

## Characteristics of Primary Care Providers in New York State

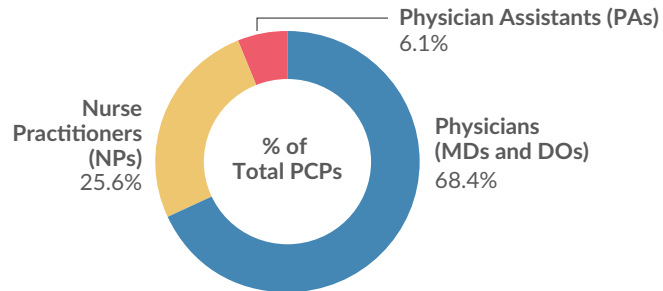
Primary care is foundational to the health care system and key to improving population health and achieving health equity. Yet, data suggest that numbers of primary care providers (PCPs) have been declining nationally for the past three decades. These provider shortages create a significant barrier to accessing care, particularly for high-poverty communities where these shortages most often occur. During the past decade, the number of generalist physician graduates has fallen by nearly a quarter as existing PCPs are aging and newly graduated physicians increasingly enter more lucrative specialty tracks. These trends will likely result in even greater shortages in the next decade(s) as the ‘silver tsunami’ of Baby Boomers require additional engagement with the health care system. These differences affect urban and rural areas distinctly, with rural areas having a larger gap in near-retirement age PCPs (56 or older) compared to those 39 and under (27.5% vs. 20.5%). To date, there is little published data available on the characteristics of PCPs by state.

One solution to increasing availability of PCPs has been Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Physician Assistants (PAs). NPs in particular have been recruited to health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) and medically underserved areas/populations (MUAs/MUPs) as part of state and federal health care workforce programs. Full practice authority (FPA) is also being used to give nurse practitioners more autonomy in their practice, resulting in increased access to care and reduced billing costs. Additionally, medical school loan forgiveness programs may incentivize physicians toward PCP specialties and PCP shortage areas.

In this data brief, the Primary Care Development Corporation explores PCP characteristics and distributions across New York State (NYS). We discuss implications of these characteristics for provider availability and health care access for New Yorkers. In this analysis, we define primary care providers to include physicians (MDs and DOs), NPs, and PAs with a specialty of Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, General Primary Care, Geriatrics, or Obstetrics and Gynecology. All figures present data for 2021 with a total of 33,563 primary care providers unless otherwise noted.

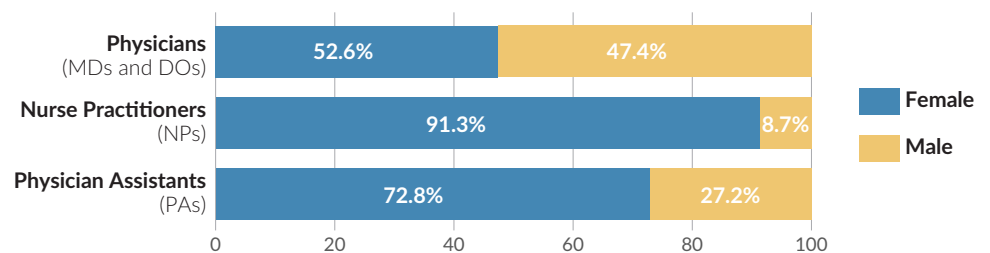
### Key Findings

- Physicians (MD/DO) represent 68% of the total PC workforce but only 50% of practitioners in rural areas.
- Higher proportions of NPs (47%) and PAs (40%) practice in Health Professional Shortage Areas compared to Physicians (36%).
- The proportions of younger primary care physicians (MD/DO) ages 25-49 is similar to the proportion of providers 50+, breaking from national trends.



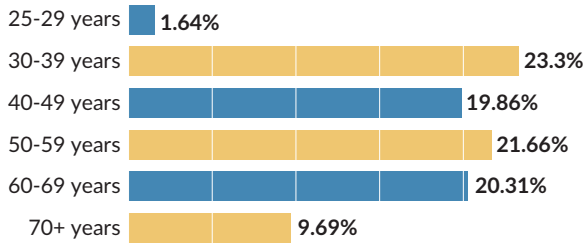
**Figure 1. Primary Care Providers by Profession Type, New York State**

Most PCPs in New York are physicians (68.4%), with approximately a quarter being nurse practitioners (25.6%).



