

MOHSS

Montana Occupational Health & Safety Surveillance

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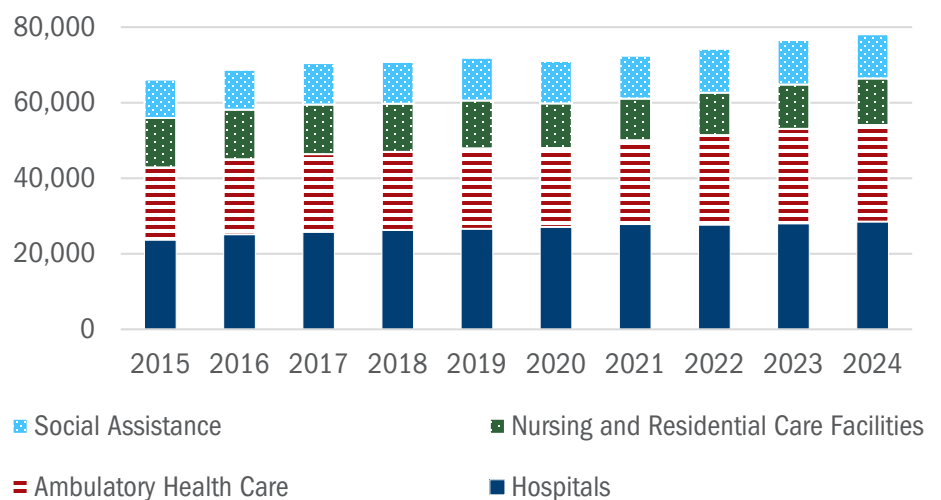
Healthcare and Social Services Safety

Thousands of Montanans work in healthcare and social services, an industry which includes medical professionals, long-term care providers, social workers, and more. These occupations meet the care needs of society, whether continuously caring for the elderly or disabled or performing acute care for the sick or injured. In conducting this work, employees must remain vigilant of a variety of hazards. This newsletter examines the healthcare and social services industry, providing insights on observed working hazards and guidance for keeping workers safe and healthy in this vital industry.

Industry Overview

Healthcare and social services is one of Montana's most common professions, with over 75,000 employees (15% of the state's total workforce).¹ The industry has grown steadily in the past decade, driven by increased employment in hospitals and ambulatory care settings. The industry largely consists of private-sector operations, although about 5% of all staff are federal, state, or local government employees. While workers in healthcare and social services can be found everywhere in Montana, over 80% of healthcare and social services workers are located within Montana's ten most populous counties.

Healthcare and Social Services Employment by Year and Sector



Common Workplace Injuries in Healthcare and Social Services

From 2015 to 2024, Montana's healthcare and social services workers reported about 38,000 workplace injuries, the most for any single industry group.ⁱⁱ However, the industry's rate of injury was 4.2 per 100 full-time equivalent employees, only slightly above the state average. Additionally, both the count and the rate of injury in healthcare and social services declined between 2015 and 2024. The injury reports for health and social services provide the following insights on injuries and hazards in this industry:

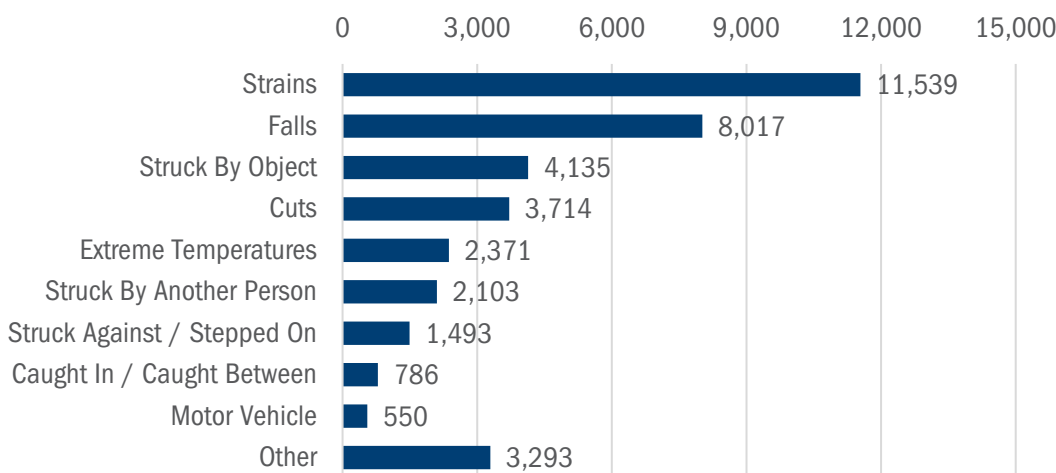
- The leading causes of injury in healthcare and social services, strains and falls, were also the leading cause of injury for Montana's entire workforce. These causes of injury accounted for about half of all injuries reported in healthcare and social services between 2015 and 2024. The number of injuries per worker from these causes did not differ when comparing healthcare and social services to the entire Montana workforce.
- Healthcare and social services workers reported injuries from being struck by another person at nearly twice the rate of the average Montana worker. This trend has previously been observed in DLI reporting on workplace violence, although not all "struck by another person" injuries resulted from intentional acts of violence.³ⁱⁱⁱ
- Workers in healthcare and social services also reported higher rates of injury from cuts and contact with extreme temperatures, as well as higher rates of work-related illness from infections.
- Roughly 10% of all injuries to workers in healthcare and social services resulted in payout of indemnity benefits, lower than workforce average of 14%.

Staying Safe in Healthcare and Social Services

The decrease in the number of injuries and rate of injury reported in the healthcare and social services industry in Montana is encouraging. To continue this trend, employees and employers in this industry should consider the following areas for safety emphasis:

Ergonomics: Strain injuries (including sprains and tears) to workers in healthcare and social service workers often occurred while workers were lifting, carrying, or otherwise handling individuals and objects. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends employees be trained in workplace-specific ergonomics. Employers in healthcare and social services should develop and provide regular training on proper lifting techniques as well as proper patient handling, including lifts, transfers, and restraints. [The OSHA webpage on Ergonomics has resources to help with developing ergonomic training.](#)

Injuries to Workers in Healthcare and Social Services by Cause, 2015 - 2024



Patient De-Escalation: Workers in healthcare and social services may be expected to work with individuals in escalated behavioral states, especially when working with individuals diagnosed with mental health disorders. Preventing these individuals from harming others is vital to ensuring a safe workplace. Employers in healthcare and social services should train all staff in proper de-escalation and conflict management. Employers are also encouraged to develop safe working practices to avoid escalation hazards, including keeping staff in groups. [See OSHA's guidance on workplace violence prevention in hospitals for more.](#)

Handling Sharps: Workers in healthcare have a unique occupational hazard presented by needles and surgical tools. Proper storage, handling, and disposal of sharps is vital to avoiding puncture wounds as well as exposure to biological hazards. [OSHA's bloodborne pathogens and needlestick prevention webpage is a good place for employers to look for sharps' safety guidance.](#)

By focusing on these major sources of injury, workers and employers can ensure the safest working conditions for the healthcare and social service professionals who keep Montana healthy and cared for.

ⁱ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

ⁱⁱ Workers' Compensation Administrative Network, Montana Department of Labor & Industry

ⁱⁱⁱ From ["Revisiting Workplace Violence in Montana", Montana Department of Labor & Industry](#)

