

# Michigan Department of Community Health

## *Survey of Physician Assistants 2007*

---

March 2008

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Michigan Department of Community Health asked Public Sector Consultants Inc. to conduct a survey of licensed physician assistants (PAs) in 2007 to collect data on their employment characteristics, age, specialty, time spent providing patient care, practice acceptance of Medicaid, education background, professional activities, use of computer technology, plans to continue practicing, gender, and racial/ethnic background. A total of 1,494 PAs received the survey with their license renewal application. Responses were received online or by return mail from 621 PAs, for a response rate of 42 percent and a margin of error of  $\pm 4$  percent with 95 percent confidence.

The high response rate for the survey suggests that the survey data are representative of all licensed PAs in Michigan. As of January 2007, the total number of physician assistants licensed in Michigan is 2,821. Key survey findings are presented below.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) contracted with Public Sector Consultants Inc. (PSC) for development, implementation, and analysis of the survey of physician assistants. The survey was designed in collaboration with the MDCH and the Michigan Academy of Physician Assistants. The instrument contained questions about employment status, education, location and setting of main clinical practice site, percent of time spent with supervising physician, specialty, use of computer technology, professional satisfaction, plans to continue practicing, as well as a number of demographic questions (age, gender, race/ethnicity). The survey questions and response frequencies are provided in the Appendix.

As of January 2007, a total of 2,821 physician assistants were licensed in Michigan. All PAs are required to renew their license every two years from the first year of licensure, thus dividing the universe of PAs into two cohorts of roughly equal size. For 2007, 1,494 physician assistants were eligible for license renewal. The surveys were mailed to all PAs renewing their license in 2007. Physician assistants could either return the two-page paper version of the survey by mail or complete the survey online.

The sample for this survey was drawn from the Michigan licensure files maintained by the MDCH. The 621 responses include fully and partially completed surveys (i.e., those with information missing for one or more variables), meaning that sample size for individual variables will differ and the margin of error may change slightly depending upon the amount of missing data for that particular variable.

## EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

- Overall, 87 percent of physician assistants licensed in Michigan are *active* in Michigan—that is, they are working part- or full-time in physician assistant practice or in a related area in Michigan<sup>1</sup> (see Exhibit 1).
  - Of active physician assistants, 88 percent are working 32 hours or more per week in PA practice or a related area and 12 percent are working less than 32 hours per week.
- About 10 percent of physician assistants licensed in Michigan are working as a PA, but not in Michigan.
- About 3 percent of licensed physician assistants are not working as a PA.

### EXHIBIT 1

#### Employment Characteristics of Physician Assistants, 2007

	Percentage of <i>all</i> physician assistants in Michigan	Percentage of <i>active</i> physician assistants in Michigan
32 or more hours per week in PA practice or related area	84%	88%
Less than 32 hours per week in PA practice or related area	12	12
Employed but not as a PA	1	NA
Not employed and seeking employment as a PA or in a related area	1	NA
Not employed and seeking employment outside of PA practice or related area	0	NA
Temporarily not working and not looking for a job	1	NA
Retired, with no plans to return to work	<1	NA
Licensed physician assistants working in PA practice or related area in Michigan	87%	NA
Licensed physician assistants working in PA-related area outside of Michigan	10	NA
Licensed physician assistants not working in PA-related area	3	NA

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. NA = Not applicable.

## PRACTICE SETTING CHARACTERISTICS

One out of five physician assistants (20 percent) work for more than one employer and 35 percent practice at more than one site for their main employer. A majority of PAs (60 percent) say that their supervising physician is with them at their main clinical practice site 76–100 percent of the time. Thirteen percent report having a supervising physician with them at their main clinical practice site 0–25 percent of the time.

<sup>1</sup> This definition of the term “active” is used throughout the report.

About two-thirds (66 percent) of PAs have a main clinical practice in an outpatient site. When asked to identify *all* of their current employment settings, about half (52 percent) of active PAs said they work in a physician's office and two-thirds said they work in either a hospital inpatient setting (41 percent) or hospital outpatient setting (27 percent) (see Exhibit 2).

---

**EXHIBIT 2**  
Current Employment Settings of Active Physician Assistants, 2007

---

Setting	Percentage
Physician's office	52%
Hospital Inpatient	41
Hospital Outpatient	27
Nursing home/long-term care facility	6
Public/community health	4
Home health care	2
PA education program	2
Hospice	1
Other	7

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan. Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

---

## PRACTICE SPECIALTY

- About 36 percent of *active* physician assistants specialize in primary care (i.e., their primary specialty is family practice, general medicine, internal medicine, or general pediatrics).
- About 64 percent of *active* physician assistants are specialists in an area other than primary care (see Exhibit 3).

