

SPECIAL REPORT SERIES

A Longitudinal Assessment of Diversity in Indiana's Health Workforce



Indiana Physician Assistants



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
BOWEN CENTER FOR HEALTH
WORKFORCE RESEARCH & POLICY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Physician assistants (PAs) are integral members of the health care team in many hospitals and clinical practices, and they practice medicine under the direction and supervision of a licensed physician in a variety of specialties and settings.¹ In fact, in 2023 the PA profession was ranked second in the best healthcare jobs in the United States,² and the U.S. Department of Labor projects an additional 39% growth in the need for PAs in the next 10 years.¹ Understanding the PA workforce's demographic characteristics is vital for identifying gaps in workforce diversity and ensuring its effectiveness in delivering medical care to diverse populations. This report provides an overview of historical data related to diversity of the PA workforce in the state of Indiana.

This report is part of the Indiana Health Workforce Diversity Brief Series which presents longitudinal trends in demographics among Indiana-licensed physician assistants. The data were collected directly from physician assistants during the license renewal periods between 2004-2022.³ For more information on the methodology used in this series, please see the first report of this series.

Indiana's PAs have undergone significant demographic changes. The representation of female PAs increased significantly from 56.7% in 2004 to 74.7% in 2022. In addition, the data demonstrated slightly increased representation of racial minority groups but showed little changes in the age distribution and in the representation of ethnic minority groups.

There are several national and state level initiatives which aim to support diversity, equity, and inclusion within the PA workforce. The American Academy of Physician Associates and the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants provide numerous resources which support continuing education, scholarship programs for marginalized students, forums for professional development, and outreach programs for recruitment of underrepresented racial and ethnic group. Each of these initiatives aims to sustain the PA workforce while also ensuring increased diversity in the workforce.

How is Underrepresented Minority Defined?

According to the Bureau of Health Workforce - HRSA, an underrepresented minority is defined as, **“someone from a racial or ethnic group considered inadequately represented in a specific profession relative to the representation of that racial or ethnic group in the general population.”**

Bureau of Health Workforce (HRSA). Glossary. Cited from [https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/glossary#:~:text=Underrepresented%20Minority%20\(URM\),group%20in%20the%20general%20population](https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/glossary#:~:text=Underrepresented%20Minority%20(URM),group%20in%20the%20general%20population)

DIVERSITY IN INDIANA'S PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT WORKFORCE

LONGITUDINAL TRENDS

The total number of PAs who reported actively practicing in Indiana has surged nearly fivefold since 2004, rising from 283 in 2004 to 1,320 in 2022. Over the years, the strategy used to identify Indiana's practicing PAs has been modified to align with changes in medical care delivery and adjustments to the bi-annual license renewal supplemental survey. More information on these changes can be found in the Diversity Report: Methodology and Introduction.⁴

Since 2004, Indiana's PA workforce has experienced a notable shift towards a higher proportion of female practitioners. The number of female PAs has grown by over 500%, while their male counterparts have seen a growth of 174% during the same time. As of 2022, nearly three-quarters of PAs in Indiana are female. Furthermore, the age distribution has shown slightly younger trends since 2004, with the percent under 35 increasing from 45.1% to 47.6%.

Additionally, the proportion of PAs that identify as a Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish has grown slightly from 1.4% in 2004 to 2.3% in 2022, with the total number increasing from 4 to 30. A similar trend is observed in racial diversity, where the proportion of Indiana PAs identifying as non-white has nearly doubled from 4.3% in 2004 to 8.3% in 2022. PAs that identify as Asian, Black or African American, and Multiracial have increased since 2004 but at a significantly lower rate. These trends in race and ethnicity are comparable to national trends but indicate a persistent lack of significant progress in workforce diversity among PAs over the years.⁵

POLICY CONTEXT

While increased diversity in the PA workforce may be attributable to increased diversity in the U.S. population overall, there have also been intentional investments and targeted programming in recent decades aimed to increase workforce diversity. National institutes and associations focus on commitments to cultivating diversity and harboring equitable work environments for PAs of all backgrounds. Perhaps the most relevant of these policies with a diversity focus are those by the American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) and the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).

