

Exploring a Career in Speech-Language Pathology in Health Care Settings

Agenda

- Role of the SLP in Health Care
- Health Care Settings
- Requirements and Skills for SLPs in Health Care
- Career Paths for SLPs in Health Care
- The Business of Health Care
- Employment Status of SLPs in Health Care
- Pay for SLPs in Health Care
- Factors To Consider When Exploring a Position in Health Care

Role of the SLP in Health Care

- SLPs in health care settings
 - provide screening, assessment, and treatment services to individuals with a range of medical diagnoses that impact communication, cognition, and swallowing;
 - play a critical role in patient safety, health literacy, communication access, and prevention and wellness initiatives within their organization; and
 - may also participate in related patient care activities (multiskilling), advocacy, supervision, research, and administration.

SLP Referral Process

- SLPs are consulted when individuals have difficulty with communication, thinking, or swallowing.
- Individuals with the following conditions may be referred to an SLP:
 - neurological conditions (e.g., stroke, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease)
 - medical/surgical events (e.g., surgery to head/neck, endotracheal intubation)
 - chronic conditions (e.g., chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD])
 - developmental or congenital conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy)

SLP Referral Process

Referral Sources

- A physician or another member of the care team—such as a nurse—initiates the referral or consult based on their own assessment or screening.
 - The patient may be screened either at admission or periodically during their stay.
- SLP referrals can be triggered automatically based on the admitting diagnosis when a facility uses clinical or critical pathways. These pathways are standardized protocols built into the medical record to streamline care.
 - For example, a stroke pathway may automatically include an SLP consult for a swallowing and/or a speech/language/cognitive evaluation within 24 hours of admission.
- Referrals may come from facility staff, care partners, or the patient themselves.

A provider order, typically from a physician, NP, or PA, may be needed, depending on state, facility, or payer requirements.

Assessment Types

- Swallowing
 - Clinical swallowing evaluation
 - Modified Barium Swallow Study (MBSS) or Videofluoroscopic Swallow Study (VFSS)
 - Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES)
- Speech
- Language
- Cognition
- Voice

Treatment Types

- Treatment is individualized and is based on the patient's goals within the following areas of functioning:
 - swallowing
 - speech
 - language
 - cognition
 - voice

Interprofessional Practice (IPP)

- Patients with chronic or complex conditions often have multiple medical and treatment needs. It is important that SLPs take an interprofessional approach to care.
- This is called *interprofessional practice (IPP)*.
- Depending on the patient's diagnosis, level of functioning, current needs, and age, the SLP may collaborate with the following professionals:
 - dietitians
 - nurses
 - physicians
 - social workers
 - occupational therapists
 - physical therapists
 - psychologists
 - recreation therapists
 - teachers
 - others

Interprofessional Practice (cont'd)

- SLPs may participate as members of IPP teams within the facility, such as craniofacial, feeding, or tracheostomy teams.
- The IPP team works together to develop an integrated, person-centered treatment plan.

Health Care Settings

- Hospital (Acute Care)
- Acute Rehabilitation
- Assisted Living Facility
- Continuing Care Retirement Community
- Outpatient Rehabilitation
- Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF)
- Long-Term Care (LTC)
- Long-Term Acute Care Hospital (LTACH)
- Home Health