**EXHIBIT 3**  
Distribution of Active Physician Assistants by Specialty, 2007

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Allergy & Immunology	1%	1%
Anesthesiology	<1	1
Cardiovascular Disease	4	3
Critical Care Medicine	1	4
Dermatology	3	0
Emergency Medicine	11	14
Endocrinology	0	1
Family Practice	21	6
Gastroenterology	2	1
General Medicine	3	7
Geriatrics	<1	5
Hospitalist	3	2
Infectious Disease	1	1
Internal Medicine (General)	9	18
Nephrology	1	1
Neurology	<1	1
Neurological Surgery	3	0
Obstetrics & Gynecology	2	0

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Occupational Medicine	3%	7%
Oncology/Hematology	3	1
Orthopedic Surgery	7	5
Otolaryngology	1	0
Pediatrics	2	5
Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation	2	1
Plastic Surgery	<1	1
Preventive Medicine	<1	2
Psychiatry	2	2
Pulmonary Disease	<1	1
Radiology	1	1
Rheumatology	<1	0
Sports Medicine	0	2
Surgery (General)	5	2
Thoracic Surgery	2	1
Urology	1	0
Vascular Surgery	<1	2
Other	4	7

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

### TIME SPENT PROVIDING PATIENT CARE

- Active physician assistants spend an average of 37 hours per week providing such care.
- One fourth (25 percent) of these PAs spend 32 hours or less per week providing patient care.
- Another 25 percent of active PAs spend more than 40 hours per week providing patient care.

### PROVISION OF CARE TO MEDICAID AND MEDICARE PATIENTS

- Four out of five physician assistants (83 percent) report that they are currently providing care to Medicaid patients (see Exhibit 4).
- Nearly three-fourths (71 percent) are providing care to *new* Medicaid patients.
- Almost nine out of ten physician assistants (88 percent) report currently providing care to Medicare patients.

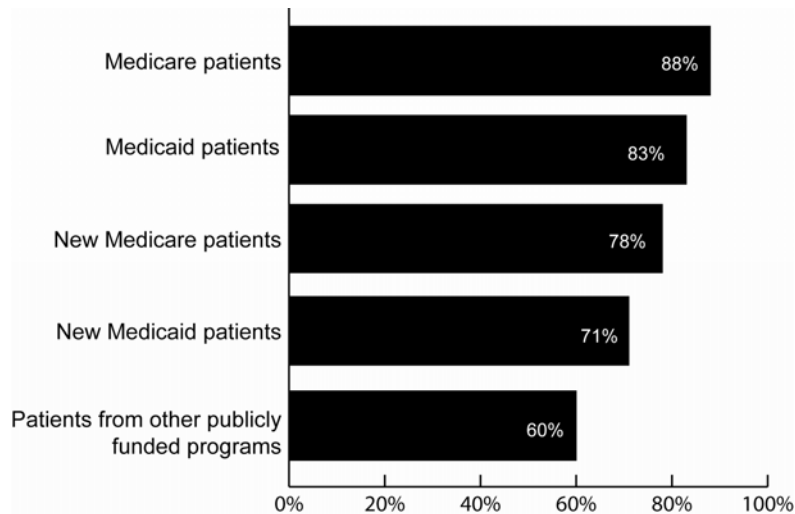
- More than three-fourths (78 percent) are providing care to *new* Medicare patients.
- Sixty percent are providing care to patients from other publicly funded programs.

---

#### EXHIBIT 4

#### Percentage of Physician Assistants Providing Care to Patients from Publicly Funded Programs, 2007

---



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

---

### CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT

- Twenty-five percent of all licensed physician assistants voluntarily left a PA position within the last two years.
- The factors cited most often as contributing to the decision to leave the PA position include general lack of job satisfaction (53 percent), inadequate salary/wages (39 percent), personal or family concerns (29 percent), employer/employee conflict (27 percent), and inadequate benefits (26 percent) (see Exhibit 5).
- Of those PAs who voluntarily left a position in the last two years, 82 percent left to take another PA position with a different organization; 8 percent took another PA position within the *same* organization; and 5 percent took a position outside of PA practice.
  - Of those who took another PA position, 55 percent left a specialty position to take another specialty position, 18 percent left a primary care position to take a specialty position, and 11 percent left a specialty position to take a primary care position (see Exhibit 6).

