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*Physician assistants are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine under physician supervision. The profession dates from the late 1960s. The curriculum was based on fast-track training of military doctors during World War II.*

*Physician assistant training programs usually take at least two years. Admission requirements vary, but programs commonly require at least two years of college and some health care working experience. Accredited physician assistant programs are offered by a wide variety of institutions, including baccalaureate colleges, university schools of allied health, community colleges and the military. Licensing requires a passing score on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination, administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. The exam is open only to graduates of programs accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.*

*Augsburg College of Minneapolis offers the only accredited physician assistant program in Minnesota. The three-year Augsburg program requires a bachelor's degree for admission. Wisconsin has three programs, Iowa has two programs, and North and South Dakota each have one program.*

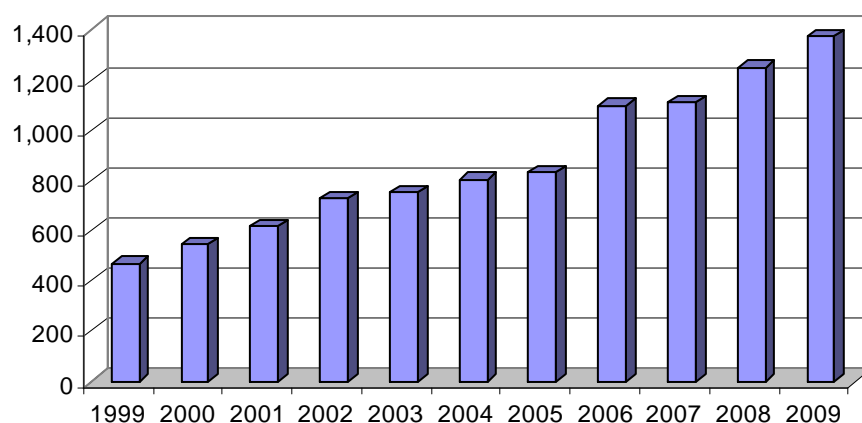
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## **Numbers of physician assistants**

In July 2009, Minnesota had 1,371 licensed physician assistants, nearly three times the number 10 years earlier, and a 10 percent increase over 2008. In comparison, the number of licensed physicians increased only 28 percent from 1999 to 2009, and 2.3 percent from 2008 to 2009. As a result, the ratio of licensed physicians to physician assistants fell from 32 to 14 between 1999 and 2009.

Some licensees are retired, not working as physician assistants, or living and practicing in other states. Based on survey responses and licensing data from the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice, the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care estimates approximately 1,051 physician assistants were practicing at least part time at Minnesota practice sites in mid-2009. For explanation of this estimate, see the methodological note at the end of this report. Using the July 1, 2008, population estimate for Minnesota, 1,051 physician assistants equates to 20 active physician assistants per 100,000 people.

### Minnesota licensed physician assistants



Numbers of registrations July 1 of each year; not necessarily practicing in Minnesota.  
Source: Minnesota Board of Medical Practice

The following data is for physician assistants who work at least part time at a primary practice site in Minnesota, according to the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (ORHPC) survey of physician assistants renewing licenses for 2009.

#### Work Status

Ninety-three percent of all respondents said they were employed in a job requiring a physician assistant (P.A.) license. Of those with identifiable Minnesota work locations, 99 percent reported working as a physician assistant.

## Geographic Distribution

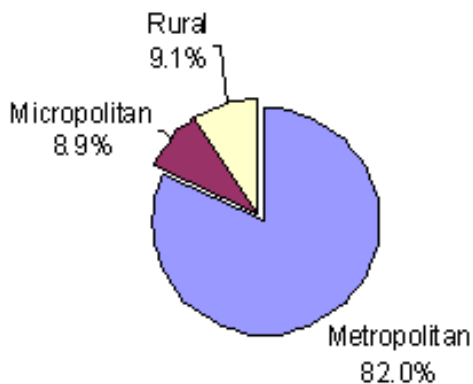
Although data from earlier years suggested that physicians were distributed across the state in close proportion to population, the most recent data indicates micropolitan and rural counties have a smaller share of physician assistants than their population would suggest.