The AAPA is the national professional society for PAs which has demonstrated their commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) by creating the DE&I Commission in 2020. The DE&I Commission website contains a wealth of programs and resources related to DEI in the PA profession. These resources include DEI-related webinars, podcasts, and continuing education courses; student scholarships for underrepresented minority, economically and/or educationally disadvantaged students; original research and position statements; and Project Access.⁶ Project Access is a unique program supported by AAPA and the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) where PAs and PA students visit middle and high schools to talk to historically marginalized minority students about the PA profession.⁷

In an effort to advance DEI effort within their programs, PAEA has also developed a four-part webinar series: Elevating DEI in PA Education.⁸ The PAEA website includes DEI tools meant to prepare educators for a more inclusive classroom experience, therefore preparing the next generation of the PA workforce.

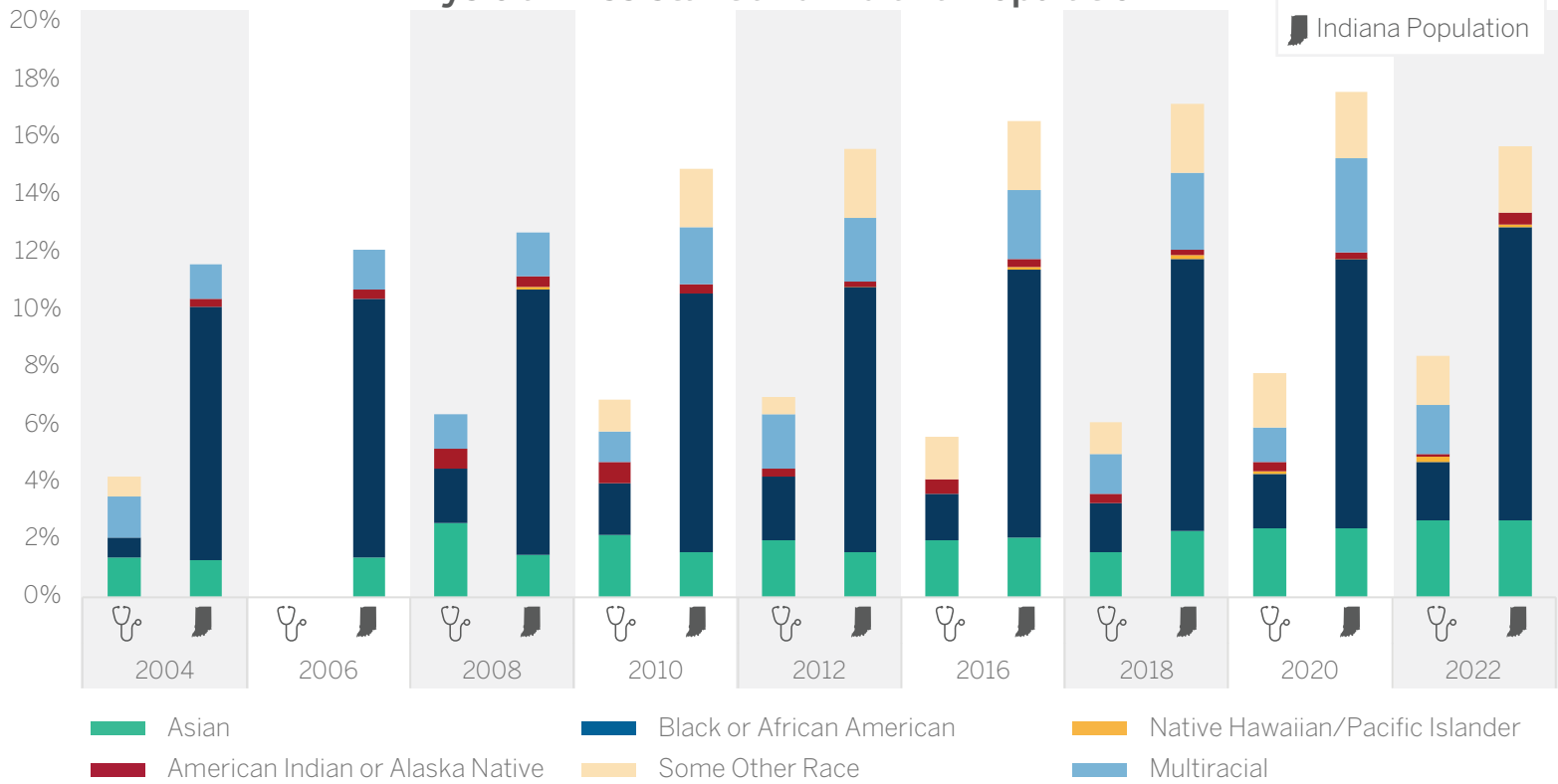
The NCCPA recognizes DEI as a part of their guiding principles. The NCCPA statement on diversity highlights the importance of these principles, the expectation that they are demonstrated in a work environment, and organizational intolerance to any form of discrimination.⁹ NCCPA demonstrates their commitment to these principals by hosting the "Represent!" Summit which was created to facilitate relationships among clinically practicing PAs, PA faculty, leaders of PA organizations, PA students, physicians, employers, and other relevant stakeholders regarding DEI in the PA profession.¹⁰ Another diversity initiative of NCCPA is the Back 2 School Program, an initiative intended to encourage PAs to speak to school age students about the career path and the profession.¹¹ At the national level, the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Health Workforce offers loan repayment, scholarship, and educational programming to support the Physician Assistant workforce broadly. Although these programs do not specifically target diversity goals, they do generally support Physician Assistant professionals seeking to further their education and experience by working in underserved communities.¹² A nationally directed state-based program also exists in Indiana: the Indiana State Loan Repayment Program (IN-SLRP) administered by the Indiana Department of Health. This program provides student loan repayment to encourage the full-time delivery of primary care physician assistant services at practices located in federally designated shortage areas in Indiana. In exchange for a two-year commitment, recipients can receive up to \$20,000 to repay their outstanding student loans. With an option for an additional two years of service, for a total of \$40,000 for four-year commitment.



