

Healthcare's four-year run as America's job engine

Healthcare added 76,000 jobs in March 2026, the largest gain of any sector and roughly 43% of all nonfarm payroll growth that month — confirming the user's claim. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation released April 3, 2026 explicitly named health care first among gaining industries, ahead of construction (+26K) and transportation and warehousing (+21K), (Bureau of Labor Statistics) with total nonfarm payrolls up 178,000. That single month is the latest entry in an extraordinary streak: healthcare has been either the #1 or a co-leading source of monthly U.S. job growth in nearly every BLS release since February 2022, a run that has only intensified as the broader labor market has cooled. The sector accelerated from a 47K/month average in 2022 to roughly 70K/month in early 2024, then settled into the 30s-50s in 2025 as overall hiring slowed, before the sole interruption — a strike-driven loss in February 2026 — was promptly reversed in March.

How March 2026 looked under the hood


The March 2026 release (USDLE-26-0580, preliminary) shows **health care +76,000**, with ambulatory health care services contributing +54,000 and hospitals +15,000.

(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) Within ambulatory, offices of physicians jumped +35,000 as workers returned from (bls) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) the late-January-through-late-February Kaiser Permanente strike, mechanically inflating the rebound. Combined "health care and social assistance" on Table B-1 totaled +89,900; (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) subtracting social assistance (+14,000) yields the +76,000 health-care-only number BLS highlights. Federal government (-18K) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) and financial activities (-15K) were the largest losers. The same release revised January 2026 up by 34,000 (to +160K) and February 2026 down by 41,000 (to -133K), (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) making the headline trajectory choppy than the underlying healthcare trend.

The most recent 12 months in detail (April 2025 - March 2026)

All figures are seasonally adjusted in thousands; status reflects each month's initial release. Sub-sector entries are ambulatory / hospitals / nursing & residential care.

Month	Health care	Sub-sector detail	Total nonfarm	Rank / leading sector	Notes
Apr 2025	+51	+21 / +22 / n/a	+177	Tied #1 with T&W	~12K NY home-health workers reclassified to social assistance, depressing the print U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...
May 2025	+62	+29 / +30 / +6	+139	#1 (~45% of total)	Home health +12, physicians' offices +10 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...
Jun 2025	+39	n/a / +16 / +14	+147	#2 behind state government (+47K)	
Jul 2025	+55	+34 / +16 / +6	+73	#1 (~75% of gains)	Healthcare carried a weak month U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...
Aug 2025	+31	+13 / +9 / +9	+22	#1	Healthcare effectively all of net growth
Sep 2025	+43	+23 / +16 / n/a	+119	#1	Release delayed to Nov 20 by shutdown
Oct 2025	~+44	not narrated	-105	#1	No standalone release; federal payrolls -162K from deferred resignations U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...
Nov 2025	+46	+24 / +11 / +11	+64	#1 (~72% of gains)	Construction +28; Bureau of Labor Statistics combined Oct/Nov release Dec 16
Dec 2025	+21	n/a / +16 / n/a	+50	#2 behind food services (+27K)	Retail -25K U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...
Jan 2026	+82	not detailed	+130	#1 (~63% of gains)	Post-benchmark; social assistance +42, federal -34 CNBC
Feb 2026	-28 ⚠️	physicians' offices -37; hospitals +12	-92 (rev. -133)	First HC decline since pandemic	Kaiser Permanente strike (~31K nurses) hit Feb 8-14 reference week Labor Finders +2

Month	Health care	Sub-sector detail	Total nonfarm	Rank / leading sector	Notes
Mar 2026	+76 	+54 / +15 / ~+7	+178	#1 (~43% of gains)	Strike unwind: physicians' offices +35K U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...

Healthcare averaged roughly **+34,000 jobs per month across 2025**, down from +56,000 in 2024 but still the dominant single contributor in a labor market where total nonfarm growth was decelerating sharply. The BLS Economics Daily reports health care and social assistance employment grew **2.9%, or 680,500 jobs, from March 2025 to March 2026**

[Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) — against essentially flat total nonfarm employment over the same year, and federal government down 11.0% (-330K). [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

The prior 12 months (April 2024 - March 2025)

This window represents healthcare's peak monthly pace in the post-pandemic cycle, with every release naming health care as a leading or top-cited sector.

Month	Health care	Sub-sectors (amb / hosp / N&R)	Total nonfarm	Rank
Apr 2024	+56	+33 / +14 / +9	+175	#1
May 2024	+68	+43 / +15 / +11	+272	#1
Jun 2024	+49	+22 / +22 / n/a	+206	#2 (after government)
Jul 2024	+55	HHC +22 / +20 / +9 (bls)	+114	#1
Aug 2024	+31	+24 / flat / +11	+142 (Humanacs)	#2 (after construction)
Sep 2024	+45	+24 / small / +9	+254 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...)	Top 3
Oct 2024	+52	+36 / +7 / +9	+12 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...)	#1 by wide margin (hurricanes/Boeing strike)
Nov 2024	+54	+22 / +19 / +14	+227 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...)	#1 / #2
Dec 2024	+46	HHC +15 / +12 / +14	+256	#1 private-sector
Jan 2025	+44	+13 / +14 / +13	+143	#1 (post-benchmark)
Feb 2025	+52	+20 / +15 / +17	+151	#1 (federal began declining)
Mar 2025	+54	+20 / +17 / +17	+228	#1

Two narrative anchors stand out. In **October 2024**, hurricanes Helene and Milton plus the Boeing strike crushed total payrolls to +12K, but health care still added 52K — the clearest illustration of the sector's role as labor-market ballast. Beginning **February 2025**, federal

employment shifted to net losses under DOGE-related cuts, mechanically elevating healthcare's share of net new private-sector jobs in every subsequent release.

