

# *Michigan Department of Community Health*

## *Survey of Physician Assistants*

### **Survey Findings 2008**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

In fall 2008, the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) conducted the second annual survey of licensed physician assistants (PAs) to gather information about their employment characteristics, education, and work environment. A total of 1,642 PAs received the survey with their license renewal application. Responses were received online or by return mail from 580 PAs, for a response rate of 35 percent and a margin of error of  $\pm 3.3$  percent with 95 percent confidence.<sup>1</sup>

While the results of the 2008 survey of physician assistants are generally consistent with those of the 2007 survey, differences in the data that fall outside the margin of error are noted. Key survey findings are presented below.

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, percentage of time spent with supervising physician, specialty, use of computer technology, professional satisfaction, and 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 2008, a total of 2,993 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 2008, 1,642 physician assistants were eligible for license renewal. The surveys were mailed to all PAs renewing their license in 2008. 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 580 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.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, if the answer to a survey question is 60 percent “Yes,” the margin of error and confidence level mean that if this question were asked 100 times, in 95 occurrences the answer of the entire universe of possible respondents would be between 56.7 percent and 63.3 percent (i.e., the  $\pm 3.3$  percent margin of error).

## EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

- Overall, 91 percent of physician assistants licensed in Michigan are *active* in Michigan—that is, they are working part- or full-time in Michigan in physician assistant practice or in a related area (see Exhibit 1). *Unless otherwise noted, data presented in this report are for active, licensed physician assistants working in Michigan.*
  - Among 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 5 percent of physician assistants licensed in Michigan are working as a PA, but not in Michigan.
- About 4 percent of licensed physician assistants are not working as a PA.

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### EXHIBIT 1

#### Employment Characteristics of Physician Assistants, 2008

	Percentage of all physician assistants	Percentage of active 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	91%	NA
Licensed physician assistants working in PA-related area outside of Michigan	5	NA
Licensed physician assistants not working in PA-related area	4	NA

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

NOTE: NA = Not applicable.

## PRACTICE SETTING CHARACTERISTICS

Less than one-fifth of physician assistants (17 percent) work for more than one employer, although 34 percent practice at more than one site for their main employer. A majority of PAs (57 percent) say that their supervising physician is with them at their main clinical practice site 76–100 percent of the time. Only 15 percent report having a supervising physician with them at their main clinical practice site 0–25 percent of the time.

About two-thirds of PAs (67 percent) have a main clinical practice in an outpatient site. When asked to identify *all* of their current employment settings, about half of active PAs (51 percent) 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).

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**EXHIBIT 2**  
Current Employment Settings of Physician Assistants, 2008

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Setting	Percentage of active physician assistants in Michigan
Physician's office	51%
Hospital inpatient	41
Hospital outpatient	27
Nursing home/long-term care facility	4
Public/community health	5
PA education program	2
Home health care	1
Hospice	<1
Other	7

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

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

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About two-fifths (41 percent) of PAs describe the area of their primary practice as suburban; one-third (33 percent) describe it as urban; and about a quarter (27 percent) say they work in a rural area or small town.

### **PRACTICE SPECIALTY**

About 38 percent of active physician assistants in Michigan specialize in primary care (i.e., their primary specialty is family practice, general medicine, internal medicine, or general pediatrics). About 62 percent are specialists in an area other than primary care (see Exhibit 3).

### EXHIBIT 3

#### Distribution of Active Physician Assistants in Michigan, by Specialty, 2008

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Allergy & Immunology	0%	1%
Anesthesiology	<1	0
Cardiovascular Disease	7	2
Critical Care Medicine	1	4
Dermatology	3	1
Emergency Medicine	10	13
Endocrinology	<1	1
Family Practice	24	11
Gastroenterology	1	1
General Medicine	2	3
Geriatrics	1	2
Hospitalist	3	3
Infectious Disease	<1	1
Internal Medicine (General)	8	14
Nephrology	<1	1
Neurology	1	0
Neurological Surgery	2	2
Obstetrics & Gynecology	2	4