Indiana Physician Assistant Demographics Trends

Figure 1.1

Trends in Racial Minority Groups for Physician Assistant and Indiana Population



A breakdown of all racial demographic characteristics are located in the appendix of A Longitudinal Assessment of Diversity in Indiana's Health Workforce: Indiana Physicians

Figure 1.2

Trends in Ethnicity for Physicians Assistant and Indiana Population

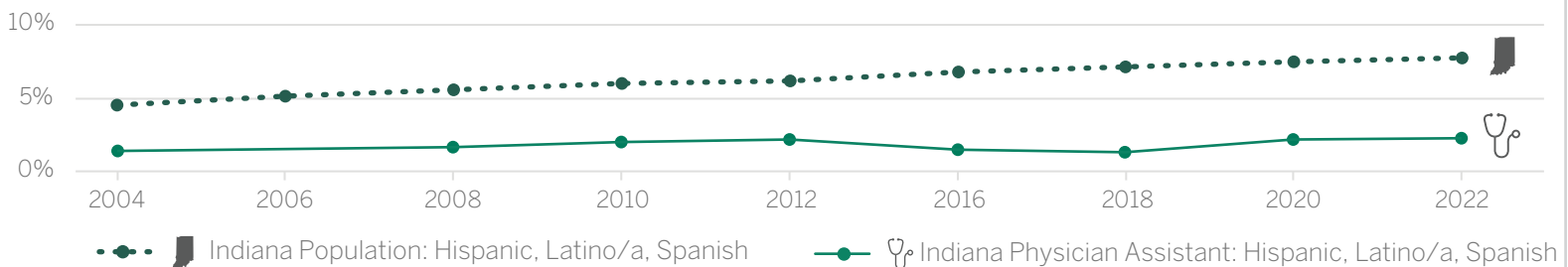


Figure 1.3

Trends in Physician Assistant Age

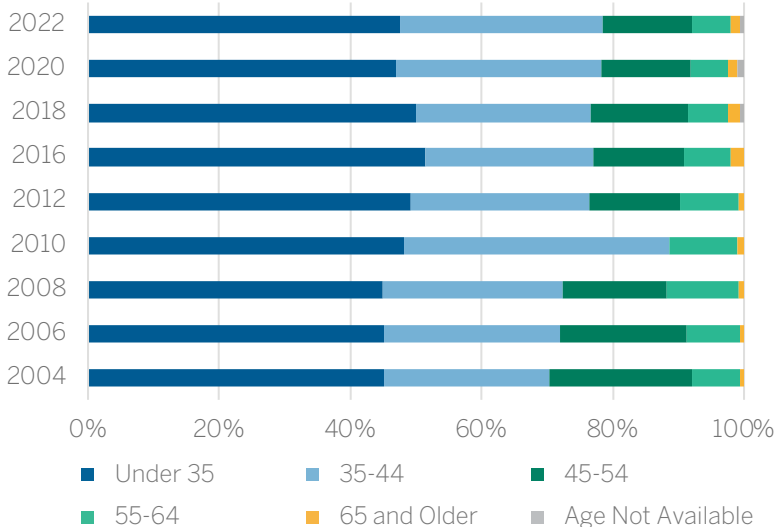
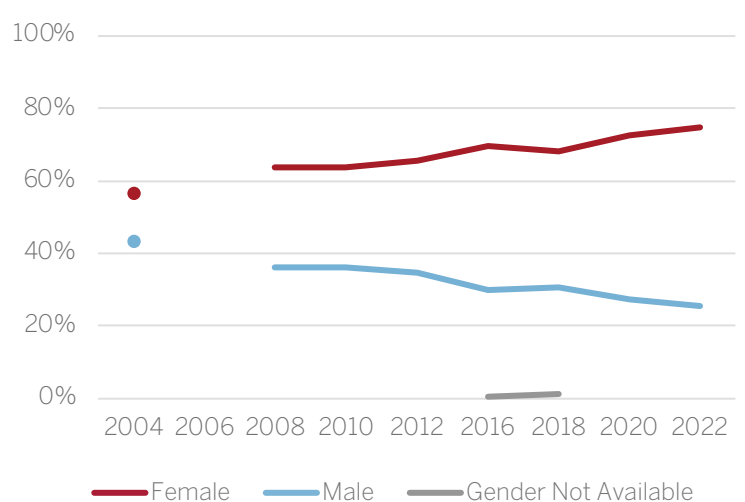


