



Career and Technical Education (CTE):

# **Healthcare Program Implementation Playbook**



## Why It's Vital to Include Healthcare in Your CTE Program

The healthcare staffing and employment landscape in the United States is poised for significant expansion in response to demographic and health trends. Over 80% of healthcare facilities face shortages of allied health professionals – staffing gaps are an ongoing problem. As it stands, there is plenty of opportunity for those seeking to start a career in allied health, and the future of the job market is looking bright.

According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), healthcare occupations and roles associated with healthcare account for several of the fastest growing occupations from 2023 through 2033. We can expect to see 1.9 million new job openings each year on average. Underscoring that is the fact that the U.S. senior population will expand to 88 million by 2050, up from 48 million in 2021, per the [National Institute of Health](#). Chronic illnesses are also on the rise, with the National Library of Medicine anticipating that 170 million individuals will be affected by 2030, a 37% increase from current figures.

Now more than ever, career and technical education (CTE) programs need healthcare pathways. CTE is a highly attrac-



tive option for talented students who are looking for faster, more economical and more relevant on-ramps to meaningful careers that relate to their interests and passions.

But why healthcare programs specifically? It comes down to need and growth. In addition to an aging population, staffing gaps, and increases in chronic illness, allied health roles are poised to see extensive job growth. Here's a breakdown of expected growth in several different allied health roles, from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, along with typical starting salaries:

- **Medical assistants:** 15% projected growth, 118,000 new jobs at \$20.19 per hour
- **Phlebotomy technicians:** 8% growth, 11,000 new jobs at \$20.10 per hour
- **EKG technicians:** 4% growth, 2,400 new jobs at \$31.81 per hour
- **Pharmacy Technician:** 7% growth, 33,300 new jobs at \$19.37 per hour
- **Patient care technicians:** 8% growth, 16,500 new jobs at \$22.69 per hour

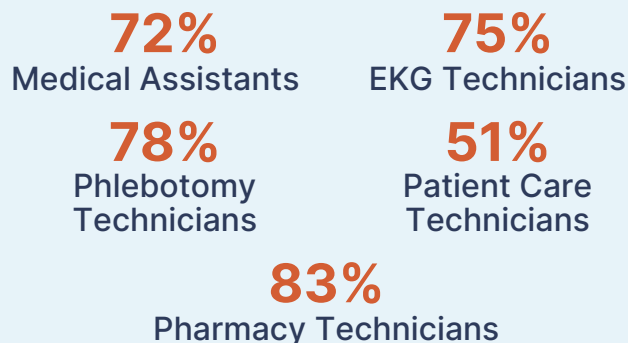
Some schools offering CTE programs feel concerned that healthcare roles may be too high-level for high school students, but this is not the case. These are entry-level roles, and certifications in these roles help high school students expand

beyond these roles as they move forward in their careers.

## Why Certification Matters

Certification proves to employers that a potential employee can provide quality care – it's seen as a mark of credibility. Many employers will even require certification, and NHA surveys show that certification typically leads to higher paying roles. [NHA research](#) shows that in 2024, 70% of institutions increased pay when an employee earned a professional certification.

How many employers, on average, screen for certifications within allied health roles? Here's how it shakes out:



In addition, certification acts as a steppingstone for those students who might choose to pursue a



“Many of the students in our program use these courses as a stepping-stone to higher education in the same or related fields. They have used their certifications as a means to get part-time jobs while in school for a higher degree,” Michelle Lynne, MSN, Nursing Program Director and Department Chair at Lake Worth Community High School



college degree. It showcases academic skill, effort, and experience, giving applicants a competitive edge. Certification also helps students to pay for college with better job opportunities. For students that choose not to pursue college, it quickly grants access to better full-time employment opportunities. A certification also comes with a degree of pride.

## Implementing a Healthcare CTE Program

The implementation process can seem daunting, but breaking it down into steps or phases will make it more manageable. Whether you're looking at implementing a new program altogether, or adding a new certification pathway, it's important to first look at what you already have in place. Having a robust understanding of your existing infrastructure will help you get a more realistic picture of how much time this process might take, your needs in terms of educators, and the supporting materials you'll want to seek out.

