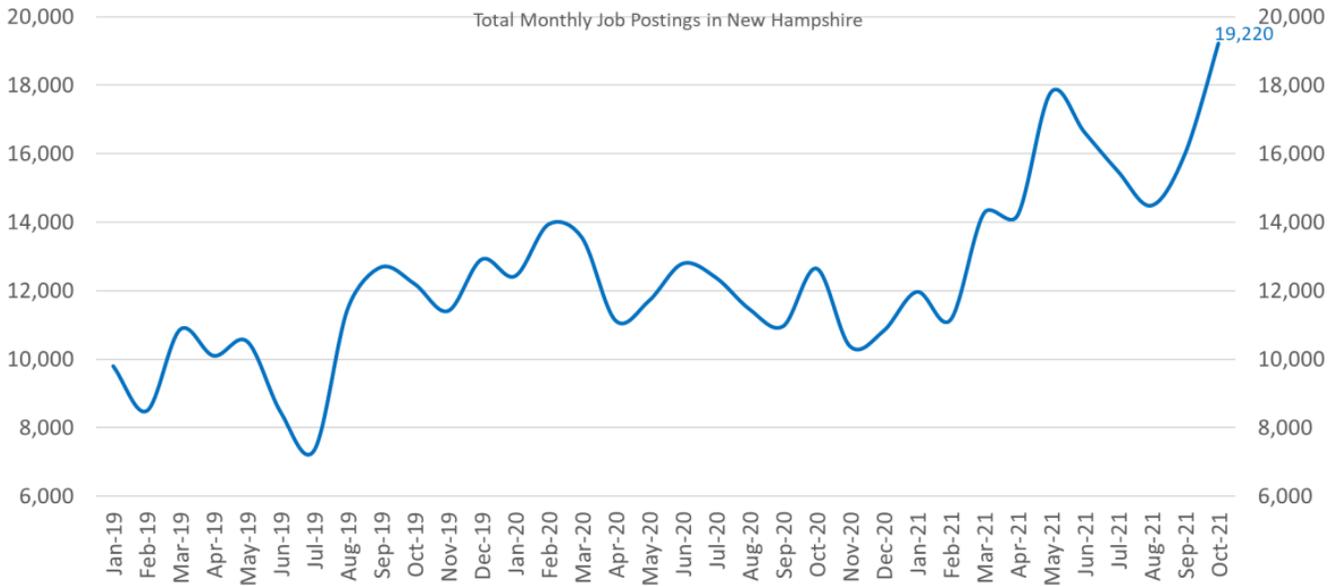


## It is Among Prime Age Workers (25-54) Where Industries Serving Older Residents Has Shrunk the Most

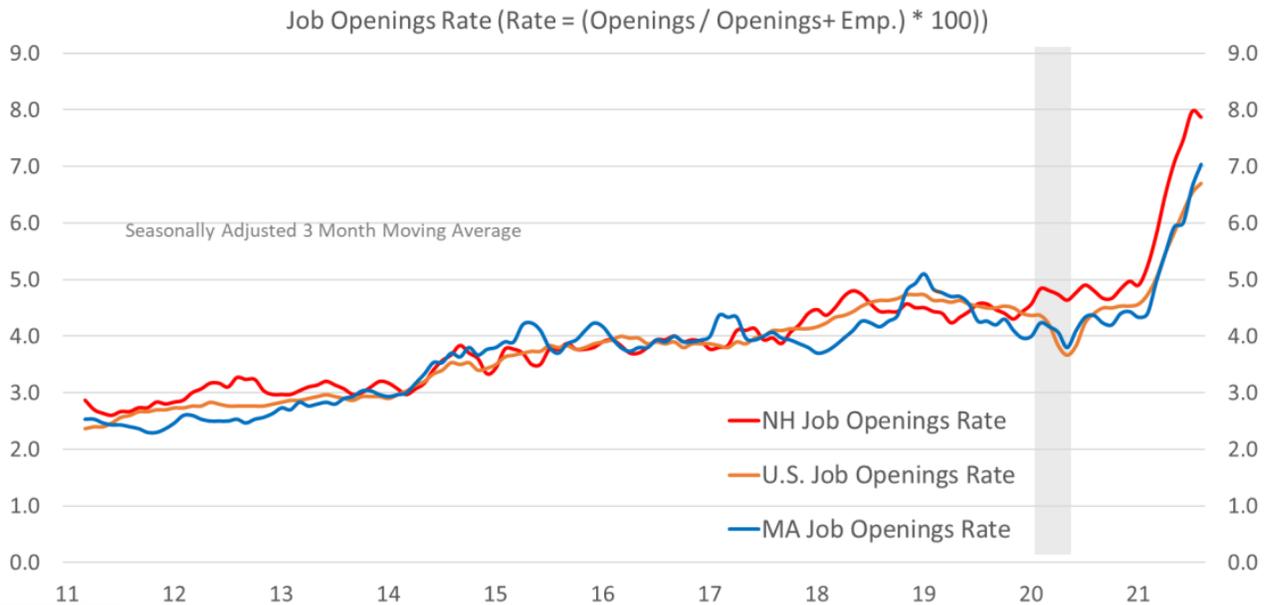
Changed in Employment by Age 2015 to 2021



