

By David Blackmer, BA, and Brad Ericson, MPC, CPC, COSC

# Salary Survey 2012: Trends Show Growth and Diversification

Five-year comparison indicates consistent progress in this health care sector.

Snapshots are instant slices of our lives. Compare them from year to year while placing them side by side and our lives become stories.

Every year, *Coding Edge* presents AAPC's Salary Survey as an annual slice of data about our members' welfare. This year, we decided to show you how the information trends through the years because it tells a very interesting story about our profession's growth.

The **2012 AAPC Health Care Salary Survey**, which was open to health care business professionals online this summer, confirms coders, billers, practice managers, auditors, and educators are in a dynamic environment. It is obvious the recession affected our industry, and for most members things are improving. But the unpredictable impact of market forces provides surprises.

A lot has happened since 2008, when our trend lines begin. A deep recession, beginning in December 2007, ended in 2009 with a slow recovery and rippling effect throughout the country. Changes to the mix of practice size and affiliation occurred. Major changes to the way federal and commercial payers could pay physicians evolved and were mandated. And, as AAPC grew from 60,000 members in 2008 to nearly 120,000 now, our professional roles, expertise, locations, and education diversified unimaginably.

A significant nod to the importance of our craft is that more than 25 percent of respondents said they have decision-making power in their work places, compared with less than 20 percent in previous years. This means AAPC members are gaining more credibility for knowledge and expertise.

## How Much We Make

The 2012 average salary is **\$47,870**, based on responses. This includes credentialed and non-credentialed members; but, when broken down by credential, the averages this year looks like this:

- Certified Professional Coder (CPC®) - \$47,796 (up nearly \$900 from 2011)
- Certified Professional Coder – Hospital Outpatient (CPC-H®) - \$56,466 (up nearly \$1,800 from last year)
- Certified Professional Coder – Payer (CPC-P®) - \$55,255 (up nearly \$3,800 from last year)
- Certified Professional Medical Auditor (CPMA®) - \$59,365 (up more than \$3200 over last year)
- Specialty credentials - \$54,145
- All AAPC credentials, avg. - \$48,033

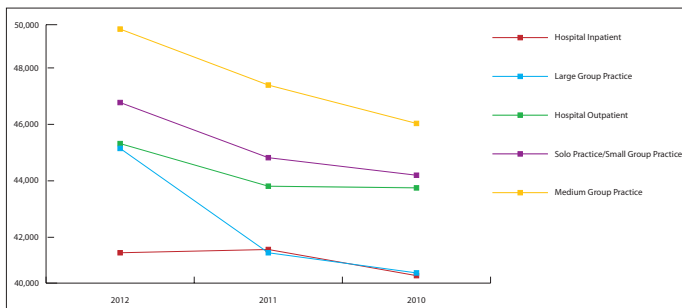
Taking all of the credential respondents' salaries and averaging them, we see that in the last two years salaries are slowly growing.



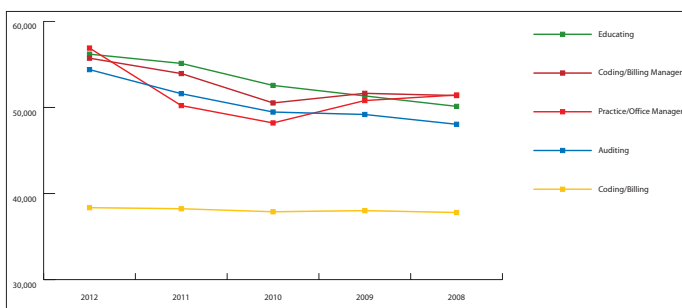
**Salary by Credentials**

All credentials, average.	2012		2011		2010		2009		2008
	% gain	Annual	% gain	Annual	% gain	Annual	% gain	Annual	Annual
	2%	\$48,033	3%	\$46,925	1%	\$45,481	1%	\$45,185	\$45,466