**Figure 2: Primary Care Providers by Provider Sex & Profession Type**

The majority of primary care providers in New York are female; however, there are large differences between composition of sex by profession type. Over 52% of physicians are male, whereas 91% of nurse practitioners and 72% of physician assistants are female.



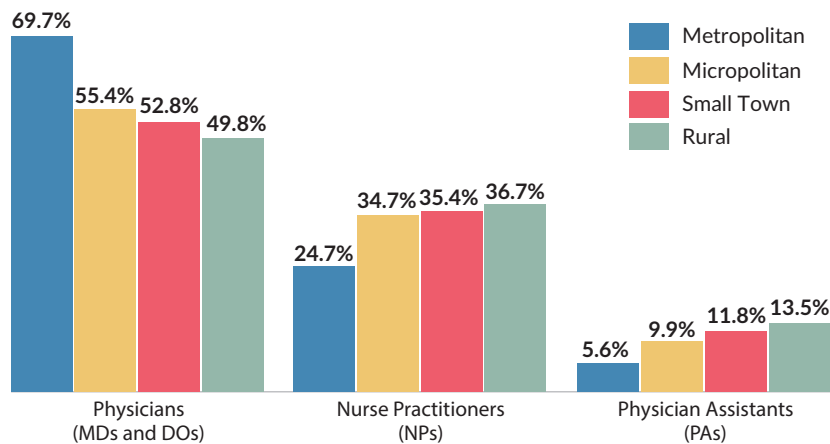
**Figure 3. Primary Care Provider Physicians (MDs/DOs) by Age Group, New York State, 2021, n=22,137**

The percentages of primary care physicians in the practice age categories (ages 30-70) are similar. The highest percentage of physicians is within the 30-39 year old range (23%) and the second highest is within the 50-59 age group (22%).



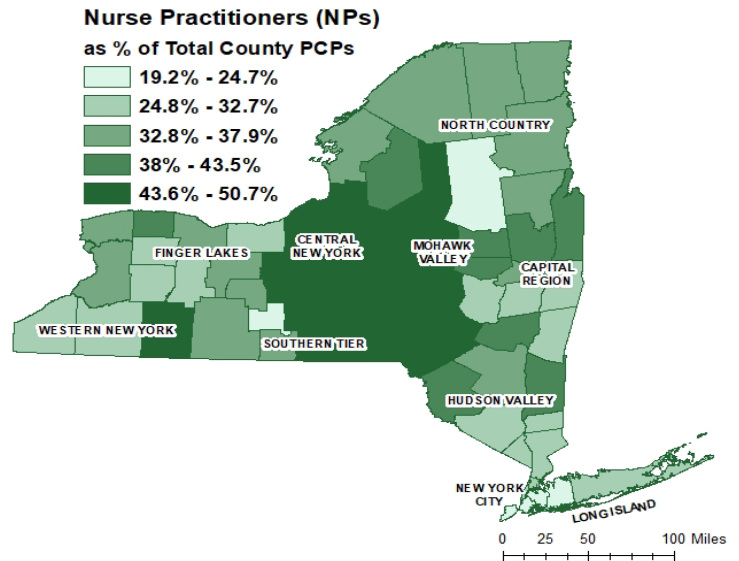
**Figure 4. Percentage Primary Care Providers by Medicaid Acceptance Status and Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) Category, New York State**

The percentage of PCPs that accepts Medicaid varies by rural-urban commuting area categories across New York. The highest percentage of providers accepts Medicaid in rural areas at 93% and the lowest in metropolitan areas at 80%.



