

Background

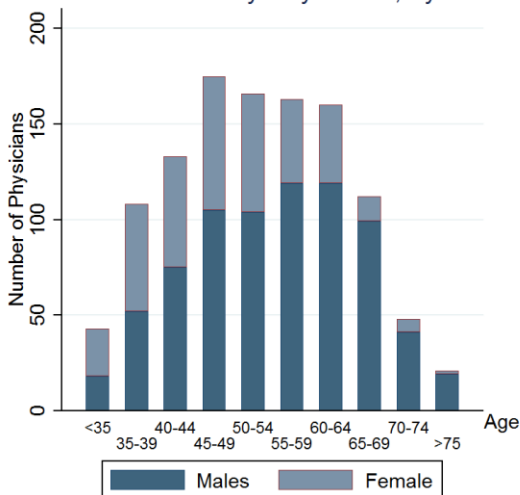
In the United States, primary care physicians (PCPs) currently represent less than one-third of the total physician workforce.¹ States are under increasing pressure to create solutions that bolster the number of physicians practicing primary care in both rural and urban settings.² This factsheet characterizes the primary care physician workforce in Alabama.

We used data mainly from the 2017 American Medical Association (AMA) Physician Masterfile. Physicians were classified as primary care if their primary specialty is family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, general practice or geriatrics. We restricted our counts to PCPs in direct patient care. With Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services data, we identified PCPs that work mainly as hospitalists and excluded them from our analysis. Finally, we used additional data sources to identify osteopaths excluded from the AMA Masterfile.

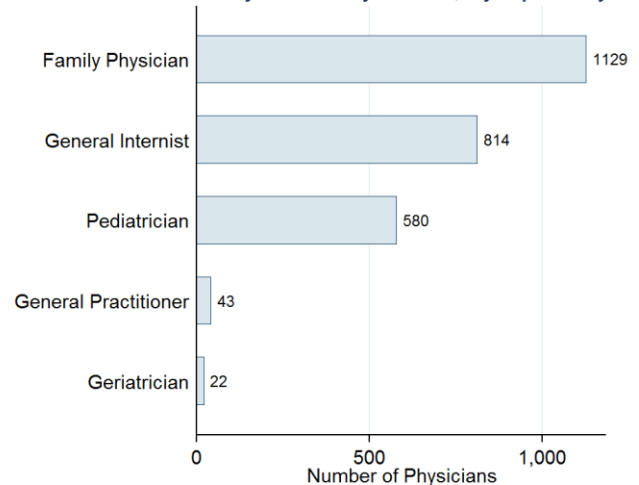
Current Workforce

In 2017, Alabama had 2,588 PCPs in direct patient care, of which 1,129 were family physicians. In other words, 44% of its primary care workforce consisted of family physicians, compared to 39% in the East South Central Census Division and 38% nationwide. On a per capita basis, there were about 53 PCPs per 100,000 persons in Alabama, compared to 64 per 100,000 in the East South Central and 70 per 100,000 in the U.S. as a whole. The state's family medicine workforce was 39% female, which was less than the percentage nationwide (47%). Consistent with national trends, younger family physicians were more likely to be female than their older counterparts. About 45% of family physicians were over the age of 55, more than the nationwide percentage of 42%.

Age Distribution of Family Physicians, by Gender



Distribution of Primary Care Physicians, by Specialty



	Alabama	East South Central*	Nation
Characteristics of Family Physicians			
Percent over 55 Years	45	44	42
Percent Female	39	39	47
Percent Osteopaths	7	7	10
Percent International Medical School Graduates	20	19	27
Distribution of PCPs			
Percent Population Rural	24	32	14
Percent Family Physicians Rural	21	28	15
Percent Population in Underserved County**	40	39	22

*US Census Bureau East South Central Census Division States: AL, KY, MS, TN

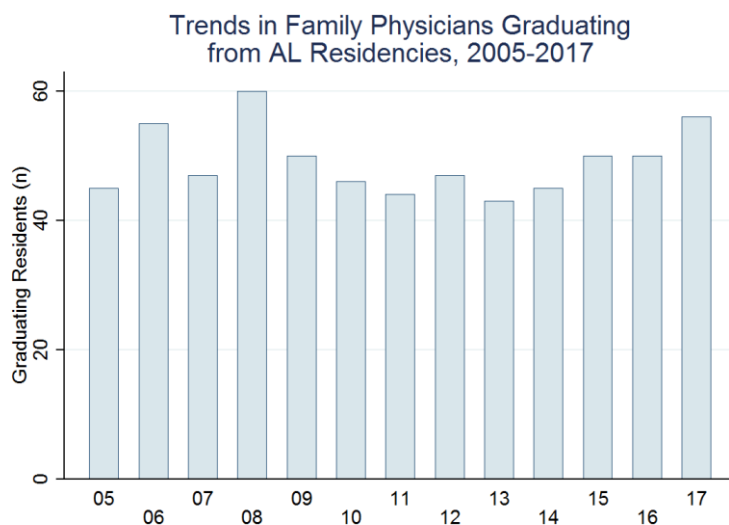
**Underserved counties had a population to PCP ratio greater than 2,000:1.

In 2017, about 20% of family physicians in the state were international medical school graduates and 7% were trained as osteopaths. While 24% of Alabama’s population lived in rural counties, 21% of family physicians work in these counties. Approximately 40% of Alabama’s residents live in underserved counties with more than 2,000 persons per PCP.

Future Workforce

Evidence indicates that physicians are more likely to practice in the state in which they completed residency.³ National PCP deficits have stimulated the growth of in-state residency programs to replenish the aging generation of physicians leaving the workforce. Understanding current primary care residency programs can help Alabama assess its future primary care workforce to meet the health care needs of its population.

There are 8 family medicine residency training programs in Alabama. Nationally, the number of family physicians graduating from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited programs declined from 3,225 in 2005 to 2,970 in 2012, then increased to 3,383 by 2017. Trends for Alabama over the same period are shown in the adjacent figure.



Between 2011 and 2017, the state produced a total of 345 family physicians; of these, 163 (47%) stayed in-state. The loss of state-trained family physicians is offset by the in-migration of 61 family physicians trained in other states. Through elevated support of family medicine residency programs, Alabama can work to replenish the PCP pipeline practicing in local communities.

Published November 2018. More details about our methods are available at <https://www.graham-center.org/content/dam/rgc/documents/maps-data-tools/maps-methodology/state-pc-physician-workforce-methodology.pdf>.

Suggested Citation: Stephen Petterson, Elizabeth Wilkinson, A.C. Kessler, Courtney Stone, Andrew Bazemore. *The State of Primary Care Physician Workforce*. Washington, D.C.: The Robert Graham Center, 2018.

1. American Medical Association (AMA). AMA Physician Masterfile. <https://www.ama-assn.org/life-career/ama-physician-masterfile>. Accessed July 20, 2018.
2. Petterson S, McNellis R, Klink K, Meyers D, Bazemore A. *The State of Primary Care in the United States: A Chartbook of Facts and Statistics*. January 2018.
3. Health Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health. *State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Primary Care Practitioners: 2013-2025*. November 2016. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/health-workforce-analysis/research/projections/primary-care-state-projections2013-2025.pdf>.