

Kentucky Physical Therapy Workforce Report



2024

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INTRODUCTION

According to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), Physical Therapists (PTs) are licensed doctors who work across multiple patient populations impacted by movement dysfunction. PTs examine, diagnose, and treat individuals of all ages, while optimizing quality of life by, maintaining, restoring, and improving a patient's ability to move, function, and live more active lifestyles (American Physical Therapy Association [APTA], 2024).

PTs work in a variety of work environments. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2023 35% of PTs were working in outpatient facilities, 28% were working within hospitals, 70% were working within home healthcare services, 6% were working within nursing and residential care facilities and 4% were self-employed (U.S. Bureau Labor of Statistics, 2024).

There were approximately 259,200 PT jobs available in the United States in 2023, with only 240,820 PTs being employed in 2023. This left close to 19,000 open opportunities for additional PTs across the nation in 2023. The mean annual wage for those 240,820 PTs was reported to be \$100,440 dollars, \$12,960 dollars more than the mean annual wage for PTs in Kentucky at just \$87,480. This ranks Kentucky among the lowest in PT wages across the United States, with only Montana having a lower annual mean wage at \$85,550 dollars (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2023).

It is estimated that the PT industry will grow by as much as 14% over the next decade. From 2023 to 2033 it is estimated that roughly 13,600 additional PT jobs will be created in the USA (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2023).

According to the APTA and the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the national patient-to-PT ratio is 1,473 people per PT. It should be noted that Kentucky ranks better than the national average with 787 people per provider (Bushling et al., 2023). For a detailed breakdown of the regional distribution, see Figure 3. and its corresponding information.

Licensure data was requested from the Kentucky Board of Physical Therapy and graduate student data was provided by the University of Kentucky Doctorate of Physical Therapy (DPT) program. The following information is obtained within the licensure set:

- Full name
- Employment address
- License type
- License status
- License number
- License expiration
- State of the original license
- Education type

The following information is obtained within the University of Kentucky graduate DPT data set:

- Full name
- Campus Location (Lexington or Hazard)
- County of residence
- Date of birth
- License issue date
- License expiration date
- Graduation year
- Employment county

Duplicates and out-of-state cases were excluded. Frequencies were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28. Rural and urban counties were coded in accordance with the rural designation by the Human Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). County-level population counts were obtained through the US Census. Years of licensure were calculated using the current year (2024) and the original licensure date within the data.

KEY FINDINGS

There are approximately 3,694 actively licensed PTs practicing in the state of Kentucky, with the majority of physical therapists located within urban counties (71%).

The following counties have one or no practicing PT; Fulton, Carlisle, Robertson, Nicholas, and Owsley Counties.

Appalachian (15%) and Delta (7%) counties have the lowest employment of practicing PTs. With approximately 56% of all PTs practicing in just six urban designated counties.

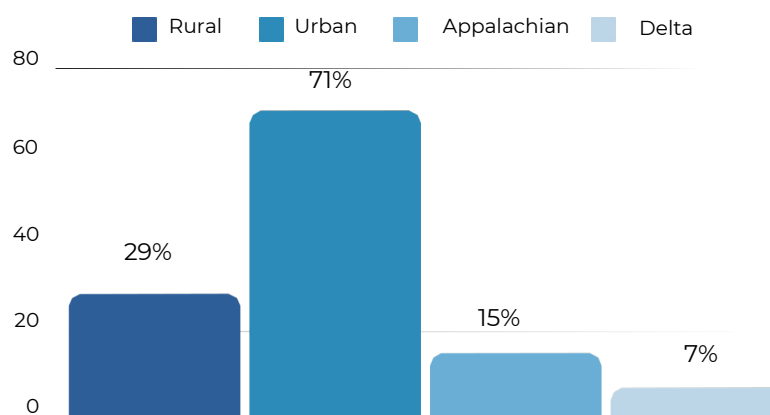


Figure 2. PT counts by geographical designation of employment

According to the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), there are 50% fewer physical therapists per 10,000 residents in rural areas than in urban areas (Distribution of U.S. Health Care Providers Residing in Rural and Urban Areas, 2078, Felter et al., 2022).

There are approximately 29% of Kentucky PTs working in rural areas, and approximately 71% working in urban areas. The geographic distribution of active PTs shows that there are roughly 15% of all PTs working in Appalachia, and just 7% working in Delta regions of the state.

Over half of the PTs practicing in Kentucky have been licensed originally in Kentucky (58%).

People Per Provider

According to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services Office of Data Analytics, as of 2023, Kentucky has **787** people per physical therapist (PT). The Cabinet notes this is better than the national rate of **1,479** people per PT.

