

# Tracking the Integration of Nurse Practitioners into Ontario's Primary Health Care System

## Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research, Laurentian University

### Background

Primary health care (PHC) reform in the mid-1990's led to revival of the nurse practitioner (NP) role. For more than a decade the Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research (CRaNHR) has been conducting tracking studies of NPs in Ontario. Collectively these studies provide a history of NP practice in Ontario illustrating the career paths, practice locations, and client and practice profiles.

In 2006 CRaNHR was commissioned by the Nursing Secretariat of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) to conduct annual surveys of NPs in 2006-2010. The goal of the surveys was to maintain current employment and practice information, and to obtain information to assist in policy development.

Introduced in PHC as a means of improving access to health services the NP role has evolved and the number of NPs who identify their main practice in primary care has increased.

### Method

NPs registered with the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) in the Extended Class [EC] and practicing as PHC NPs were surveyed between February and May 2010.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Nursing Secretariat and NP stakeholders and pilot tested with several PHC NPs. Ethical approval for the survey was obtained from Laurentian University's Research Ethics Board.

Of the 991 RN[ECs] who were mailed a survey package, 516 returned a completed questionnaire for a response rate of 52.1%. Of these, 379 were practicing as PHC NPs. This sample of respondents represents 62% of all NPs who were employed in nursing in Ontario and identifying primary care as the main area of practice\*.

\* CNO Membership Statistics Report, 2009

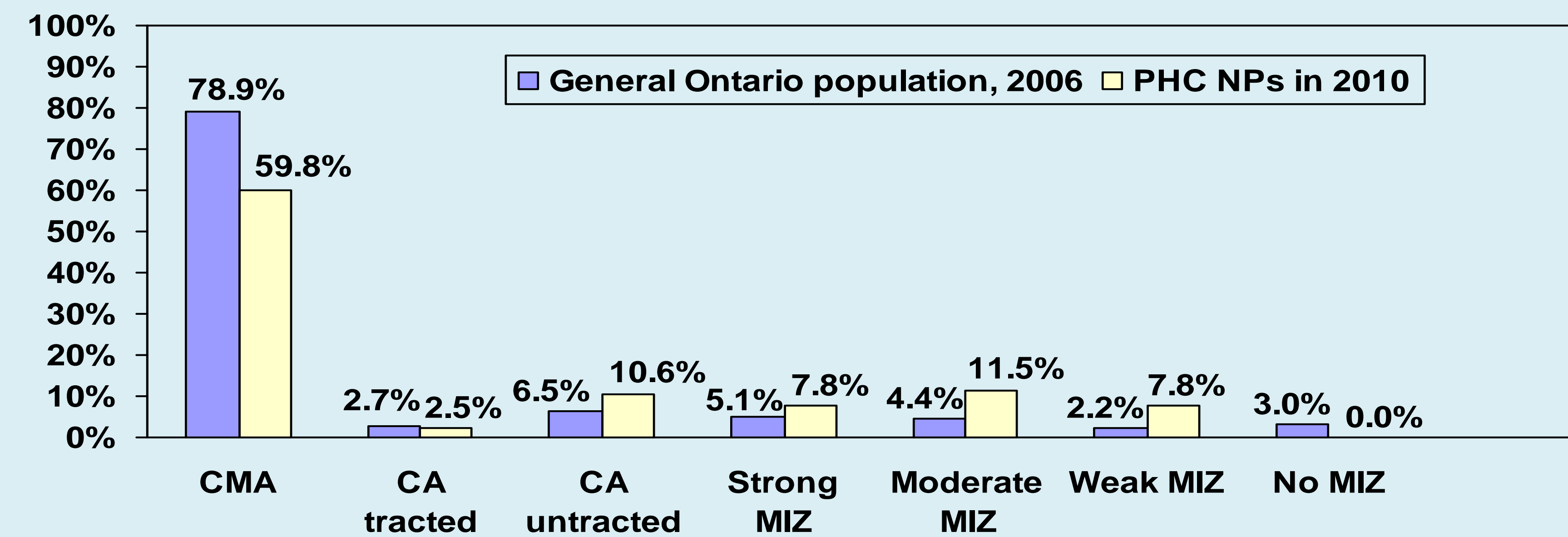
### Socio-demographic, educational and professional characteristics of NPs in PHC