## Job Openings are at Record Highs – But Labor Force Participation Has Declined and Fewer are Available or Looking for Work

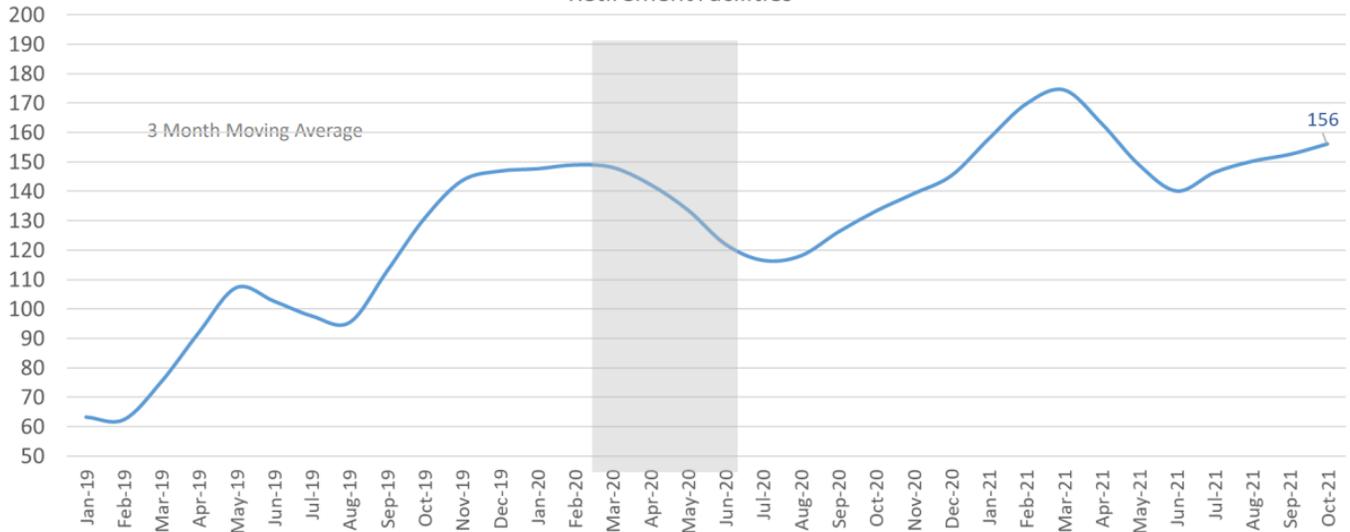


## New Hampshire's Job Openings Rate is Higher Than the U.S. Average and Neighboring States



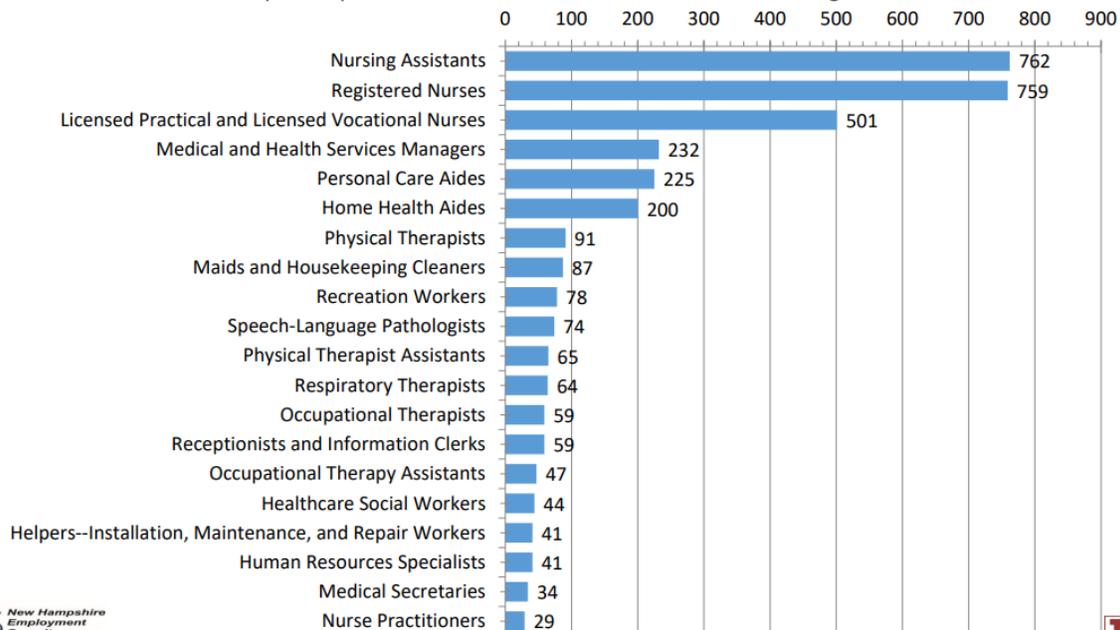
## Monthly Job Postings In NH in Industries Serving Older Residents Have About Doubled Since Early 2019