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Occupational Medicine	3%	3%
Oncology/Hematology	4	0
Orthopedic Surgery	6	3
Otolaryngology	1	1
Pediatrics	4	2
Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation	1	1
Plastic Surgery	1	1
Preventive Medicine	0	2
Psychiatry	2	5
Pulmonary Disease	<1	1
Radiology	1	0
Rheumatology	1	0
Sports Medicine	0	2
Surgery (General)	4	2
Thoracic Surgery	1	2
Urology	1	0
Vascular Surgery	1	2
Other	4	11

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

### TIME SPENT PROVIDING PATIENT CARE

- Active physician assistants in Michigan spend an average of 37 hours per week providing patient care.
- One-fourth of these PAs (25 percent) spend 31 hours or less per week providing such care.
- Another 25 percent spend more than 40 hours per week providing patient care.

### PROVISION OF CARE TO MEDICAID AND MEDICARE PATIENTS

Among active physician assistants in Michigan:

- Four out of five (82 percent) report that they are currently providing care to Medicaid patients (see Exhibit 4).
- Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) are providing care to *new* Medicaid patients.
- Almost nine out of ten (86 percent) report currently providing care to Medicare patients.

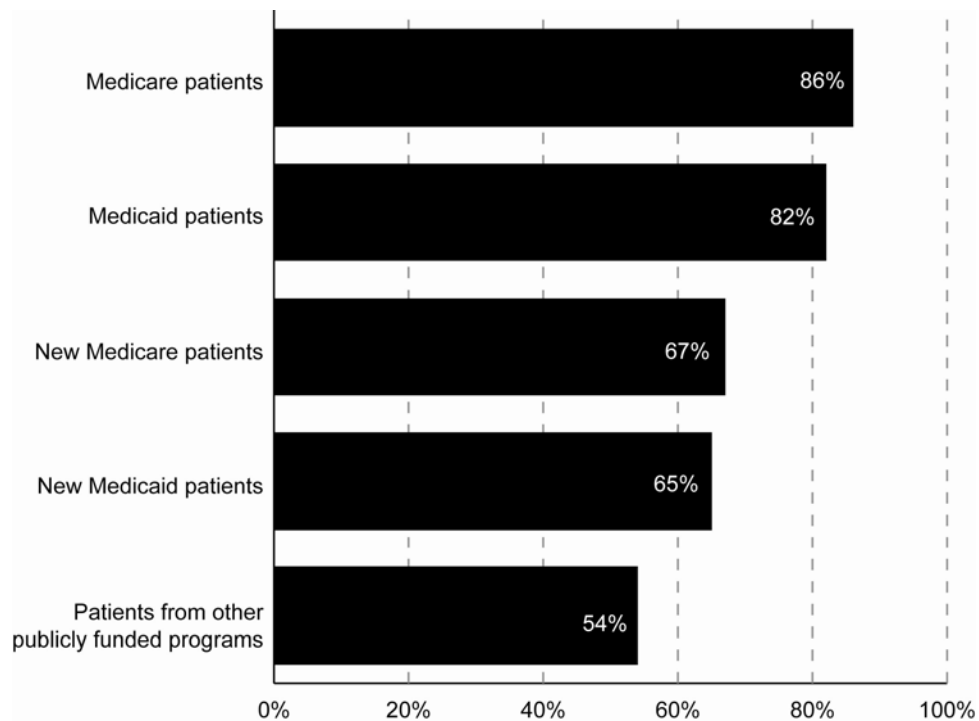
- About two-thirds (67 percent) are providing care to *new* Medicare patients. In 2007, 78 percent of active physician assistants reported providing care to new Medicare patients.
- More than half (54 percent) are providing care to patients from other publicly funded programs.