- Average age of respondents was 47 years and 96% were female\*.
- 79% reported a COUPN\*\* certificate or equivalent as the highest level of nursing education obtained.
- 26% had a Master's degree in nursing.
- 7% had completed the COUPN transition program or CNO Prior Learning Assessment.
- 98% of NPs working in PHC had the CNO's NP-PHC certificate and 2% had the NP- Adult certificate.

\* The average age reported by NPs in the province was 45.5 years and 95% were female (CNO Membership Statistics Report, 2009)

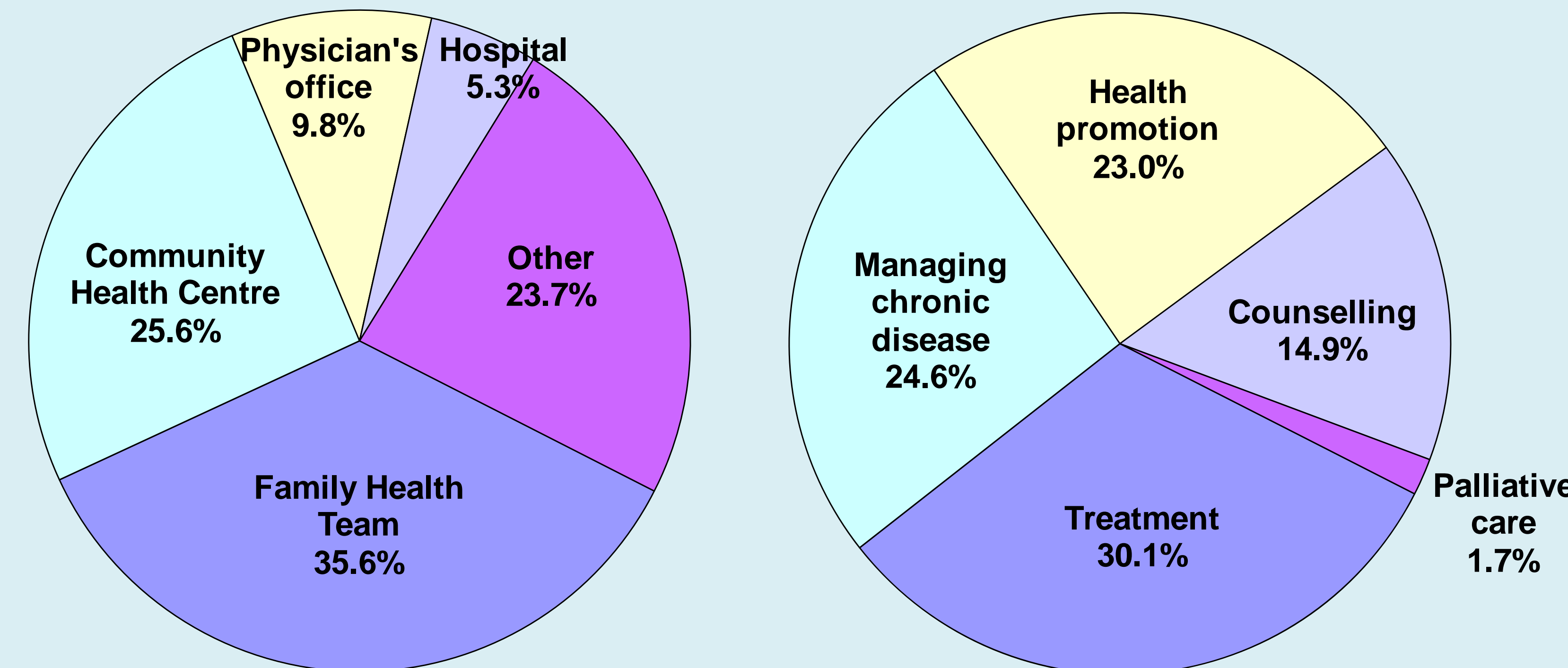
\*\* COUPN = Council of Ontario University Programs in Nursing

