

**Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health**

**Health Professions Data Series  
Physician Assistants 2011**



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**April 2013**

## Massachusetts Health Professions Data Series: Physician Assistants 2011

### Overview

*The Massachusetts Health Professions Data Series: Physician Assistants 2011* report provides baseline data about the workforce demographics of physician assistants licensed to practice in Massachusetts. It is part of the Department of Public Health's Health Professions Data Series currently reporting on seven licensed health professions: dentists, dental hygienists, pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses.

This series responds to the need for quality and timely data on workforce demographics and characteristics of employment among these components of the Commonwealth's healthcare workforce, and is intended to provide useful information and tools to assist in workforce development initiatives and health care workforce policy development and planning in both the public and private sectors.

*The Massachusetts Health Professions Data Series: Physician Assistants 2011* report is a collaborative effort coordinated by the Health Care Workforce Center of the MDPH Bureau of Community Health and Prevention, the Division of Health Professions Licensure and the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Physician Assistants in the MDPH Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality, and partners from the UMass Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network.

### Chapter 305 of the Acts of 2008: An Act to Promote Cost Containment, Transparency, and Efficiency in the Delivery of Quality Health Care<sup>1</sup>

The publication of this data series is a major step toward fulfilling the mandates of Chapter 305 of the Acts of 2008 which established the MDPH Health Care Workforce Center (the Center). It complements and contributes to other state and federal efforts such as the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis Assessment, as well as other ongoing health care access and payment reform initiatives in the Commonwealth.

The need for timely, high quality data about the healthcare professions in the Commonwealth is constant. This initiative is ground-breaking because it utilizes the capacity of the MDPH Division of Health Professions Licensure to provide online license renewal which offers an efficient and sustainable system for collecting and analyzing workforce data submitted directly by licensed health care professionals upon renewal of their licenses.

This data series is intended to characterize the workforce from a supply perspective, and will enhance the Commonwealth's ability to identify trends and patterns in the workforce that may impact access to health care professionals and the services they provide. The resulting Health Professions Data Series promises to be a very robust, timely source of data that will be integral to future discussions and decisions about healthcare workforce development, education, training, recruitment, and retention.

Quality data collection, analysis, and reporting at the state level are integral to the development of effective health care planning and policy-making. The Massachusetts Health Professions Data Series has fostered public-private collaborations that are key to the availability of a highly qualified, diverse, and culturally competent workforce to meet the current and future needs of all Massachusetts residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 305 of the Acts of 2008 is codified at MGL c.111, §§25L through 25N  
<http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter111/Section25L>

**BACKGROUND**

During the 2011 license renewal cycle, 2,192 physician assistants (PAs) were sent a renewal notice with an option of renewing their license online and completing 28 workforce survey questions. The survey included questions related to demographics, employment characteristics and future work plans. A total of 1,267 (58%) PAs completed the online survey, of which 1,132 (89%) reported practicing in Massachusetts. **The results should be quoted with caution as the representativeness of the physician assistant respondents for this report is unknown.**

The following data represents the responses of all Physician Assistants who completed an online renewal between December 2010 and June 2011.

**DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>2</sup>**

n = 1,267 – All licensed in Massachusetts

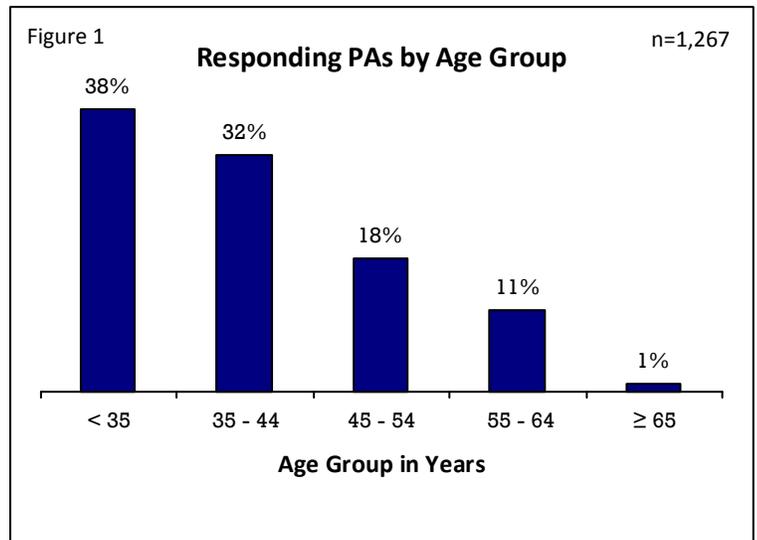
**Gender:** Females: 69%      Males: 31%