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#### EXHIBIT 4

#### Percentage of Active Physician Assistants in Michigan Providing Care to Patients from Publicly Funded Programs, 2008

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SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

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### CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT

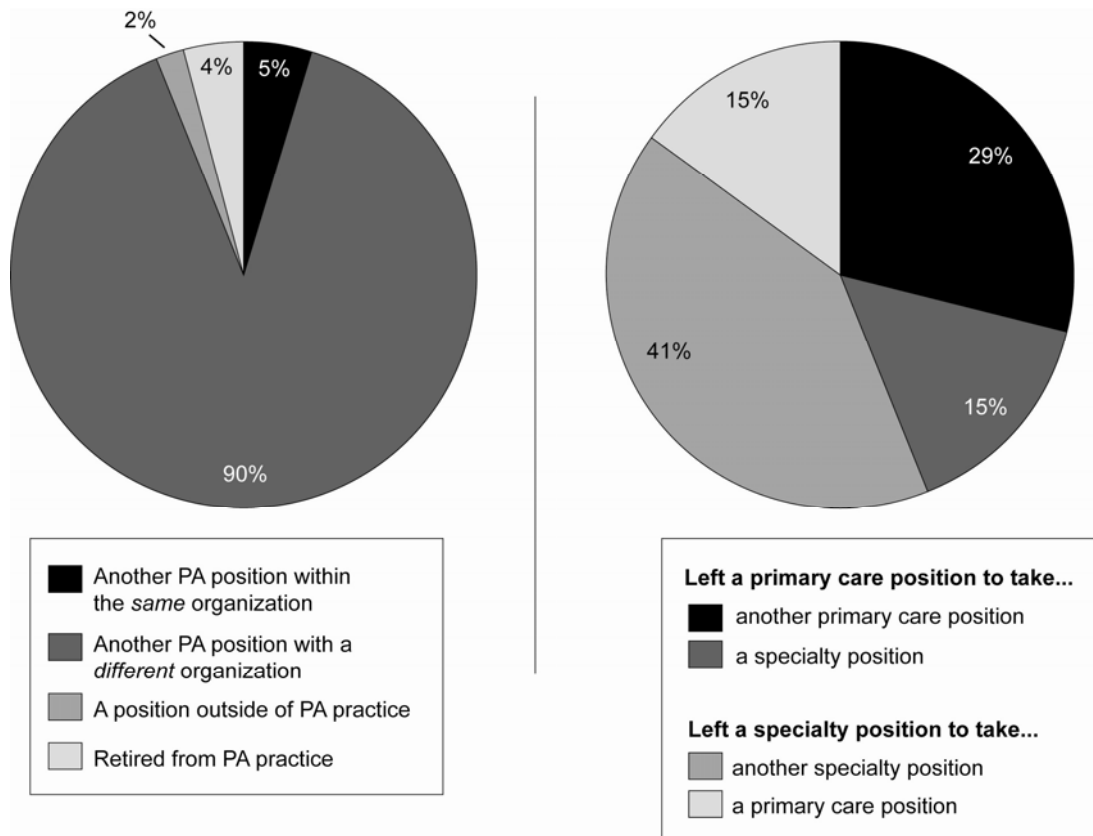
- Twenty-five percent of *all* licensed physician assistants voluntarily left a PA position within the last two years.
- Among active physician assistants in Michigan who voluntarily left a PA position in the last two years, 90 percent (23 percent of all licensed PAs) left to take another PA position with a different organization; 5 percent took another PA position within the *same* organization; 2 percent took a position outside of PA practice; and 4 percent retired.
- Of those who took another PA position, 41 percent left a specialty position to take another specialty position; 29 percent left a primary care position to take another primary care position; 15 percent left a primary care position to take a specialty position; and 15 percent left a specialty position to take a primary care position (see Exhibit 5).

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## EXHIBIT 5

### Positions Taken by Active Physician Assistants in Michigan who Voluntarily Left a PA Position within the Last Two Years, 2008

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SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

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## FUTURE PRACTICE PLANS

Most active physician assistants in Michigan (78 percent) plan to maintain their present number of patient care hours for the next three years. During that same time frame, 10 percent plan to increase patient care hours, 7 percent plan to significantly reduce patient care hours, 6 percent plan to relocate to another Michigan location, 6 percent plan to relocate to another state, and 2 percent plan to retire (see Exhibit 6).