---

**EXHIBIT 5****Distribution of Factors Contributing to Decision to Leave a Physician Assistant Position within the Last Two Years, 2007**

---

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
General lack of job satisfaction	53%
Inadequate salary/wages	39
Personal or family health concerns	29
Employer/employee conflict	27
Inadequate benefits	26
Career promotion	16
Childbearing/childrearing	9
Increasing administrative burden	8
Age	5
Physical demands of the job	7
Opportunity to work in PA administration	1
Opportunity to work in PA education	1

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

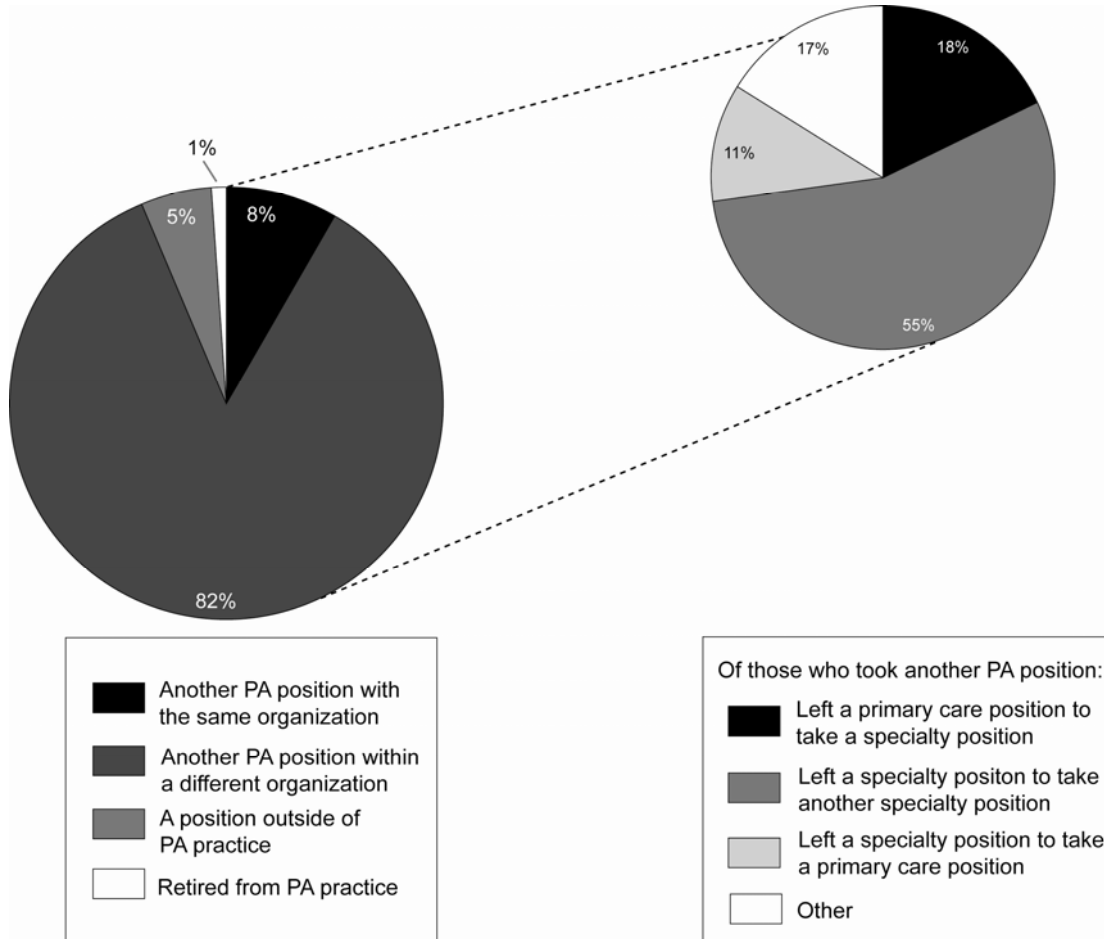
---

---

## EXHIBIT 6

### Positions Taken by Physician Assistants who Voluntarily Left a PA Position within the Last Two Years, 2007

---



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007. Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

---

## FUTURE PRACTICE PLANS

- Most *active* physician assistants (80 percent) plan to maintain their present number of patient care hours for the next three years (see Exhibit 7).
- During that time, 9 percent of active physician assistants plan to increase patient care hours, 7 percent plan to significantly reduce patient care hours, 6 percent plan to relocate to another Michigan location, 5 percent plan to relocate to another state, and 2 percent plan to retire.