SLPs Working in Health Care Settings

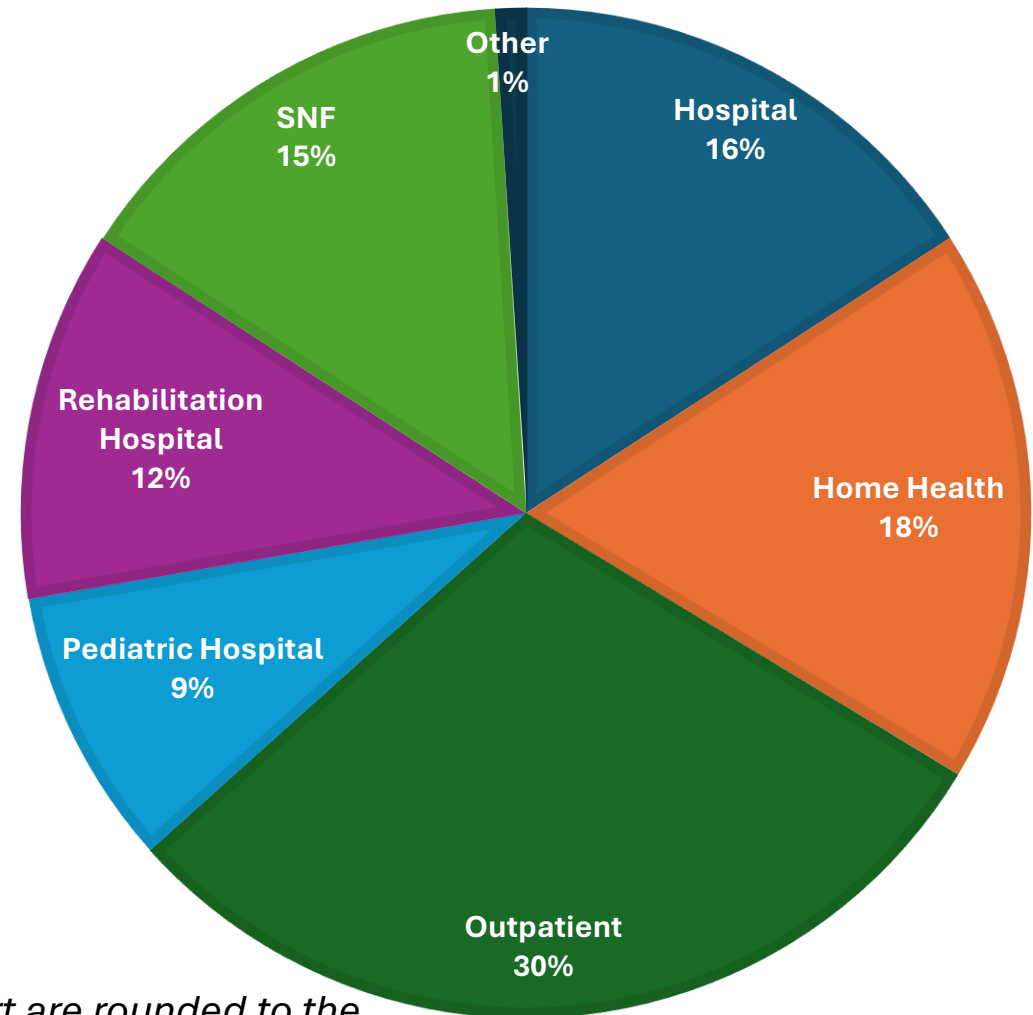
In 2023, of all ASHA-certified SLPs, **40.4%** reported that a health care facility was their primary place of employment.

Source: ASHA 2023 Member and Affiliate Profile

Most SLPs in health care worked in an outpatient setting, followed by home health, hospital, SNF, rehabilitation hospital, and pediatric hospital.

Note: Numbers in pie chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Primary Employment Setting for SLPs in Health Care



Source: ASHA 2023 SLP Health Care Survey

Requirements and Skills for SLPs in Health Care

- Requirements

- master's degree from a communication sciences and disorders (CSD) program
- license in speech-language pathology in the state of employment
- see your state's SLP practice act in the state of licensure for any additional requirements

- Skills

- strong communication skills
- empathy and compassion
- critical thinking and problem solving
- collaboration and teamwork
- adaptability and resilience
- cultural competence
- time management and organization
- ethical decision making
- teaching and coaching skills

Career Paths for SLPs in Health Care

- Clinician
 - As a clinician, in addition to performing clinical care, you may also supervise graduate students or clinical fellows, provide in-service trainings, and participate in interdisciplinary rounds. Many clinicians also contribute to program development, outcomes tracking, or quality improvement initiatives.
 - Some facilities offer “clinical ladders” — with each tier on the ladder corresponding to experience levels, clinical educator roles, or senior clinician positions.
- Administrator
 - SLPs with strong leadership and organizational skills may move into administrative roles such as rehab manager or department director. These roles often involve overseeing staff, managing budgets, coordinating services across teams, ensuring regulatory compliance, and contributing to strategic planning. An administrator grounded in clinical practice can advocate for evidence-based care and appropriate staffing models.

Career Paths for SLPs in Health Care(cont'd)

- Researcher
 - Some SLPs pursue research careers in academic, medical, or private settings. As a researcher, you might design and carry out studies on treatment effectiveness, health outcomes, service delivery models, or the patient experience. This path often involves applying for grants, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, and presenting findings at conferences. Clinical experience can enrich research questions and make findings more applicable to real-world practice.
- Professor
 - SLPs may teach at the undergraduate or graduate level. Professors may develop and deliver coursework, supervise student research, mentor future clinicians, and engage in academic program development. Many also maintain active research agendas. This role often combines clinical expertise, scholarship, and a passion for education.

The Business of Health Care

There are several factors related to the business of health care that impact how SLPs operate in health care settings.

