



PROFESSIONAL STATUS SURVEY 2019: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Facts about the Genetic Counseling Profession

Did you know...?

- ✓ Genetic Counselor was highlighted as a biology job for science lovers in a December 2018 article published by U.S. News and World Report¹.
- ✓ The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics² projects a growth rate of 29% for genetic counseling positions over the years 2016 to 2026. This exceeds the projected growth rate of 18% over the same period for all healthcare occupations.
- ✓ Genetic counselors work in a variety of settings, including university medical centers, private and public hospitals/medical facilities, diagnostic laboratories, health maintenance organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and government organizations and agencies.
- ✓ Genetic counselors can work in multiple areas of practice, including prenatal, cardiology, cancer, metabolic disease, neurology, pediatrics, infertility, pharmacogenetics, genomic medicine, and others.
- ✓ Increasing demands for genetic expertise in varied fields provides genetic counselors new ways of using their training in genetic counseling. These include working in administration, research, public and professional education, educational content development and editing, public health, laboratory support, public policy, and consulting.
- ✓ The average salary for a full-time genetic counselor is \$91,318 USD³ but can reach up to \$247,000 USD depending on specialty area and experience.
- ✓ Ninety-eight percent of genetic counselors have a Master's degree in human genetics or genetic counseling.
- ✓ Nine out of ten genetic counselors report they are satisfied with their current job⁴.
- ✓ The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), founded in 1979, promotes the professional interests of genetic counselors and provides a network for professional communications. As of 2019, NSGC has over 4,000 members.
- ✓ The American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated in 1993 for the purpose of certifying and recertifying genetic counselors. As of the date of this survey, ABGC has nearly 5,000 certified genetic counselors, an increase of 68% over the number of certified genetic counselors in 2009.
- ✓ The Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) accredits genetic counseling training programs. As of May 2019, there are 45 accredited training programs in the U.S. and Canada.

¹<https://money.usnews.com/careers/applying-for-a-job/articles/biology-jobs-for-science-lovers>

²<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm>

³Data from the 2019 PSS.

⁴Data from the 2018 PSS.

About the Survey

The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) administers a Professional Status Survey (PSS) to its members. Since the survey was first administered in 1980, results from the NSGC PSS have served many purposes, including establishing benchmarks for salaries and benefits for genetic counselors, identifying workforce issues, and gauging job and professional satisfaction in the genetic counseling community. Data from the PSS originate from genetic counselors working in a variety of settings, including those who provide direct patient care as well as those who work in commercial diagnostic laboratories, research, public health, and other roles.

Historically, the PSS has been offered biennially. This is the first year that the NSGC offered a shortened version of the PSS to establish an annual reporting framework for the information that may change most rapidly from year-to-year. The published reports from the PSS provide a detailed profile of the current genetic counseling community, primarily in the U.S. and Canada, and identify new and emerging trends in this growing profession. The analysis also provides information useful to individual genetic counselors and those who interact with them, including prospective employers, human resource departments, medical associations, as well as individuals who are considering entering the profession or obtaining genetic counseling services.

The 2019 PSS

The PSS was administered from January 7, 2019 through February 28, 2019 to genetic counselors who are either full or new members of the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), and/or diplomates of the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC).

A total of 2,438 completed surveys were received from the 4,996 solicited from the two organizations, resulting in a 49 percent response rate⁵. This is an equivalent response rate to NSGC PSSs administered in previous years and demonstrates the widespread interest in sharing professional information. The response rate also reflects the commitment genetic counselors have to their profession and to NSGC.



Scope of the PSS

This year's PSS addresses approximately 100 questions in the following areas:

- Genetic Counselor Preparation and Education
- Salary and Benefits
- Job Descriptions
- Work Environment
- Board Certification/Licensure/Credentialing

⁵ The response rate for the 2018 PSS was 53% (N=2,543).

Demographics

Genetic counselors who responded to the 2019 PSS predominantly identified as female; 95% of the respondents identified as female and 5% identified as male⁶. Over the past two decades of PSS administrations, the number and percentage of individuals identifying as men have increased slightly, but non-significantly from a statistical perspective and remain comparatively low.

Two percent of respondents (46/2,438) identified themselves as part of a disability community.

The majority of respondents (90%) identified as White or Caucasian. Just over 2% identified as Hispanic or Latino(a).

