

Mapping the proportion of district health entities with a family physician in South Africa

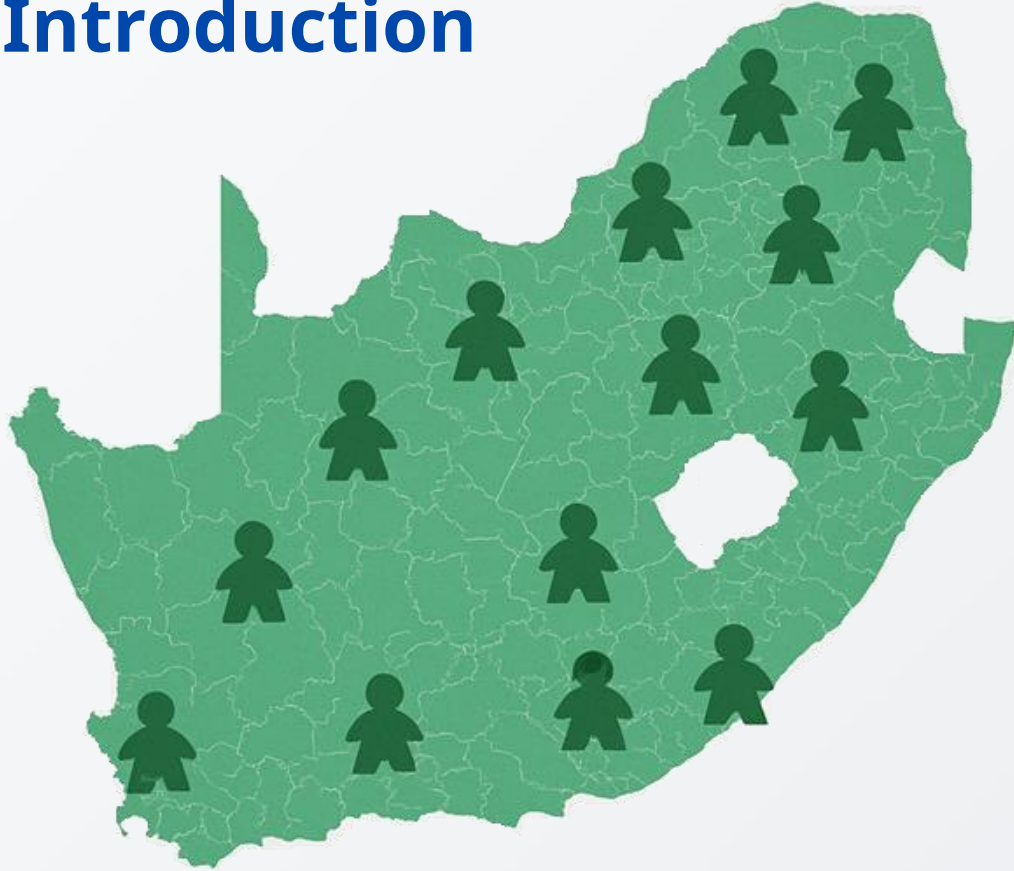
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Introduction

