

The State of Primary Care Physician Workforce: Colorado

Background

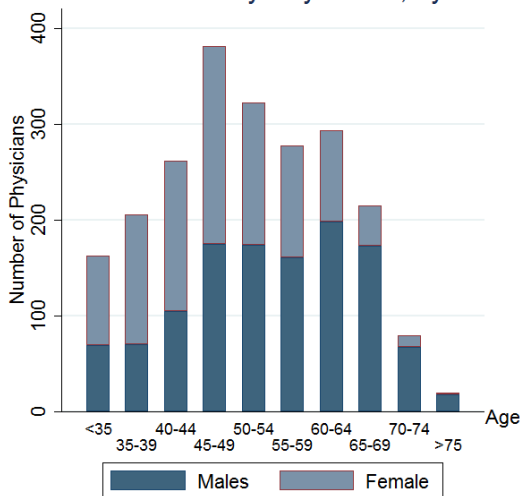
In the United States, primary care physicians (PCPs) currently represent less than one-third of the total physician workforce.¹ States are under increasing pressure to create solutions that bolster the number of physicians practicing primary care in both rural and urban settings.² This factsheet characterizes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

We used data mainly from the 2018 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.

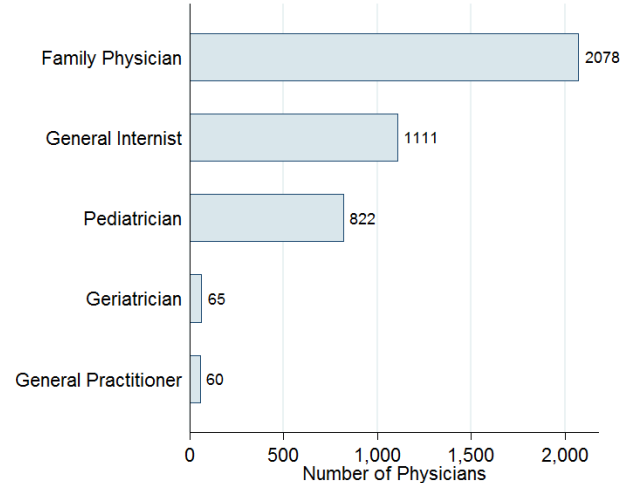
Current Workforce

In 2018, Colorado had 4,136 PCPs in direct patient care, of which 2,078 were family physicians. In other words, 50% of its primary care workforce consisted of family physicians, compared to 40% in the Mountain Census Division and 38% nationwide. On a per capita basis, there were about 74 PCPs per 100,000 persons in Colorado, compared to 69 per 100,000 in the Mountain and 76 per 100,000 in the U.S. as a whole. The state's family medicine workforce was 49% female, which was more than the percentage nationwide (45%). Consistent with national trends, younger family physicians were more likely to be female than their older counterparts. About 39% of family physicians were over the age of 55, less than the nationwide percentage of 44%.

Age Distribution of Family Physicians, by Gender



Distribution of Primary Care Physicians, by Specialty



	Colorado	Mountain*	Nation
Characteristics of Family Physicians and PCPs			
Percent over 55 Years (PCP)	39	40	44
Percent Female (FP)	49	42	45
Percent Osteopaths (FP)	14	15	12
Percent International Medical School Graduates (FP)	4	8	12
Distribution of PCPs			
Percent Total State Population Rural	13	15	14
Percent Family Physicians Rural	15	18	14
Percent Total State Population in Underserved County**	3	17	18

*US Census Bureau Mountain Census Division States: AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY

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

In 2018, about 4% of family physicians in the state were international medical school graduates and 14% were trained as osteopaths. While 13% of Colorado's population lived in rural counties, 15% of family physicians work in these counties. Approximately 3% of Colorado'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 Colorado assess its future primary care workforce to meet the health care needs of its population.

There are 14 family medicine residency training programs in Colorado. 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 Colorado over the same period are shown in the adjacent figure.

Between 2011 and 2017, the state produced a total of 426 family physicians; of these, 214 (50%) stayed in-state. The loss of state-trained family physicians is offset by the immigration of 158 family physicians trained in other states. Through elevated support of family medicine residency programs, Colorado can work to replenish the PCP pipeline practicing in local communities.

Published December 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>.

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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>.