Posted Job Openings in Home Health Care, Skilled Nursing Facilities, and Continuing Care & Retirement Facilities



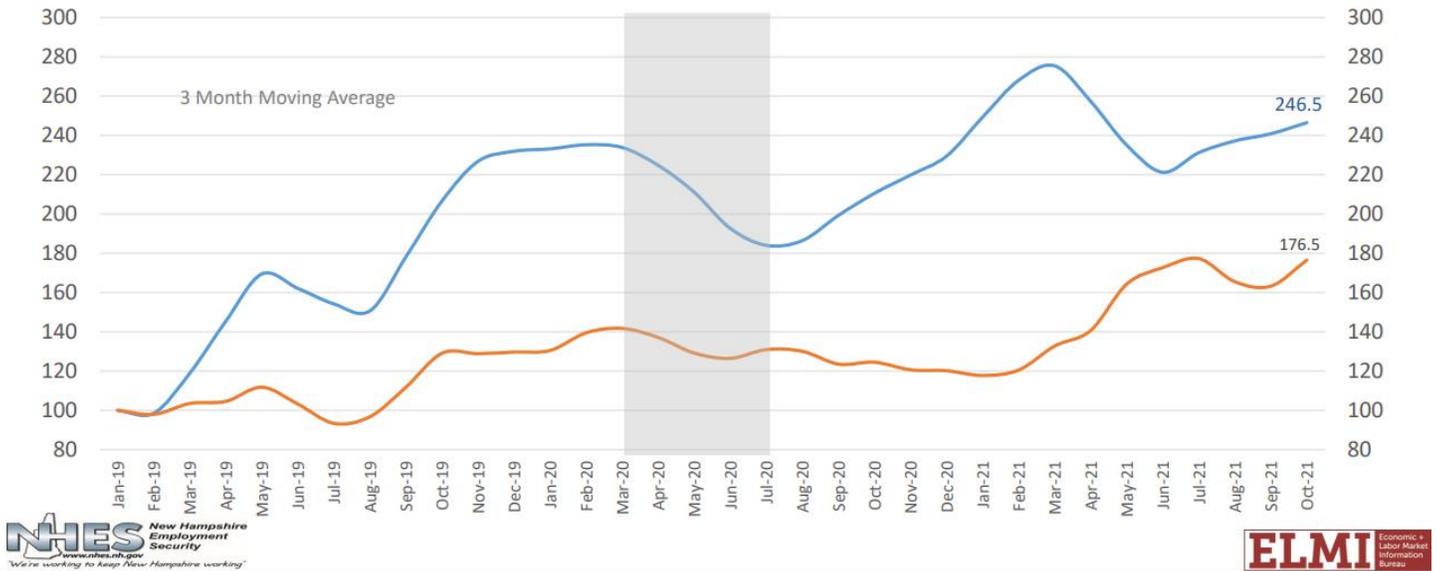
## Job Postings in NH Over the Past Year Show That the Three Industries Compete for the Same Limited Supply of Health Care Workers