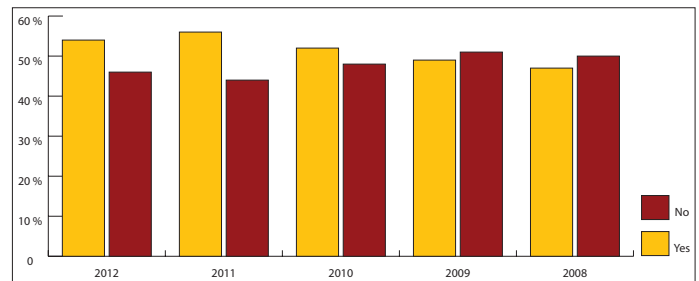
Average salary by workplace has increased from last year by 9.7 percent or more for those in smaller groups or practices. Those working in facilities made more, but received less in raises comparatively, averaging between 4 and 5 percent. For example, as shown in the **Salary by Workplace** table, the average salary at a solo practice was \$40,290 in 2010, \$41,301 in 2011, and \$45,312 in 2012 compared to the average salary in an outpatient hospital: \$43,685 in 2010, \$43,751 in 2011, and \$45,399 in 2012.

**Salary by Workplace**

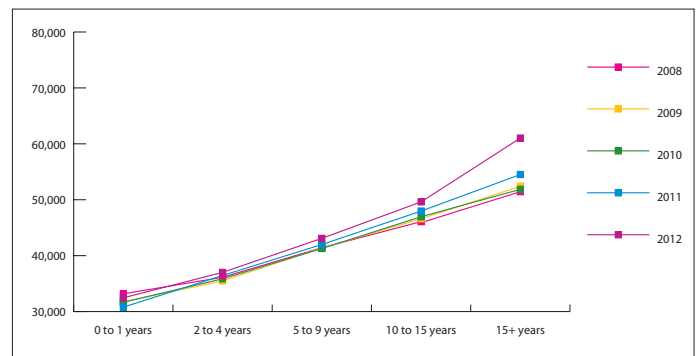
As you can see in this next table, **Salary by Job Responsibility**, salaries are indeed affected by job responsibility, and educators are making the most money.

**Salary by Job Responsibility****Credentials, Education, and Benefits**

Credentials and education impact our salaries. How much education and what certifications we hold factor in to where we sit financially. While slow, there is a definite trend toward employers requiring credentials. As you can see in the **Credential Required** table, 54 percent of employers require certification today, compared to 47 percent in 2008.

**Credential Required**

We know now that the average years of experience of credentialed members are significant. In our survey, CPCs® have 12; CPMAs® and CPC-Hs® have 14; and Certified Professional Coder—Instructors (CPC-Is®) have 19 average years of experience. As shown in the **Salary by Experience** table, salary reflects experience over the years, and salary increases follow suit.

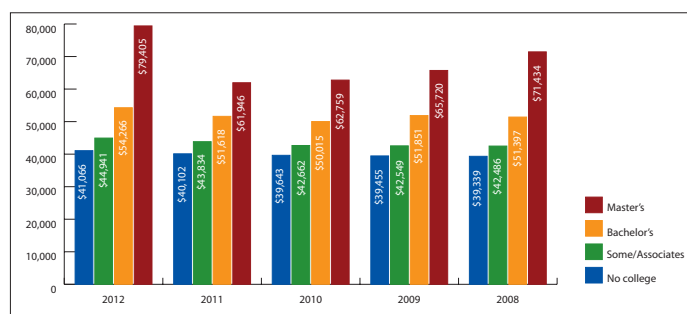
**Salary by Experience**

It is discouraging to note that beginning coders' salaries have not changed much in five years, while those with significant experience are seeing larger increases.

Our education is less predictable from year to year. For example, salaries are larger depending on how much education a member has, but higher levels of education did not always see an increase in average salary in past years. Fortunately, as shown in the **Education** table on the next page, this year showed improvement for everyone, especially for those with a master's degree or higher.