*(Methodological note at the end of report defines grouping of counties used for reporting data.)*

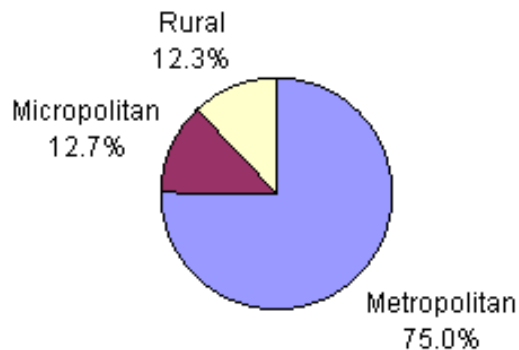
- The 46 most rural counties have 12 percent of the state’s population, but only 9 percent of the state’s practicing physician assistants.
- Metropolitan statistical area counties claim 75 percent of the state’s population, and 82 percent of practicing physician assistants.

In 2007, survey data showed 14 percent of all physician assistants licensed in Minnesota practiced in rural communities. Both the 2006 and 2009 surveys showed 9 percent of physician assistants practiced in rural communities. The variance may be due to biases in location of the survey respondents.

**Physician Assistants, 2009**



**Minnesota Population, 2008**



	2008 Population	% Population	% Physician Assistants
<b>Statewide</b>	5,287,976	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Metropolitan counties</b>	3,965,678	75.0%	82.0%
<b>Micropolitan counties</b>	669,993	12.7%	8.9%
<b>Rural</b>	652,305	12.3%	9.1%

## Gender of Physician Assistants

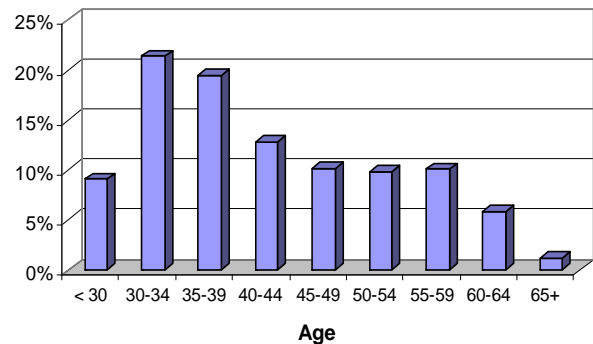
- Two-thirds of all physician assistants are female.
- Women especially predominate among younger ranks of physician assistants; 81 percent of physician assistants under age 35 are female.
- Conversely, most physician assistants age 55 or older are male.

AGE	Respondents	% MALE	% FEMALE
All active physician assistants	744	33.6%	66.4%
Under 35	227	19.4%	80.6%
35-44	240	32.5%	67.5%
45-54	149	35.6%	64.4%
55-64	119	58.8%	41.2%
65 and older	9	44.4%	55.6%
Metropolitan	615	34.1%	65.9%
Micropolitan	60	26.7%	73.3%
Rural	69	33.6%	66.4%

## Age of Physician Assistants

Physician assistants are relatively young compared to the physicians they work alongside. The younger age of physician assistants reflects the shorter training period, the large number of young physician assistants entering the field in recent years and the newness of the profession.

Age of Physician Assistants, 2009



- Physician assistants (median = 39.5 years) are much younger than physicians (median = 48.9 yrs.).
- Fifty percent of physician assistants were less than 40 years old in 2009; 30 percent were under 35.
- Rural physician assistants are older than physician assistants in metropolitan counties. Only 19 percent of rural physician assistants were under 35, compared to more than 30 percent of physician assistants working in metropolitan and micropolitan counties.
- This difference implies that most newly trained physician assistants are taking jobs in metropolitan or micropolitan area counties. Eighty-six percent of physician

assistants under age 45 work in metropolitan counties, compared to 76 percent of physician assistants aged 45 to 64. Six percent of physician assistants under age 35 work in rural counties, compared to 15 percent of those aged 45 to 64.