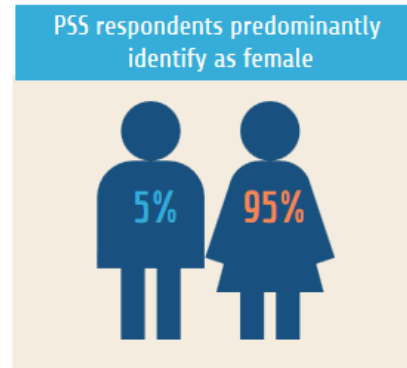


Table 1. Respondent Race/Ethnicity**	Not Hispanic or Latino(a)	Hispanic or Latino(a)	Prefer not to respond	Total	Percent
American Indian or Alaskan Native	8	1	0	9	0.4%
Asian	119	2	0	121	5%
Asian Indian	66	1	0	67	3%
Black or African American	29	1	0	30	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	0	0	2	0.1%
White or Caucasian	2,179	47	3	2,229	90%
Other	25	4	0	29	1%
Prefer not to respond	3	1	1	5	0.2%
Total	2,431	57	4	2,488	100%

“Other” responses included Middle Eastern, Persian, Southeast Asian, Ashkenazi Jewish, Sephardi Jewish, Arabic, Sri Lankan, Native Caribbean, Mediterranean, European, French Canadian, Canadian First Nations, and Chaldean.

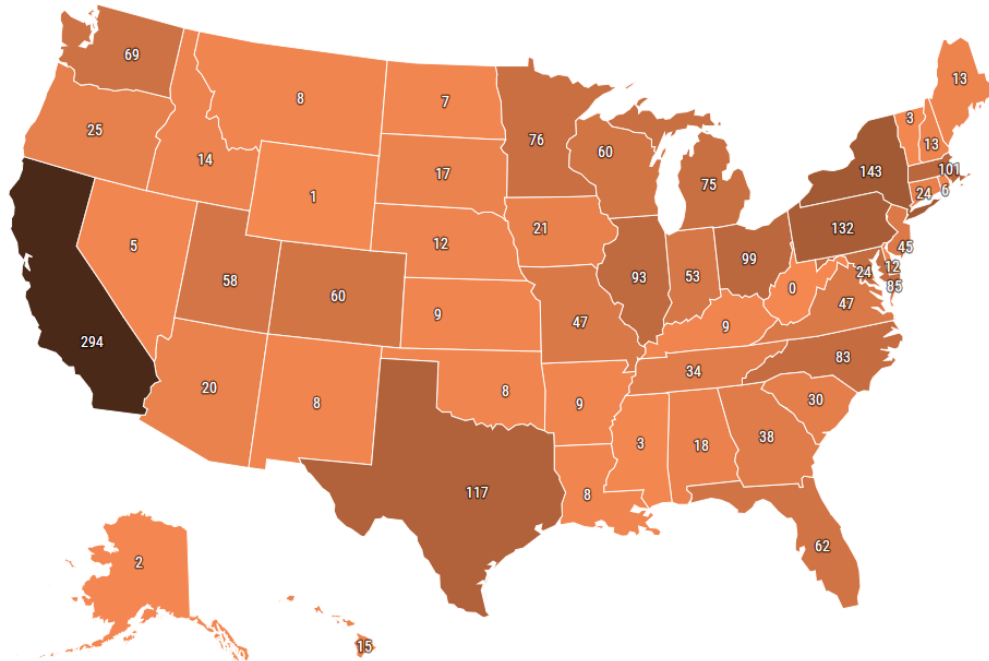
**Respondents could select more than one race.

⁶ Four respondents preferred not to respond, and one indicated “non-binary/third gender.”

Where Do Genetic Counselors Practice?

The 2019 PSS generated responses from every U.S. state except West Virginia. Over half of survey respondents (56%) work in ten U.S. states (in descending order; generated from work postal codes): California, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Massachusetts, Ohio, Illinois, Maryland, North Carolina, and Minnesota.

Figure 1. PSS Respondents: United States



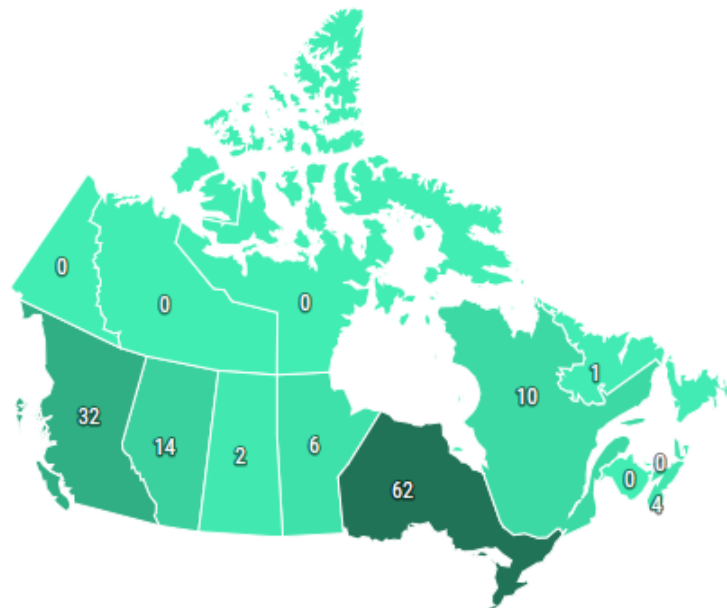
For the 2019 PSS, respondents were categorized by U.S. Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA)⁷. The 28 MSAs represented by 1% or more of PSS respondents are shown below in descending order. Over half of respondents to the PSS (55%) work in these MSAs.

