

Background

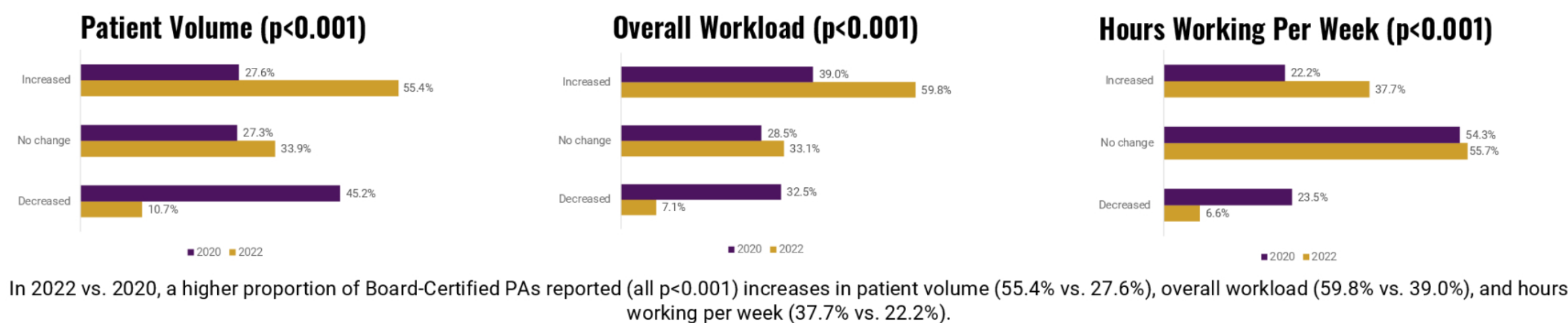
- Reports from early in the pandemic demonstrate that many Board Certified PAs experienced significant psychological stress.
- However, more research is needed to quantify how PAs cope and adapt a few years into the pandemic.
- We analyzed changes in workload, staffing, morale, and resilience among PAs in 2022 and compared them to 2020.

Method

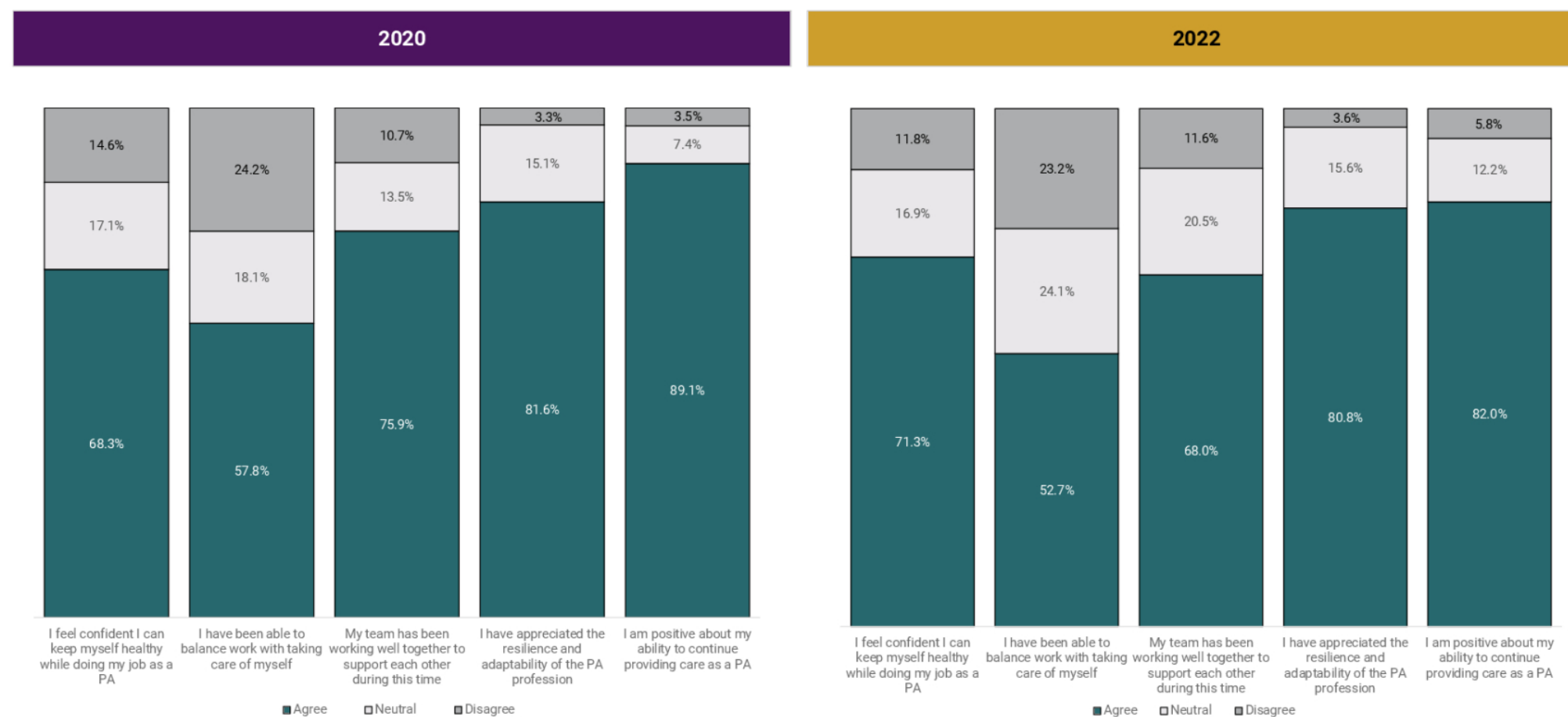
- A repeated cross-sectional design was employed using data from the 2020 (n=17,780; 12.8% response rate) and 2022 (n=1,376; 45.6% response rate) NCCPA national surveys.
- PAs' demographics and practice characteristics in both samples were similar to that of the entire Board Certified PA population.
- Both questionnaires relied on the same items to assess changes in workload, staffing, morale and resilience.
- We conducted descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to detect significant differences by survey year and subgroup analyses for PAs practicing in the most prevalent specialties and practice settings.