These factors—which are not unique to speech-language pathology—are as follows (see more details on subsequent slides):

- Reimbursement
- Prospective Payment System (PPS)
- Fee-for-Service (FFS) Versus Value-Based Care (VBC)
- Reimbursement Limits
- Productivity
- Documentation
- Medical Necessity
- Service Delivery Methods

The Business of Health Care

Reimbursement

Reimbursement: In health care, *reimbursement* is how providers—like doctors and SLPs—get paid for the services they provide to patients. Instead of patients paying the full cost themselves, the insurance companies, Medicare, or Medicaid (known as *payers*) cover some or all of the cost. Providers submit claims with details about the care that they gave; if approved, they receive payment based on set rates. The amount and type of services that are covered depend on the patient's insurance plan and the rules set by the payer. In some cases, patients pay out-of-pocket—known as *private pay*.

Prospective Payment System (PPS): A *PPS* is a reimbursement method in which Medicare payments are made based on a pre-determined, fixed amount that is unique to specific settings. Facilities are reimbursed a lump sum based on the patient's diagnosis.

The Business of Health Care

Reimbursement (cont'd)

Fee-for-Service (FFS) Versus Value-Based Care (VBC): *Fee-for-service (FFS)* reimburses the health care provider for each service that they deliver to the patient. *Value-based care (VBC)* incentivizes providers to focus on quality outcomes rather than the quantity of services rendered.

Reimbursement Limits: Payers often set limits on either

- (a) the *dollar amount* or
- (b) the *length of time*

that they will pay for such services.

Documentation must show that the services are medically necessary; otherwise, claim denials are possible.

The Business of Health Care

Productivity: *Productivity* is the amount of time that the clinician spent in patient care versus the total number of hours that they worked.

- Some facilities base productivity on the total number of services delivered in a day, whereas others base productivity on the time spent performing care. Standards vary by facility.
- ASHA encourages employers to include any activity required for patient care into productivity measures (e.g., documentation, care coordination, screening). However, in practice, many employers only include billable, face-to-face time with the patient in their definition of “patient care time,” which can leave out essential but non-billable tasks.
- For more information, see www.asha.org/slp/productivity

The Business of Health Care

Documentation: Tracking the clinician's services and keeping careful records—a process known as *documentation*—is critical to reimbursement and is consistent with the definition of “quality care” as outlined in the *ASHA Code of Ethics* (www.asha.org/policy/code-of-ethics). Documentation conveys that care is patient centered, skilled, and medically necessary.

Medical necessity within a health care setting refers to the justification that evaluation and treatment services provided by the SLP are essential for diagnosing, treating, or preventing a communication, cognitive, swallowing, or voice disorder that impacts a patient's health and function. It establishes that the services are reasonable, appropriate, and required based on the patient's condition, and that they cannot be effectively provided by someone without the specialized skills of an SLP.