Table 2. Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA)	N	% of U.S Respondents
New York, NY	95	3.9%
Boston, MA	87	3.6%
Chicago, IL	84	3.4%
Washington, DC	74	3.0%
Philadelphia, PA	71	2.9%
San Francisco, CA	69	2.8%
Los Angeles, CA	62	2.5%
Houston, TX	61	2.5%
Minneapolis, MN	57	2.3%
Salt Lake City, UT	54	2.2%
Seattle, WA	51	2.1%
Annapolis, MD	50	2.1%
Denver, CO	50	2.1%
Palo Alto, CA	44	1.8%
Indianapolis, IN	43	1.8%
Chapel Hill, NC	42	1.7%
Pittsburgh, PA	37	1.5%
Detroit, MI	33	1.4%
Irvine, CA	33	1.4%
Atlanta, GA	29	1.2%
Cincinnati, OH	29	1.2%
Kansas City, MO	28	1.1%
Columbus, OH	26	1.1%
Dallas, TX	26	1.1%
Cleveland, OH	25	1.0%
Milwaukee, WI	25	1.0%
Portland, OR	25	1.0%
San Diego, CA	24	1.0%

⁷ In the United States, a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) is a geographical region with a relatively high population density at its core and close economic ties throughout the area. MSAs are defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and used by the Census Bureau and other federal agencies for statistical purposes.

Canadian genetic counselors represent a growing share of respondents to the PSS: 5% in 2016, 7% in 2018 and 6% in 2019. The majority of Canadian respondents work in Ontario (46%), followed by British Columbia (24%). Please note that the PSS analysis does not show specific survey responses by geographical regions where there are fewer than five respondents.

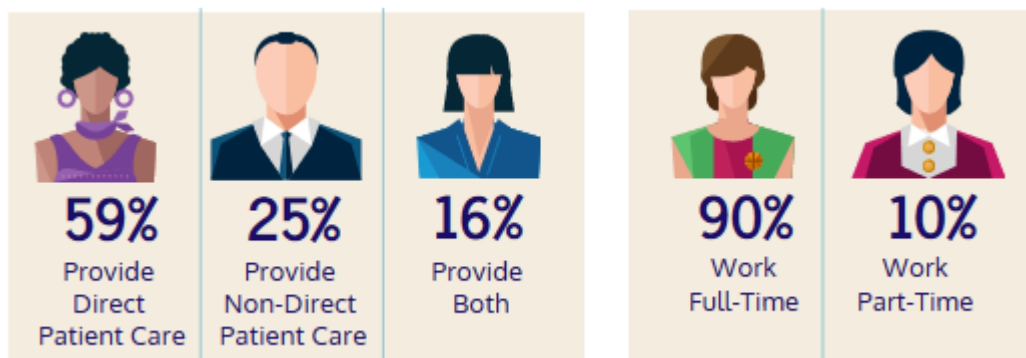
Figure 2. PSS Respondents: Canada



For more information about the PSS respondent demographics, please see the *Demographics & Methodology Report*.

Genetic Counselor Positions

The majority of PSS respondents (90%) reported working full-time (defined as 37.5 or more hours per week). Most respondents to the PSS provide direct patient care as a regular part of their jobs (59%), while 25% do not provide direct patient care, and 16% provide both. Over the past two decades, the percentage of genetic counselors who do not provide direct patient care has grown as the profession has expanded to include new roles.



Genetic counselors who responded to the PSS reported working for a variety of employer types. However, 78% work for one of four employer types: university medical center, diagnostic laboratory (commercial, non-academic), or a public or private hospital/medical facility. As would be expected, those who provide direct patient care were more likely to be employed by a hospital or other medical setting than those in non-direct patient care or mixed positions. Conversely, those who had no direct patient contact were more likely to be employed by a commercial, non-academic diagnostic laboratory.

