



Professions on Fast Track for Growth

by Susan Boswell

Speech-language pathology and audiology will be among the hottest professions in the country in the next decade, according to recent employment growth projections in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) 2002–2003 *Occupational Outlook Handbook* .

The professions ranked among the top 30—out of 700—fastest growing occupations over the next decade, with the number of audiology positions expected to climb 45% and the number of speech-language pathology positions to grow by 39% from 2000–2010, according to the BLS November 2001 *Monthly Labor Review* .

The BLS pointed to key trends that will contribute to growth:

- As America ages and the population over age 55 increases rapidly, the number of people with hearing loss will continue to climb because hearing loss is strongly associated with aging.
- Baby boomers are now approaching middle age, a time when the possibility of neurological disorders—and associated speech, language, and hearing disorders—increases.
- Medical advances have improved the survival rate of premature infants, trauma, and stroke victims, bringing the need for speech, language, and hearing assessment and treatment.
- Greater awareness of the importance of early identification of speech, language, and hearing disorders also will increase employment.

Where Will We Work?

The BLS highlighted the ebb and flow of professionals into different work settings in response to national reimbursement, regulatory, and demographic trends.

Jobs in health care facilities may be limited over the short term because federal legislation, such as the \$1,500 Medicare cap, can limit reimbursement for speech-language pathology services. At the same time, employment in schools will increase as the overall enrollment—including special education students—increases in elementary and secondary schools. The number of SLPs and audiologists in private practice will increase as hospitals, schools, and nursing homes increasingly rely on contract services. In addition to employment growth, attrition also will create job openings for SLPs and audiologists.

Where Are the Jobs?

Data from states show where jobs can be found in the future, according to data collected from each State Employment Security Agency in cooperation with the BLS.

Across the United States, the growth rate for speech-language pathology and audiology jobs ranges from 19% in South Dakota to 63% in Nevada from 1998–2008. Another 9 states—Arizona, California, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Virginia—will

have the highest rate of job growth, with a 50% or more increase in jobs in the next decade.

Other states will have a larger number of job openings over the next decade as a large employment base grows slowly, creating more jobs than in states where a small employment base grows rapidly. Growth in the number of jobs over the next decade will range from 50 jobs in Alaska and Delaware to 4,500 job openings in California. Another 10 states—Florida, Illinois, Indiana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington—top the charts with 1,200 or more job openings expected between 1998 and 2008.

For more information on the BLS employment projections, visit www.bls.gov/emp/emptab3.htm for a list of the fastest growing occupations from 2000–2010. Visit www.bls.gov/oco/ocos085.htm#outlook for the national job outlook for the professions or visit <http://www.projectionscentral.com/> for state occupational projections from 2002–2012.

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