

# Minnesota's Physician Assistant (PA) Workforce

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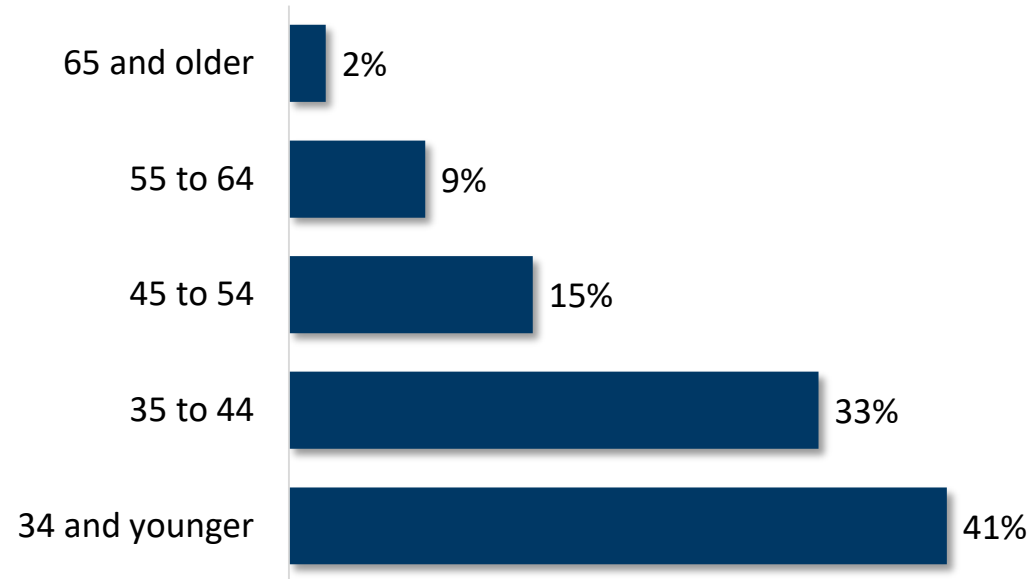
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# Introduction to Minnesota's Physician Assistant (PA) Workforce

- Physician assistants (PAs) are health care professionals who work under the supervision of physicians. They often work in primary care clinics where they conduct physicals and prescribe medications, but they may specialize in any branch of medicine. PAs serve an essential role on a health care team, filling gaps in services that result from shortages of physicians. PAs must graduate from an accredited educational physician assistant program. Learn more about PAs' legal scope of practice in Minnesota at the [Office of the Reviser of Statutes](#).
- According to the Minnesota Board of Medical Practice, there were 3,209 actively licensed Minnesota PAs as of September, 2019. Of that total, 394 listed a practice address that was either outside Minnesota or otherwise could not be located within the state. Based on survey responses, we also know that 1.9% of the total licensees were not working as an PA. (See more about our [data and methodology](#).)
- The PA workforce is quite young, with nearly half of all PAs under the age of 35 (see [slide 4](#)). An estimated 82 percent of PAs report that they plan to practice for at least 10 more years ([slide 10](#)).
- Less than one-fourth of Minnesota PAs earned their degree in Minnesota; another 29 percent earned their degrees in states bordering Minnesota (see [slide 8](#)). The share of PAs that are educated in Minnesota may increase in the coming years as new PA programs have opened recently in three Minnesota schools.
- The large majority of PAs (92 percent) are white ([slide 5](#)), and just under 90 percent speak only English in their practice ([slide 6](#)).
- PAs typically work a 40-hour work week and spend the majority of their time doing patient care ([slide 9](#)). The single most common specialty among PAs is family medicine ([slide 11](#)).
- Most PAs report being either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their careers, both in the last 12 months and overall ([slide 16](#)).
- Like most other health professionals, PAs are overrepresented in the metropolitan areas of the state (see slides [18](#) and [19](#)).

# Demographics: Sex and Age

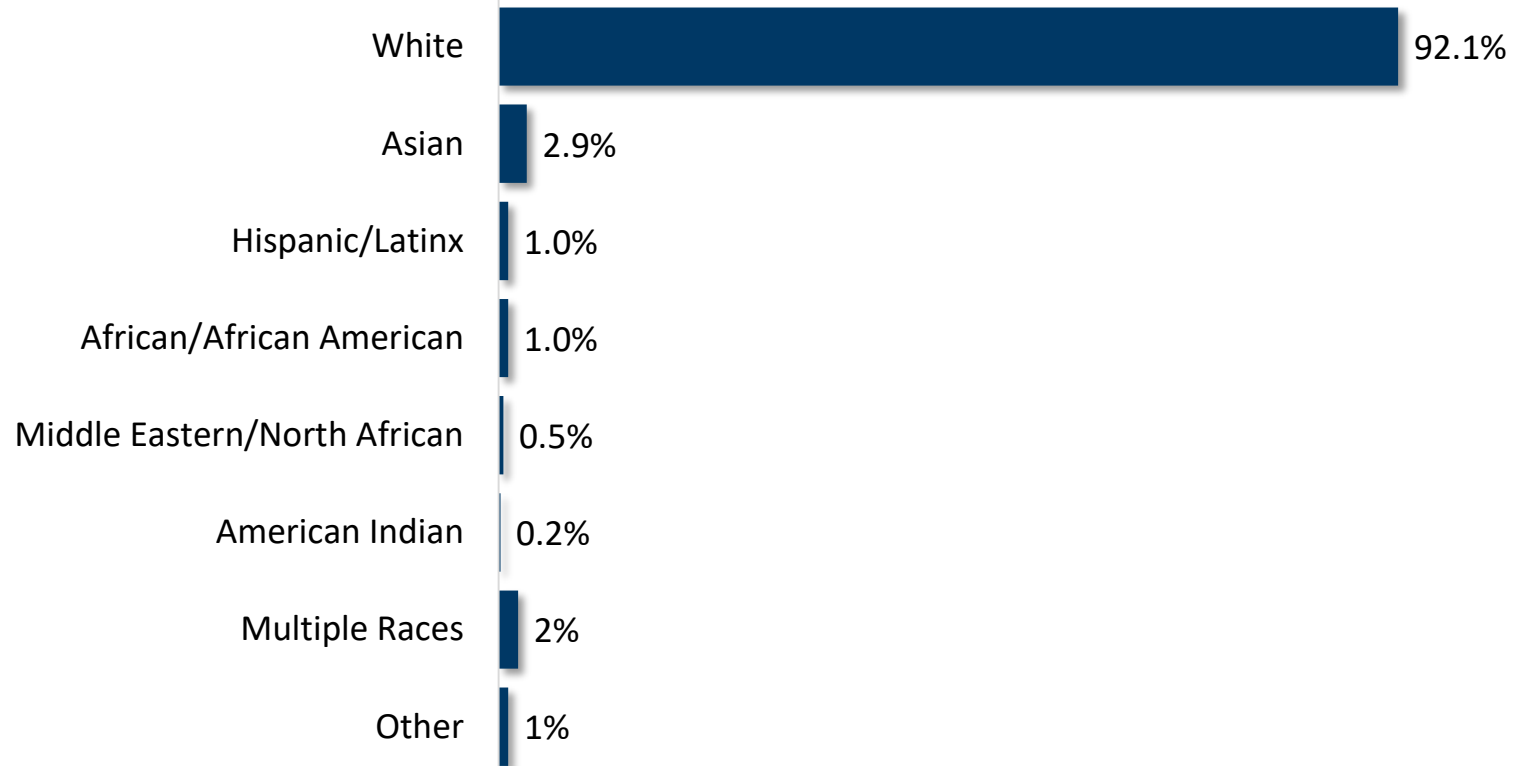
## Age of Minnesota Physician Assistants