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Results

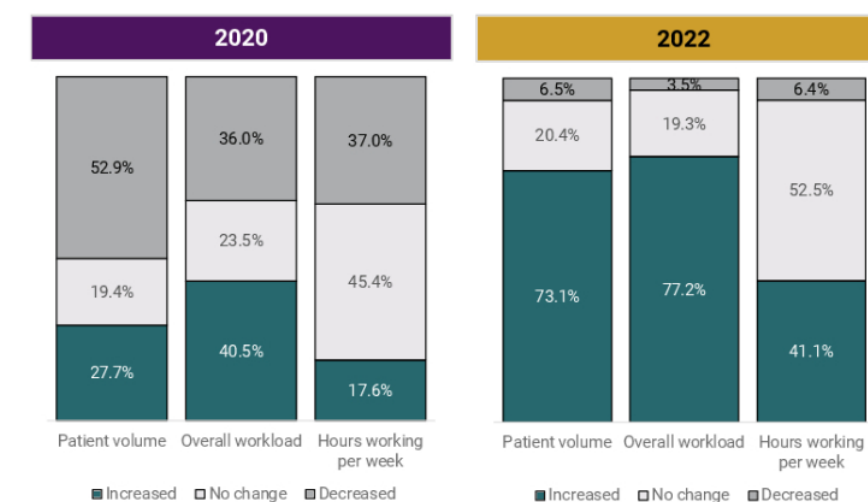


Resilience and Morale



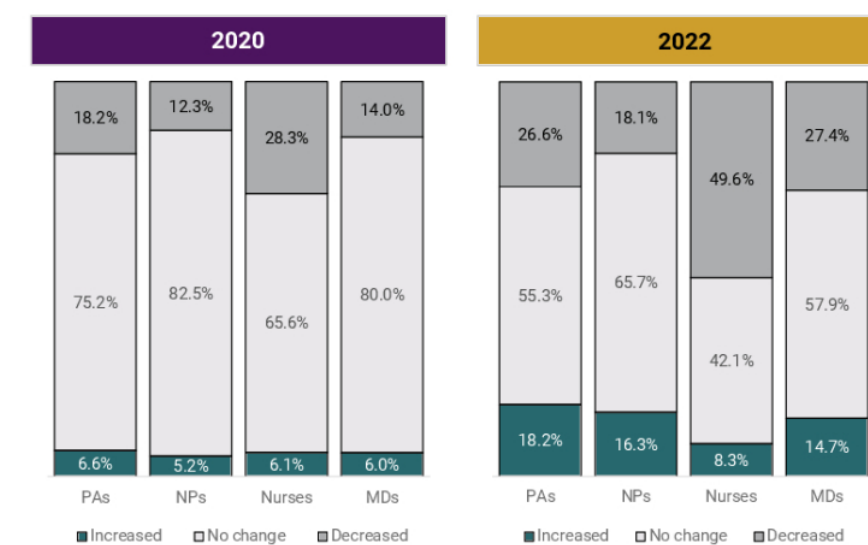
Despite a slight decline in 2022 from 2020, most PAs were optimistic about their ability to continue providing patient care (82.0% vs. 89.1%; p<0.001). A troubling pattern in responses was that slightly fewer PAs in 2022 than 2020 agreed that their team has been working well together (68.0% vs. 75.9%; p<0.001) and have been able to balance work with taking care of themselves (52.7% vs. 57.8%; p<0.001). However, a higher proportion in 2022 vs. 2020 reported feeling confident that they can keep themselves healthy while working as a PA (71.3% vs. 68.3%; p=0.015), and similar proportions in both years appreciate the resilience/adaptability of the PA profession (80.8% vs. 81.6%; p=0.751).

PAs Practicing in Hospital-Based Specialties



In subgroup analyses, significantly higher proportions (all p<0.001) of PAs practicing in hospital-based specialties in 2022 vs. 2020 noted increases in patient volume (73.1% vs. 27.7%), overall workload (77.2% vs. 40.5%), and hours working per week (41.1% vs. 17.6%).

Number of Staff at Principal Clinical Position



A higher proportion in 2022 compared to 2020 indicated that the number of PAs (18.2% vs. 6.6%; p<0.001) and NPs on staff increased (16.3% vs. 5.2%; p<0.001). However, a concerning finding was that a larger percentage in 2022 compared to 2020 reported that the number of nurses on staff decreased (49.6% vs. 28.3%; p<0.001).

Key Findings & Conclusion

- Our findings suggest that the most significant changes from 2020 to 2022 included increased workload, patient volume, and hours working per week – particularly among PAs in hospital-based specialties.
- Results are more nuanced regarding morale and resilience, with slight decreases in proportions being optimistic about continuing to provide care, increases in feeling confident in keeping themselves healthy, and no changes in appreciating the resilience and adaptability of the PA profession.
- Assessment and monitoring of how the ongoing pandemic impacts PAs is essential to ensuring support to optimize their resilience, utility, and sustainability to provide high-quality patient care.

References

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