**EXHIBIT 6**  
Physician Assistant Practice Plans for the Next Three Years, 2008

Practice plan	Percentage of active physician assistants in Michigan
Maintain the number of patient care hours I currently work	78%
Increase patient care hours	10
Significantly reduce patient care hours	7
Relocate to another Michigan location	6
Relocate to another state	6
Retire	2

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.  
NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 percent because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

The 9 percent of active physician assistants who plan to retire or reduce their patient care hours cite factors such as lifestyle changes (40 percent), age (40 percent), childbearing/childrearing (32 percent), and personal or family health concerns (19 percent). Eleven percent cite the cost of medical malpractice insurance; in 2007, no physician assistants reported planning to retire or reduce patient care hours because of the cost of malpractice insurance (see Exhibit 7).

**EXHIBIT 7**  
Distribution of Factors Contributing to Decisions to Retire or Reduce Patient Care Hours, 2008

Factors	Percentage of active physician assistants in Michigan
Lifestyle changes	40%
Age	40
Childbearing/childrearing	32
Personal or family health concerns	19
Inadequate reimbursement for services	17
Increasing administrative/regulatory burden	17
General lack of job satisfaction	15
Medical malpractice insurance cost	11
Moved to management/consulting/teaching/research	4
Employer/employee conflict	4
Other	13

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.  
NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 percent because respondents were asked to mark all that apply.

**ORIGIN AND EDUCATION BACKGROUND**

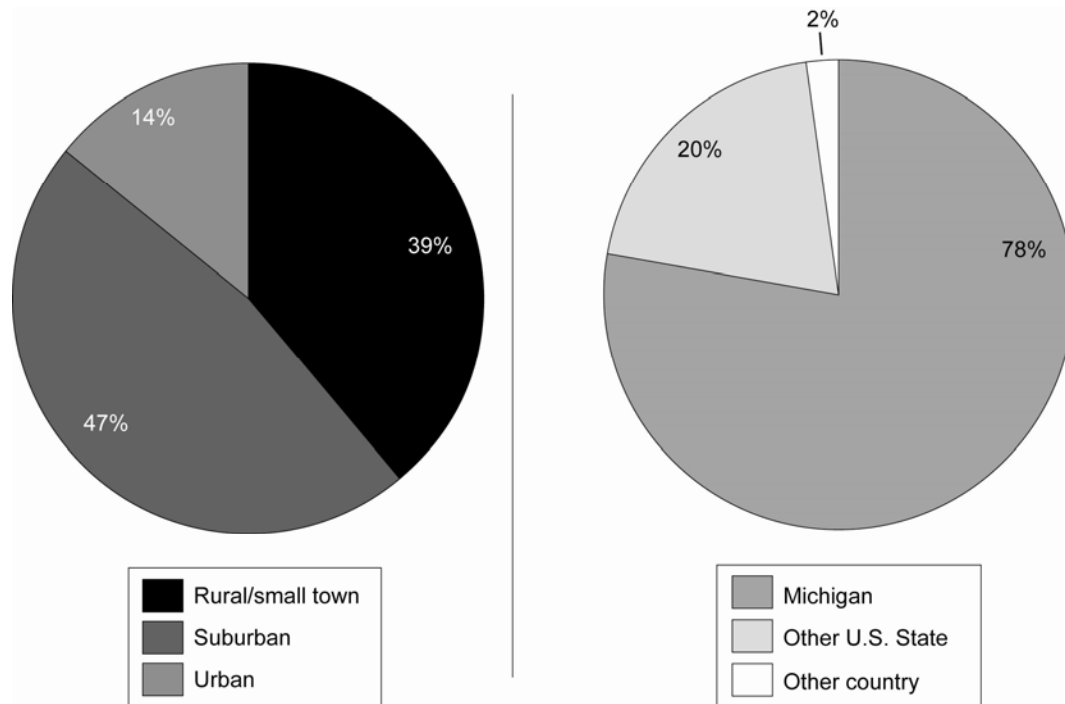
- A large majority (78 percent) of active Michigan-licensed physician assistants grew up in Michigan, 20 percent grew up in another U.S. state, and 2 percent grew up in another country (see Exhibit 8).

