



# OSKA health care study

## *Key findings*

According to OSKA's forecast, around 7,700 additional professional specialists will be needed in the health sector over the next ten years. Around 6,400 people are expected to join from the offered education, leaving a shortfall of 1,300.

The total number of people in health care professions will increase by around a tenth by 2033 (from 20,380 to 22,600).

More than half of the labour needs over the next ten years includes replacing retiring workers, a fifth includes replacing staff turnover, and just under 30% includes meeting growing service needs.

### Replacement needs due to age

Over the next ten years, around 4,000 people will be needed to replace those who leave professional occupations because of age. In a comparison of professions, doctors stand out for their high age-related replacement needs. As many as half of the doctors currently practising will exceed the official retirement age threshold in the next ten years.

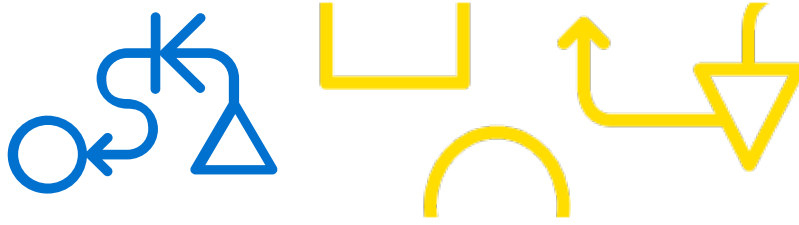
As the median age of professional retirement of Estonian doctors aged 65 and over is 74, it is not necessary to replace all the doctors who will reach retirement age in the next decade, but only about a quarter of those currently practising, i.e. 1,200 people.

During the same period, around 1,100 new doctors are expected to enter the profession from their studies. According to OSKA, an increase in the number of admissions to the Estonian-language basic medical training by one tenth, i.e. up to 200 people per year, should be considered.

### Replacement needs due to turnover

OSKA estimates that Estonia could lose around 1,500 of its prime-age health professionals over the next decade due to staff turnover. Staff turnover refers to the difference between those entering and leaving the occupation, excluding graduates and persons of retirement age.

The problem of staff turnover is most acute in the largest occupation in the sector, nursing. In ten years, if current trends continue, around 750 nurses who have left the occupation may need to be replaced. Satisfaction with working conditions,



including workload and treatment at the workplace, must be improved to stop the turnover.

### Growth needs

The increase in the number of people in employment is mainly due to the growing need for treatment caused by the ageing of the population. In addition, there is a need to alleviate the shortage of experts in certain specialities, such as mental health or speech therapy, to expand opportunities for health promotion and disease prevention, and to respond to increased expectations of the society in terms of the quality, accessibility, speed, and personalisation of health services.

To fill the additional posts, around 2,200 new employees will be needed over ten years. Clinical psychologists and physiotherapists are likely to see the biggest change compared to the current number of people employed (40–50% increase). The number of speech therapists in the health care workforce is projected to increase by 20%, and that of radiology technicians by up to 10%. The largest occupation in the sector, nursing, is expected to grow by 20%.

### Recommendations

Five key recommendations for balancing workforce needs and offered education in the health professions and making the best use of labour resources:

- increasing the number of student places for doctors, clinical psychologists, and speech therapists;
- task-shifting in a way that allows people from all professions to maximise the potential of their skills;
- greater use of digital solutions;
- tackling the staff turnover of prime-age specialists, starting by first identifying its causes from a profession-specific perspective;
- increasing people's awareness of and responsibility for monitoring and managing their health;
- evaluating the choice of round-the-clock services in general hospitals.

The studies for the OSKA skills and labour demand monitoring and forecasting system are conducted by the Estonian Qualifications Authority (SA Kutsekoda) with funding from the European Social Fund.