**EXHIBIT 7**  
Physician Assistant Practice Plans for the Next Three Years, 2007

Practice plan	Percentage
Maintain the number of patient care hours I currently work	80%
Increase patient care hours	9
Significantly reduce patient care hours	7
Relocate to another Michigan location	6
Relocate to another state	5
Retire	2

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for active physician assistants licensed in Michigan. Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

- Those who plan to retire or reduce their patient care hours cite factors such as lifestyle changes (43 percent), age (32 percent), childbearing/childrearing (32 percent), general lack of job satisfaction (21 percent), and inadequate reimbursement for services (21 percent) (see Exhibit 8).

**EXHIBIT 8**  
Distribution of Factors Contributing to Decisions to Retire or  
Reduce Patient Care Hours, 2007

Factors	Percentage
Lifestyle changes	43%
Age	32
Childbearing/childrearing	32
General lack of job satisfaction	21
Inadequate reimbursement for services	21
Increasing administrative/regulatory burden	19
Personal or family health concerns	17
Moved to management/consulting/teaching/research	6
Medical malpractice insurance cost	0
Employer/employee conflict	0
Other	19

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan. Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

## ORIGIN AND EDUCATION BACKGROUND

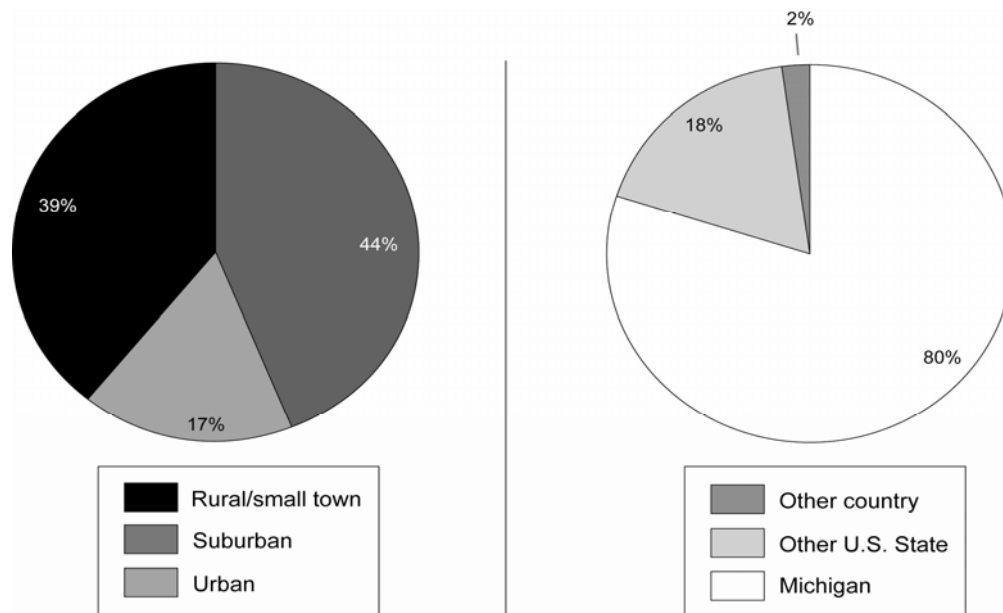
- A large majority (80 percent) of *active* Michigan-licensed physician assistants grew up in Michigan, 18 percent grew up in another U.S. state, and 2 percent grew up in another country (see Exhibit 9).
- Nearly half of active physician assistants (44 percent) grew up in a suburban area, 39 percent in a rural area/small town, and 17 percent in an urban area.