- Nearly half (47 percent) grew up in a suburban area, 39 percent in a rural area/small town, and 14 percent in an urban area.

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**EXHIBIT 8**  
Origin of Active Physician Assistants in Michigan, 2008

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SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

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- The highest education level achieved by two-thirds (68 percent) of active physician assistants in Michigan is a master's degree in PA Studies; 27 percent hold a bachelor's degree in PA Studies; 3 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 9).

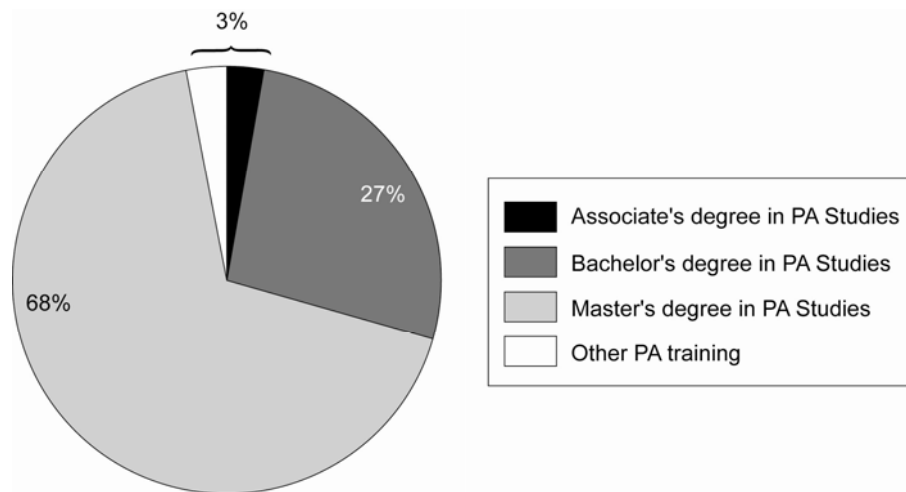


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### EXHIBIT 9

#### Highest Degree Achieved by Active Physician Assistants in Michigan, 2008

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SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

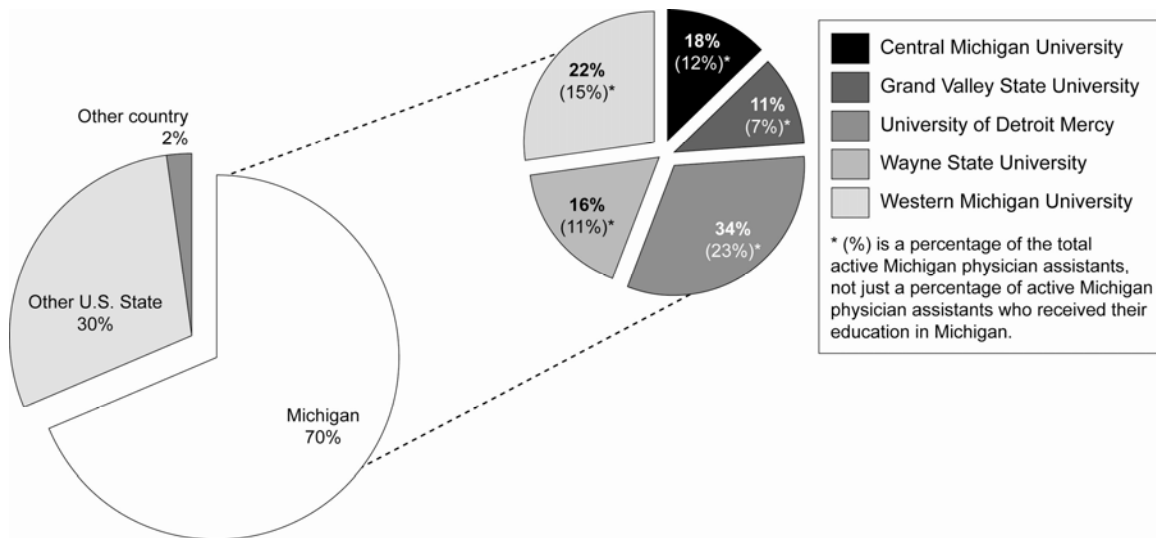
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Among active physician assistants in Michigan:

- About 70 percent received their highest physician assistant degree from a PA school in Michigan and 30 percent attended a PA school in another state (see Exhibit 10).
- Among those who received their degree from a PA school in Michigan, 34 percent attended University of Detroit Mercy, 22 percent attended Western Michigan University, 18 percent attended Central Michigan University, 16 percent attended Wayne State University, and 11 percent attended Grand Valley State University.
- Five percent are either enrolled in or have completed a postgraduate physician assistant residency program.

