



ACHCA

American College of Health Care Administrators

Could You Be a Post-Acute and Aging Services Leader?

*A Practical Guide for
Students and Parents*

For middle school, high school students, undecided college students, and parents curious about leading a home/community-based agency, senior living or post-acute care community.

What is an Administrator/Executive Director/Aging Services Leader?

Think “**community CEO + head coach.**” You lead a senior living or post-acute care community, or agency, so residents/patients are safe, healthy, and happy—and staff have what they need to do great work. You don’t give medical care yourself; you lead the team that does.

Where they work

- Nursing homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities (short-term rehab & long-term care)
- Assisted Living & Memory Care Communities
- Life Plan Communities/CCRCs (independent → assisted → skilled)
- Home Health Agencies
- Hospice Agencies
- Programs for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE)
- Adult Day Centers
- Home Care/Personal Care
- Industry Suppliers – technology, food service, therapy, pharmacy, staffing
- Other Companies Focused on Older Adults

The impact

- Families trust you with loved ones.
- Staff look to you for clear goals, coaching, and recognition.
- You set the tone for safety, kindness, financial performance and quality.

Demand and Compensation

Nursing Home Administrators

- **National Average:** The 2025–2026 *Nursing Home Salary & Benefits Report* from Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service (HCS) found that the average salary for nursing home administrators rose to ≈\$133,750 per year[1][2]. Administrators working in continuing care retirement communities earned about \$140,000, while assistant administrators made ≈\$86,400[1].
- **Regionally:** The 2024–2025 HCS survey shows pronounced regional variation. McKnight’s *Salary Snapshot* summarized the data: administrators in Region 2 (Middle Atlantic states) earned ≈\$152,883, Region 1 (New England) \$149,830 and Region 9 (Pacific) \$157,669. Pay was lowest in Regions 5 and 6 (East and West)

Assisted Living Administrators

- **National Average:** PayScale’s 2025 survey of 190 profiles placed the average assisted living administrator salary at \$68,035 (median). Salaries ranged from \$43 k (10th

percentile) to \$98 k (90th percentile)[9]. Entry-level administrators (<1 year) averaged ≈\$53,041, while those with 1-4 years' experience earned ≈\$60,304. Senior administrators (20+ years) commanded roughly 9 % more than the average.

- **Industry Comparisons:** SalaryExpert (ERI) reports a substantially higher mean salary of ≈\$171,092 with an average bonus of \$13,431. The disparity likely reflects differences in job scope (executive directors of larger communities vs. managers of small facilities), sample size and methodology.

Home Health Agency Administrators

- **National Averages:** PayScale's 2025 data found the average home health agency administrator earns \$84,930 per year. Salaries ranged from \$63,000 to \$112,000.
- **Experience:** Pay by experience demonstrates clear progression: administrators with <1 year of experience make about \$65 k, early-career (1-4 years) about \$78,474, mid-career (5-9 years) around \$80–85 k, and experienced administrators (10+ years) slightly higher.

Hospice Agency Administrators

- **Average Salary:** PayScale's 2025 survey shows that hospice administrators earn an average base salary of \$101,489, with a 10th-percentile salary of \$77 k and a 90th-percentile salary of \$123 k[16].
- **Experience:** Early-career administrators (1–4 years) average \$82,990; mid-career administrators (5–9 years) average ≈\$80,000[16].

These professions are in demand, with salaries that compete well with other healthcare leadership roles yet vary widely by setting and region. Nursing home administrators command the highest pay, often exceeding \$133,000, but must navigate complex regulatory and staffing challenges. Assisted living administrators typically earn less, reflecting differences in facility size and reimbursement models. Home health and hospice administrators fall between these extremes, with compensation strongly influenced by agency type and geographic location.

A Week in the Life

- **Rounding & listening** (daily): Talk with residents, families, and staff, fix small problems fast.
- **Team huddles** (daily): What's our census, staffing, safety priority today?
- **People leadership** (weekly): Hire, onboard, coach, retain and celebrate wins.
- **Quality & safety** (weekly): Check infection-prevention, incidents, readiness for inspections.
- **Finance & planning** (weekly): Review admissions, budget, and key metrics; remove roadblocks.

- **Community relationships** (weekly): Referring hospitals, volunteers, local partners.

You'll love this if... you like variety, people, responsibility, and solving problems.

Hard parts: tough conversations, busy days, staying calm under pressure.

Is this me?

Rate **1–5** (1 = not me; 5 = very much me). Add your total.

_____ I enjoy leading people and keeping things organized.

_____ I stay calm and respectful in difficult conversations.

_____ I like clear standards and checklists—and following through.

_____ I'm okay learning budgets, numbers, and simple spreadsheets.

_____ I'm motivated by helping older adults and their families.

Score guide: 20–25 = strong match • 14–19 = likely match (try a shadow) • ≤13 = explore more before committing.

Why choose this path?

- **Meaningful Leadership:** You make daily life better for real people.
- **Growth:** Clear path from assistant roles to Executive Director to regional leadership.
- **Solid Career:** Leaders in aging services typically earn professional-level salaries with strong national demand.