---

### EXHIBIT 9

#### Origin of Active Physician Assistants, 2007

---



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

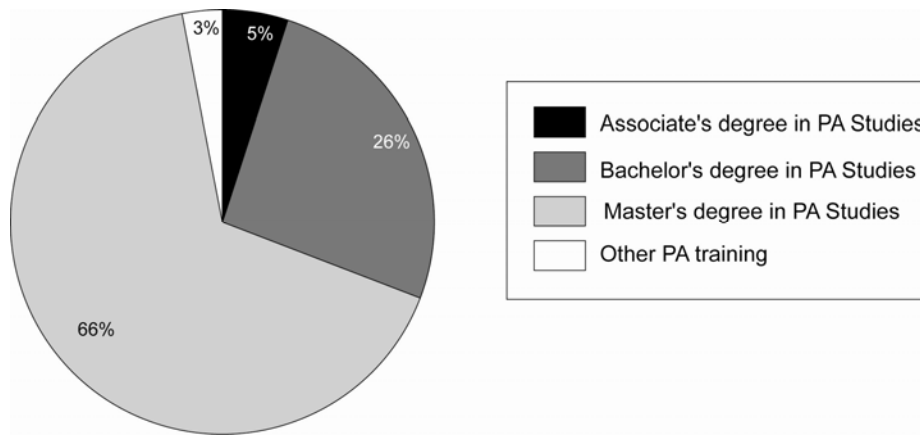
---

- The highest education level achieved by two-thirds (66 percent) of active physician assistants is a master's degree in PA Studies; 26 percent hold a bachelor's degree in PA Studies; 5 percent have completed an associate's degree in PA Studies; and 3 percent do not hold a degree, but have received other PA training (see Exhibit 10).

---

**EXHIBIT 10**  
Highest Degree Achieved by Active Physician Assistants, 2007

---

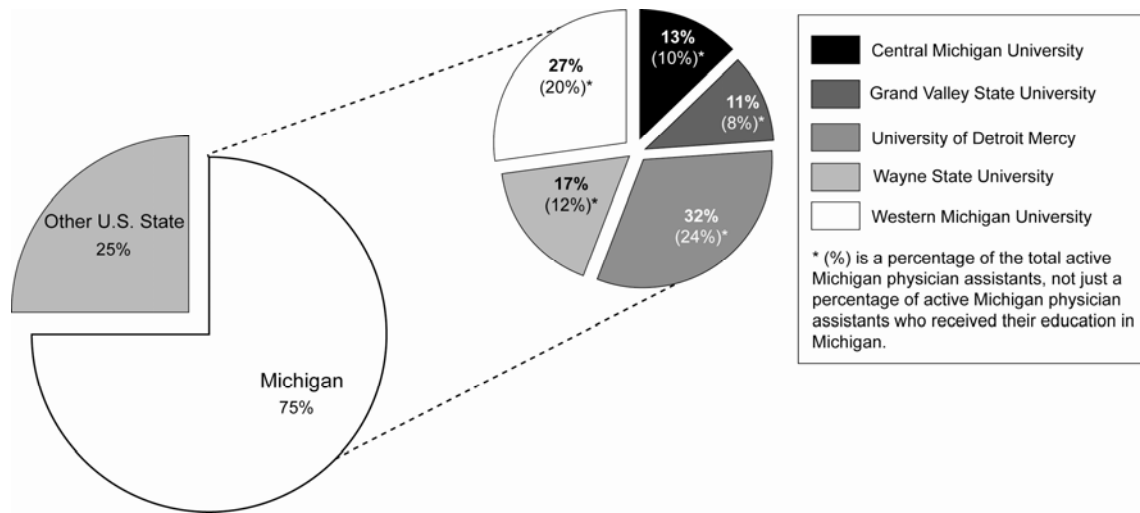


SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.  
NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

---

- Three-fourths (75 percent) of active physician assistants received their highest physician assistant degree from a PA school in Michigan and 25 percent attended a PA school in another state (see Exhibit 11).
- Of the active physician assistants who received their degree from a PA school in Michigan, 32 percent attended University of Detroit Mercy, 27 percent attended Western Michigan University, 17 percent attended Wayne State University, 13 percent attended Central Michigan University, and 11 percent attended Grand Valley State University.
- Five percent of active physician assistants are either enrolled in or have completed a postgraduate physician assistant residency program.

**EXHIBIT 11**  
Education Background of Physician Assistants, 2007



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.  
NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

- One third (33 percent) of *active* physician assistants are involved in teaching (see Exhibit 12).
- Eight percent are involved in administration in a private practice; 4 percent are involved in administration in a PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic.
- Ten percent of active physician assistants are involved in research.