## How much education and what certifications we hold factor in to where we sit financially.

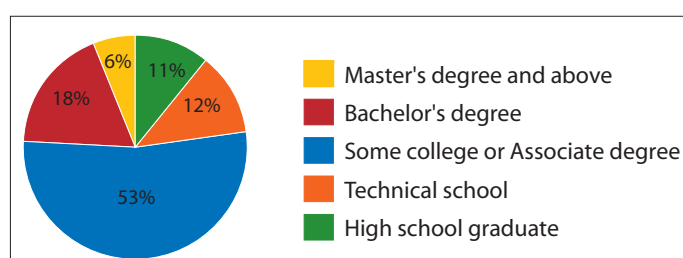
Education



Those with an associate degree or some college make 9 percent more on average than those who have not attended college. Those who have a bachelor's degree make 21 percent more on average than those with an associate degree or some college experience. Those who have a master's degree or greater make 46 percent more on average than those who have a bachelor's degree. Clearly education pays.

We are an educated group, according to the breakdown of respondents' education level in 2012, as shown in the **Education Breakdown** table.

Education Breakdown



We've seen growth in members with bachelor's and master's degrees. We believe that much of this gain is based on an increasing number of providers becoming certified and members who are choosing this field as a second or third career. This led us to look at unemployment rates. As shown in the **Unemployment** table, the unemployment rate is up for CPCs® and those with AHIMA credentials, but still well below the national average of 8 percent. For apprentices (CPC-As®, CPC-H-As®, and CPC-P-As®) who are breaking into the field, employment has improved, but remains difficult, with rates close to 25 percent.



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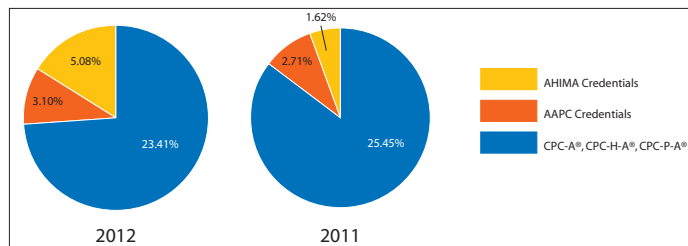
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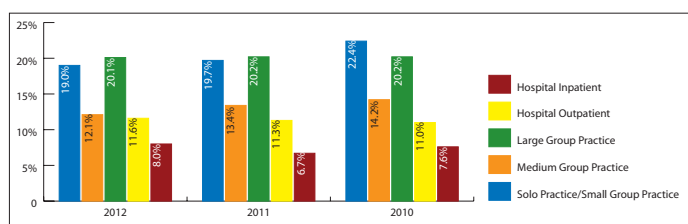


## Unemployment



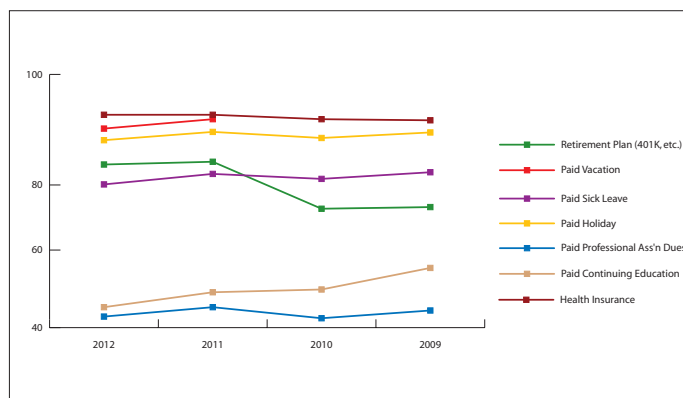
We are seeing an upward trend towards facility employment, as shown in the **Workplace** table. This may be a reflection of many providers' decision to sell their practices to facilities.