- An estimated 41 percent of PAs in Minnesota are under the age of 35. The large share of young professionals entering the field is good news for Minnesota, particularly as more physicians retire. (PAs' work must be supervised by a physician, a physician may supervise up to five PAs at a time.)
- **Data not shown:** With a few exceptions, health care professions are predominantly female, and this is true for physician assistants as well. Approximately 73 percent of all Minnesota PAs are female, and among the youngest new cohort of PAs, eight out of ten are female.

# Demographics: Race and Ethnicity

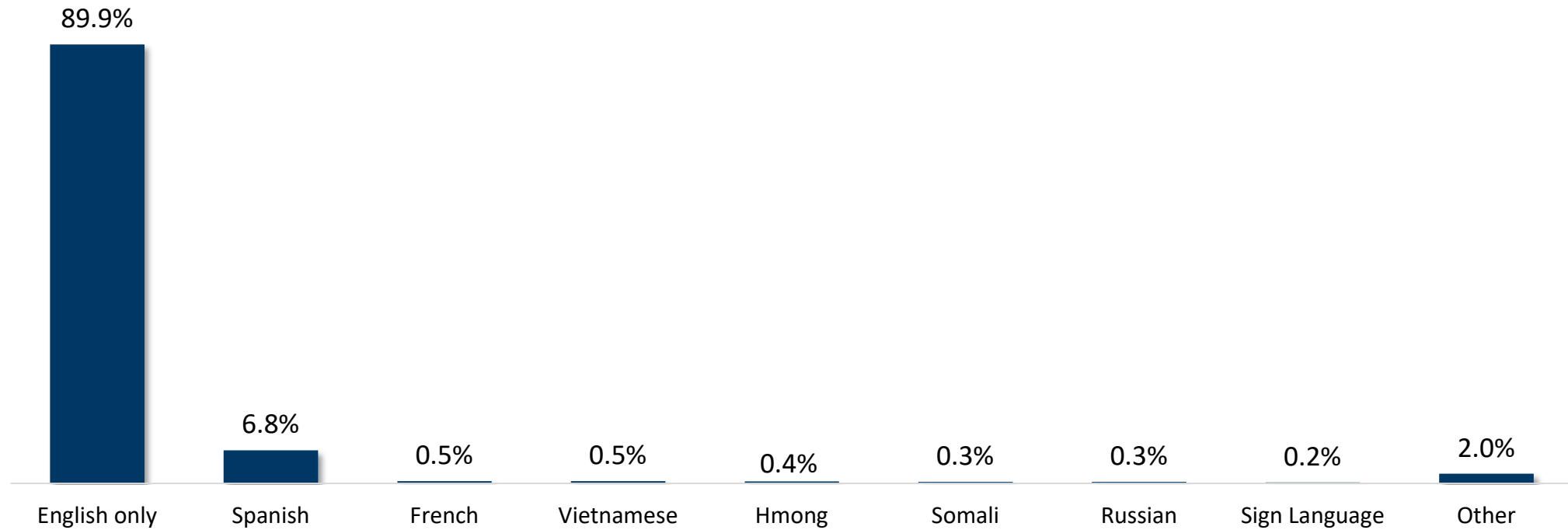
## Race of Minnesota Physician Assistants



- Typical of racial patterns among health care professionals, the majority (92.1 percent) of PAs indicated they were white. There were small shares of PAs identifying as Asian or Hispanic/Latinx, and even smaller shares identifying as other races.