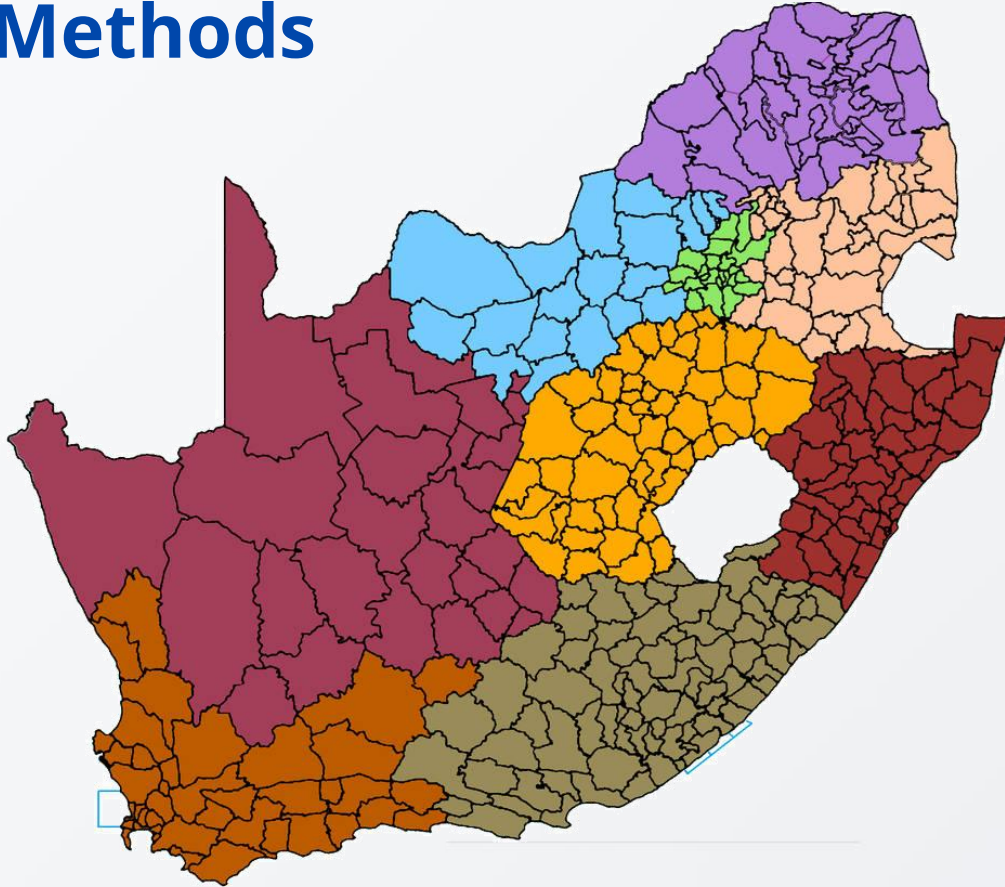


2021: SAAFP recommends ≥ 1 FP per DH/CHC/sub-district by 2030

Knowledge gap: unclear current supply of FPs in DHS

Study aim: Map proportion, distribution & characteristics of FP posts in DHS

Methods



Study Design

Descriptive observational study with a **cross-sectional survey** of the District Health System

Study Setting

All **242 subdistricts** within 52 districts across South Africa's nine provinces

Including all	Excluding
DCSTs	Private healthcare sector
DHs	District office/DoH positions
CHCs and CDCs	Specialised hospitals (psychiatric and TB hospitals)
Subdistricts	Higher levels of care (regional, provincial and tertiary facilities)
	University academic posts

Methods

Respondents

Family medicine academics from South Africa's ten universities

Data Collection Tool

Custom-developed, structured Microsoft **Excel spreadsheet**.

The tool was **piloted** before implementation.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and mixed-effects regression analysis.



Results: Key Findings

- 1 South Africa achieved only **18.9%** of the SAAFP goals, with enormous variability between provinces.
- 2 A total of **214 family physicians** were recorded as employed within District Health System entities.
- 3 Family physicians were more likely to be employed in **district hospitals** and **metropolitan districts**.
- 4 Approximately **1 in 10** family physicians held medical officer posts, and almost all were employed fulltime with **41%** jointly appointed with universities.

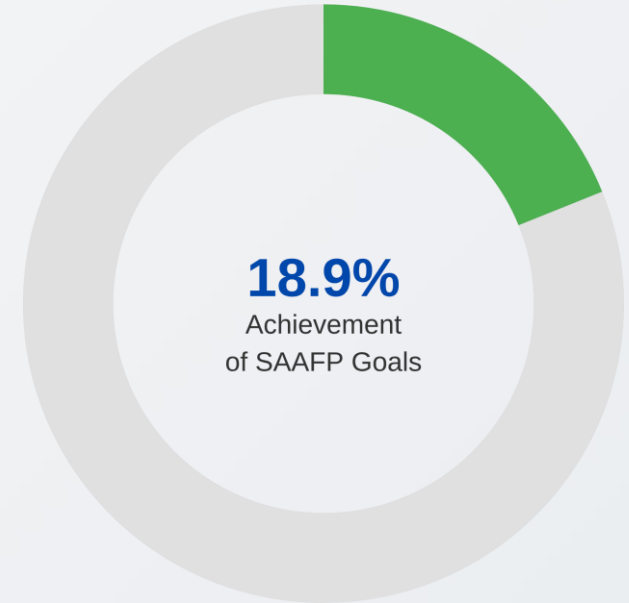


Table 2: The provincial distribution of family physicians within district health system entities in South Africa.

