

# THE HEART, HISTORY AND HOPE OF THE NATA Salary Survey

## Unveiling the member benefit that has empowered NATA members in their advocacy for better compensation

By Lydia Hicks

**D**ating back to 2008, the NATA Salary Survey has been one of the important sources of knowledge and negotiation power for ATs needing to quantify their value to their employers and advocate for a more equitable compensation package.

The NATA Salary Survey is conducted every two years with the goal of providing NATA members the data they need to negotiate with current and prospective employers. The survey results provide a snapshot of the profession as a whole from an earnings standpoint and shows how specific variables affect the average salary.

“The purpose of the [NATA Salary Survey] is to better capture the unique factors and determinants that play into an AT’s overall compensation package, so that we can equip members with the data they need to negotiate a more appropriate compensation for themselves and their staff,” said NATA Senior Internal Marketing Manager Dylan Orrell, who has overseen the execution of the salary survey since 2016. “It’s also helpful from a hiring perspective, equipping those who employ ATs with the intel they need in order to not only attract quality health care professionals, but to stay competitive in the market.”

Orrell said the survey’s power comes from the fact that its participants are not only NATA members, but also nonmember ATs. This has enabled the salary survey to provide a clearer understanding of the AT compensation landscape for those in the profession.

### How It Started and Evolved

The NATA Salary Survey started as an in-house-operated project run by one staff member, Orrell said.

“It was very time consuming, and it required some complex computations that resulted in really long delays in releasing the information,” he said.

Therefore, in 2016, NATA decided to procure the assistance of McKinley Advisors, the leading research consulting firm dedicated exclusively to associations, Orrell said. With the firm’s help, NATA conducted multiple one-hourlong in-depth interviews with members from each of the profession’s major employment settings. The goal was to get a pulse of the profession as well as identify common and differentiating factors among the various employment settings.

“This ensured that the salary survey, including the one we’re conducting this year, is not a cookie-cutter generic survey that you might find elsewhere,” Orrell said. “It’s truly influenced by ATs and combined with the expertise of McKinley Advisors, so it’s uniquely tailored to reflect the athletic training profession.”

### Its Impact and Growth

The NATA Salary Survey has produced several valuable resources pertinent to compensation advancement for the profession. Orrell said because of the survey’s growing participation, it captures a range of data regarding many variables including, but not limited to, salary, benefits,

staff and department size, credentials and employment status, such as part time, full time, per diem, contract, hourly or salary.

“Based on its findings, members of NATA actually have access to four different resources depending on their specific needs,” he said.

These resources are:

- **Executive Summary:** This is a two-page overview of the survey’s most significant findings, revealing highlights and major statistics.
- **White Paper:** Approximately 80 pages long, this document is a deeper dive into the survey’s results, providing information on various demographic factors.
- **Subsections Report:** This special report delves into specific areas of interest as indicated by NATA leadership. These are college/university, higher education, professional sports and secondary school settings, along with young professionals, ethnic diversity, gender and part-time employees. Orrell said having researched these areas for several years, NATA can see baselines and trends emerge, from which members can gain critical insight into the profession.
- **Salary Survey Database:** This member-only, online tool enables users to filter results by dozens of categories, match them up to see what other ATs with similar experiences, skills and roles are making. It helps them get a better sense of their specific compensation package, compared with others in the profession.

Orrell said because the profession has grown, and since the survey has been extended to nonmembers to complete since 2018, participation in the survey has increased as well.

“Despite sending during the holiday season in 2021, the response rate yielded impressive numbers, exceeding industry standards,” he said. “In addition, we saw a high percentage of engagement from nonmembers, surpassing [previous years], which really drives home the importance of the [NATA Salary Survey] for the profession.”

Between the first NATA Salary Survey in 2008 and the 2021 iteration, another sign of growth can be seen in the average salaries and paid time off benefits of ATs.

“If you look at the 2021 NATA Salary Survey that was completed and the results published in 2022, we’ve maintained a continued trend upwards since 2016,” he said. “The national average salary for certified and licensed athletic trainers has risen by 8% between 2018 and 2021. So, certified ATs are making on average \$4,795 more than in 2018. “This average also represents an all-time high. It’s up more than \$17,000 since 2008. So that’s been very encouraging that we’ve seen a very steady incline. In 2008, the average national salary for athletic trainer was \$44,243. When you look at the average national salary of an athletic trainer in 2021, it’s now \$61,998. That’s remarkable. All we care about is just reflecting accurately the data for the profession. So, anybody within the profession can and should take this survey.”