# Demographics: Languages Spoken in Practice

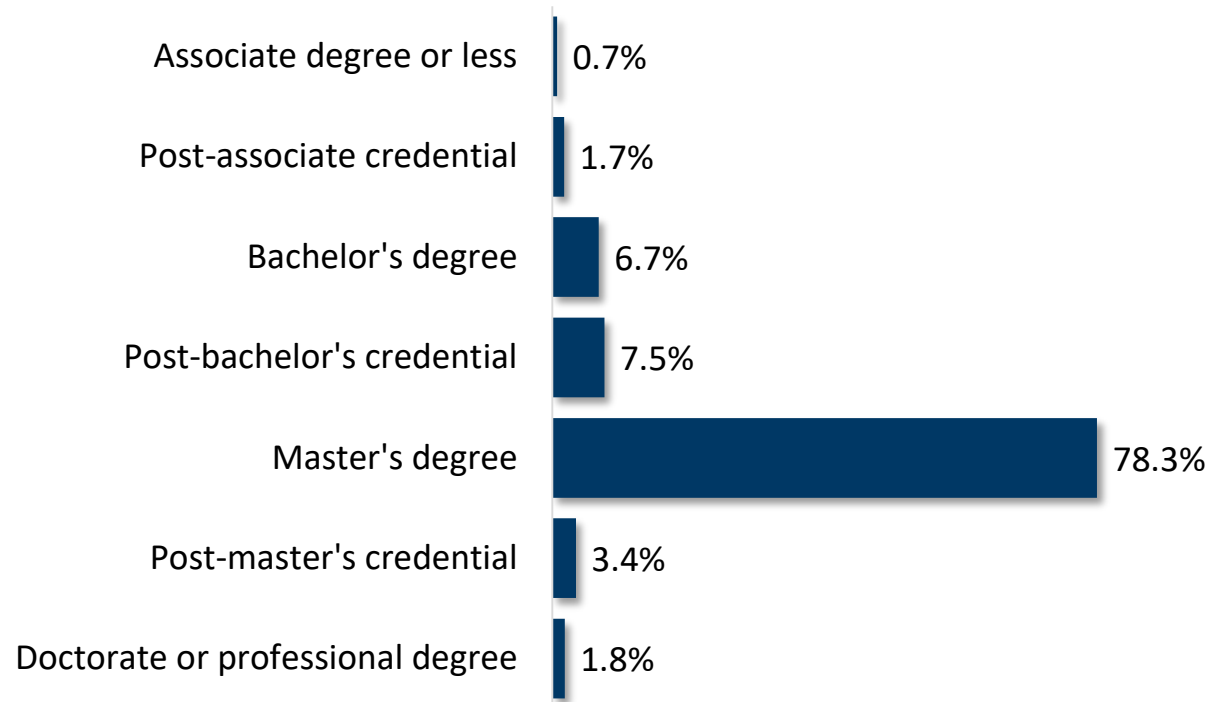
## Languages Spoken by Minnesota Physician Assistants in their Practices



- The majority of physician assistants—just under 90 percent—spoke only English in their practices. The second most commonly spoken language was Spanish. Very few physician assistants spoke other languages such as French, Vietnamese, Hmong or Somali with their patients.

# Education: Educational Attainment

## Educational Attainment of Physician Assistants



- A master's degree is now the minimum requirement for licensure as a PA, and 78.3 percent of the workforce holds this degree. Among PAs who are age 34 or younger, virtually all hold a master's degree or above.
- **Data not shown above:** When asked how likely they were to pursue additional training or credentials to advance in their field, only about 6 percent of PAs said they were "very likely" to enroll (5.8 percent) or were "currently enrolled" (1.2 percent) in a training program.

# Education: Minnesota Graduates

## Physician Assistant Program Graduates, by Year

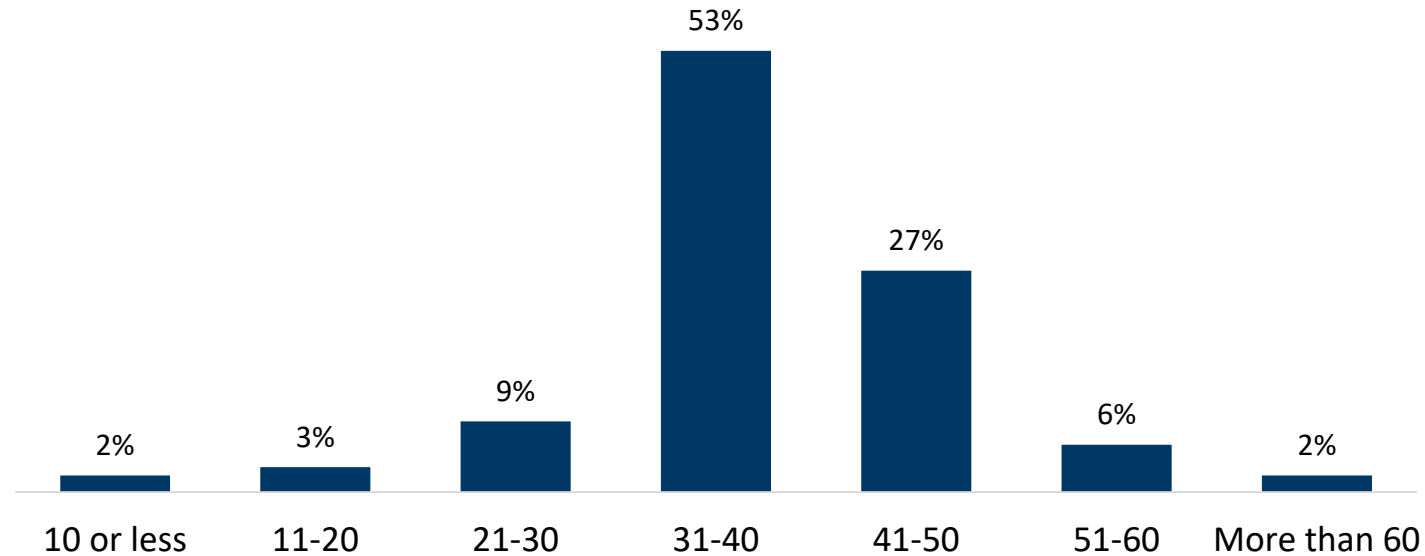
Physician Assistant Program Graduates, by Year						
Region	Institution	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Twin Cities	Augsburg	25	28	33	30	23
Twin Cities	Bethel	0	0	0	31	30
Twin Cities	Saint Catherine's	0	0	24	32	31
<b>Total</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>84</b>

- Based on data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System, Minnesota institutions produced 84 new PA graduates in 2017. Within the last five years, two new PA programs have opened in Minnesota (Bethel University and Saint Catherine's University). All three existing PA programs are in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, however, potentially leaving gaps in the rural supply of PAs.
- **Data not shown above:** To date, 23.8 percent of PAs earned their highest degree in Minnesota. An additional 29.1 percent of all PAs were educated in one of Minnesota's four border states—Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota or Wisconsin. At least until now, Minnesota has imported far more PAs than it has trained.