Top Occupations in Demand in NH in Industries Serving Older Residents

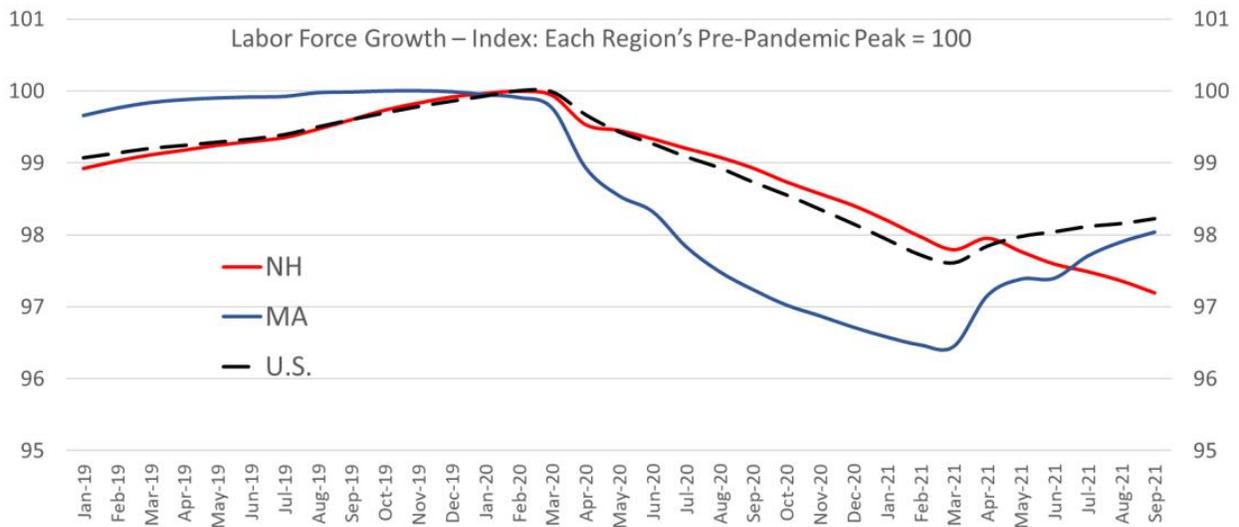


## Monthly Job Postings In Three Industries Serving Older Residents Have About Doubled Over the Last Six Years and Have Increased at a Faster Rate Than Jobs Overall in NH

Posted Job Openings in Home Health Care, Skilled Nursing Facilities, and Continuing Care & Retirement Facilities (Index: January 2019 = 100)