**Average Age:** 40 years

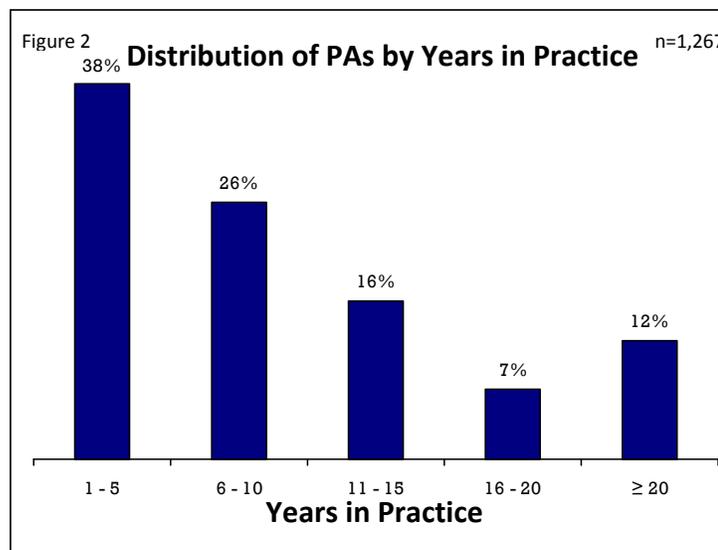
**Age Range:** 23-75 years

**Race:**

White, Non-Hispanic (NH):	84%
Black, NH:	1%
Asian, NH:	3%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, NH:	<1%
Hispanic:	3%
Other:	1%
Decline to Answer:	8%



**Languages other than English most frequently spoken with sufficient fluency to provide adequate care:** Spanish 10%, French 2%, Portuguese 2%, Russian 1%

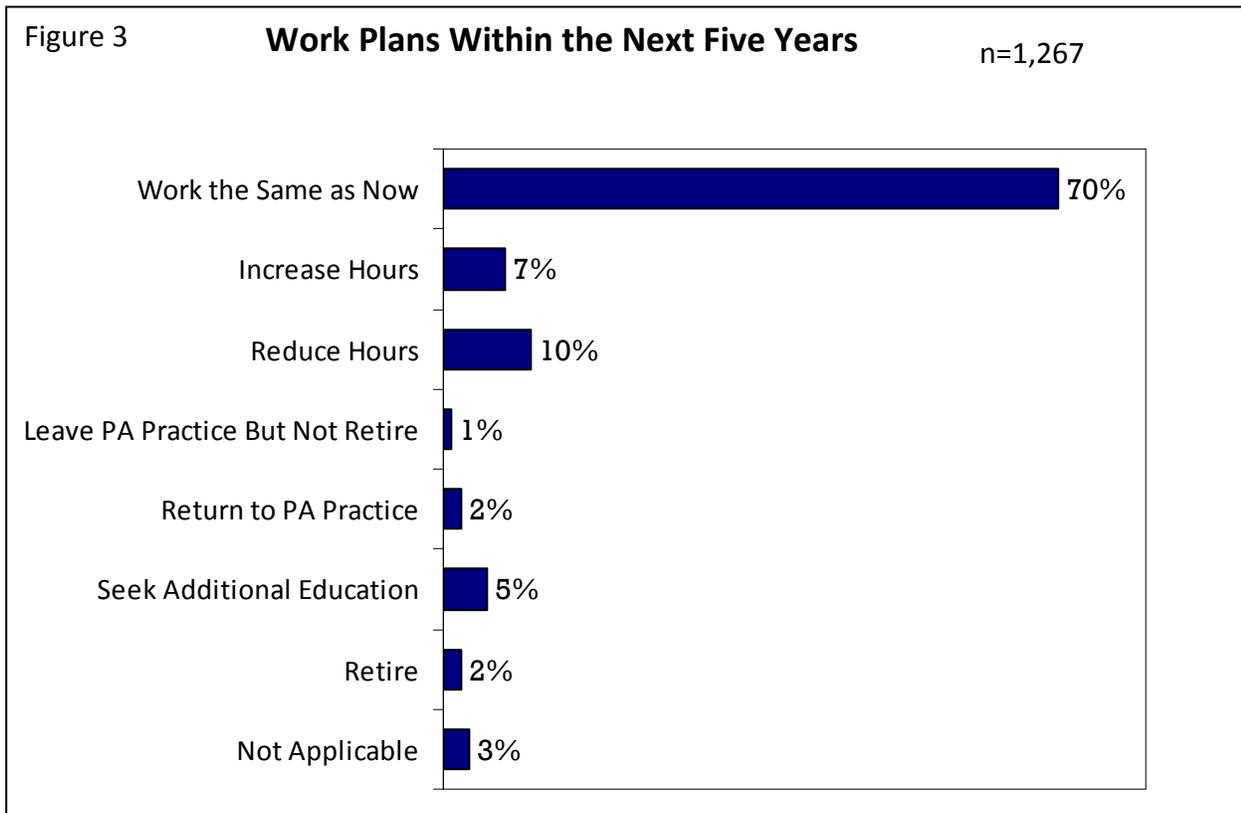


<sup>2</sup> Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding or the respondent's ability to select more than one answer.

### Future Plans (in the next 5 years)

n = 1,267 – All licensed in Massachusetts

70% of respondents did not intend to change their work status. 10% of PAs indicated a desire to reduce the number of hours that they work, while 7% wanted to increase their hours. 5% indicated they would seek additional education.