# Employment: Employment & Hours Worked

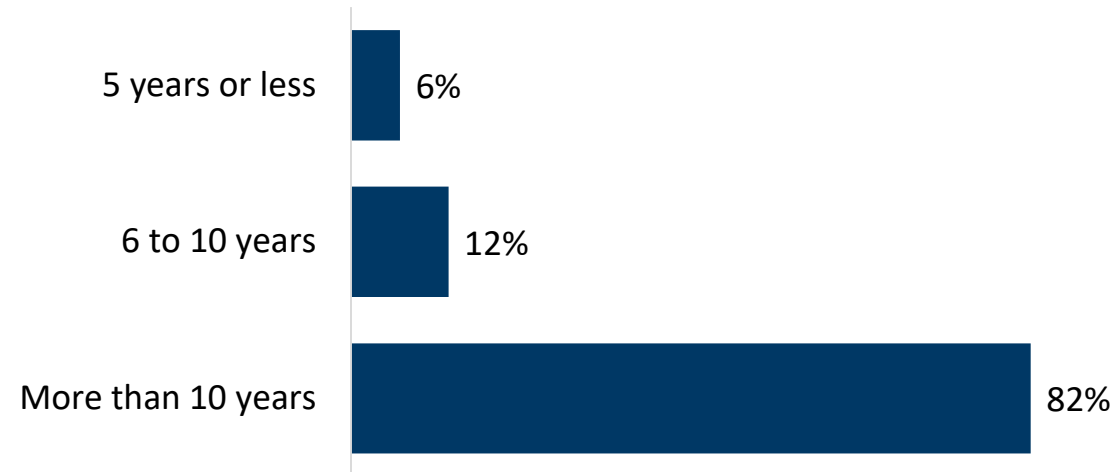
## Hours Worked in a Typical Week



- The median work week for physician assistants was 40 hours, and about half of all PAs worked between 31 and 40 hours per week.
- **Data not shown above:** An estimated 98.1 percent of Minnesota licensed physician assistants reported on the MDH questionnaire that they were “working in a paid or unpaid position related to [their] license.” This indicates that the vast majority of the potential PA workforce is being utilized. In addition, PAs spend the majority of their time caring for patients: 80 percent reported on the MDH survey that they spent more than three-quarters of their time providing direct patient care. This is another indication that PAs are being fully utilized professionally.

# Employment: Future Plans

“How long do you plan to continue practicing as a physician assistant in Minnesota?”



- Just 6 percent of Minnesota PAs indicated that they planned to leave the field within five years, whereas 82 percent reported that they planned to continue practicing for at least ten more years, reflecting the stability (and relative youth) of this profession.
- **Data not shown above:** Among the six percent planning to leave, the majority (64 percent) said their reason for leaving was to retire. Another 12 percent planned to leave the field due to burnout or dissatisfaction, followed by 10 percent who said they planned to leave for family or personal reasons.

# Physician Assistants at Work: Specialties

## Physician Assistant Specialties

Specialty	Share of PAs who report practicing this specialty
Family Medicine	28.4%
Internal Medicine	9.3%
General Surgery	3.8%
Other Surgery	16.6%
Dermatology	2.3%
Psychiatry	1.7%
OB/GYN	1.3%
Other	40.7%

- The survey asked physician assistants to identify all the medical specialties they practiced. As shown above, the most commonly reported specialty was family medicine, with just over 28 percent of PAs identifying this specialty.
- However, the largest share of PAs reported that they had another specialty not included in the selection list. Based on open-ended responses, PAs' most common "other" specialties were critical/urgent care/emergency medicine; cardiology; gastroenterology; orthopedics; and urology.