Cancer and Prenatal were the most frequently cited practice areas by a substantial margin – together they were chosen by 73% of the respondents overall, and 86% of direct patient care providers. This is similar to the total found in the 2018 PSS. Among non-direct care providers, the top three areas of practice were Laboratory (26%), Cancer (20%) and Genomic Medicine (19%). Sixty-one percent of genetic counselors who responded to the PSS reported having two or more areas of practice within a single position.

Table 3. Overall Top 5 Areas of Practice	Direct patient care		Non-direct patient care		Mixed		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Cancer	697	50%	184	31%	152	39%	1033	44%
Prenatal	503	36%	95	16%	86	22%	684	29%
Pediatrics	402	29%	55	9%	92	24%	549	23%
General Genetics	355	25%	79	13%	83	22%	517	22%
Preconception / Reproductive Screening	295	21%	69	12%	63	16%	427	18%

Respondents who provided direct patient care cited clinical care (98%), student supervision (38%) and clinical coordination (35%) as their top roles within their primary area of practice. The top roles reported by non-direct care providers were laboratory support (49%), customer liaison (33%) and scientific writing (25%). Genetic counselors who responded to the PSS reported similar rates of teaching/education and patient advocacy across position types.

For more information about genetic counselor positions, please see the *Work Environment Report*.

Salary & Benefits

The average yearly gross salary reported by full-time genetic counselors was \$91,318. This is significantly higher⁸ than the 2018 PSS's average of \$88,498 and the 2016 PSS's average of \$81,377. The median salary for a full-time genetic counselor was \$84,886 compared to \$82,000 in the 2018 PSS and \$75,000 in the 2016 PSS⁹.

The average starting salary for a full-time genetic counselor who graduated in 2018 was \$71,114. This is approximately the same as in the 2018 PSS, in which the average starting salary for a full-time genetic counselor who graduated in 2017 was \$71,000.

Salaries differed by the type of position a genetic counselor holds. In general, full-time genetic counselors in non-direct patient care positions earned the most, followed by genetic counselors in mixed positions, and then those in direct patient care positions¹⁰.

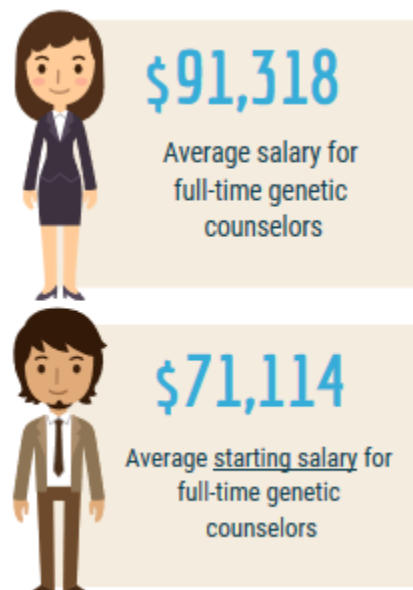


Table 4. Full-Time Salaries	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	25th Percentile	75th Percentile	90th Percentile
Direct patient care	1,096	\$81,147	\$78,000	\$40,000	\$194,000	\$71,500	\$88,000	\$100,000
Non-direct patient care	515	\$109,698	\$100,600	\$34,022	\$247,000	\$86,839	\$128,000	\$150,000
Mixed	311	\$96,725	\$91,387	\$41,000	\$200,000	\$78,780	\$110,000	\$128,128

⁸ $p < .01$.

⁹ $p < .01$.

¹⁰ $p < .01$.

The top ten benefits offered to full- and part-time genetic counselors are shown below.

Table 5. Benefits	Direct patient care		Non-direct patient care		Mixed		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Health insurance	1,292	93%	564	95%	367	95%	2,223	94%
Dental insurance	1,240	89%	546	92%	355	92%	2,141	90%
Continuing Education/Conference funding	1,144	82%	522	88%	339	88%	2,005	85%
Vision plan	1,141	82%	523	88%	335	87%	1,999	84%
Life insurance	1,153	83%	513	87%	329	85%	1,995	84%
Disability (short or long term) insurance	1,091	78%	525	89%	329	85%	1,945	82%
Retirement savings (with employer match)	1,068	77%	449	76%	282	73%	1,799	76%
Pre-tax expense accounts (childcare, medical)	788	57%	427	72%	264	68%	1,479	62%
Accidental death and dismemberment insurance	776	56%	421	71%	238	62%	1,435	61%
Wellness incentives	821	59%	274	46%	185	48%	1,280	54%

Respondents could select more than one item, so the total will not add up to 100%. Percentages reflect the total number of respondents indicating each item divided by the total number who responded to the question.