## EXHIBIT 10

### Education Background of Active Physician Assistants in Michigan, 2008



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.  
NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Among active physician assistants in Michigan:

- One-third (32 percent) are involved in teaching (see Exhibit 11).
- Eleven percent are involved in research.
- Five percent are involved in administration in a private practice, and another 5 percent are involved in administration in a PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic.

## EXHIBIT 11

### Distribution of Professional Activities, 2008

Professional activity	Percentage of active physician assistants in Michigan
Teaching	32%
Research	11
Administration in a private practice	5
Administration in PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic	5

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.

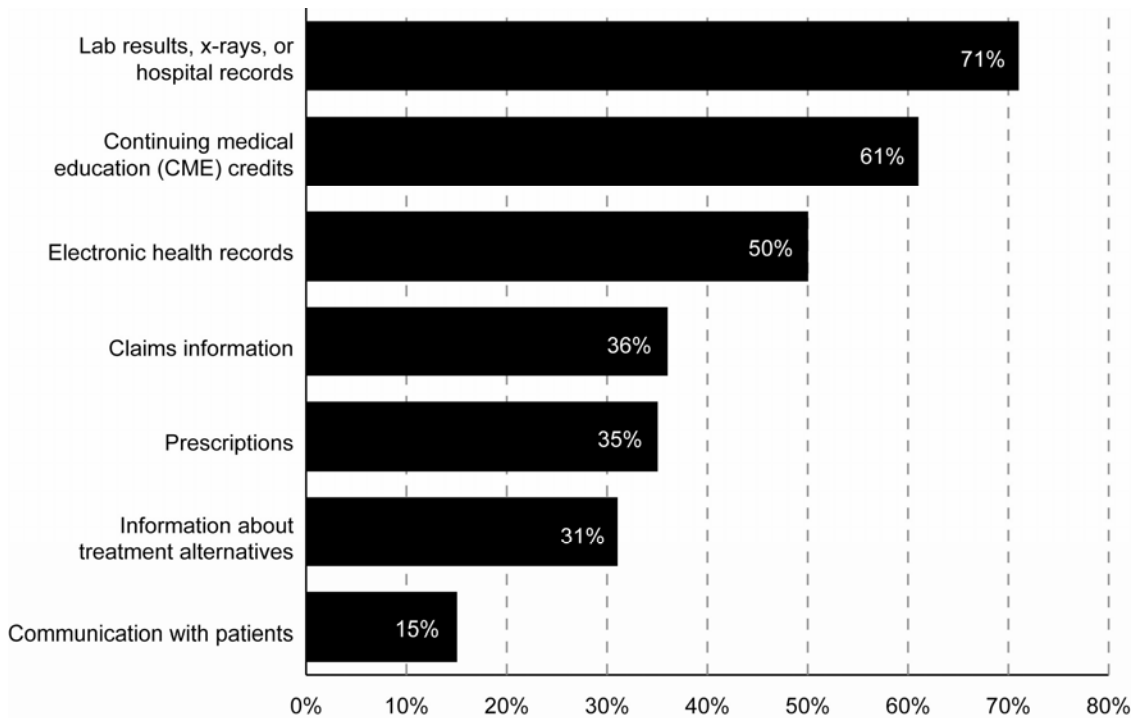
## USE OF COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

PAs report that someone in their practice uses a computer or computer-like device to receive or transmit the following types of information (see Exhibit 12).