# Physician Assistants at Work: Work Settings

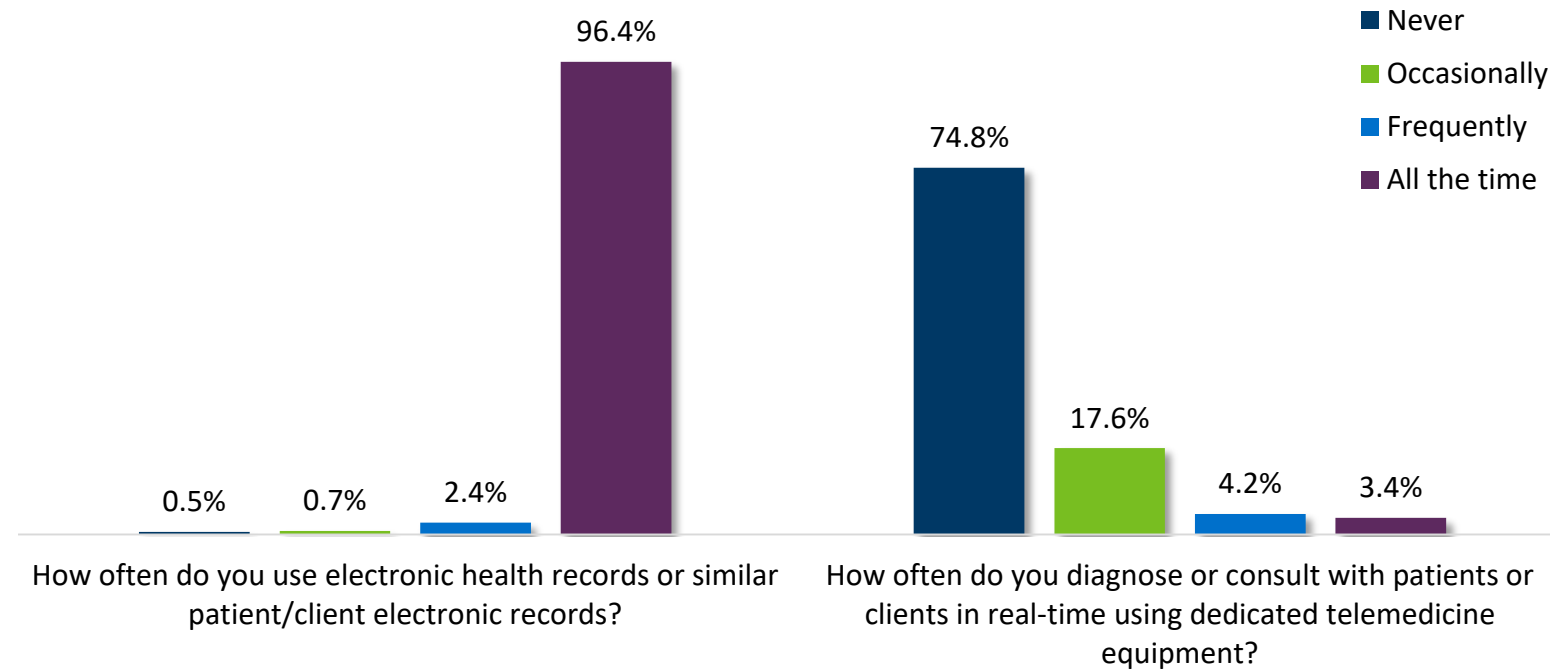
## Physician Assistants' Primary Work Settings

Setting	Share of PAs Working in this Setting
Clinic/Professional Office/Health Center/Ambulatory Care	64.6%
Hospital	28.5%
Academic (Teaching/Research)	3.6%
Community/Faith-Based Organization	0.6%
Long-Term Care Facility	0.5%
Correctional Facility	0.3%
State, County, or City Agency	0.2%
Other	1.4%

- **Data not shown above:** The survey asked PAs to identify their primary work setting. Much like physicians, PAs frequently split their time between two, three, or even more work settings. About half of PAs reported working in one setting; approximately 27 percent reported splitting their time across two settings, and another 25 percent said they worked at three or more different settings. The table above shows results for primary settings only (see footnote for more details).
- The table above shows nearly all PAs work in either a traditional clinic or hospital setting (93 percent total).

# Physician Assistants at Work: EHRs and Telemedicine

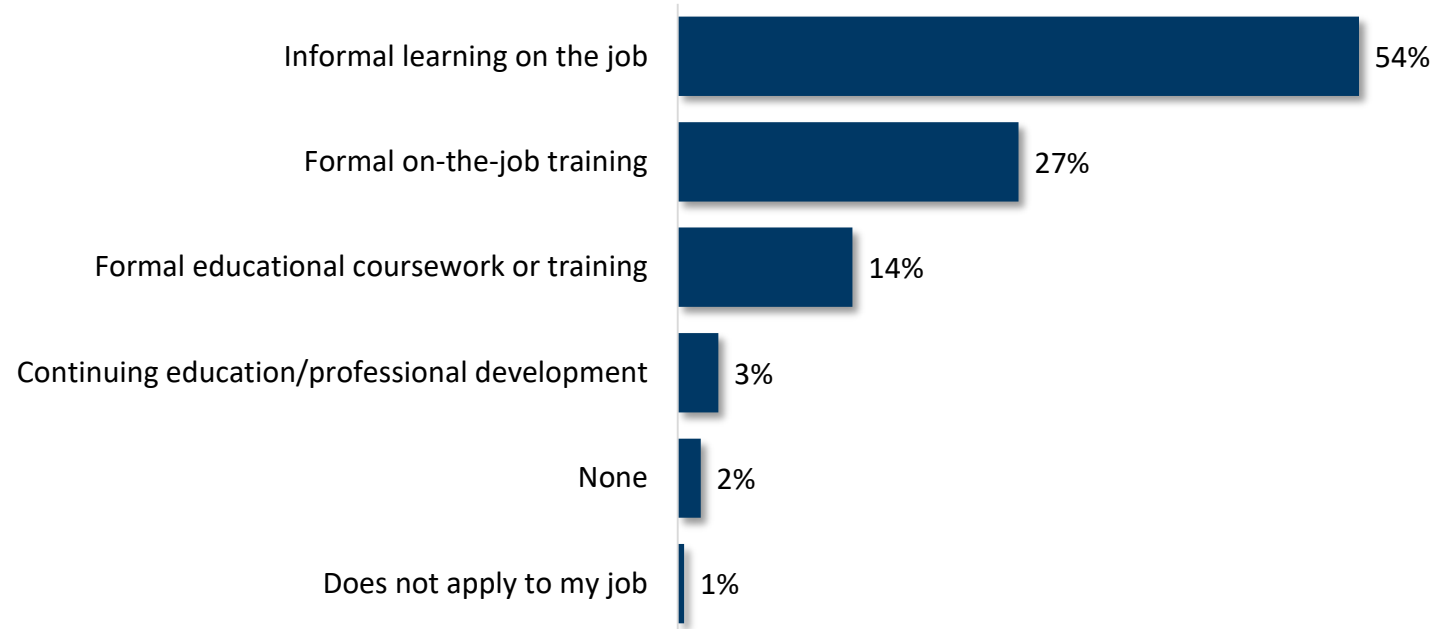
## PA's' Use of Electronic Health Records and Telemedicine Equipment



- The 2018 survey included items about the use of both electronic health records (EHRs) and dedicated telemedicine equipment. The results showed that the vast majority of PAs use EHRs “all the time,” but most do not use telemedicine equipment regularly.