Conference Funding

Eight out of ten genetic counselors who responded to the PSS reported that their employer funds their attendance at conferences (80%). Among those, most attended the conferences for educational or continuing education purposes.

Table 5. Conference Attendance	N	Percent
For educational/continuing education purposes	1,852	97%
To present a paper/poster/lecture	620	33%
For company work purposes (i.e. to work at a booth)	264	14%
Other	27	1%

Respondents could select more than one item, so the total will not add up to 100%. Percentages reflect the total number of respondents indicating each item divided by the total number who responded to the question.

The most frequently attended employer-funded conference was the NSGC Annual Conference (54% reported receiving funding to attend), followed by regional or specialty meetings (33%).

Table 6. Meetings Funded by Employer	N	Percent
NSGC annual conference	1,008	54%
Regional or specialty meeting	619	33%
ACMG annual meeting	462	25%
Other meeting(s)	406	22%
ASHG annual meeting	168	9%
CAGC annual meeting	43	2%

Respondents could select more than one item, so the total will not add up to 100%. Percentages reflect the total number of respondents indicating each item divided by the total number who responded to the question.

For more information about genetic counselor salaries, benefits, and other forms of compensation, please see the *Salary & Benefits Report*.

Data Analysis & Methodology

The online administration of the PSS was completed in February 2019. Frequencies and means reported are based on the number of respondents who answered the specific question. Statistical comparisons of group differences, such as T-tests and Chi-Square procedures, are calculated at $p < .05$.

Geographic Data

The 2019 PSS asked genetic counselors to furnish their home postal codes, their work postal codes, and their employer's postal code (if they work remotely). Descriptive and comparative geographical data seen throughout the series of PSS reports (U.S. states, major metro areas, NSGC regions, and Canadian provinces) are derived from the work postal codes reported by genetic counselors.

Salary Data

Over the past two decades, the NSGC has adhered to a strict policy whereby no aggregate salary information will be shared when $N < 5$, or in cases where any individual or group of genetic counselors might be personally identified. PSS data are analyzed by professionals with no affiliation to the NSGC and who are not in the genetic counseling community.

Of the 2,438 total respondents to the 2019 PSS, 2,064 (85%) shared salary information. Canadian dollars were converted to U.S. dollars for comparability. The seven salaries reported by genetic counselors who lived or worked outside the U.S. and Canada were not used in the analysis¹¹. Statistical outliers (extreme high and low salaries) were removed before analyses were performed using an Interquartile Range Rule of 3.

Remote Workers

Our analysis found that the salaries of remote workers were statistically aligned with the state/province where they physically work compared to the state/province of their employing company. For example, a remote worker who is employed by a California company and lives and works in Colorado is more likely to have a salary on par with Colorado workers than California workers. Therefore, genetic counselors who work remotely 100% of the time are included among other workers in the U.S. state or Canadian province where they work.

For more information about the PSS data analysis, please see the *Demographics & Methodology Report*.

¹¹ Please note that the PSS analysis does not show specific survey responses by geographical regions where there are fewer than five respondents.

Find Out More

In addition to this Executive Summary, there are three other reports that document results from the 2019 PSS. Please contact the NSGC if you would like copies of the reports.

1. **The Demographics & Methodology Report** shows who responded to the 2019 PSS by gender identity, race/ethnicity, geographic representation, education, years of experience, and many other variables of interest.
2. **The Salary & Benefits Report** provides detailed analyses of salaries in the genetic counseling profession. The report also provides information about per diem and hourly rates, bonuses and commissions, average raises and extra income, cost-of-living index, benefits, vacation time, and employer-funded extras for genetic counselors.
3. **The Work Environment Report** provides information from genetic counselors about the nature of their work, areas of practice, and involvement in professional activities.

Two additional reports are available with information from the PSS 2018.

1. **The Service Delivery & Access Report** (2018) details how genetic counselors deliver their services to clients, weekly caseloads, and patient access to genetic counselors.
2. **The Professional Overview & Satisfaction Report** (2018) examines the various facets of satisfaction with the genetic counseling profession.

The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC), incorporated in 1979, is the leading voice, authority and advocate for the genetic counseling profession, representing more than 4,000 health professionals. NSGC advances the various roles of genetic counselors in health care by fostering education, research, and public policy to ensure the availability of quality genetic services and is committed to ensuring that the public has access to genetic counseling and genetic testing.

For additional information about NSGC, visit www.nsgc.org.

For additional information about genetic counselors, please visit www.aboutgeneticcounselors.com

NSGC Executive Office
330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60611
nsgc@nsgc.org
(312) 321-6834

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