

Genetic Counselor

Professional Activities

Genetic counselors can work in a wide variety of settings. The most common setting is a clinical practice. Genetic counselors work in prenatal, pediatric, adult and cancer clinics. In these settings, genetic counselors work as part of a health care team providing information and support to individuals who have or are at risk of having birth defects or genetic conditions, and their families. They analyze family history information, interpret information about specific disorders, discuss the inheritance patterns, assess the risk to individuals and review available options for testing or management with families. In addition to informative counseling, genetic counselors also provide supportive counseling to help individuals and families cope with and adapt to their altered circumstances.

Many genetic counselors are involved in educating medical residents, medical students, genetic counseling students, physicians, other health care providers and the general public. Frequently, genetic counselors are involved in research activities related to the field of medical genetics and genetic counseling.

Genetic counselors also work in laboratories as a resource for other health care professionals regarding the most appropriate testing plan for a patient. Some counselors are now working for agencies such as the NIH, CDC and state Departments of Health. Others are working for pharmaceutical companies in the area of pharmacogenetics.

Genetic counselors in clinical settings work in a medical office building or outpatient area of a hospital. They will often be meeting face-to-face with their patients. The job is not physically demanding, but may involve travel to satellite offices to provide counseling. The emotional nature of some situations can be demanding. Full-time genetic counselors typically work approximately 40 hours per week, though there are many genetic counselors working part time.

Educational Requirements

Currently, 27 training programs offer master's degrees in genetic counseling in the United States and there are three accredited training programs in Canada. Coursework typically includes clinical genetics, population genetics, cytogenetics, and molecular genetics coupled with psychosocial theory, ethics and counseling techniques. Clinical placement in approved medical genetics centers is an integral part of the degree requirement. Additionally, there are non-accredited genetic counseling programs in Australia, England and South Africa and there are other programs that accept nurses seeking post-graduate degrees with specialty training in genetics. One program offers a PhD in human genetics with a focus in genetic counseling and others are planning similar programs.

Certification is not currently required to be a practicing genetic counselor, however the majority of counselors practicing today are board certified. Licensure is becoming available in a growing number of states and is often dependent upon board certification.

Board certification to become a Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC) is available through the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC). Requirements include documentation of the following: a graduate degree in genetic counseling from an accredited program; clinical experience in an ABGC-approved training site or sites; a log book of 50 supervised cases; and successful completion of both the general and specialty certification examination.

Certification is valid for 10 years. Recertification after 10 years is made possible through reexamination or the collection of continuing education units (CEUs).

Academic Programs

[Northwestern University](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

Genetic counselors are employed in a growing number of professional settings including hospitals, universities, private practices, research and commercial labs, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, nonprofit organizations and government agencies.

The future of the genetic counseling profession is strengthened by advances in genomics, including the completion of the Human Genome Project. The expansion of genomic medicine demands experts who can assess and communicate health risks and assist healthcare professionals and patients with decision-making regarding testing and treatment options. Genetic counselors are ideally equipped to respond to these demands and will be a primary resource as society adapts to the changes brought about by this new scientific era. As the field of genetics continues to revolutionize medicine, the number of patients interacting with genetic counselors is expected to grow exponentially. The need for qualified genetic professionals will therefore increase accordingly, creating a greater demand for the employment of genetic counselors.

State and National Wages

| Location | Pay Period | 2021 | | |
|---------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | | Low | Median | High |
| United States | Hourly | \$23.62 | \$38.54 | \$58.21 |
| | Annual | \$49,120 | \$80,150 | \$121,070 |
| Illinois | Hourly | \$33.29 | \$37.94 | \$48.13 |
| | Annual | \$69,230 | \$78,920 | \$100,110 |

State and National Trends

| United States | Employment | | Percent Change | Job Openings ¹ |
|--------------------|------------|-------|----------------|---|
| | 2020 | 2030 | | |
| Genetic Counselors | 2,400 | 3,100 | 26% | 300 |
| Illinois | Employment | | Percent Change | Job Openings ¹ |
| | 2018 | 2028 | | |
| Genetic Counselors | 250 | 290 | +16% | 20 |

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Note: Employment trends data for **Genetic Counselors** is included in the trends data for *Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Workers, All Other*.

Professional Organizations

National Society of Genetic Counselors (nsgc.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/29-9092.00>)

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