Beyond that, you'll want to begin building your program with the end in mind and work your way backwards. That means determining your program outcomes and the professions you plan on offering by aligning with the workforce, choosing your program partner, checking in with the Department of Education, and building your program backwards based on the testing timeline.

## 1. Lay the Foundation

### Align with the Workforce

The first step is to consider the job market in your area, as well as your students' dreams and goals.

Survey your potential students – where do their professional interests lie? What excites them in school now, and how might that carry over into their professional future? Where do they see themselves after school? A program without students is no program at all, so determine how you can best serve your student body.

When it comes to discovering your region's work-



force needs, you'll have to do some outreach. Both as an individual and as an organization, you have a vast network of contacts at your disposal – this is a great time to put them to work. This may include current or former employers, colleagues, workforce organizations, or individuals on the Chamber of Commerce.

From your large health systems to your mom-and-pop pharmacies, getting to know these organizations and their need for quality employees is important. A great first step is scheduling coffee or a call to talk about the challenge of helping your students gain access to job opportunities. Look to build externships or other opportunities for hiring right after certification.

Consider asking local health systems about their need for clinical and administrative support – areas where patient care technicians, medical assistants, administrative assistants, and billing and coding employees could help.

Establishing a more holistic view of your area's employment needs and your students' goals will help guide you when it comes to choosing which credentials you want to offer your students.

### Choosing Your Program Partner

Once you've determined the professions you'll be educating for, your next step is considering your program's partner. Choosing your partners is an important piece in this puzzle – the organizations you choose should be able to advise you every step of the way.

Your partner should be able to provide program resources across the entire learner journey – from core learning, to testing, certification exams, faculty support/training and beyond. This same partner should be available for support and guidance when gathering the resources you need, working with your department of education, and right sizing a curriculum to you and your students' unique needs.

Support for your organization and your students shouldn't end with certification. Your program partner would ideally provide resources to fuel career



“Our students are employable in positions such as pharmacy technicians or medical assistants as soon as they complete their program and graduate from high school. They know that their employers will support them via tuition reimbursement, as they pursue further education for mid- and high-level career growth,”  
Kyle Backer, Communications Specialist for West-MEC



growth for learners post-certification. This might look like continuing education libraries, professional development programs that help build new skills, or job boards. Your program partner can also help connect newly minted healthcare workers through professional networks or communities and offer support throughout their career journey.

## Accreditation

Certification may only be one facet of how your program partner supports your learners, but it's important to remember that not all certifications are created equal. There are differences between NCCA (National Commission for Certifying Agencies) accredited and unaccredited certifications, and even within those subsets, each provider is different.

Accredited certifications serve as the gold standard in the healthcare industry. They act as the highest mark of quality and credibility. Only organizations that follow stringent standards for exam development, test security, and overall quality (as adjudged by third-party bodies) can offer accredited certifications. Accredited certifications require that students sit through standardized and secure exam processes, which includes the development of a well-structured and psychometrically sound exam. This ensures a consistent level of competence and knowledge.

These certifications also play a major role in determining a student's eligibility for both scholarships and financial aid – many programs require accreditation. Holding an accredited certification offers a significant advantage for those pursuing higher education. What's more, multiple NHA certification exams have received American Council on Education (ACE) approval as being equivalent to earning a college credit. Individuals who hold certain NHA certifications may be eligible to receive college credits for their achievement.

## Checking in With the Department of Education

You'll need to begin considering state requirements –check with your state's Department of Education (DOE) to learn about the standards your program must meet. States have different requirements, and it's best to be sure that you're not trying to create a program that you'll later find doesn't stand up to DOE scrutiny. For example, some states may require a certain number of hours from a program, or unique requirements for their instructors.

Checking in with your state will also help you learn how to unlock funding opportunities for your program, and help you determine a portion of your budgeting plan.

This is a process that your program partner can help you with, so reach out to their team for assis-



tance. They should be able to help get you in touch with the DOE, typically offering an introduction or helping to open up communication with the relevant individuals, while also providing guidance around state requirements.

## 2. Planning

### Budgeting

Budgeting plays a pivotal part in the future of your program and offers another opportunity for you to look at what you already have available in your toolbox. You may have resources available to you from prior programs, like textbooks or other materials, that can help you save on your budget. Find a program partner who is willing to meet you where you are in terms of your budgetary needs.