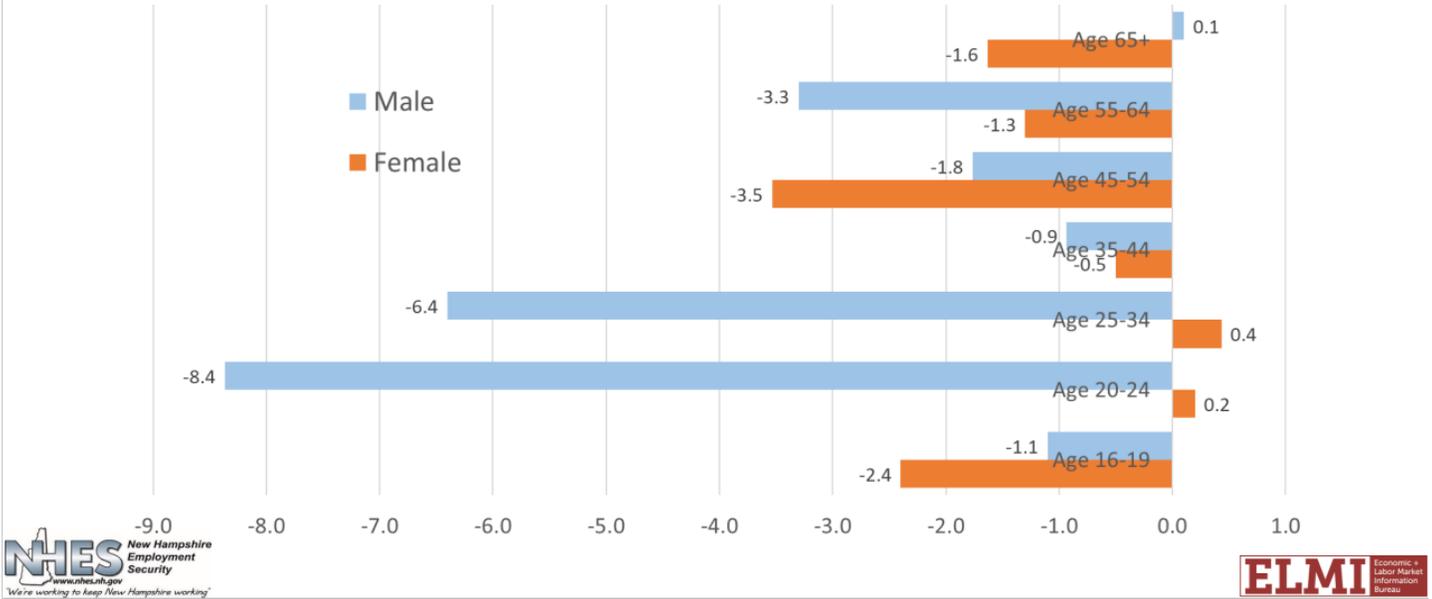


## According to the U.S. BLS, New Hampshire's Labor Force is Down About 2.8% or 21,700 From its Pre-Pandemic Peak



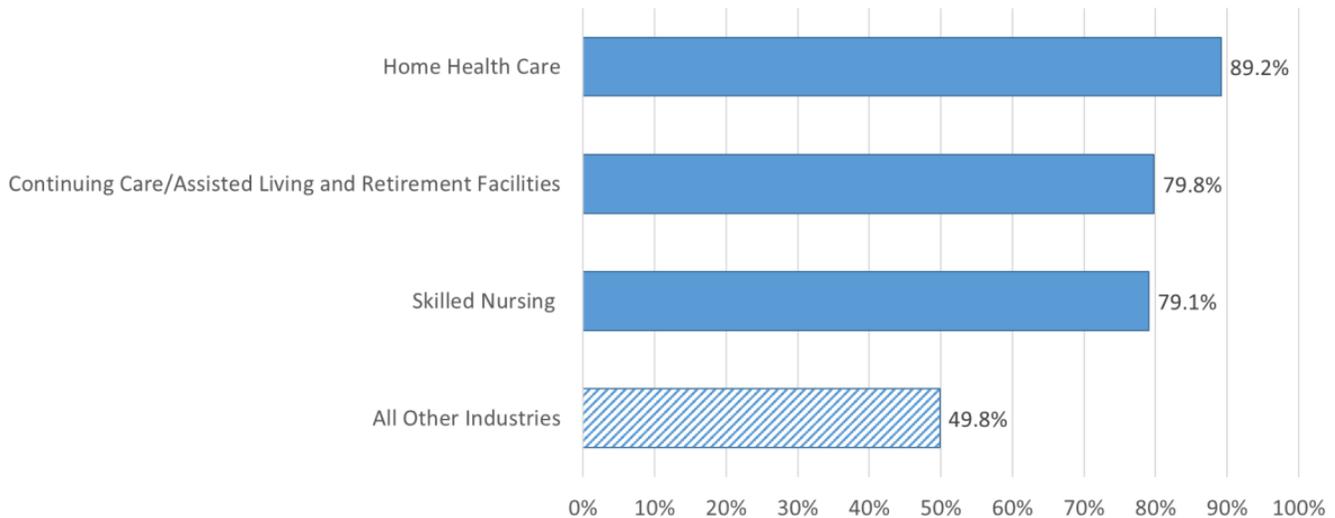
## It is Younger Males That are Largely Responsible for the Decline in Labor Force Participation in the State

% Change in Labor Force Participation Rate  
(3 Month Avg. July-Sept. 2021 vs July-Sept. 2019)