The Business of Health Care

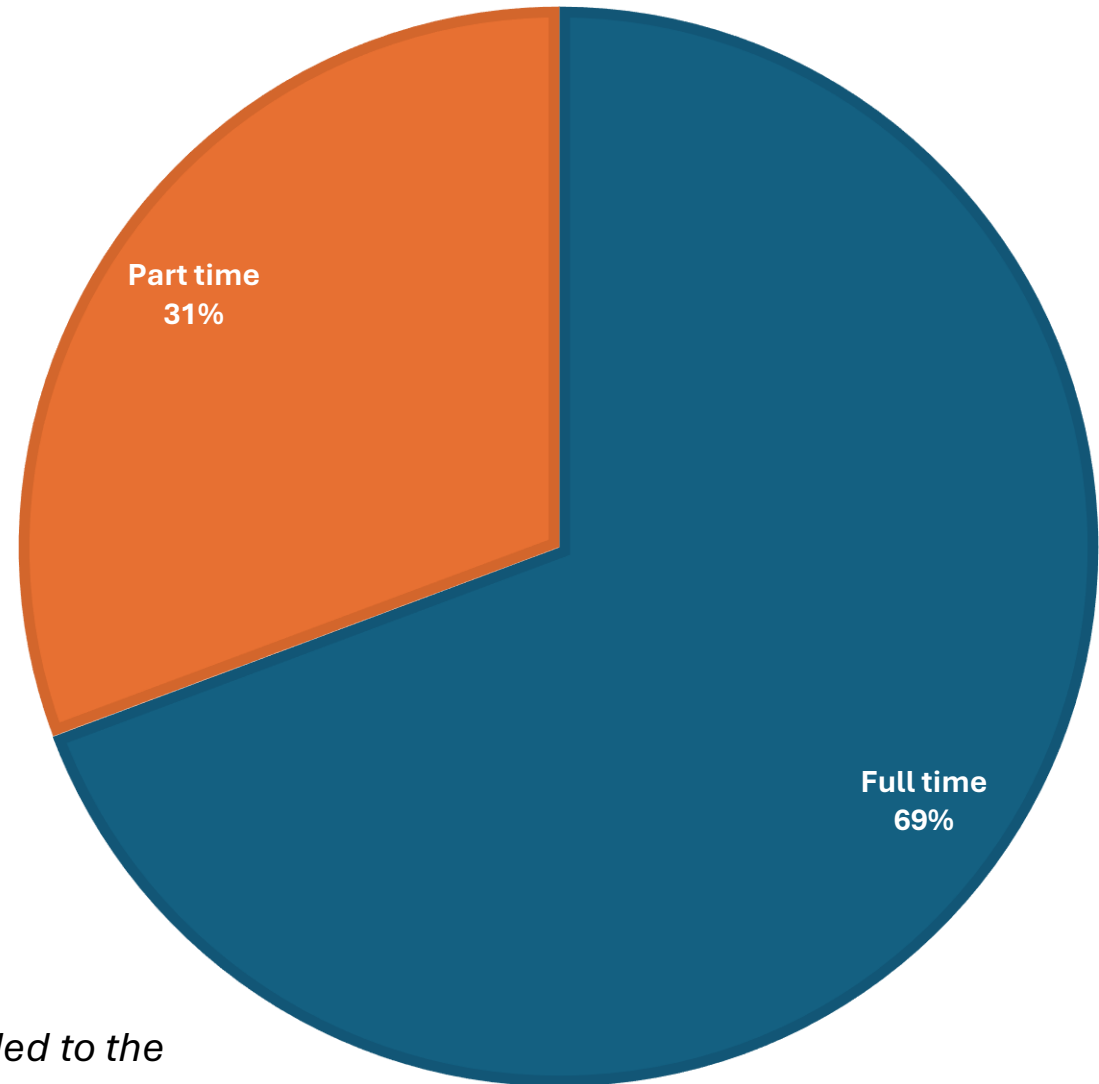
Service Delivery Methods: Clinicians use what are known as “service delivery methods” when working with patients. A *service delivery method* is a structured approach for providing services to a patient involving specific methods, processes, and technologies to provide efficient and effective treatment. Service delivery methods can and will vary. Patients often benefit from such variations in service delivery method.

Examples of service delivery methods include:

- individual treatment
- group treatment
- co-treatment
- skilled maintenance
- telepractice
- consultation

