

Becoming a Nutrition Health Associate

Your first step into the nutrition world

What is a Nutrition Health Associate (NHA)?

Nutrition Health Associates (NHAs) are paraprofessionals trained in food and nutrition, expanding on preparation of the community health worker with cutting-edge science, nutrition and food knowledge.

As an essential part of the healthcare and foodservice management teams, the NHA works under the supervision of Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) or other health practitioners with individuals in their homes and community settings. NHAs are not RDNs, but work in a support role to RDNs, as key components to the food and nutrition health team.

Goals of the NHA:

- Address social factors of health
- Support the individual's progress towards wellness
- Assist with healthcare navigation and education

Services performed by the NHA include, but are not limited to:

- Collect data and assist with screening (e.g. home environment, weight, activity level, blood glucose).
- Provide assistance in label reading.
- Aid with food selection, preparation, and access.
- Help keep individuals out of the hospital and in their home.

Skills needed to perform the duties of an NHA:

- Ability to interpersonally communicate and collaborate with culturally diverse individuals and health team members.
- Basic food and nutrition knowledge to assist individuals in their daily food selection and preparation.
- Ability to integrate knowledge of determinants of health into nutrition care and services.

Educational and professional requirements

NHAs meet the following criteria:

- Complete an associate degree program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) in which didactic coursework and experiential learning are integrated in a single program.
- Gain experiences in actual work settings working with community health professionals.

College Coursework

The associate degree coursework for Nutrition Health Associate includes a variety of classes in food and nutrition sciences, wellness and determinants of health, food safety, cultural competence, and communication.

Employment Opportunities

Potential setting in which NHAs work:

- **Community Agencies:** provides support and education in nutrition, food preparation, medication adherence, physical activity, health care system navigation, community assistance programs, substance use and other health topics. Also participates in the development of care plans with the individual and their health care team, and supports the individual to achieve goals.
- **Social Service Agencies:** coordinates care to bridge the gaps and eliminate barriers to health care and social services of identified at-risk individuals. Collects specific nutrition, health, behavioral and social information for the health care team.

- **Healthcare Organizations:** helps individuals and families access resources, including health insurance, food, housing, quality care, and nutrition and health information. Facilitates communication and empowerment by helping individuals understand and develop health strategies to improve their wellbeing.
- **Grant Funded Projects:** conducts outreach to identify individuals who are in need of health care and social services. Assists individuals to obtain access to health care and supportive services. Performs grant intake interviews, and provides basic advocacy, assessment, planning and casework services.
- **Home Health Agencies:** conducts outreach to individuals who are challenged by medical, age, or mobility-related conditions. Advocates for individuals in need of higher level of care so they are connected to services they require. Helps individuals comprehend and use community services, assisting in scheduling appointments, building a support system, and reinforcing use of self-management and organizational tools.

Salaries and Job Outlook

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean annual wage of a community health worker, *a role similar to a nutrition health associate*, is more than \$42,000. Overall employment of health educators and community health workers is projected to grow 16 percent from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. Growth will be driven by efforts to improve health outcomes and to reduce healthcare costs by teaching people healthy behaviors and explaining how to use available healthcare services.

Financial Aid

There are many resources to help students pay for college. You may be able to obtain a grant or scholarship from a corporation, community or civic group, philanthropic or religious organization, or directly from your chosen school or college you are interested in attending. Federal grants and low-interest loans may also be available.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation offers scholarships to encourage eligible students to enter the field of dietetics. Student members of the Academy enrolled in their first year of study in an ACEND-accredited program may apply for a Foundation scholarship for use in the second year of study.

Interested in learning more about this exciting career opportunity?

Visit www.eatrightpro.org/acend or contact the Education Programs team at **800/877-1600, ext. 5400** or education@eatright.org.