Province	Total n/N (%)	Subdistricts without CHC/CDC n/N (%)	CHC/CDC n/N (%)	District hospitals n/N (%)
Total	132/700 (18.9)	17/95 (17.9)	56/351 (16.0)	59/254 (23.2)
Gauteng	33/60 (55.0)	2/5 (40.0)	23/43 (53.5)	8/12 (66.7)
Western Cape	40/116 (34.5)	3/12 (25.0)	20/71 (28.2)	17/33 (51.5)
Limpopo	15/64 (23.4)	3/8 (37.5)	2/26 (7.7)	10/30 (33.3)
North West	13/62 (21.0)	0/1 (0)	9/48 (18.8)	4/13 (30.8)
KwaZulu-Natal	18/93 (19.4)	7/29 (24.1)	1/23 (4.3)	10/41 (24.4)
Free State	3/50 (6.0)	1/15 (6.7)	0/10 (0)	2/25 (8.0)
Eastern Cape	6/121 (5.0)	0/16 (0)	1/40 (2.5)	5/65 (7.7)
Mpumalanga	4/84 (4.8)	1/3 (33.3)	0/58 (0)	3/23 (13.0)
Northern Cape	0/50 (0)	0/6 (0)	0/32 (0)	0/12 (0)

CHC = Community Health Centre, CDC = Community Day Centre

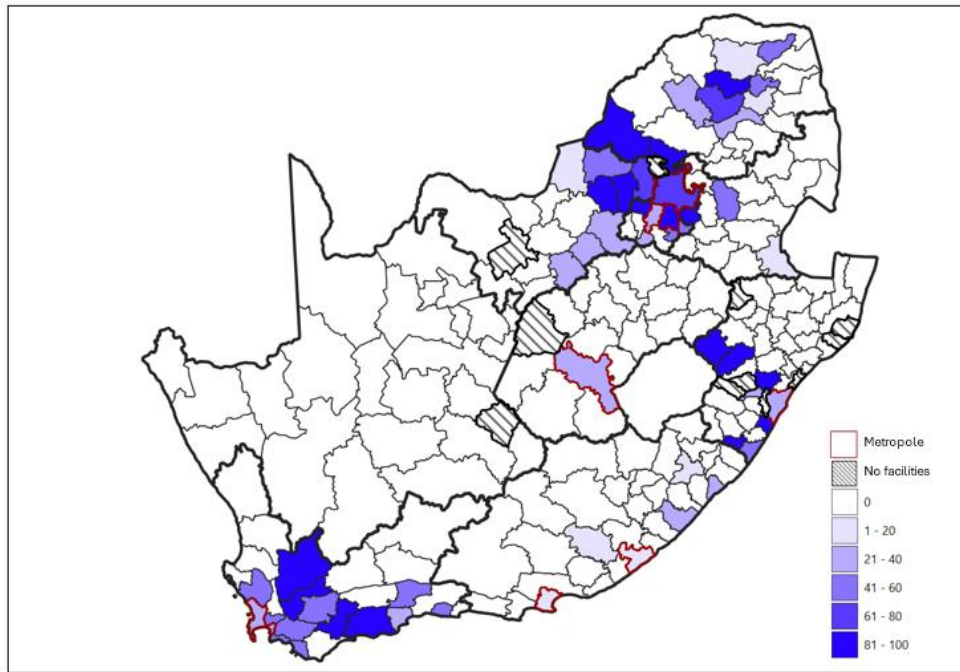


Figure 2: The percentage of district health target facilities with a family physician by subdistrict in South Africa.