# Physician Assistants at Work: Teamwork

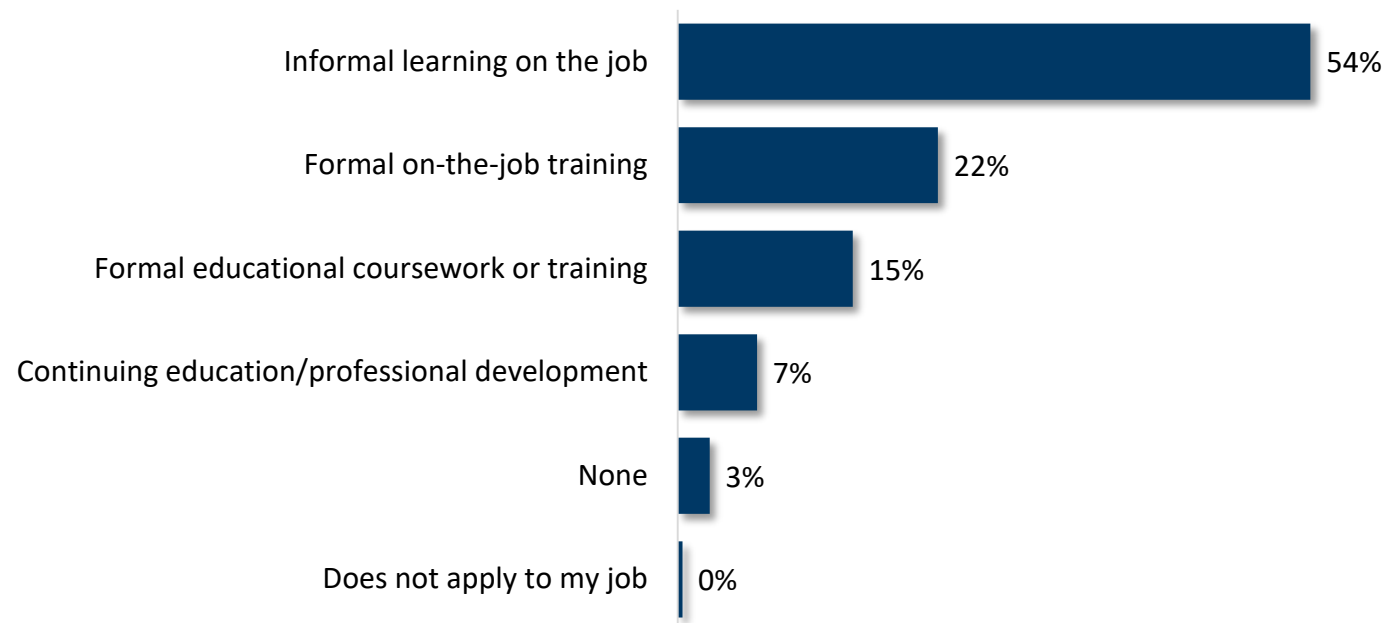
“Which of the following work or educational experiences best prepared you to work in a multidisciplinary team when providing care?”



- Health care providers increasingly work in multidisciplinary teams, prompting educators and health policymakers to ask how best to train providers to communicate and coordinate across professions. MDH included a question on its 2017 survey to shed light on these concerns. As shown above, more than half of Minnesota PAs reported that learning on the job (either informal or formal) *best* prepared them to work in multidisciplinary teams.

# Physician Assistants at Work: Cultural Competence

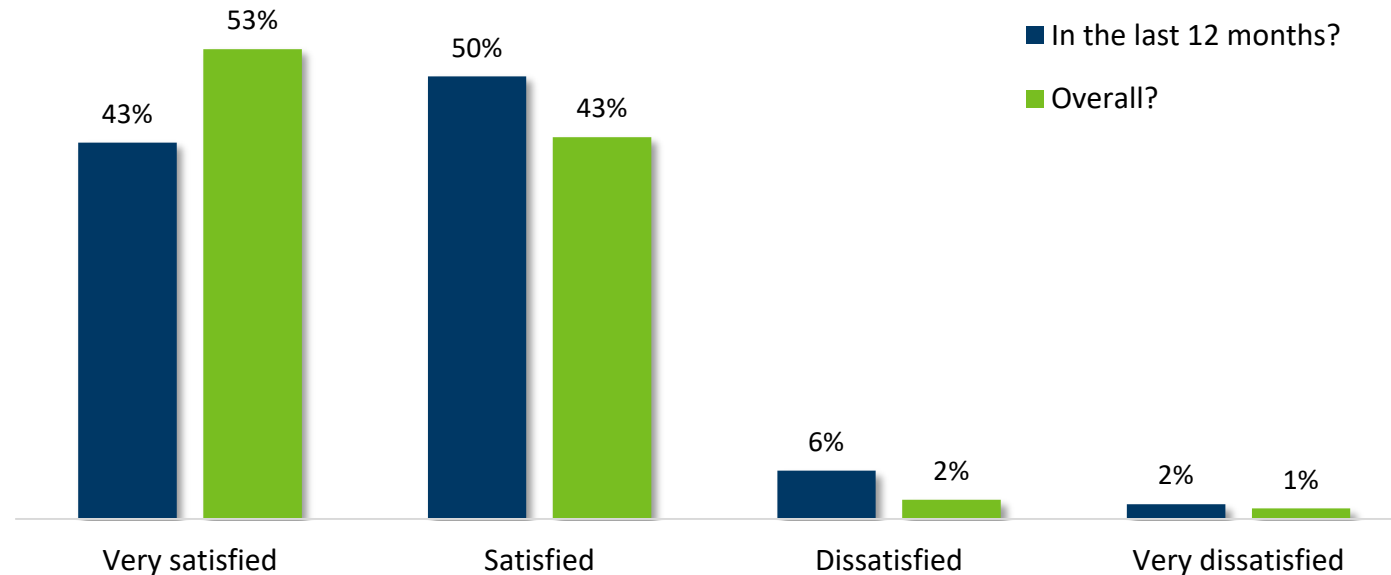
“Which of the following work or educational experiences best prepared you to provide culturally competent care?”