Employment Status of SLPs in Health Care

- Employed full time: 69.3%
- Employed part time: 30.7%

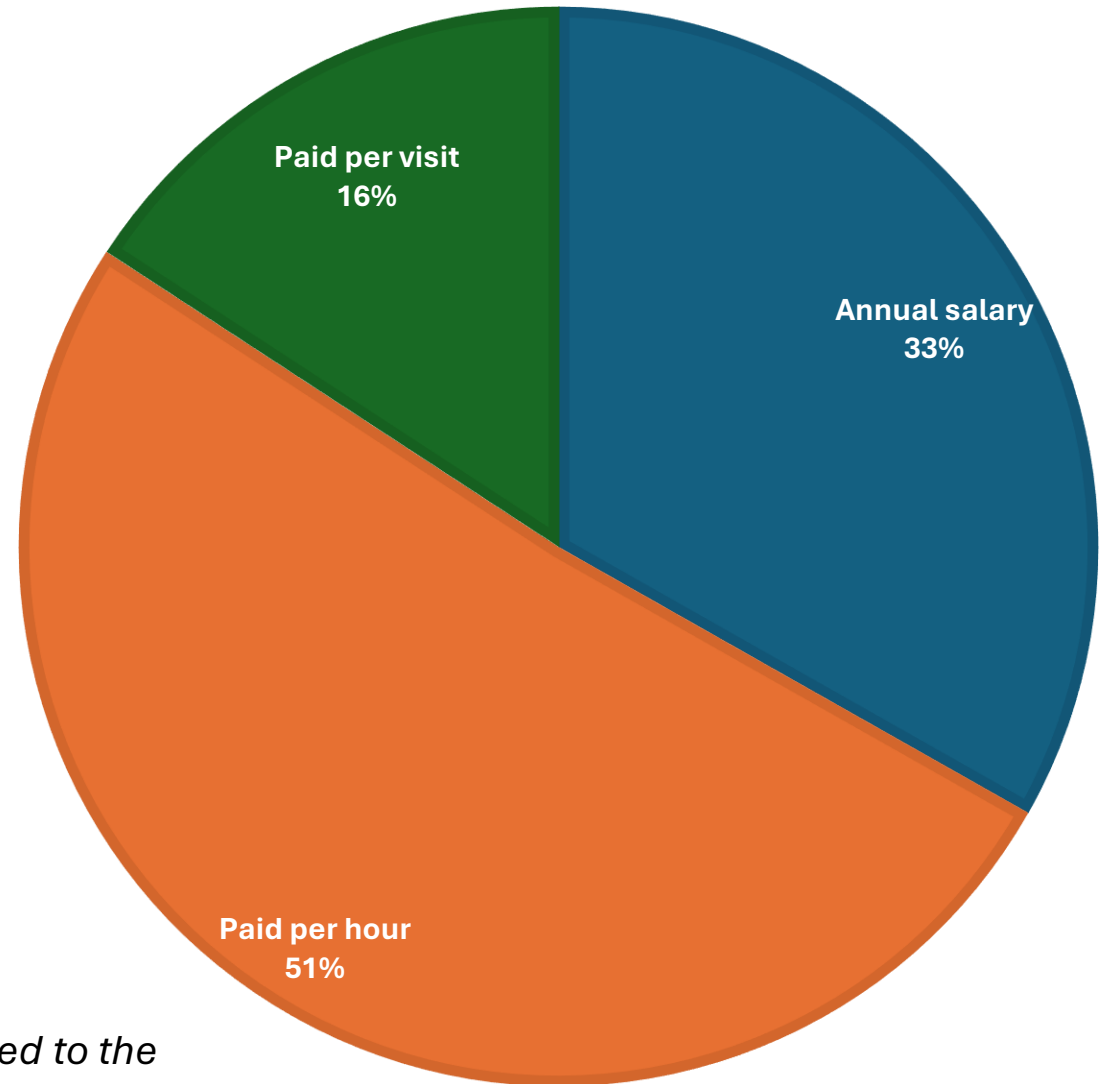


Note: Numbers in pie chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: ASHA 2023 SLP Health Care Survey

Pay for SLPs in Health Care

- Annual salary: 33.2%
- Paid per hour: 51.0%
- Paid per visit: 15.8%



Note: Numbers in pie chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: ASHA 2023 SLP Health Care Survey

Average Annual Salary for SLPs in Health Care, by Setting

Pay models in health care vary by geographical location, health care setting, and years of experience—among other factors.

- Hospital: \$93,378
- Home Health: \$84,712
- Outpatient: \$87,885
- Rehab Hospital: \$89,530
- Skilled Nursing Facility: \$96,900

Note: Pediatric hospital salary was not included in survey data due to small sample size.

Source: ASHA 2023 SLP Health Care Survey

Average Hourly Rate for *Full-Time* SLPs in Health Care, by Setting

- Hospital: \$47.21
- Home Health: \$62.40
- Outpatient: \$47.21
- Skilled Nursing Facility: \$44.01

Note: Rehab hospital and pediatric hospital hourly rate were not included in survey data due to small sample size.

Average Hourly Rate for *Part-Time* SLPs in Health Care, by Setting

- Hospital: \$49.76
- Home Health: \$67.24
- Outpatient: \$52.90
- Rehab Hospital: \$49.90
- Skilled Nursing Facility: \$50.56

Note: Pediatric hospital hourly rate was not included in survey data due to small sample size.

Factors To Consider When Exploring a Position in Health Care

- Leadership characteristics: Is your direct supervisor . . .
 - an SLP or
 - another rehab professional (e.g., PT or OT)?
- Team member characteristics
 - Are there other SLPs onsite?
 - What is the team dynamic like?
- Pay structure: Will you get paid . . .
 - an annual salary,
 - per hour, or
 - per visit?
- Productivity standard
- Work hours

Factors To Consider When Exploring a Position in Health Care (cont'd)

- Health insurance, accident and liability protection
- Disability coverage and life insurance
- Retirement benefits
- Leave time and leave types
 - How much leave time do you accrue each pay period?
 - Are there separate “leave banks”?
 - What are the policies surrounding the use of each leave type?
- Professional development
 - Does the employer offer cross-training opportunities?
 - Do they cover continuing education costs, state licensure fees, or ASHA dues?

Additional Information

Explore these resources for more information on pursuing a career as an SLP in health care:

- [Getting Started as an SLP in Health Care](#)
- [Why a Career in CSD? Hearing and Speech Careers](#)
- [Job Seeker Toolkit](#)
- [Speech-Language Pathologists in Health Care Settings](#)

Questions? Email [**healthservices@asha.org**](mailto:healthservices@asha.org) and let us know how we can support you.