Purchase **596** people per provider
Kentucky River **652** people per provider
KIPDA **671** people per provider
Green River **694** people per provider
Bluegrass **736** people per provider
Lake Cumberland **754** per provider
Barren River **820** per provider
Pennyrile **861** per provider
FIVCO **865** per provider
Lincoln Trail **973** per provider
Northern Kentucky **1,018** per provider
Cumberland Valley **1,019** per provider
Gateway **1,123** per provider
Big Sandy **1,395** per provider
Buffalo Trace **1,395** per provider

Note: While the state has better numbers than the national average, the Appalachian region of Kentucky, other than the Kentucky River, ranks among the worst in the state in people per provider ratio (Busling et al.,2023).



Figure 3. Map of the Kentucky Area Development Districts (University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, 2024)

DPT Education in Kentucky

The national standard for licensure for graduates of a DPT program to become eligible to practice in the United States, must first earn a doctorate degree in Physical Therapy from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy (CAPTE) and pass the state licensure exam (American Physical Therapy Association [APTA], 2024). It should be noted that many PTs across the state practice physical therapy with a Masters level degree as standards have changed and evolved over the years.

According to the APTA and the CAPTE, the typical physical therapy program will consist of a three-year didactic in-classroom experience, consisting of a curriculum that may include areas of study such as biology, anatomy, and physiology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, kinesiology, pathology, and many more. PT students spend approximately 77% of their curriculum in a didactic classroom and lab based training, with 23% of their time dedicated to clinical education and least 22 weeks in a clinical rotation gaining hands-on experience (American Physical Therapy Association [APTA], 2024).

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has three fully accredited DPT programs that have graduated PT students within the past five years and two DPT programs awaiting full accreditation.

The University of the Cumberlands and Spalding University both have fledgling Doctorate of Physical Therapy programs that have been granted candidacy for accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education and are awaiting the graduation of inaugural classes in the 2024 fiscal year.

According to Bellarmine University in 2022, 77 of 77 PT students graduated and 69 of 77 PT students graduated from the School of Physical Therapy in 2023. The University reports 98.6% pass rate in 2022 and 100% pass rate in 2023 on the national licensure exam and a 100% employment rate for the 2022 and 2023 classes, with additional 2024 information yet to be determined (DPT Program Student Outcome Data, 2024).

Western Kentucky University reports that in 2022, 28 of 28 PT students graduated, in 2023 31 of 32 PT students graduated, and in 2024 29 of 31 PT students graduated from the School of Physical Therapy. The University reports a 100% employment rate for the 2022 and 2023 classes and a 100% pass rate on the national licensure exam, with additional 2024 information yet to be determined (Program Outcome Data, 2024).

The University of Kentucky reports that from 2018 – 2023, over 90% of all PT students graduated, with a 100% graduation rate for the class of 2019 with 66 of 66 graduates. The university boasts a 97.8% 5-year average for graduates taking the national licensure exam. The school reports that graduates from the 2022 and 2023 graduating classes report a 100% employment rate (Program Outcome Data (Graduate Rates), 2023).

The University of Kentucky Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree provided by the College of Health Sciences is offered at the Lexington Campus and at the Center of Excellence in Rural Health in Hazard.

The majority of UK DPT students remain practicing within Kentucky after they graduate (94%). At least 6% of UK DPT graduates are working throughout the country in other states. Approximately 19.5% of UK DPT graduates attended the UK CERH campus and 80.4% attended the Lexington campus. There are currently 45 students enrolled in the DPT program at the UK CERH, with 14 students who are candidates to graduate in the August 2025 cohort.

According to the UK DPT graduate data 41% of graduates are working in rural areas, with 59% working in urban, 25.7% working in Appalachia, and 5% working in Delta regions of the state.

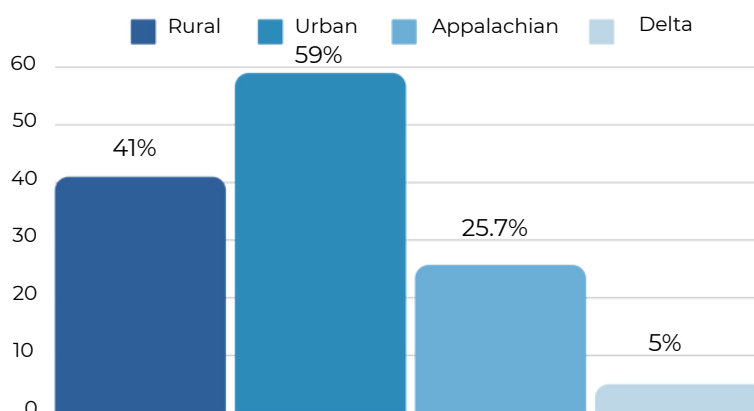


Figure 4. Percent of UK Lexington and hazard campus DPT graduates by geographic designation

The following map illustrates the number of UK DPT graduates by Kentucky county. These counts reflect the county of employment reported by UK DPT and the Kentucky Board of Physical Therapy.