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**EXHIBIT 12**  
Percentage of Practices Using Computer Technology to  
Receive or Transmit Information, 2008

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SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.  
NOTE: Data presented are for *active* physician assistants licensed in Michigan.

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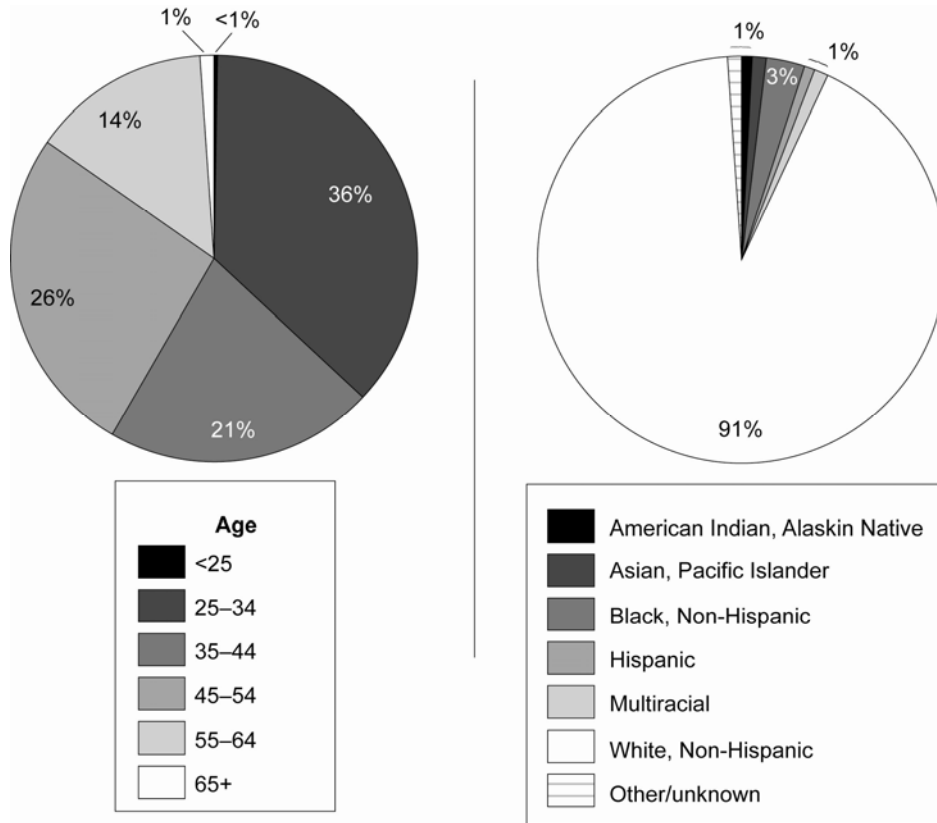
## **GENDER, AGE, RACE, AND ETHNICITY**

Among active physician assistants in Michigan:

- Thirty percent are male; 70 percent are female.
- Fifteen percent are aged 55 or older; nearly three-fifths are under the age of 45 (see Exhibit 13).
- Three percent African American; 1 percent are Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, or multi-racial.

**EXHIBIT 13**

**Age, Race, and Ethnicity of Active Physician Assistants in Michigan, 2008**



SOURCE: Michigan Department of Community Health Survey of Physician Assistants 2008.  
 NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Appendix

### *Survey Questions and Response Frequencies\* (N=580)*

1. In what year were you born?

Age	Percentage
<25	<1%
25–34	36
35–44	21
45–54	26
55–64	14
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	70%
b. Male	30

4. What is your race/ethnicity?

a. American Indian, Alaskan Native	1%
b. Asian, Pacific Islander	1
c. Black, Non-Hispanic	3
d. Hispanic	1
e. Multi-racial	1
f. White, Non-Hispanic	91
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	6
c. Canada	<1
d. Other country	0

6. Where is your primary place of employment?

	Percentage of all licensed physician assistants
a. Michigan	94%
b. Other U.S. state	6
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	34%
b. No	66