**EXHIBIT 12**  
Distribution of Professional Activities, 2007

Professional activity	Percentage
Teaching	33%
Research	10
Administration in a private practice	8
Administration in PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic	4

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.  
NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

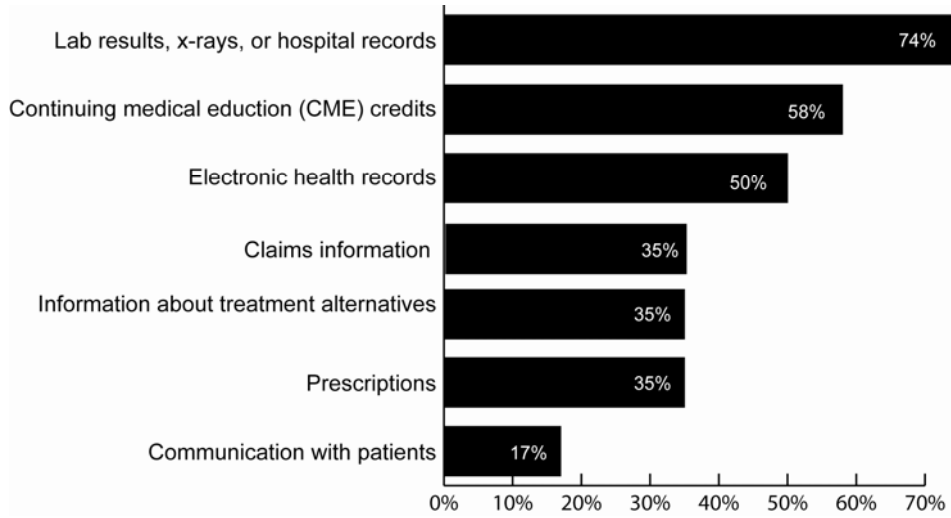
## USE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

*Active* physician assistants report that someone in their practice uses a computer or computer-like device to receive or transmit (see Exhibit 13) the following types of information:

---

**EXHIBIT 13**  
Percentage of Practices Using Computer Technology to  
Receive or Transmit Information, 2007

---



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.  
NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

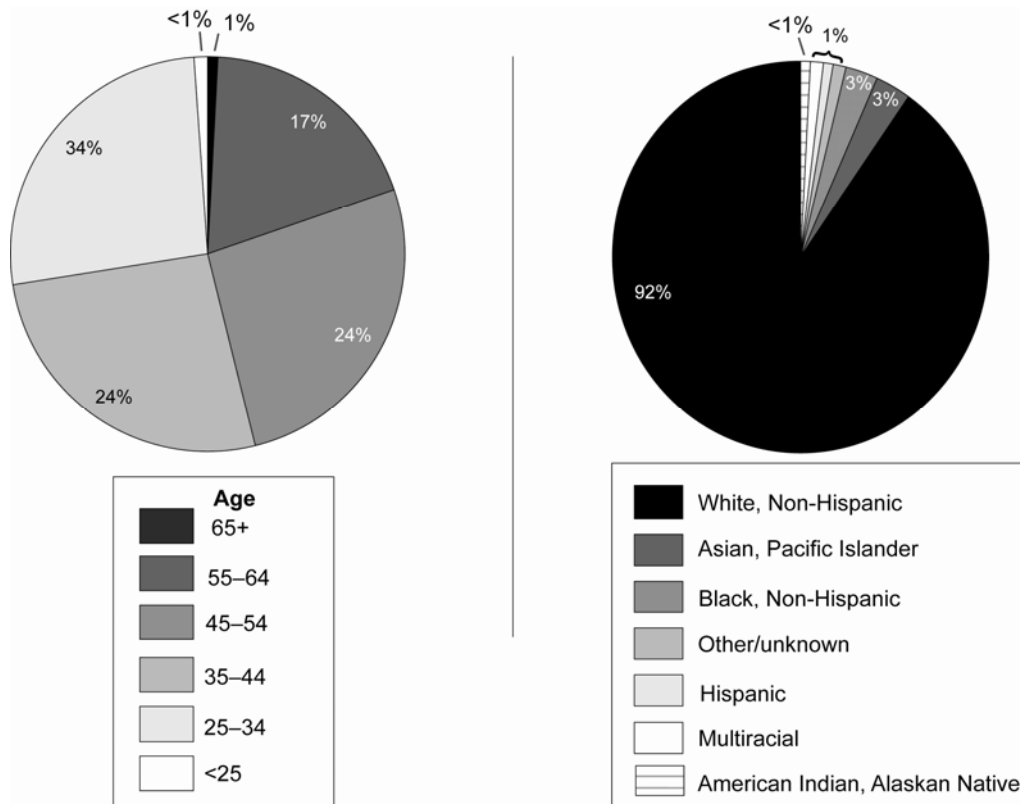
---

## GENDER, AGE, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

- Thirty-eight percent of *active* physician assistants are male; 62 percent are female.
- Eighteen percent of active PAs are aged 55 or older; nearly two-thirds are under the age of 45 (see Exhibit 14).
- Three percent of active physician assistants are Asian or Pacific Islander, 3 percent are African American, 1 percent are Hispanic, and less than 1 percent are American Indian/Alaskan Native.