### Age Distribution of Physician Assistants by Geography

Age Group	Statewide n = 744 respondents	Metropolitan n = 615 respondents	Micropolitan n = 60 respondents	Rural n = 69 respondents
Median age	39.5 years	39.1 years	38.9 years	47.5 years
Less than 35	30.5%	31.9%	30.0%	18.8%
35-44	32.3%	33.5%	30.0%	23.3%
45-54	20.0%	18.7%	25.0%	27.5%
55-64	16.0%	14.6%	15.0%	29.0%
65 and older	1.2%	1.3%	-0-	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Less than 30	9.1%	9.3%	10.0%	7.2%
30-34	21.4%	22.6%	20.0%	11.6%
35-39	19.5%	20.0%	21.7%	13.1%
40-44	12.8%	13.5%	8.3%	10.2%
45-49	10.2%	10.2%	5.0%	14.5%
50-54	9.8%	8.5%	20.0%	13.0%
55-59	10.1%	9.3%	10.0%	17.4%
60-64	5.9%	5.4%	5.0%	11.6%
65 and older	1.2%	1.3%	-0-	1.4%

Recently trained physician assistants are entering the profession at a younger age than in the past. The median age at time of first licensure is 29 for physician assistants licensed since 2005. The median age at first licensure for those licensed before 1995 was 37.

Date of First Licensure	Median age at licensure	N*
<b>Before 1995</b>	37	125
<b>1995-99</b>	33	167
<b>2000-04</b>	30	274
<b>2005 or later</b>	29	396

\* all active licensees in database, whether or not actively practicing in Minnesota.

## Types of Practice Site

Compared to previous years, the 2009 survey found a substantially lower percentage of physician assistants working in provider offices and clinics, and a higher percentage working in hospitals. It is not clear if the shifts are real, or due to changes in response rates.

- Most physician assistants work in provider offices or clinics; about one-fourth work in hospitals.
- In rural counties, with few large hospitals, more than three-fourths of physician assistants work in provider offices or clinics. Ten percent of physician assistants in metropolitan area counties work in urgent care clinics; urgent care clinics are less common in more rural counties.
- Male physicians are more likely to work in hospitals than are female physician assistants.

Type of Site	Statewide	Metropolitan	Micropolitan	Rural
<b>N = respondents</b>	706	582	58	66
<b>Office/clinic</b>	56.8%	52.6%	77.6%	75.8%
<b>Hospital</b>	24.9%	26.8%	10.3%	21.2%
<b>Urgent Care</b>	9.1%	10.5%	3.4%	1.6%
<b>Long-term care facility</b>	3.4%	4.1%	-0-	-0-
<b>Other</b>	5.8%	6.0%	8.7%	1.4%

**Note:** Percentages for micropolitan and rural are less reliable because of the small number of respondents.

Type of Site	Respondents	Male	Female
<b>Office/clinic</b>	401	31.9%	68.1%
<b>Hospital</b>	176	42.0%	58.0%

	Males N = 234	Females N = 472
<b>Office/clinic</b>	54.7%	57.8%
<b>Hospital</b>	31.6%	21.6%
<b>Other</b>	13.7%	20.6%
<b>Total</b>	100.0%	100.0%

## Education and Experience

Most Minnesota practicing physician assistants received their training outside Minnesota; only 25 percent were trained in Minnesota. Younger physician assistants are more likely than older physician assistants to have trained in Minnesota.

- Nearly one-third (31 percent) of physician assistants under 40 trained in Minnesota.
- Only 19 percent of physician assistants age 40 or older trained in Minnesota.