## Workplace



What sort of benefits we receive fluctuates from year to year, as does the number of hours we work per week. More than half of respondents work an average of 31 to 40 hours a week. Around 40 percent work more than 40 hours per week. As shown in the **Benefits** table, employer-sponsored perks appear to be little changed over the past four years.

## Benefits

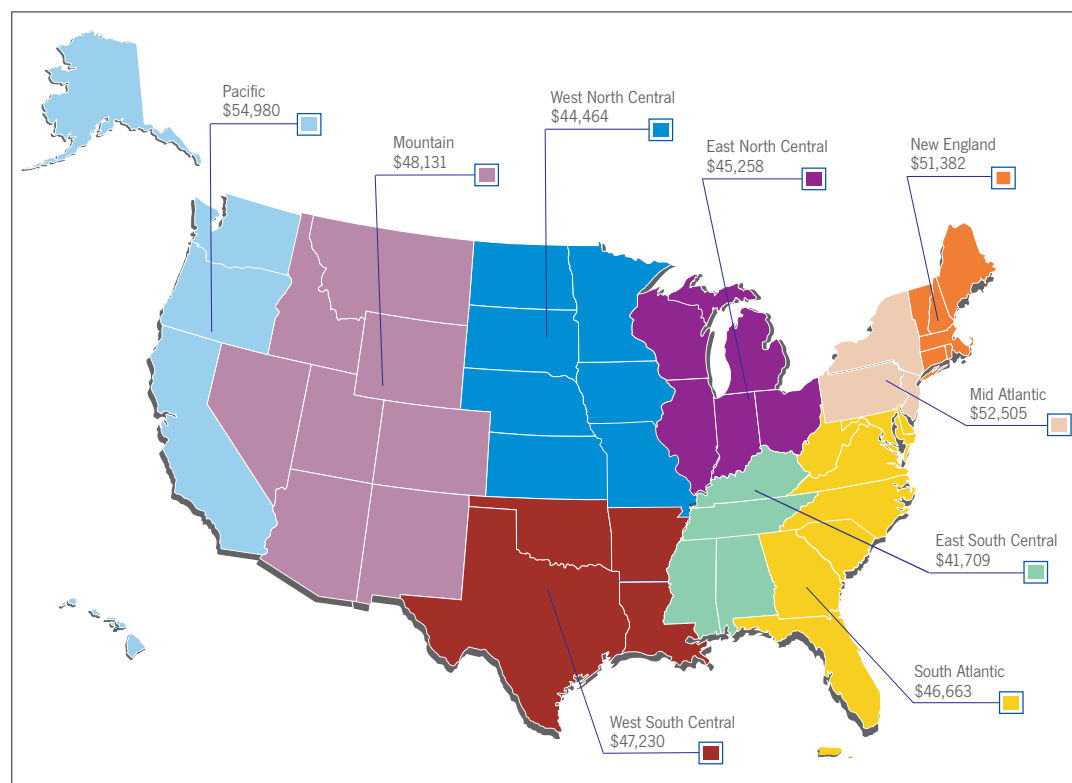


## Where Do We Go from Here?

Interestingly, most of us are alright staying exactly where we are. The highest percentage of respondents (44 percent) indicate coding/billing was their long-term career goal. Auditing and practice management were the next top choices (about 16 percent each), with compliance and health information technology (HIT) trailing behind at 7 and 6 percent respectively.

## Salary by Region

One of the most interesting year-to-year comparisons is of average salary by region. It is easy to see how the recession has moved through regions and when. Most heartening, though, is that for respondents in 2012 in all regions, salaries are up. Only 19 percent of us work in a rural area, while 37 percent work in a suburban location, and 44 percent work in an urban setting.



Overall, since the advent of the recession of 2008, members have slowly grown their compensation and continue to do so. For more data, go to [www.aapc.com](http://www.aapc.com).

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