### EXHIBIT 14

#### Age, Race, and Ethnicity of Physician Assistants, 2007



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2007.

NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Appendix

### *Survey Questions and Response Frequencies\* (N=621)*

1. In what year were you born?

Age	Percentage
<25	<1%
25-34	34
35-44	24
45-54	24
55-64	17
65+	1

2. What is your current employment status? (Mark one)

	Percentage of all physician assistants	Percentage of active physician assistants in Michigan
a. 32 or more hours per week in PA practice or related area	84%	88%
b. Less than 32 hours per week in PA practice or related area	12	12
c. Employed by not as a PA	1	NA
d. Not employed and seeking employment as a PA or in a related area	1	NA
e. Not employed and seeking employment outside of PA practice or related area	0	NA
f. Temporarily not working and not looking for a job	1	NA
g. Retired, with no plans to return to work	<1	NA

3. What is your gender?

a. Female	62%
b. Male	38

4. What is your race/ethnicity?

a. American Indian, Alaskan Native	<1%
b. Asian, Pacific Islander	3
c. Black, Non-Hispanic	3
d. Hispanic	1
e. Multi-racial	1
f. White, Non-Hispanic	92
g. Other/unknown	1

\* Unless otherwise noted, all frequencies are for *active* physician assistants. NA = Not applicable. Percentages in tables may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

5. Where do you live? (Mark **one**)

Percentage of all licensed physician assistants	
a. Michigan	94%
b. Other U.S. state	5
c. Canada	<1
d. Other country	<1

6. Where is your primary place of employment?

Percentage of all licensed physician assistants	
a. Michigan	95%
b. Other U.S. state	4
c. Canada	<1
d. Other country	0

7. Please indicate the ZIP Code for your main clinical practice site. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you practice at more than one site for your main employer?

a. Yes	35%
b. No	65

9. Do you work for more than one employer?

a. Yes	20%
b. No	80

10. Approximately what percentage of the time is your supervising physician at your main clinical practice site when you are?

a. 0–25 percent	13%
b. 26–50 percent	11
c. 51–75 percent	16
d. 76–100 percent	60

11. Is your main clinical practice an outpatient or inpatient site?

a. Outpatient	66%
b. Inpatient	33
c. Not applicable	2

12. Identify your current employment setting(s). (Mark **all** that apply)

a. None or not active as a physician assistant	<1%
b. Hospital Inpatient	41
c. Hospital Outpatient	27
d. Physician's office	52
e. Nursing home/long-term care facility	6
f. Home health care	2
g. Public/community health	4
h. Hospice	1
i. PA education program	2
j. Other	7

13. How many hours per week do you spend providing direct patient care? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Overall, how would you rate your professional satisfaction as a physician assistant?

a. Extremely satisfied	66%
b. Somewhat satisfied	31
c. Neutral	2
d. Somewhat dissatisfied	1
e. Extremely dissatisfied	0

15. What is the highest physician assistant degree you have achieved? (Mark **one**)

a. Associate's degree in Physician Assistant (PA) Studies	5%
b. Bachelor's degree in PA Studies	26
c. Master's degree in PA Studies	66
d. Other PA training	3

16. Are you involved in any of the following professional activities? (Mark **all** that apply)

a. Research	10%
b. Teaching	33
c. Administration in a private practice	8
d. Administration in a PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic	4

17. Are you currently providing care to...

a. Medicaid patients?	83%
b. New Medicaid patients?	71
c. Medicare patients?	88
d. New Medicare patients?	78
e. Patients from other publicly funded programs?	60

18. Mark the practice specialty(ies) in which you spend most of your professional time. Mark **ONE primary** and, if applicable, **ONE secondary** specialty.