Figure 1.4

Trends in Physician Assistant Gender



APPENDIX

TABLE 1.1 PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Physician Assistants	2004		2006		2008		2010		2012		2016		2018		2020		2022	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	283		593		426		461		640		806		1004		1182		1320	
Sex																		
Female	160	56.7	-	-	268	63.7	283	63.9	419	65.5	562	69.7	685	68.22	858	72.6	986	74.7
Male	122	43.3	-	-	153	36.3	160	36.1	221	34.5	241	29.9	309	30.77	324	27.4	334	25.3
Gender Not Available	1	-	-	-	5	-	18	-	-	-	3	0.4	10	1.01	-	-	-	-
Age																		
Under 35	195	45.1	266	45.1	293	44.9	219	48.1	322	49.2	414	51.4	502	50	556	47	628	47.6
35-44	109	25.2	159	26.9	180	27.6	184*	40.4*	178	27.2	206	25.6	267	26.6	369	31.2	407	30.8
45-54	94	21.8	114	19.3	103	15.8	-	-	91	13.9	113	14	149	14.8	160	13.5	180	13.6
55-64	31	7.2	47	8	71	10.9	47	10.3	59	9	57	7.1	62	6.2	69	5.8	78	5.9
65 and Older	3	0.7	4	0.7	6	0.9	5	1.1	5	0.8	16	2	18	1.8	15	1.3	19	1.4
Age Not Available	-	-	3	-	2	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	6	0.6	13	1.1	8	0.6
Ethnicity																		
Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish	4	1.4	-	-	7	1.7	9	2	14	2.2	12	1.5	13	1.3	26	2.2	30	2.3
Not Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish	277	98.6	-	-	411	98.3	444	98	629	97.8	720	89.3	836	83.3	1156	97.8	1290	97.7
Non-Respondents	2	-	-	-	8	-	8	-	-	-	74	9.2	155	15.4	-	-	-	-
Race																		
White	270	95.7	-	-	393	93.6	425	93.2	601	93	748	92.8	933	92.9	1092	92.4	1210	91.7
Asian	4*	1.4*	-	-	11*	2.6*	10*	2.2*	13*	2*	16	2	16	1.6	28	2.4	36	2.7
Black or African American	2	0.7	-	-	8	1.9	8	1.8	14	2.2	13	1.6	17	1.7	22	1.9	26	2.0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.1	2	0.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	-	-	-	-	3	0.7	3	0.7	2	0.3	4	0.5	3	0.3	3	0.3	1	0.1
Other	4	1.4	-	-	5	1.2	5	1.1	12	1.9	-	-	14	1.4	14	1.2	23	1.7
Multiracial	2	0.7	-	-	-	-	5	1.1	4	0.6	12	1.5	11	1.1	22	1.9	22	1.7
Non-Respondents	1	-	-	-	6	-	5	-	-	-	13	1.6	10	1	-	-	-	-

Source: Indiana Physician Assistant License Supplemental Data, 2004-2022.

Notes: * Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander demographics were combined between 2004 and 2012.

* 35-44 and 45-54 age groups were combined in 2010.

Pharmacist license and supplemental data were not available for 2006 and 2014.

ENDNOTES

- 1 What is a Physician Assistant? Tufts University School of Medicine. <https://medicine.tufts.edu/academics/physician-assistant/pa-program-overview/what-physician-assistant>
- 2 "Best Health Care Jobs." U.S. New & World Report, New York, NY. 2023.
- 3 Indiana Professional Licensing Agency, Physician Assistant License and Supplemental Data, 2004 - 2022.
- 4 A Longitudinal Assessment of Diversity in Indiana's Health Workforce: Introduction and Methodology. (2022). Bowen Center for Health Workforce Research and Policy. Indiana University School of Medicine. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1805/31536>
- 5 DiBaise M, Salisbury H, Hertelendy A, Muma RD. Strategies and perceived barriers to recruitment of underrepresented minority students in physician assistant programs. J Physician Assist Educ. 2015 Mar;26(1):19-27. doi: 10.1097/JPA.000000000000005. PMID: 25715011.
- 6 AAPA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Center. American Academy of Physician Associates. <https://www.aapa.org/about/dei-resource-center/>
- 7 Project Access. American Academy of Physician Associates. <https://www.aapa.org/about/dei-resource-center/#tabs-4-project-access>
- 8 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. Physician Assistant Education Association. <https://paeaonline.org/equity-diversity-inclusion>
- 9 Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. <https://www.nccpa.net/diversity-at-nccpa/>
- 10 What is REPRESENT! Summit? National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. <https://www.nccpa.net/represent-summit/>
- 11 What is the Back2School Program? National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. <https://www.nccpa.net/back2schoolprogram/>
- 12 HRSA Programs such as the Physician Assistant Loan Repayment Program (https://www.hrsa.gov/grants/find-funding?text=behavioral&status=All&bureau=All&sort=deadline_DESC)

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