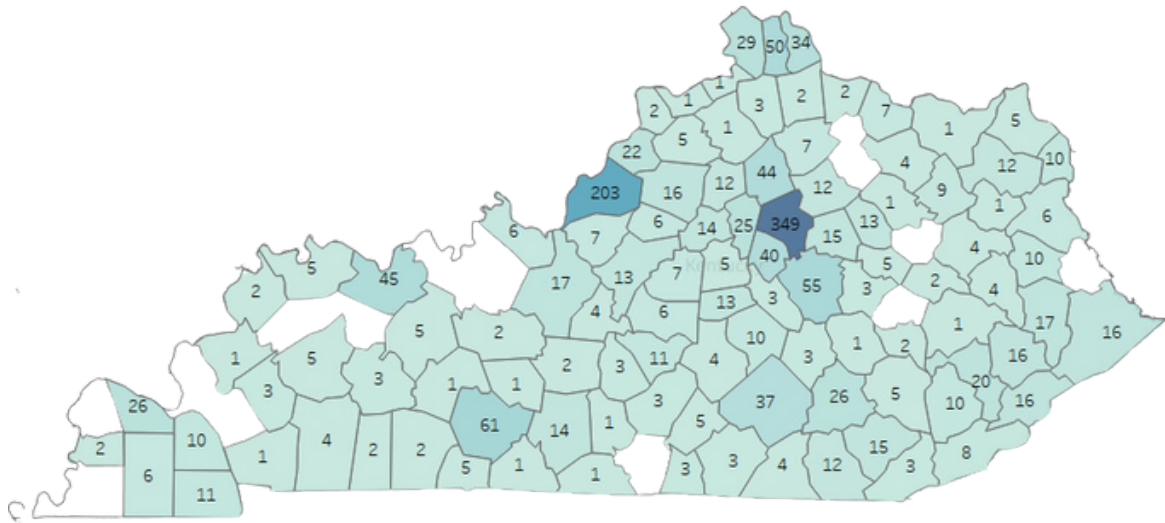


Figure 5. UK DPT Student Distribution by County

UK's Lexington campus and Hazard campus DPT graduates are licensed in 110 of 120 Kentucky counties (92%).

- 92 of those 110 counties are rural (84%).
- Trigg, Crittenden, Butler, Edmonson, Allen, Monroe, Jackson, Metcalfe, Carroll, Gallatin, Owen, Bath, Lewis, Breathitt, and Elliott counties only have 1 licensed UK DPT graduate.
- The majority of UK DPT graduates are licensed in Jefferson (13%) and Fayette (22%) counties.

Rural communities lack certain types of providers, particularly specialists (RH I hub, 2024).

According to an article published by the Kentucky Education Television (KET), based on data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics, the demand for PTs in Kentucky is expected to grow 16.62 percent from 2018-2028. As of 2018, there were 2,641 PTs in Kentucky, that number is expected to grow to more than 3,000 PTs by 2028 (KET, 2024).

According to the Massachusetts General Hospital's MGH Institute of Health Professions, current trends in Physical Therapy are changing the way PTs treat and see patients. Technology such as telehealth, wearable technologies, personalized rehabilitation, preventative care, and the integration of mind and body, are all driving and continuously evolving the PT profession (MGH Institute on Health Professions, 2024).

The Institute also notes that new trends are developing within the industry as well. Breakthroughs in regenerative medicine, robotic and artificial intelligence, enhanced data analytics, and new approaches to holistic medicine are all resources that will begin a rapid transformation as new technologies and innovations continue to push the field of physical therapy forward (MGH Institute on Health Professions, 2024).

Conclusion

With this rapid growth and new technologies, it is imperative for Kentucky-based DPT programs to continue making strides in graduating competent well-trained individuals to meet the needs of the Commonwealth. This report has demonstrated the Commonwealth's dedication and determination to adequately meet the needs of PT patients across the state. With a growth expectancy of more than 14% over the next decade, the physical therapy industry will continue to be a critical part of the Commonwealth's ability to take care of its people.

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