It’s also especially notable that NATA members are more likely to earn higher salaries overtime than their nonmember counterparts, the 2021 NATA Salary results show.

“Beyond 10 years of experience, NATA member salaries were found to be consistently higher on average,” Orrell said. “They reached an average of \$85,630 for those with 25 or more years of experience, compared to just \$66,927 for nonmembers with similar experience. Members with 11 to 15 years of experience earned an average of 8% more than nonmembers, increasing to 22% for members with 25 or more years’ experience.”

The impact of the NATA Salary Survey has been most palpable in recent years, Orrell said, with its results shared via “The NATA-Cast” podcast, NATA Chats and Q&A sessions at the 73rd and 74th NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expos.

### The 2023 NATA Salary Survey and Beyond

This year’s NATA Salary Survey will be slightly different from previous surveys, Orrell said.

“We don’t create it in a vacuum,” he said. “Every salary survey that goes out has been vetted and screened by a whole team of athletic trainers in various settings – a very diverse group. That peer-review team is

critical in serving as the eyes and ears of the association.

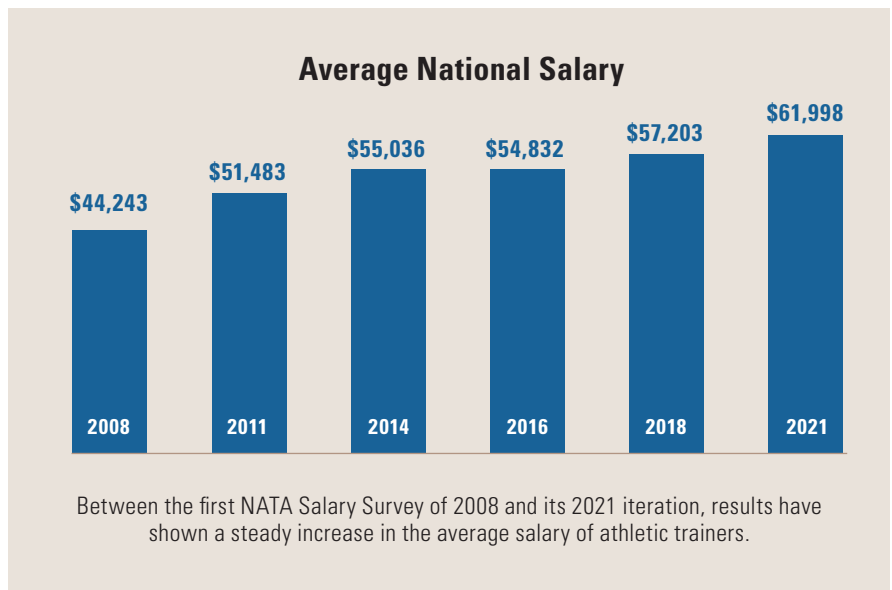
“They’re providing observations, what they’re experiencing and infusing that into the survey, so that we’re asking accurate, relevant and timely questions, as it relates to the overall compensation questions. So, you can always expect a slightly different, slightly tweaked, always improved survey based on the feedback that we get from the last iteration.”

Orrell encouraged ATs to take this year’s and all future NATA Salary Surveys, which NATA makes available via its communication channels.

“We’re trying to eliminate any barriers in terms of access so that as many people in the profession who should take it can take it,” he said. “That’s important because you then have a more accurate reporting on the findings.”

By applying these findings, members can advocate for their position as invaluable health care providers to the appropriate audiences in their respective settings, Orrell said.

For more information, findings and how to participate in the NATA Salary Survey, visit [www.nata.org/career-education/career-center/salary-survey](http://www.nata.org/career-education/career-center/salary-survey).



**Average Salary by Years of Experience and Membership Status**

Years of Experience	Average Member Salary	Average Nonmember Salary
Less than 1	\$43,735	\$45,456
1 - 5	\$47,110	\$49,836
6 - 10	\$54,671	\$56,983
11 - 15	\$64,818	\$59,501
16 - 20	\$71,732	\$63,114
21 - 25	\$78,001	\$66,419
25+	\$85,630	\$66,927

NATA members are likely to earn, on average, a consistently higher salary than nonmembers after 10 years of experience.