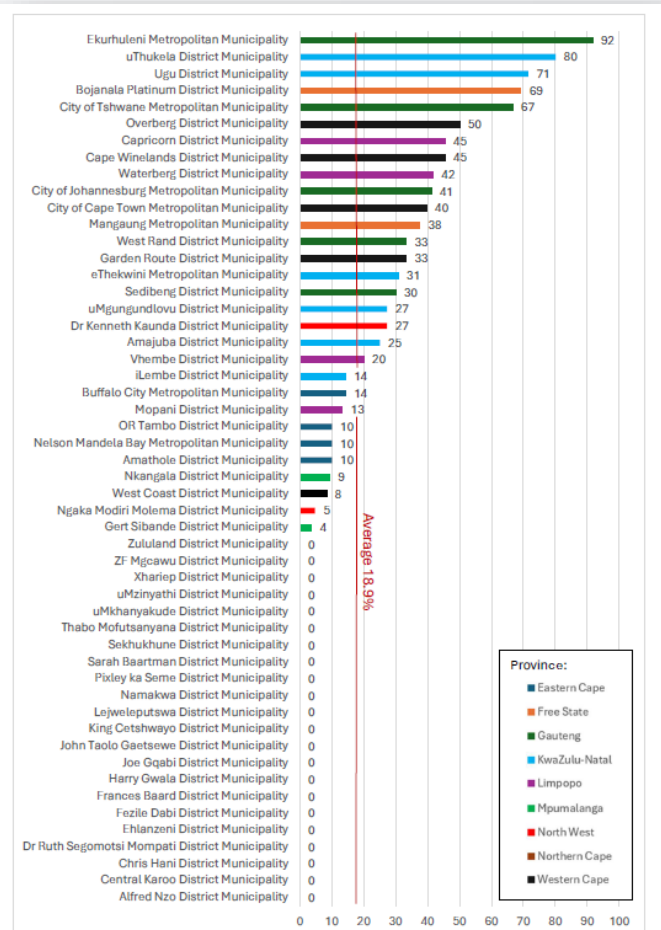


Figure 1: The percentage of district health entities with a family physician by district and province in South Africa.

Table 3: Total number of family physicians per district health system entity across South African provinces.

Province	Total	District clinical specialist teams	Subdistricts	Target facility
Total	214	23	28	163
Western Cape	71	-	7	64
Gauteng	47	4	5	38
KwaZulu-Natal	24	4	5	15
North West	20	3	3	14
Limpopo	18	-	5	13
Eastern Cape	15	5	2	8
Free State	9	5	1	3
Mpumalanga	8	-	0	8
Northern Cape	2	2	0	0

Table 4: Employment characteristics of family physicians employed in the district health system entities in South Africa, stratified by the location of the employment post.

Characteristic	Total FPs N = 214 n (%)	FPs in DCSTs N = 23 n (%)	FPs in Target Facilities N = 163 n (%)	FPs in Subdistricts N = 28 n (%)
Employment Post				
Family Physician	168 (78.5)	21 (91.3)	124 (76.1)	23 (82.2)
Medical Officer	25 (11.7)	0 (0.0)	23 (14.1)	2 (7.1)
Manager	16 (7.5)	0 (0.0)	14 (8.6)	2 (7.1)
Uncertain	5 (2.3)	2 (8.7)	2 (1.2)	1 (3.6)
Nature of Post				
Fulltime	206 (96.3)	23 (100)	157 (96.3)	26 (92.9)
Sessional	8 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	6 (3.7)	2 (7.1)
Uncertain	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Type of Post				
Joint Appointed	87 (40.7)	9 (39.1)	67 (41.1)	11 (39.3)
Non-joint Appointed	124 (57.9)	13 (56.5)	94 (57.7)	17 (60.7)
Uncertain	3 (1.4)	1 (4.3)	2 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
FPs = Family Physicians, DCSTs = District Clinical Specialist Teams				

Conclusion



Our study confirms that the current supply and distribution of FPs within South Africa's DHS remains **well below** the 2021 SAAFP position paper recommendations. With **568 DHS entities lacking** a FP during the study period.

Recommendations

 National and Provincial Health Departments

 Universities with FM Programmes

 FM-specific Professional Bodies

 Public Health and PHC Advocacy Groups

 Researchers

References & Acknowledgements

References

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Full reference list available on request

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Thank You

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