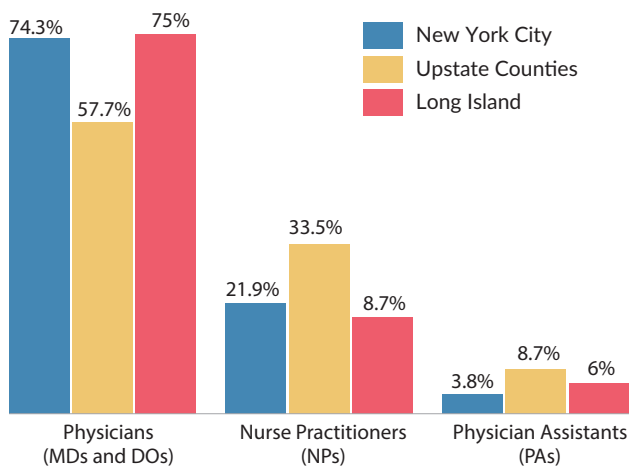
**Figure 6. Primary Care Providers by Profession Type and Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) Category, New York State**

Most physicians in NYS are located in metropolitan areas, where they make up nearly 70% of the total PCPs. In rural areas, NPs and PAs make up a greater proportion of the total practitioners (36.7% and 13.5%, respectively) when compared to metropolitan (24.7% and 5.6%).



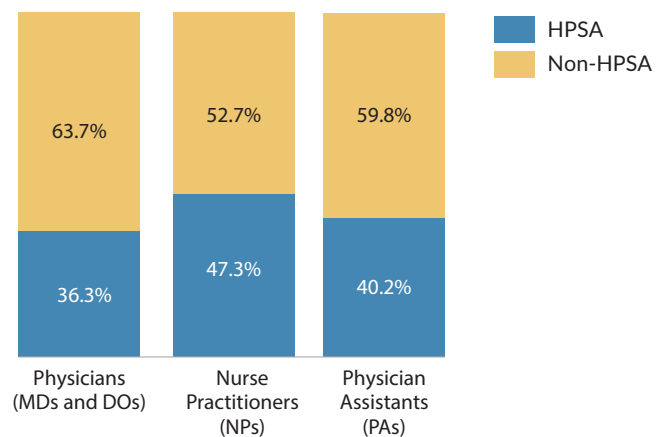
**Figure 5. Nurse Practitioners as Percentage of Total Primary Care Providers by County, New York State**

The percentages of NPs varies across the state ranging from 19.2% to 50.7%. Counties with higher percentages of NPs are in Central New York, the Mohawk Valley, and the Southern Tier. Counties with lower percentages of NPs are more urban.



**Figure 7. Primary Care Providers by Profession Type and Region, New York State**

The distribution of PCPs by profession type varies across New York regions. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of PCPs in NYC and Long Island are physicians. However, in Upstate New York, only 58% of PCPs are physicians. In Upstate New York, a greater percentage of PCPs are NPs (33.5% compared to 22% in NYC). PAs similarly have a greater representation in Upstate Counties than in NYC or Long Island.



**Figure 8. Primary Care Providers by Primary Profession Type and Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Area Status, New York State**

While the majority of PCPs are located in non-HPSA areas in New York, NPs and PAs both have greater representation in HPSAs across the state. Nurse practitioners had the highest proportion of practitioners in HPSAs at 47%, whereas physicians have the lowest percentage at 36%.

## Key Takeaways

Understanding the data on primary care providers is crucial to eliminating barriers in access to care, such as availability of PCPs, insurance status, transportation, and cultural acceptability. This is particularly true for New York State where characteristics of PCPs differ in several important areas. For example, most primary care providers in New York State are physicians followed by nurse practitioners. However, the numbers of NPs are greater in rural and small-town areas and notably higher in Health Professional Shortage Areas. This may be due to the introduction and success of loan forgiveness programs, which incentivize nurse practitioners to work underserved communities in exchange for educational funding.

The data in this report also suggest that, in New York State, the percentage of younger physicians (ages 25-49) is similar to the percentage of providers 50+, breaking from the national trend on provider age trends. Additionally of note, most providers accept Medicaid, with particularly high rates of Medicaid acceptance in rural areas. While these are important steps forward in eliminating barriers to care, additional investment in the primary care system in New York will be essential to increasing access and addressing health equity across populations.

## Suggested citation:

Allard, A. Ford, M. Smith, AM. Summers, C. 2021. "Characteristics of Primary Care Providers in New York State." Points on Care Data Brief 8. Primary Care Development Corporation. New York, NY.

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