You will also want to contact your state Department of Education's CTE representative – this not only helps you align with DOE standards but also offers you an opportunity to uncover funding. Grants and advanced funding through your DOE can offer you a budgetary boost. Be sure not to leave any money on the table.

This will soon become a tired refrain, but every state is different when it comes to their DOE. This includes what's on offer, but also what sorts of guidelines and requirements they may have, which is what makes this step so crucial.

### Map out the Course Curriculum

Now that you have chosen your program partner, and you've walked through the various requirements with your state's Department of Education, it's time to begin building out your course curriculum schedule.

The easiest way to begin is by mapping the credential provider's test plan to the curriculum, to ensure that all of the certification exam content is covered throughout the duration of the course. It's vital that you consider the number of hours expected for completion for whatever resources you choose to work with, so your students have proper time to absorb the curriculum's content.



Consider your program layout, flexibility of modules or sections based on clinical hours, timeframe to complete the curriculum, and where relevant, which skills are a best fit for certain portions of the curriculum. Think about externships and internships – these may not be required, but they are highly recommended.

Once you've done that, administering the course is next. Near the end of the program, administer practice assessments to your students to begin preparing them for the certification exam. It's good to offer more than one practice test opportunity to your students.

Be sure to contact your certifying organization's team to submit a site application, to allow your students to sit for their exam on-site. Alternatively, establish a clear understanding of where and when your organization sits learners for exams.

## 3. Implementation

### Teacher Onboarding and Training

As with the process of aligning to the workforce, finding your educators also means tapping your network. Say, for example, you're interested in offering an EKG certification – do you have a teacher



that knows EMTs or EMRs, or a teacher that works with a community partner who is a paramedic? Make use of who you know within your regional and local health systems to cast a wide net.

Like with budgeting, you'll need to check in with your state DOE on their expectations and requirements. Each state has their own guidance on who can teach different professions, and your DOE may offer a mentorship program, or require professional development hours. Mentorship varies from state to state – some states assign a mentor for a new program or teacher, while others may have all health science teachers meet quarterly.

### Customer Service and Support

A good partner will offer additional customer service and supporting resources to help you and your learners succeed before, during, and after your program.

This will look like partner onboarding, solution planning, faculty training for new resources, coaching and guidance for instructors, and more. They should be active in their communication with you when it comes to important dates for exams, renewals, and continuing education, and they should offer you a dedicated team of experts to help guide you through the entire learning journey.

Your program partner's support should extend to analytics as well. The learning resources and prep materials provided should offer analytics reporting as a feature, helping you to gauge progress, performance, and remediation needs at a glance. Your partner should offer training in their reporting resources.

For example, a practice test ought to provide the areas on the test plan where students are scoring low, helping to guide the instructor on what topics to revisit and cover in more detail.

### How NHA Can Help

NHA offers full solution resources for educators looking to incorporate healthcare into their CTE program. We offer all the didactic content and resources your program needs to establish clinical medical assistant (CCMA), patient care technician/assistant (CPCT/A), pharmacy technician (ExCPT), and medical administrative assistant (CMAA) certifications. In addition, we offer preparation and exams for billing and coding specialists (CBCS), EKG technicians (CET), electronic health records specialists (CEHRS), and phlebotomy technicians (CPT).

We assist new teachers coming from the field in taking what they know from hands-on experience and turning that into classroom teaching.

NHA will work alongside you to determine what learning routes you will need in your program. Unlike other solutions, which may be limited in scope, or require you to accept and pay for options you don't need, NHA offers scalable, right-sized programming designed for your unique needs – and we'll work alongside you not only during the implementation process, but beyond.

Schedule a [consultation with NHA](#), and learn how our flexible learning solutions can help your students achieve their goals. NHA is with you every step of the way.



NHA is building the next generation of allied health professionals. Since 1989, we have helped over 1.5 million people access a better future in healthcare. From innovative learning solutions to certification and career development, we partner with individuals, educators and employers to elevate the learning experience, ensure practice and career readiness and drive positive outcomes for the industry, allied health professionals, and ultimately patients.

Interested in learning more? [We'd love to chat.](#)

