



Trends in the Size and Distribution of the South Carolina Physician Workforce: 2009-2017

This is the first in a series of fact sheets produced by the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce describing trends in the supply and distribution of selected licensed healthcare professions in South Carolina over the 8-year period from 2009 to 2017. This fact sheet utilizes information provided by physicians during their biennial license renewal process in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017. Counts are based on the number of physicians licensed to practice in South Carolina who are actively engaged in their profession. County-level data reflect their primary practice location. Physicians who have a secondary practice location in a different county are not included in the count of the total number of physicians practicing in that county.

The number of physicians actively practicing in South Carolina grew from 10,163 in 2009 to 12,741 in 2017, an overall increase of 25.4% (Table 1). The rate of growth in the physician workforce outpaced that of the state’s population, resulting in an 11.8% increase in the number of physicians per 10,000 residents during this time.

Table 1. Size of the Physician Workforce and Population in South Carolina, 2009-2017

	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	% Change 2009-2017
Number of physicians	10,163	10,644	11,373	12,182	12,741	+25.4%
Number of physicians per 10,000 residents	22.7	23.0	24.1	25.5	25.4	+11.8%
Total SC population	4,479,800	4,625,364	4,723,723	4,896,146	5,024,369	+12.2%

An analysis of 2-year trends in the size and distribution of the workforce over the 8-year period from 2009 to 2017 shows that the size of the physician workforce grew steadily, roughly keeping pace with the rise in population, until the most recent period, between 2015 and 2017, when growth in the number of physicians per 10,000 residents leveled off (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trends in the size and concentration of the physician workforce in South Carolina, 2009-2017.

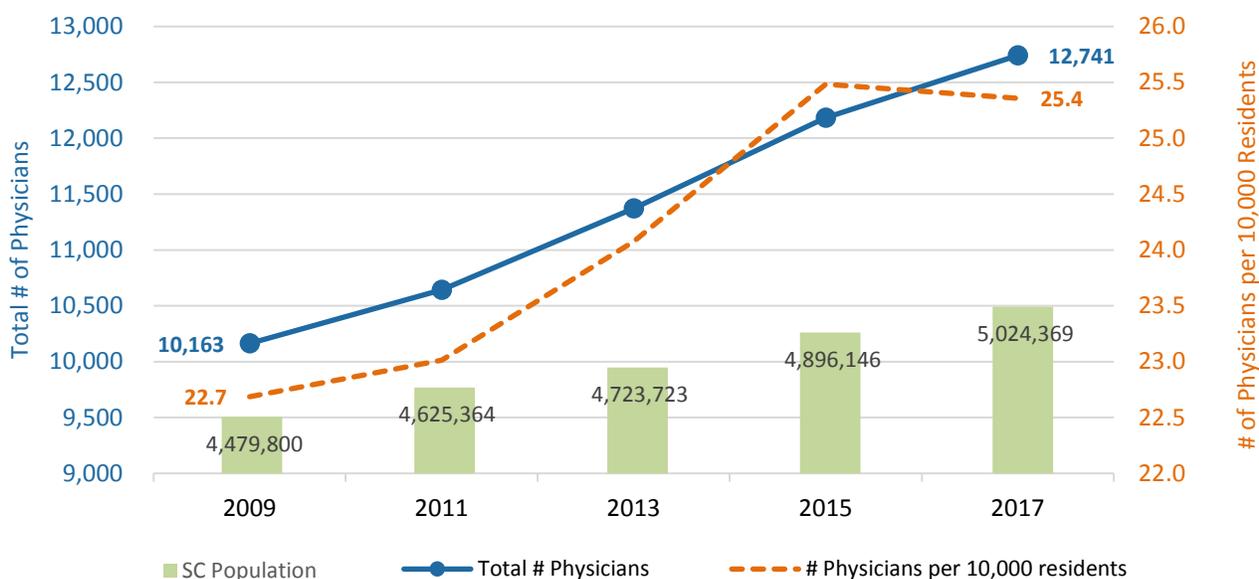


Table 2 and Figure 2 on the following page show how the physician workforce is distributed across the state and how that distribution has changed since 2009. Counties are grouped based on their Metropolitan Statistical Area designation as being either metropolitan, micropolitan, or nonmetropolitan. Counties designated as nonmetropolitan are the most economically isolated in the state.

Between 2009 and 2017, both metropolitan and micropolitan counties saw increases in the size of the workforce relative to the population (10.4% and 12.3%, respectively), with the former counties collectively adding 2.6 physicians and the latter gaining 2.0 physicians for every 10,000 residents. The concentration of physicians in nonmetropolitan counties also increased, but the increase was significantly smaller (4.6%) and the result of a shrinking population in these rural areas, rather than an influx of providers. Over the entire 8-year period, nonmetropolitan counties had consistently and considerably fewer physicians per 10,000 residents than did counties designated as metropolitan or micropolitan.