- PAs most commonly indicated that formal or informal learning *on the job* (as opposed to training or education) provided the best preparation for working with diverse groups of patients.

# Physician Assistants at Work: Career Satisfaction

How satisfied have you been with your career....

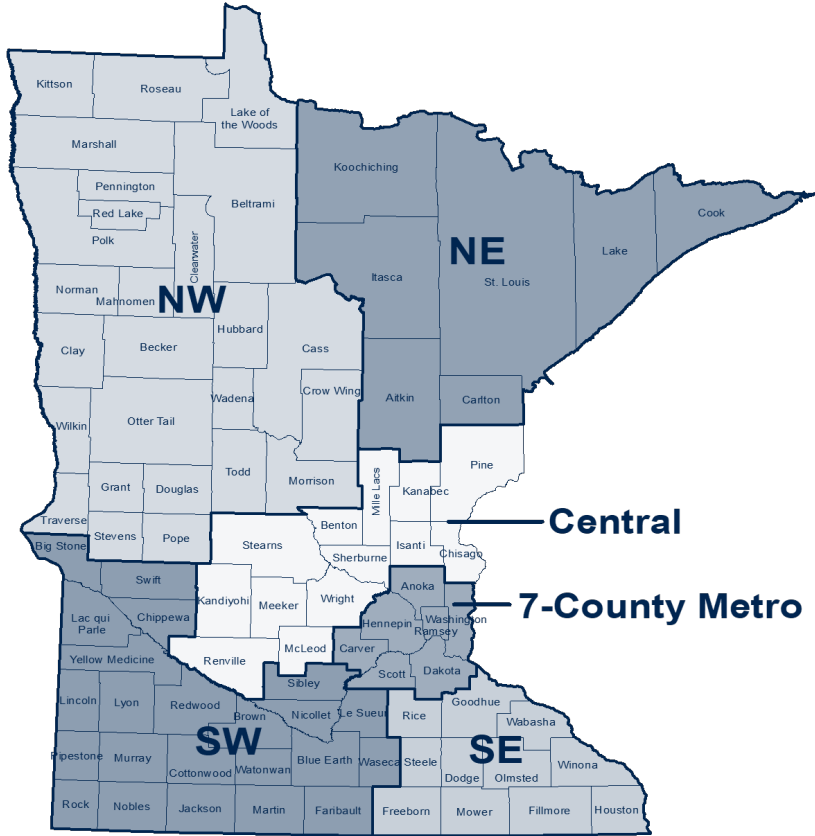


- The questionnaire included questions on career satisfaction in the past 12 months and overall. As shown above, the majority of PAs indicated that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their careers both in the past 12 months and overall.
- PAs were slightly more likely to report being very satisfied with their career overall compared to the last 12 months—a trend typical among health care professionals for which work satisfaction data is available. This is consistent with national findings which suggest that the increase in administrative work—such as dealing with billing, insurance, and electronic medical records—has dampened work satisfaction among health care providers.



# Geographic Distribution: Two ways to present geography

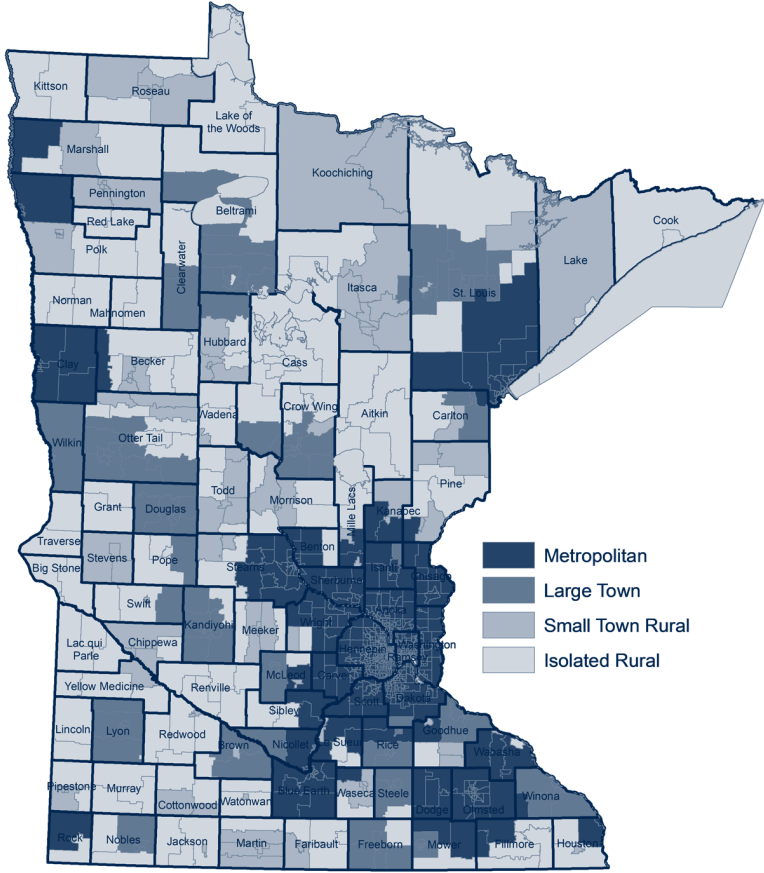
By state planning areas



For more information:

[Minnesota Employment and Economic Development Planning Areas](#)

By rural-urban commuting regions (RUCAs)