### EDUCATION

n = 1,267 – All licensed in Massachusetts

**Highest level of Physician Assistant education completed:** A masters degree was the highest level of Physician Assistant (PA) level education completed for most (74%) of the respondents. PAs in younger age groups reported attaining significantly higher levels of PA education than their older counterparts

**Highest level of Physician Assistant education attained by age group:** In order to be licensed in Massachusetts, a Physician Assistant must document a bachelor's degree and graduation from an approved physician assistant training program. PA training programs grant Certificates, AS, BS or MS degrees.

**Location of initial PA education which qualified PA to work in the US:** 46% of respondents reported completing their first PA degree-credential in Massachusetts. 54% completed this first degree in another US state, and less than 1% in a US territory.

The following data reflects physician assistants who reported practicing in Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup>

### EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

n = 1,132– All licensed and working in Massachusetts

#### Employment Status:

Full-time PA:	86%
Part-time PA:	11%
Per Diem PA:	9%

#### Number of hours spent in *Direct Patient Care* per week at primary PA position:

1-10 Hours per Week:	3%
11-20 Hours per Week:	8%
21-30 Hours per Week:	16%
31-40 Hours per Week:	52%
More than 40 Hours per Week:	20%

**Where PAs work by EOHHS Regions<sup>4</sup>:** 30% work in Boston Region; 17% work in Metrowest Region; 15% work in Western Region; 13% work in Southeast Region; 12% work in Northeast Region; 11% work in Central Region.

### PRIMARY PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT POSITION CHARACTERISTICS

n = 1,132– All licensed and working in Massachusetts

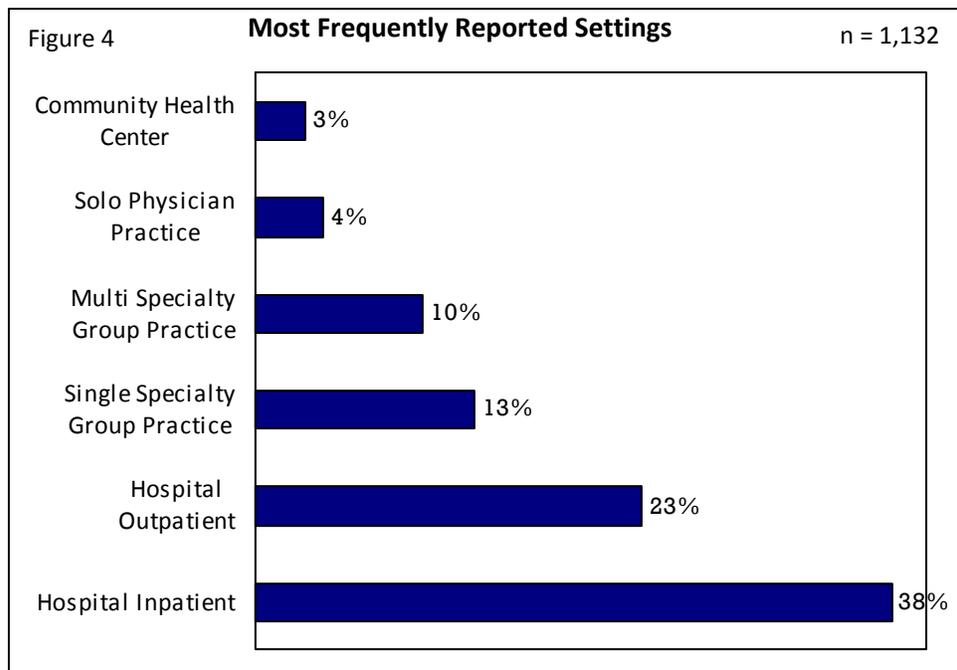
97% of respondents identified clinically practicing PA as their primary position.

Most frequently reported practice settings (*Figure 4*) were hospital/inpatient (38%), hospital outpatient (23%), and single specialty group practice (13%).

21% reported spending most of their professional time in emergency medicine, 16% in other surgery, 13% in primary care – internal medicine, and 13% in orthopedic surgery.

84% have not completed any post-graduate training in a specialty. 78% reported that they would work in an underserved community for 2 years in exchange for loan repayment benefits.

20% reported that they have participated in a loan repayment program.



<sup>3</sup> Number represents all PAs who reported working either full-time, part-time or on a voluntary basis in Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup> EOHHS Regions used [http://www.mass.gov/mgis/reg\\_eohhs.htm](http://www.mass.gov/mgis/reg_eohhs.htm)

This report was developed by the

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health**

Bureau of Community Health and Prevention  
Health Care Workforce Center

Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality  
Division Health Professions Licensure  
Board of Registration of Physician Assistants

in collaboration with

UMass Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network



For additional information about the *Health Professions Data Series* or this Physician Assistants report please contact the Massachusetts Health Care Workforce Center at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Website: [mass.gov/dph/hcworkforcecenter](https://mass.gov/dph/hcworkforcecenter)

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