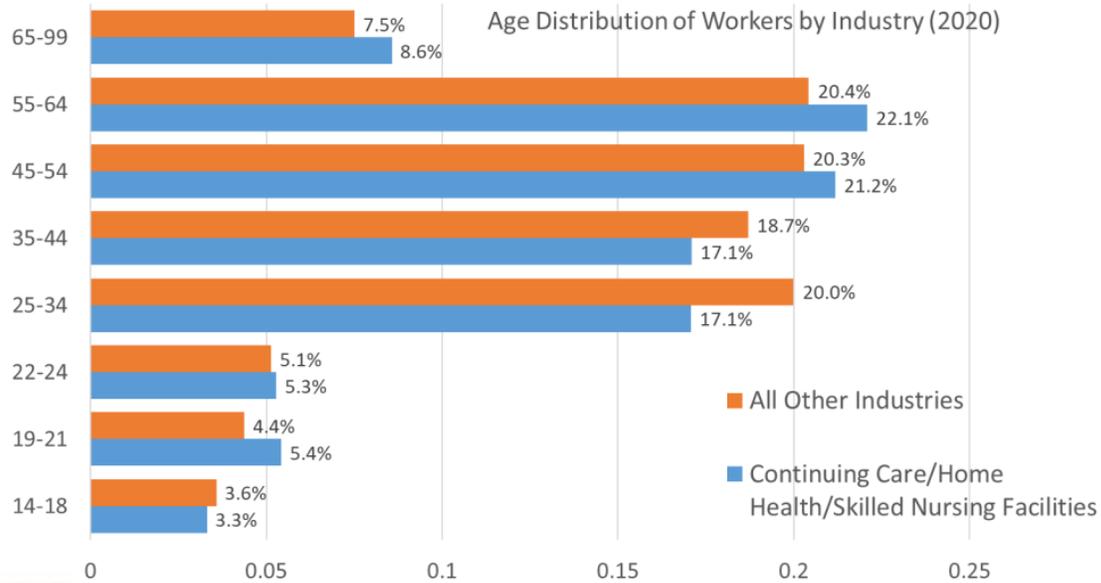


## Women Comprise the Vast Majority of Workers in the Three Primary Industries Serving Older NH Residents

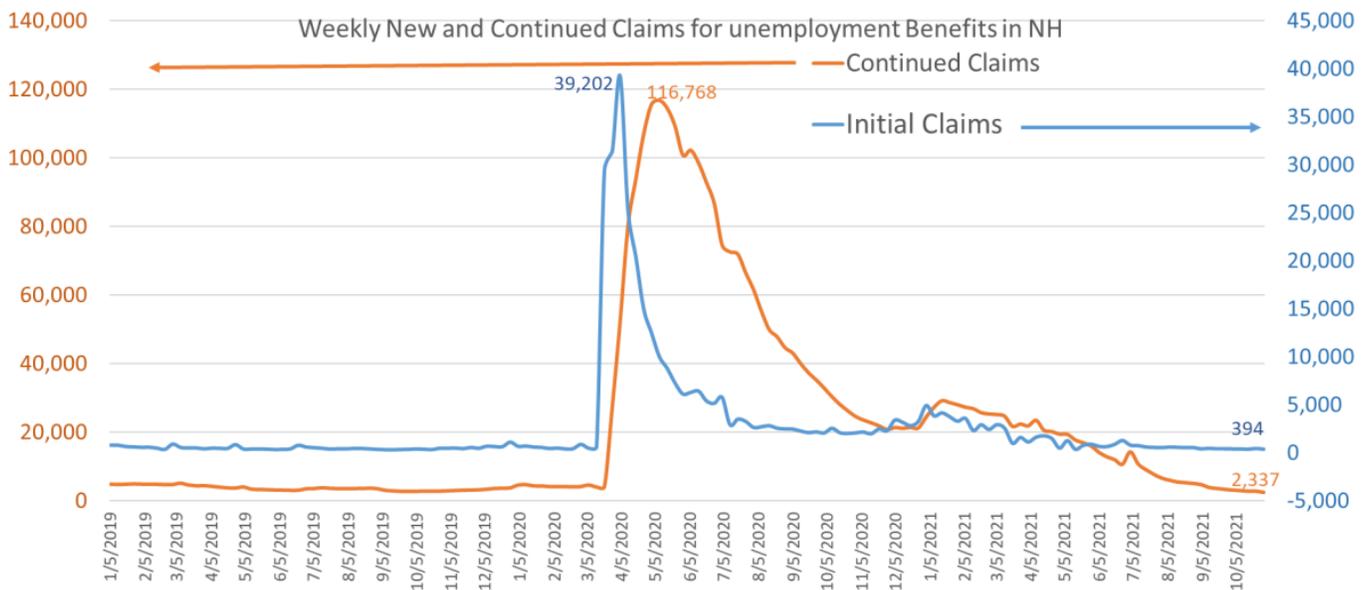
% of Workers in NH That are Female



## The Age Distribution of Workers is Similar in Industries Serving Older Residents as in New Hampshire Industries Overall

