

# Executive Summary

**The Practice Analysis of Chiropractic 2020 is a project report and analysis of a survey of the chiropractic profession within the United States. This is the sixth survey of U.S. chiropractors conducted by The National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE). Previous analyses were released in 1993, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015.**

A *Practice Analysis* performs a fundamental role in developing valid tools for licensure and certification assessment. This analysis helps to establish test validity by creating a profile of the profession, tracking trends in professional practice, and providing information vital to the development and refinement of professional programs. It also identifies current practice standards while anticipating future changes.

For the first time, this *Practice Analysis of Chiropractic 2020* report contains information about the graduates of chiropractic programs who do not practice in the field and those who practice part time. The study results also provide legislators, insurance companies, educators, and the general public with an overview of the chiropractic profession and its growing importance and effectiveness as a healthcare profession.

The report includes the following contents:

- Introduction
- Overview of the chiropractic profession
- Methods of survey construction, data collection, and data analysis
- Demographic portrait of the chiropractic profession in the United States
- Practice settings and patient characteristics
- Professional functions and treatment procedures
- Research and ethics
- Part-time practitioners and non-practitioners
- Conclusion

The level of gender diversity in the chiropractic profession is increasing steadily. The percentage of female chiropractors in 2019 was 31.8%, compared with 13.3% in 1991, 19.2% in 1998, 18.0% in 2003, 22.4% in 2009, and 27.1% in 2014. The ethnic diversity in the profession is also increasing. Greater percentages of non-White chiropractors are reported among practitioners younger than 30 years of age. The proportion of practicing

chiropractors who have a Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degree has increased from 53.7% in 1991 to 82.8% in 2019. The vast majority of practitioners younger than 40 (95.4%) report having at least a Bachelor's degree.

A typical chiropractor works at least 30 hours per week (58.3%) at a chiropractic office (82.4%), which is often located in a city (35%) or a suburb (29%).

Some chiropractors (15.1%) were employed by a multi-disciplinary health care facility. The majority (64%) of chiropractors in the United States are sole proprietors, while 13% worked in partnerships and 17% were employed by other healthcare professionals or organizations. Twenty-eight percent (28.1%) of the respondents (an increase of 4.5 times over 5 years) indicated that they now are providing chiropractic care to the military. The vast majority of chiropractic practitioners (83.9%) focus on general practice. Thirty-nine percent (39.4%) provide care to athletes, 38.8% deliver pediatric care, 39.5% focus on orthopedics and injuries, and 37.9% focus on rehabilitation.

A large majority of chiropractic practices (65%) focus on wellness and maintenance of health, and 33.3% reported a specialty focus on the provision of nutritional recommendations.

Chiropractors spend 64.3% of their time on patient care and treatment, 19% on documentation of care, 11.3% on tasks related to business management, and 6.3% on professional education and research.

On average, 36.3% of chiropractic cases are reimbursed by private pay or cash. Twenty-five percent (25.4%) of cases are paid through health insurance (non-managed care), while only 9.3% of the cases are paid by managed care. On average, Medicare and Medicaid reimburse 14.3% of the cases. Two percent of the cases are handled pro bono. In 2019, 47% of chiropractic practitioners obtained radiographic images in their offices, a slight decrease from 50.1% as reported in 2014.

According to the 2019 survey, a typical chiropractic patient is female (57%) and between the ages of 30 and 64 years (45.9%). Regarding Patient Assessment, survey respondents indicated that they perform cervical, thoracic, lumbopelvic, and/or extremity palpation examinations several times a day ( $M = 5.8$ ,  $SD = .6$ ). This function was associated with

one of the highest importance index values ( $Importance = 20.6$ ).

Regarding Case Management, the two professional functions with the highest frequencies are *developing a differential diagnosis or clinical impression* ( $M = 5.3$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ,  $Importance = 24$ ) and *assessing the existence of risk factors and contradictions to chiropractic care* ( $M = 5.2$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ,  $Importance = 23.4$ ). Chiropractors perform these functions several times a day.

Regarding Communication Tasks, on a daily basis, chiropractic practitioners produce documentation ( $M = 5.9$ ,  $SD = .07$ ,  $Importance = 21.5$ ), suggest self-care strategies ( $M = 5.3$ ,  $SD = 1$ ,  $Importance = 16.6$ ), make specific recommendations to patients regarding physical fitness ( $M = 5.3$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ,  $Importance = 17.5$ ), and make recommendations about ergonomics and posture ( $M = 5.2$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ,  $Importance = 16.8$ ). Regarding Treatment Tasks, according to the 2019 survey, *a manual chiropractic adjustment of the occiput, spine, and/or pelvis* was the treatment task performed with the highest frequency ( $M = 5.8$ ,  $SD = .7$ ,  $Importance = 22.2$ ).

The overwhelming majority of chiropractic practitioners (96.4%) spend some of their time reading published, peer-reviewed chiropractic, and/or medical research. The vast majority of practicing chiropractors (90.3%) use current chiropractic and/or medical research when making patient treatment decisions. Half of responding practitioners (51.1%) use evidence-based research in their practice at least once a week.