9. Do you work for more than one employer?

a. Yes	17%
b. No	83

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

a. 0–25 percent	15%
b. 26–50 percent	9
c. 51–75 percent	19
d. 76–100 percent	57

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

a. Outpatient	67%
b. Inpatient	30
c. Not applicable	3

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

a. None or not active as a physician assistant	2%
b. Hospital Inpatient	41
c. Hospital Outpatient	27
d. Physician's office	51
e. Nursing home/long-term care facility	4
f. Home health care	1
g. Public/community health	5
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	57%
b. Somewhat satisfied	27
c. Neutral	2
d. Somewhat dissatisfied	4
e. Extremely dissatisfied	9

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

a. Associate's degree in Physician Assistant (PA) Studies	3%
b. Bachelor's degree in PA Studies	27
c. Master's degree in PA Studies	68
d. Other PA training	3

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

a. Research	11%
b. Teaching	32
c. Administration in a private practice	5
d. Administration in a PA education program, hospital, health plan, nursing home, or clinic	5

17. Are you currently providing care to...

a. Medicaid patients?	82%
b. New Medicaid patients?	65
c. Medicare patients?	86
d. New Medicare patients?	67
e. Patients from other publicly funded programs?	54

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	0%	1%
Anesthesiology	<1	0
Cardiovascular Disease	7	2
Critical Care Medicine	1	4
Dermatology	3	1
Emergency Medicine	10	13
Endocrinology	<1	1
Family Practice	24	11
Gastroenterology	1	1
General Medicine	2	3
Geriatrics	1	2
Hospitalist	3	3
Infectious Disease	<1	1
Internal Medicine (General)	8	14
Nephrology	<1	1
Neurology	1	0
Neurological Surgery	2	2
Obstetrics & Gynecology	2	4

	Specialty	
	Primary	Secondary
Occupational Medicine	3	3
Oncology/Hematology	4	0
Orthopedic Surgery	6	3
Otolaryngology	1	1
Pediatrics	4	2
Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation	1	1
Plastic Surgery	1	1
Preventive Medicine	0	2
Psychiatry	2	5
Pulmonary Disease	<1	1
Radiology	1	0
Rheumatology	1	0
Sports Medicine	0	2
Surgery (General)	4	2
Thoracic Surgery	1	2
Urology	1	0
Vascular Surgery	1	2
Other	4	11

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?	71%
b. Prescriptions?	35
c. Claims information?	36
d. Electronic health records?	50
e. Communication with your patients	15
f. Information about treatment alternatives	31
g. Continuing medical education (CME) credits?	61



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

SECTION A	
a. Rural/small town	39%
b. Suburban	47
c. Urban	14
SECTION B	
a. Michigan	78%
b. Other U.S. state	20
c. Other country	2

21. How would you describe the area of your primary practice?

a. Rural/small town	27%
b. Suburban	41
c. Urban	33

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

a. Michigan	70%
b. Other U.S. state	30
c. Other country	2

B. If in Michigan, please specify the school.

a. Central Michigan University	18%
b. Grand Valley State University	11
c. University of Detroit Mercy	34
d. Wayne State University	16
e. Western Michigan University	22

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

a. Yes	5%
b. No	95

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

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

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

a. Take another PA position within the same organization	5%
b. Take another PA position with a different organization	90
c. Take a position outside of PA practice	2
d. Retire from PA practice	4

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

a. Leave a primary care position to take a specialty position	15%
b. Leave a specialty position to take another specialty position	41
c. Leave a specialty position to take a primary care position	15
d. Leave a primary care position to take another primary care position	29

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

a. Maintain the number of patient care hours I currently work	78%
b. Increase patient care hours	10
c. Significantly reduce patient care hours	7
d. Relocate to another Michigan location	6
e. Relocate to another state	6
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)

a. Age	40%
b. General lack of job satisfaction	15
c. Childbearing/childrearing	32
d. Lifestyle changes	40
e. Medical malpractice insurance cost	11
f. Personal or family health concerns	19
g. Increasing administrative/regulatory burden	17
h. Employer/employee conflict	4
i. Inadequate reimbursement for services	17
j. Moved to management/consulting/teaching/ research	4
k. Other	13