	<b>Trained in Minnesota</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
<b>Less than 40</b>	31%	357
<b>Age 40-54</b>	19%	235
<b>55 or more</b>	18%	126
<b>All active physician assistants</b>	25%	718

One-third (32.8 percent) of physicians reported working two years or less at their current principal site. Eighty-four percent had been at their principal work site 10 years or less.

<b>Years at Practice Site</b>	
<b>0-2 years</b>	32.8%
<b>3-5 years</b>	27.6%
<b>6-10 years</b>	23.1%
<b>&gt; 10 years</b>	16.5%

## Work Hours and Work Plans

Among actively practicing physician assistants who reported their hours, the median work week was 40 hours.

- One-third of physician assistants worked 45 hours or more per week; 27 percent worked less than 36 hours per week.
- Female physician assistants typically work fewer hours per week than males.
- Physician assistant work hours vary little by age, except for the 35-39 age group, which reports working four to five fewer hours per week than younger or older P.A.s.

Age/Sex	Hours Worked per Week	
	Mean	Median
<b>25-29</b>	39.6	49
<b>30-34</b>	40.4	40
<b>35-39</b>	36.1	40
<b>40-45</b>	39.1	40
<b>45-49</b>	41.0	40
<b>50-54</b>	42.7	42
<b>55-59</b>	41.1	40
<b>60-64</b>	40.1	40
<b>Female</b>	37.8	40
<b>Male</b>	43.7	44

Physician assistants commonly practice at more than one site. Thirty-seven percent reported working at least one hour at a second site. Most (62 percent) of these worked 10 hours or less at their second site, but 25 percent said they worked 20 hours or more at their second site.

Unlike the case for physicians, nurses and dentists, near-term retirements are not a major concern for physician assistants. Less than 20 percent expect to leave the field within five years. Six-in-10 (61 percent) expect to practice more than 10 additional years.

Responses = 733	Percent
Expect to work 0-5 years	18.3%
Expect to work 6-10 years	21.1%
Expect to work more than 10 years	60.6%

## **Methodological note for numbers of physician assistants**

The Office of Rural Health and Primary Care asks physician assistants to answer questions about their employment status and the nature of their practices each year when they renew their registrations. Response to the survey is voluntary and does not affect license renewal.

Data reported here is from responses received from physician assistants renewing their licenses for 2009-10. Renewals were due July 1, 2009, so most physician assistants answered the survey in May or June 2009.

The Board of Medicine received about 1,212 license renewals in 2009. This estimate is based on the number of licenses in effect July 1, 2008, and July 1, 2009, and the number of newly issued licenses. Survey responses were received from 970 physician assistants renewing licenses, for a response rate of 80 percent.

Of these, 744, or about 77 percent, said they working at least part time at a primary practice site in Minnesota.

The exact number of physician assistants actually practicing in Minnesota is not known. If the 77 percent figure is applied to the total number of registered physician assistants, there would have been about 1,051 physician assistants working in Minnesota in mid-2009. This would be a reasonable estimate if practitioners working in Minnesota were no more likely than physician assistants not working in Minnesota to respond to the survey. However, active Minnesota practitioners might have been more likely to respond, making this estimate somewhat high.

Using the July 1, 2008, population estimate for Minnesota, 1,051 physician assistants equates to 20 active physician assistants per 100,000 people.

Three groupings of counties are used for reporting data:

**Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) counties** – 23 Minnesota counties included in eight metropolitan statistical areas (Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Cloud, Rochester, Duluth-Superior, Mankato-North Mankato, Fargo, Grand Forks and La Crosse). Metropolitan statistical areas are single or multi-county areas surrounding cities of at least 50,000 population.

**Micropolitan counties** – 18 counties surrounding smaller urban centers of at least 10,000 people.

**Rural** – 46 counties outside MSAs and Micropolitan areas.

The counties within each category are not geographically contiguous.

Minnesota Office of Rural Health and Primary Care Workforce information is online at [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/data.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/data.html) or contact Angie Sechler at [angie.sechler@state.mn.us](mailto:angie.sechler@state.mn.us) or (651) 201-3862.