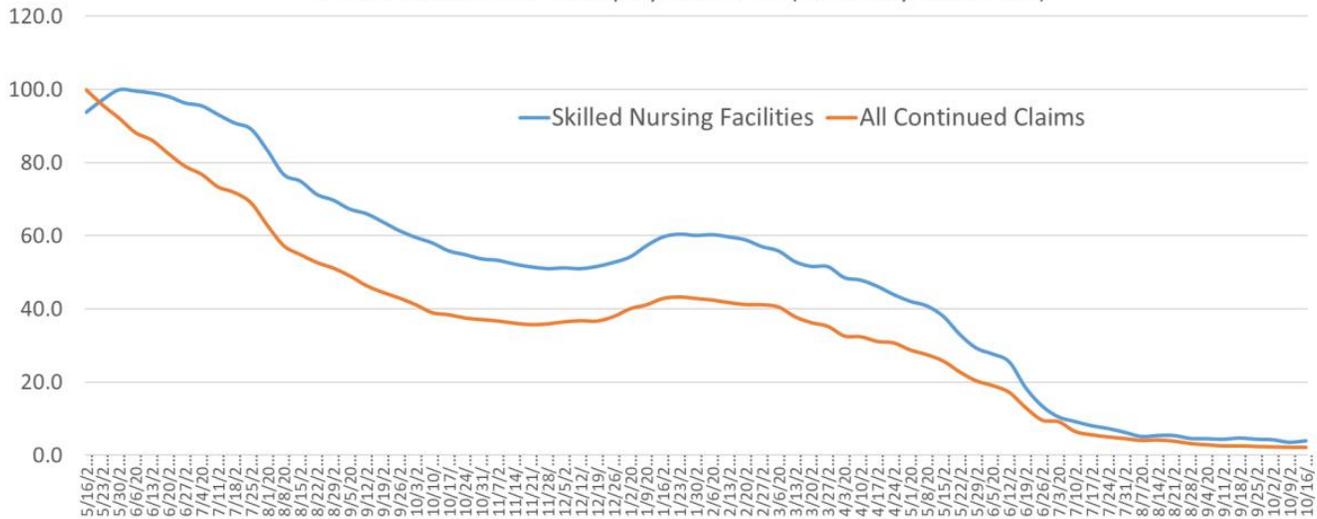


## More Claims for Unemployment Insurance Were Filed in a Week During the Early Months of the Pandemic Than Were Filed in Entire Prior Years

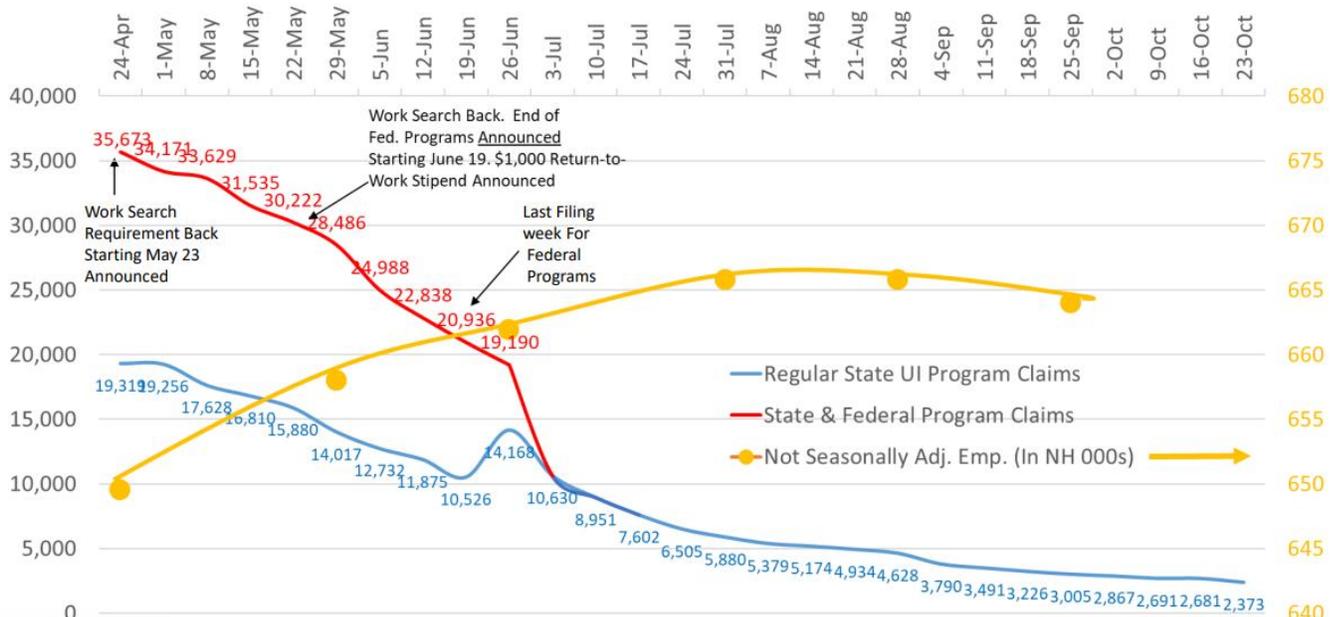


## Unemployment Claims in Skilled Nursing Facilities Declined More Slowly Than Did Claims Overall in NH But Since Work Search Requirements Resumed, Industry Claims Have Fallen at About the Same Rate as Overall Claims

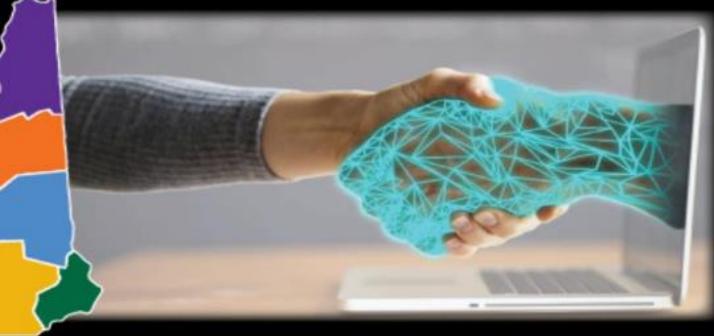
Continued Claims for Unemployment in NH (Index May 2020 = 100)