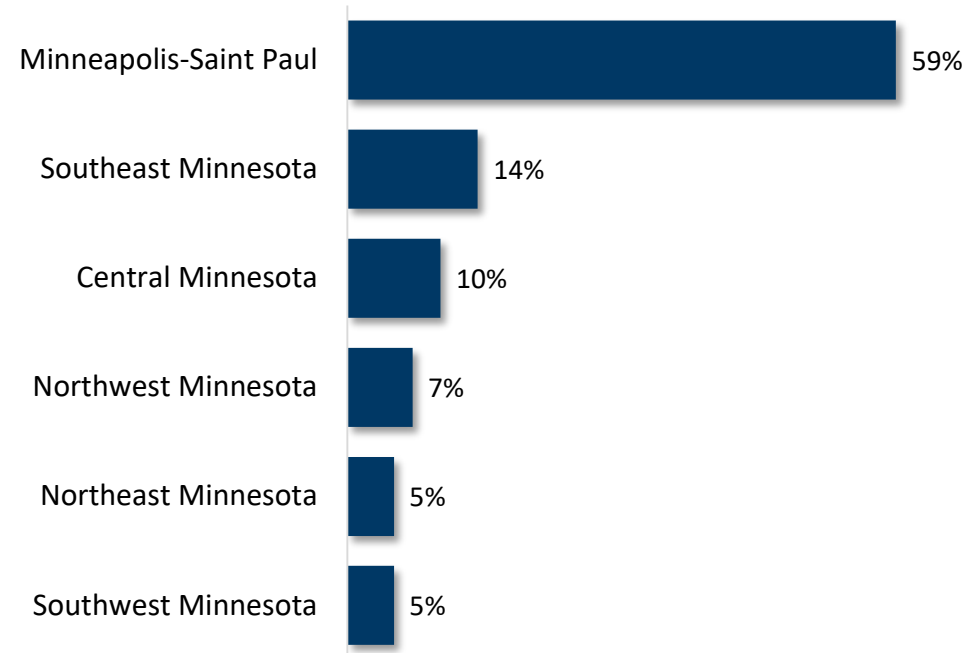
Source: Minnesota Department of Health  
 Developed by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration's Office of Rural Health Policy,  
 the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, and WWAMI Rural Health Research Center  
 at the University of Washington.

For more information:

[Minnesota Department of Health RUCAs](#)

# Geographic Distribution: by Planning Area

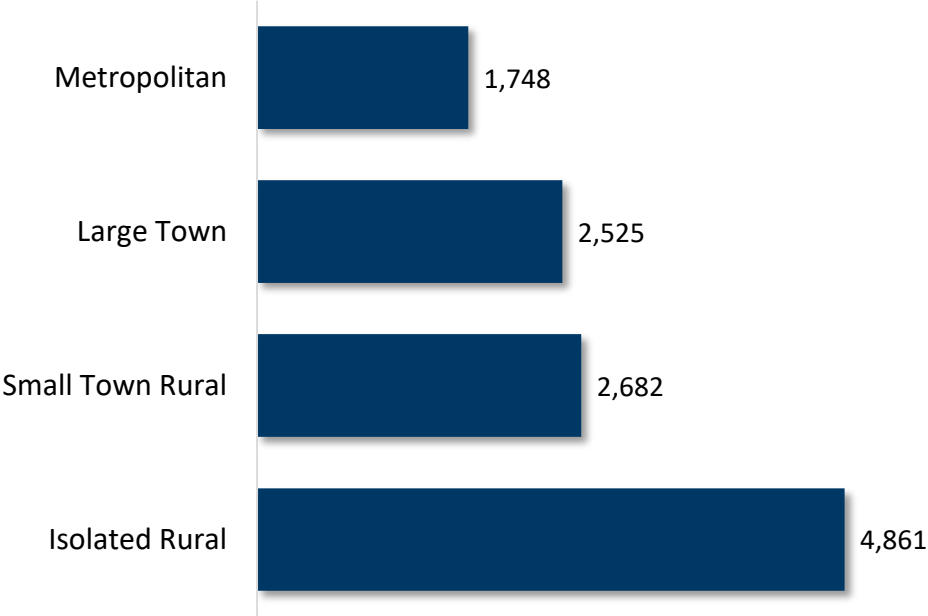
Share of Physician Assistants by State Planning Area



- Slightly over half of all PAs work in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area. Another 14 percent of PAs work in the Southeast region, reflecting the substantial pull of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

# Geographic Distribution: by Rurality

Minnesota Population-to-PA Ratio, by Level of Rurality



- The chart above provides another view of the geographic distribution of physician assistants, showing the share of the population for every one PA in urban, large town, small town rural, and isolated rural areas. As shown, there are 1,748 people for every PA in metropolitan areas of Minnesota, compared to 4,861 in isolated rural areas of the state. This pattern is typical of other health care professions, and reflects the relative inaccessibility of care in sparsely populated areas of Minnesota.

# Methodology

The data in this report come from two sources:

- The **Minnesota Board of Medical Practices (BMP)** provides data on the entire population of physician assistants who have active licenses in the state of Minnesota. The BMP maintains this database primarily for administrative purposes. BMP provides the data to the Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (MDH-ORHPC). This report uses data current as of September, 2019. At that time, there were a total of **3,209** physician assistants with active Minnesota licenses, approximately 91.6 percent of whom indicated that their primary business address was in Minnesota. (Note that the analyses exclude physicians whose licenses were active/restricted or active/conditional.) Analysts at the Minnesota Department of Health-Office of Rural Health and Primary Care clean, organize, clean, and geocode addresses that come from the board, which is how we can identify practice locations (shown in Slides 19 and 20).
- The **2018 Minnesota Department of Health-Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (MDH-ORHPC) Physician Assistant Workforce Survey** collects additional demographic and workforce data from physicians. MDH-ORHPC administered the survey to all physicians who renewed their Minnesota license in the calendar year of 2018. The response rate was approximately 83 percent.

# Notes

Visit our website at

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/reports.html>  
to learn more about the Minnesota health care workforce.

County-level data for this profession is available at

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/database/>

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