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Allergy & Immunology	1%	1%
Anesthesiology	<1	1
Cardiovascular Disease	4	3
Critical Care Medicine	1	4
Dermatology	3	0
Emergency Medicine	11	14
Endocrinology	0	1
Family Practice	21	6
Gastroenterology	2	1
General Medicine	3	7
Geriatrics	<1	5
Hospitalist	3	2
Infectious Disease	1	1
Internal Medicine (General)	9	18
Nephrology	1	1
Neurology	<1	1
Neurological Surgery	3	0
Obstetrics & Gynecology	2	0

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Occupational Medicine	3	7
Oncology/Hematology	3	1
Orthopedic Surgery	7	5
Otolaryngology	1	0
Pediatrics	2	5
Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation	2	1
Plastic Surgery	<1	1
Preventive Medicine	<1	2
Psychiatry	2	2
Pulmonary Disease	<1	1
Radiology	1	1
Rheumatology	<1	0
Sports Medicine	0	2
Surgery (General)	5	2
Thoracic Surgery	2	1
Urology	1	0
Vascular Surgery	<1	2
Other	4	7

19. In your practice, does someone use a computer or computer-like device (e.g., PDA) to receive or transmit... (Mark **all** that apply)

a. Lab results, x-rays, or hospital records?	74%
b. Prescriptions?	35
c. Claims information?	35
d. Electronic health records?	50
e. Communication with your patients	17
f. Information about treatment alternatives	35
g. Continuing medical education (CME) credits?	58

20. How would you describe the area where you grew up? (Please mark an answer in **both** sections A & B).

<b>SECTION A</b>	
a. Rural/small town	39%
b. Suburban	44
c. Urban	17
<b>SECTION B</b>	
a. Michigan	80%
b. Other U.S. state	18
c. Other country	2

21. A. Please indicate where you received your highest physician assistant degree.

a. Michigan	75%
b. Other U.S. state	25
c. Other country	0

B. If in Michigan, please specify the school.

a. Central Michigan University	13%
b. Grand Valley State University	11
c. University of Detroit Mercy	32
d. Wayne State University	17
e. Western Michigan University	27

22. Are you enrolled in or have you completed a postgraduate physician assistant residency program?

a. Yes	5%
b. No	95

23. Have you voluntarily left a physician assistant position within the last two years?

	<b>Percentage of all licensed PAs</b>
a. Yes	25%
b. No	75

24. If you voluntarily left a physician assistant position within the last two years, was it to... (Mark **one**)

	<b>Percentage of licensed PAs who voluntarily left position in last two years</b>
a. Take another PA position within the same organization	8%
b. Take another PA position with a different organization	82
c. Take a position outside of PA practice	5
d. Retire from PA practice	1

25. If you voluntarily left a physician assistant (PA) position within the last two years to take another PA position, did you...

	Percentage of licensed PAs who voluntarily left position in last two years to take another PA position
a. Leave a primary care position to take a specialty position	18%
b. Leave a specialty position to take another specialty position	55
c. Leave a specialty position to take a primary care position	11
d. No response	17

26. If you voluntarily left a physician assistant position within the last two years, what were the factors that led you to this decision? (Mark **all** that apply)

	Percentage of licensed PAs who voluntarily left position in last two years
a. Age	5%
b. General lack of job satisfaction	53
c. Childbearing/childrearing	9
d. Personal or family health concerns	29
e. Increasing administrative burden	8
f. Physical demands of the job	7
g. Employer/employee conflict	27
h. Inadequate salary/wages	39
i. Inadequate benefits	26
j. Opportunity to work in PA administration	1
k. Opportunity to work in PA education	1
l. Career promotion	16

27. In the next three years, I plan to... (Mark **all** that apply)

a. Maintain the number of patient care hours I currently work	80%
b. Increase patient care hours	9
c. Significantly reduce patient care hours	7
d. Relocate to another Michigan location	6
e. Relocate to another state	5
f. Retire	2

28. If you are retiring or reducing your patient care hours, what are the factors that led to this decision? (Mark **all** that apply)

	<b>Percentage of active PAs planning to retire or reduce patient care hours</b>
a. Age	32%
b. General lack of job satisfaction	21
c. Childbearing/childrearing	32
d. Lifestyle changes	43
e. Medical malpractice insurance cost	0
f. Personal or family health concerns	17
g. Increasing administrative/regulatory burden	19
h. Employer/employee conflict	0
i. Inadequate reimbursement for services	21
j. Moved to management/consulting/teaching/ research	6
k. Other	19