## Continued Unemployment Claims are Falling Sharply (Regular State UI Claims are Down 83% Since Federal Benefits Ended in June)



# 2021 NHES & the Community College System of New Hampshire Job & Resource Fairs



New Hampshire Employment Security is proud to partner with the Community College System of New Hampshire for the next series of Regional Virtual Job & Resource Fairs

CAPITAL & SOUTHERN REGIONS	LAKES REGION	SEACOAST REGION	MONADNOCK & DARTMOUTH REGIONS	GREAT NORTH WOODS & WHITE MOUNTAINS REGIONS
<p><b>Tuesday, November 30, 2021</b> 11 am – 1 pm</p>	<p><b>Thursday, December 2, 2021</b> 11 am – 1 pm</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, December 7, 2021</b> 11 am – 1 pm</p>	<p><b>Thursday, December 9, 2021</b> 11 am – 1 pm</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, December 14, 2021</b> 11 am – 1 pm</p>

Employers and Job Seekers must register to attend

<https://virtualjobfairs.nh.gov>

Click or scan to register!



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NHES Homepage



## New Hampshire Job Search Portal

Get Hired and be Eligible for a \$1,000 Bonus Payment from the State of New Hampshire. [Learn More](#)

Select Region(s)  Select Town(s)  Select Occupation(s)  Select Position Type  Full Time  Part Time

**SEARCH**

2207 Jobs Match Your Result: CLEAR RESULTS

Position Title	Employer	Town	Full or Part Time	More Info
Specialized Machine Operator - All Shifts - 4th (weekend shift)	Allstaff Contract Services, Inc.	Littleton	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Cook	Omnit Mount Washington Resort	Carroll	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Physical Therapist	Laconia Rehabilitation Center (Genesis Rehab Services)	Laconia	FullTime PartTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Ice Cream/ Takeout	Puritan Backrooms	Manchester	FullTime PartTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Business Development Assistant Manager	AutoFair Nissan	Stratham	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Service Writer	Auto North	Gorham	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Assembler	PSI Molded Plastics	Wolfeboro	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Personal Care Assistant/Housekeeping	NH Home Care Providers, LLC	Concord	FullTime PartTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Homemaker	Concord Regional Visiting Nurse Association	Carterbury	PartTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>
Quality Inspector II	Cobham	Exeter	FullTime	<a href="#">INQUIRE</a>

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Unemployment Assistance Hotline: (603) 271-7200  
TDD Access: Relay NH 1-800-735-2964  
Back to <https://www.nhes.nh.gov>

## Employer Vaccination Requirements- Eligibility for Unemployment Benefits

- **Am I eligible for unemployment benefits if I am fired for not complying with my employer's vaccine mandate or if I quit in response to my employer's vaccine mandate?**
- It depends. NHES looks at whether the employer's policy is reasonable and whether the mandate is intended to serve a legitimate business interest of the employer.
- **My employer requires unvaccinated employees to undergo regular COVID testing and/or a mask mandate to comply with their workplace protocols. If I quit or am fired for refusing to comply, will I be eligible for benefits?**
- **NO.** Generally, employees that quit or are fired for refusing to comply with reasonable alternatives to a vaccination mandate, such as a facemask requirement, would not be eligible for unemployment benefits.

## Employer Vaccination Requirements - Eligibility for Unemployment Benefits

- **I work in a health care facility and/or work in close contact with elderly and vulnerable people and refuse to comply with my employer's vaccine mandate. Their policy states that anyone who works in direct contact with patients or vulnerable individuals must be vaccinated and they do not provide reasonable alternatives such as testing or masking. If I quit or am fired for noncompliance, am I eligible for unemployment benefits?**
- **NO.** Generally, it is reasonable for an employer to require employees who work with vulnerable people to be vaccinated. However, the department would still review whether the employer's policy was applied reasonably, and considered requests for medical or religious accommodations.

## Employer Vaccination Requirements- Eligibility for Unemployment Benefits

- **If I quit or I am terminated for noncompliance with a vaccine mandate imposed by my employer, and no reasonable alternative was offered, such as having to wear a mask, and my employment is not directly related to working with vulnerable individuals or in health care, am I eligible for unemployment benefits?**
- Most likely. Employees that quit or are fired for refusing to comply with a vaccine requirement in this instance would likely be found eligible for unemployment benefits. Simply requiring a vaccination without any alternatives may not be deemed reasonable for all employees in all industries.