January 2022 – March 2024: the acceleration phase

This earlier stretch covers healthcare's post-COVID re-acceleration and its 2023 record year. Healthcare led or near-led essentially every monthly release across 27 consecutive months from February 2022 through March 2024 (Altarum) — the longest sector-leadership streak BLS data show in the post-pandemic period.

2022 (annual average ~+47K/month, total nonfarm avg ~+392K/month). Health care entered 2022 still recovering from the Omicron wave, with nursing and residential care at its post-pandemic trough in January (~869,500 jobs in elderly care). (Peterson-KFF Health System...) Hiring accelerated from February onward — illustrative months include **Feb 2022 ~+64K** (ambulatory +53.6, physicians' offices +15.1, hospitals +2.7), (Advisory) **Oct 2022 +52.6K** (ambulatory +30.7, hospitals +10.8, nursing/residential +11.1), (Altarum) **Nov 2022 +44.7K**, (Altarum) and **Dec 2022 +48.0K**. The February 2023 benchmark revision later cut December 2022 health care by ~91,500 (hospitals -36K, ambulatory -60K, residential +4.5K), the largest single revision affecting this entire timeline.

2023 (annual total ~+654,000 jobs, fastest annual growth since 1991 at +3.9%). Healthcare added roughly **1 in 4** of all U.S. jobs created that year. (altarum) (Altarum) Monthly figures (revised Altarum vintage / headline release): Jan +54.0/+58, (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) Feb +36.5/ (Altarum) +44, Mar +36.2/+34, Apr +41.1, May +49.4/+52, (Altarum) Jun +61.9, Jul +76.8/+63, (Altarum) (Altarum) Aug +70.0/+71, (Altarum) Sep +60.2/+41, (Altarum) Oct +51.9, Nov +78.3/+77, (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) Dec +37.7. (altarum) (Altarum) Cumulative 2023 sub-sector growth was ambulatory +319.8K (physicians' offices +110K, home health +100.5K), hospitals +183.2K, and nursing & residential care +151.0K. (altarum)

Q1 2024 (peak monthly pace, ~+70K/month). Jan 2024 +70K (ambulatory +33, hospitals +20, N&R +17) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) on total nonfarm +353K; (Altarum) Feb 2024 +67K (ambulatory +28, hospitals +28, N&R +11); (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) Mar 2024 +72K (ambulatory +28, hospitals +27, N&R +18). (bls) Total nonfarm averaged ~+291K in this quarter, with healthcare contributing roughly a quarter of all gains.

Benchmark revisions and definitional caveats

Three benchmark revisions reshaped the historical record over this period without changing the qualitative story. The **February 2023** benchmark cut December 2022 health care by ~91.5K (Altarum) but raised total nonfarm March 2022 by +568K. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) The **February 2024** benchmark adjusted 2023 monthly trajectories modestly. The **February 2025** benchmark cut total nonfarm by 589K at the March 2024 anchor but left healthcare's monthly profile largely intact — health care was *not* a major source of the downward revision. The most consequential

adjustment came with the **February 11, 2026** benchmark, (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) which slashed the March 2025 employment level by **898,000 (SA)** and cut full-year 2025 job growth from +584K to **+181K**; again, healthcare emerged as one of the few sectors essentially unrevised, making its share of remaining 2025 growth even more dominant.

Two definitional points matter for clean presentation. First, "health care" in this report refers to BLS NAICS 6562 (the sector excluding social assistance, NAICS 624) — this is the figure BLS highlights in press release narrative text, while Table B-1 typically shows the combined "Health care and social assistance" line that is 10–20K larger most months. Second, several releases reflect non-economic distortions worth flagging: the **April 2025** New York Medicaid home-health reclassification (~12K workers shifted out of health care), the **October 2025 government shutdown** that suppressed federal employment by 162K and delayed the BLS release, (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) and the **Kaiser Permanente strike** (Jan 26–Feb 25, 2026) that produced February's –28K print (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statist...) and March's +35K rebound in physicians' offices.

What the four-year arc tells us

The data reveal an inverted-U trajectory in pace alongside an uninterrupted ascent in relative importance. Monthly healthcare hiring climbed from ~47K in 2022 to ~55K in 2023 to a ~70K peak in early 2024, then decelerated to ~56K in 2024 and ~34K in 2025 before the strike-distorted early 2026 prints. Yet **healthcare's share of total job growth rose throughout** — from roughly 12% of monthly gains in 2022 to 24% in 2023, (Altarum) ~30% across 2024, and frequently more than half of all net new jobs in 2025–2026. The pattern reflects two compounding drivers: persistent demand-side pressure from an aging population (Bureau of Labor Statistics) and post-pandemic care backlogs, and a cyclical slowdown elsewhere — particularly in federal government, professional services, retail, and information — that has left healthcare as the labor market's load-bearing wall. The February 2026 strike-driven decline is the exception that proves the rule: the only month in four years when healthcare did not add jobs, immediately offset the following month, and entirely attributable to a one-off labor action rather than any softening of underlying demand.