Table 2. Trends in the Size and Distribution of the Physician Workforce in SC, 2009-2017

	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	# Change 2009-2017	% Change 2009-2017
Metropolitan Counties							
Number of physicians	9,197	9,616	10,327	11,383	11,656	2,459	26.7%
Physicians per 10,000 residents	24.7	24.9	26.0	27.5	27.2	2.6	10.4%
Population	3,728,219	3,861,857	3,967,769	4,146,729	4,278,588	550,369	14.8%
Micropolitan Counties							
Number of physicians	729	776	799	838	831	102	14.0%
Physicians per 10,000 residents	16.7	17.5	18.8	18.9	18.7	2.0	12.3%
Population	437,215	443,793	424,330	442,689	443,848	6,633	1.5%
Nonmetropolitan Counties							
Number of physicians	237	252	247	246	238	1	0.4%
Physicians per 10,000 residents	7.5	7.9	7.4	8.0	7.9	0.3	4.6%
Population	314,366	319,714	331,624	306,728	301,933	-12,433	-4.0%

County-level Data

Number of Physicians

31 counties (67.4%) gained physicians:

21 (67.7%) were metropolitan
6 (19.4%) were micropolitan
4 (12.9%) were nonmetropolitan

11 counties (23.9%) lost physicians:

5 (45.5%) were metropolitan
2 (18.2%) were micropolitan
4 (36.4%) were nonmetropolitan

4 counties (8.7%) had no change in # of physicians

% of counties in each MSA showing change:

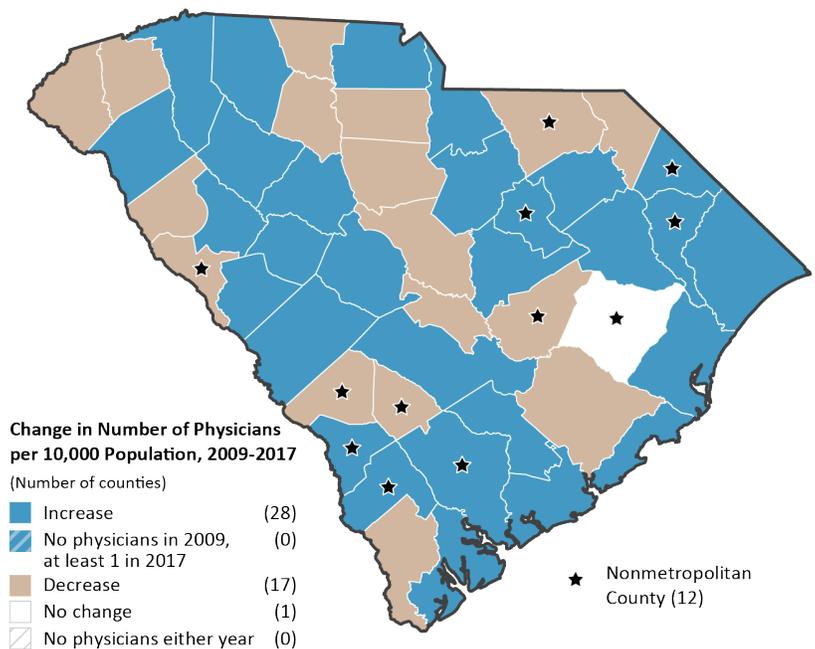
	Metro	Micro	Nonmetro
Increase	80.8%	75.0%	33.3%
Decrease	9.2%	25.0%	33.3%

Notable gains and losses in # of physicians:

	# in 2009	# in 2017	% gain/loss
Saluda	4	7	+75.0%
Lancaster	84	135	+60.7%
Calhoun	2	1	-50.0%
Barnwell	13	5	-61.5%
Union	24	9	-62.5%

Number of Physicians Adjusted for Population

Figure 2. Change in Active Physicians per 10,000 Population by Primary Practice Location, South Carolina, 2009-2017



Notes: Data include licensed physicians actively practicing in South Carolina as reported during the license renewal periods ending 12/31/2009 and 12/31/2017. Physician counts are based on self-reported primary practice location, and include residents in training but exclude physicians employed in federal or military facilities. Sources: Physician data are drawn from the licensure files maintained by the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, Healthcare and Demographics Section; population data are derived from the National Center for Health Statistics. Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) designations were based on 2010 census data and the new MSA designation standards published by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget in February 2013. A metropolitan area contains a core urban area of 50,000 or more persons. A micropolitan area contains an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) persons. Areas not designated as metropolitan or micropolitan are defined as nonmetropolitan.