How do you get there?

- Earn a bachelor's degree related to healthcare/management. Good keywords when searching:

Health Services Administration • Long-Term Care Administration • Healthcare Management • Gerontology (with admin focus) • Business + Healthcare minor

- Get experience while in school (part-time or summer): front desk/concierge, admissions assistant, activities aide, dining, scheduler.
- Complete an Administrator-in-Training (AIT) residency after (or near the end of) your degree under a licensed preceptor (your state sets the rules).
- Pass required exams and apply for your state license.
- Start as an Assistant Administrator or Executive Director (depending on program and experience).

Details (hours, exams) differ by state. You'll look those up later—today is about deciding if this path fits you.

Your next 2 weeks:

This weekend: Watch two “day-in-the-life” videos—one of an Administrator, one of a CNA or therapist. Write 3 things that surprised you.

Nursing Home Administrator: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osFfeB2jCwk>

Nursing Home Administrator: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtUcw3xCDFk>

Assisted Living Administrator: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWgKaNjsG_s

Week 1: Email two local communities asking to shadow for 2 hours (use the script below).

Week 2: Volunteer at one activity or meal service; ask an Administrator 3 questions about their job.

Shadow request (copy/paste)

Hello [Name],

I'm a [middle-school/high-school/college] student exploring a career as a post-acute and aging services leader. Could I shadow for 2 hours to learn what the job is like? I'll follow your privacy and safety rules.

Thank you! [Your Name]

What to Study

High school classes that help:

- English/Speech (communication/public speaking), Algebra or Statistics (numbers), Biology (health basics), Business/Accounting (budgets), Computer Apps (Excel/Google Sheets), Psychology (people).

College major/minor ideas:

- Health Services Administration, Long-Term Care Administration, Healthcare Management, Gerontology (admin focus), Business + Healthcare minor.

Clubs & experiences: ACHCA, HOSA, service clubs, leadership roles, volunteering at a senior living community.

Skills to Build Now

- **People skills:** listening, empathy, conflict resolution, public speaking.
- **Organizing skills:** planning your week, meeting notes, simple checklists.
- **Digital skills:** spreadsheets (sum/average), email etiquette, calendars/To-Do tools.

Professional Habits: show up on time, finish tasks, ask for feedback

4-year College Roadmap

Year 1: Intro to healthcare systems; part-time campus or senior living job; meet program advisor.

Year 2: Take healthcare management and accounting; volunteer monthly; shadow an ED.

Year 3: Internship in a senior living community; small improvement project; build references.

Year 4: Capstone; apply for AIT and plan exams; licensure → Assistant Administrator or ED (depending on state/program).

Parent Corner

- **Safety & professionalism:** Students are supervised; there are privacy and infection-prevention rules.

- **Career prospects:** Aging population + leadership retirements = steady demand.
- **Costs & support:** Many employers offer tuition help, paid AITs, and exam fee support.
- **Fit:** Great for organized, people-oriented students who like responsibility.

Common Challenges and Misconceptions

“Administrators just sit in offices and do paperwork.”

Reality: Most of the job is people leadership—rounding, coaching, solving problems in real time.

How to prepare now: Practice public speaking, take on a small leadership role at school/work, and shadow an ED.

“I have to be a nurse to be an ED.”

Reality: You don’t need to be a nurse; you lead a clinical team and use experts well.

How to prepare now: Learn basic healthcare terms, shadow a nurse/therapist, and ask great questions.

“It’s too sad all the time.”

Reality: There are hard moments, but also constant wins—recovery, purpose, connection.

How to prepare now: Build healthy coping habits (journaling, exercise), and debrief tough moments with a mentor.

“Regulations are impossible.”

Reality: There are many rules, but checklists and routines make them manageable.

How to prepare now: Get comfortable with standard operating procedures/handbooks, and learn a simple improvement cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act).

“I’m not a numbers person.”

Reality: You’ll use practical math (census, staffing grids, simple budgets).

How to prepare now: Practice basic spreadsheets (sum/average), and build a weekly scorecard for a class or club.

“It’s 24/7 with no life.”

Reality: You’ll sometimes be on call, but strong teams and clear escalation rules protect your time.

How to prepare now: Learn time-blocking, prioritization, and when to delegate/ask for help.

“Staffing problems will crush me.”

Reality: Staffing is challenging everywhere; leaders who recruit, coach, and recognize retain people longer.

How to prepare now: Practice structured interviews and make recognition a habit (thank-you notes, shout-outs).

“Families are always upset.”

Reality: Most families want clear, fast communication.

How to prepare now: Use a simple service-recovery script: *listen* → *acknowledge* → *fix* → *follow-up*.

“I must know everything on day one.”

Reality: You’ll learn through AIT, mentors, and playbooks.

How to prepare now: Join ACHCA as a student/early-career member and connect with a mentor.

Ready to explore more?

- Look up colleges with “Long-Term Care Administration” or “Health Services Administration” programs.
- Visit a local senior living community—ask about student jobs and shadowing.
- Join ACHCA as a student/early-career member for mentoring, community, and early leadership opportunities. QR Code provides link to complimentary Student Membership.