### Geographical distribution (n=358)



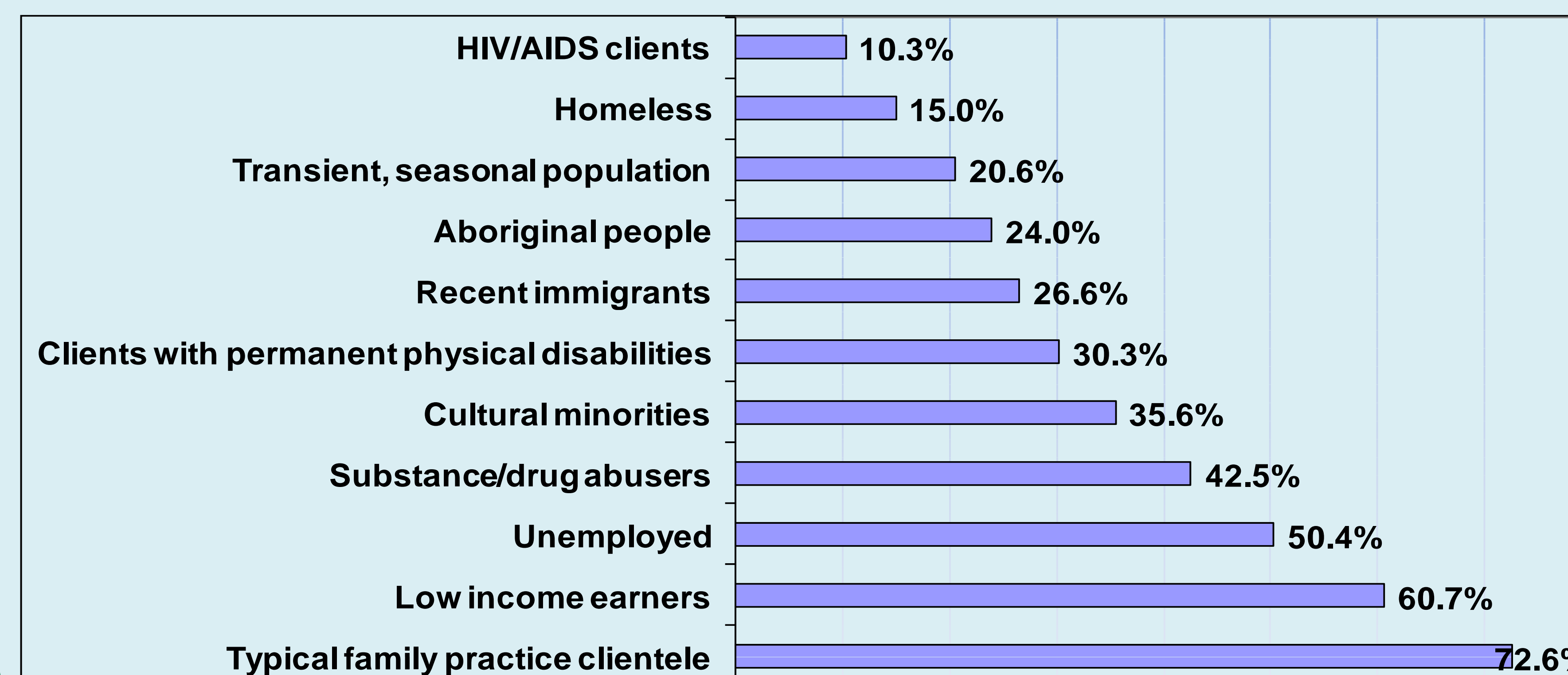
Almost 40% of PHC NP practices were located outside large urban areas (CMAs) compared to about 20% of the general population of Ontario. Overall, PHC NPs were more likely to work in smaller urban communities (CA untracted) and rural areas of the province (moderate and weak) compared to the general population.

### NPs' practice settings and profile (n=378)

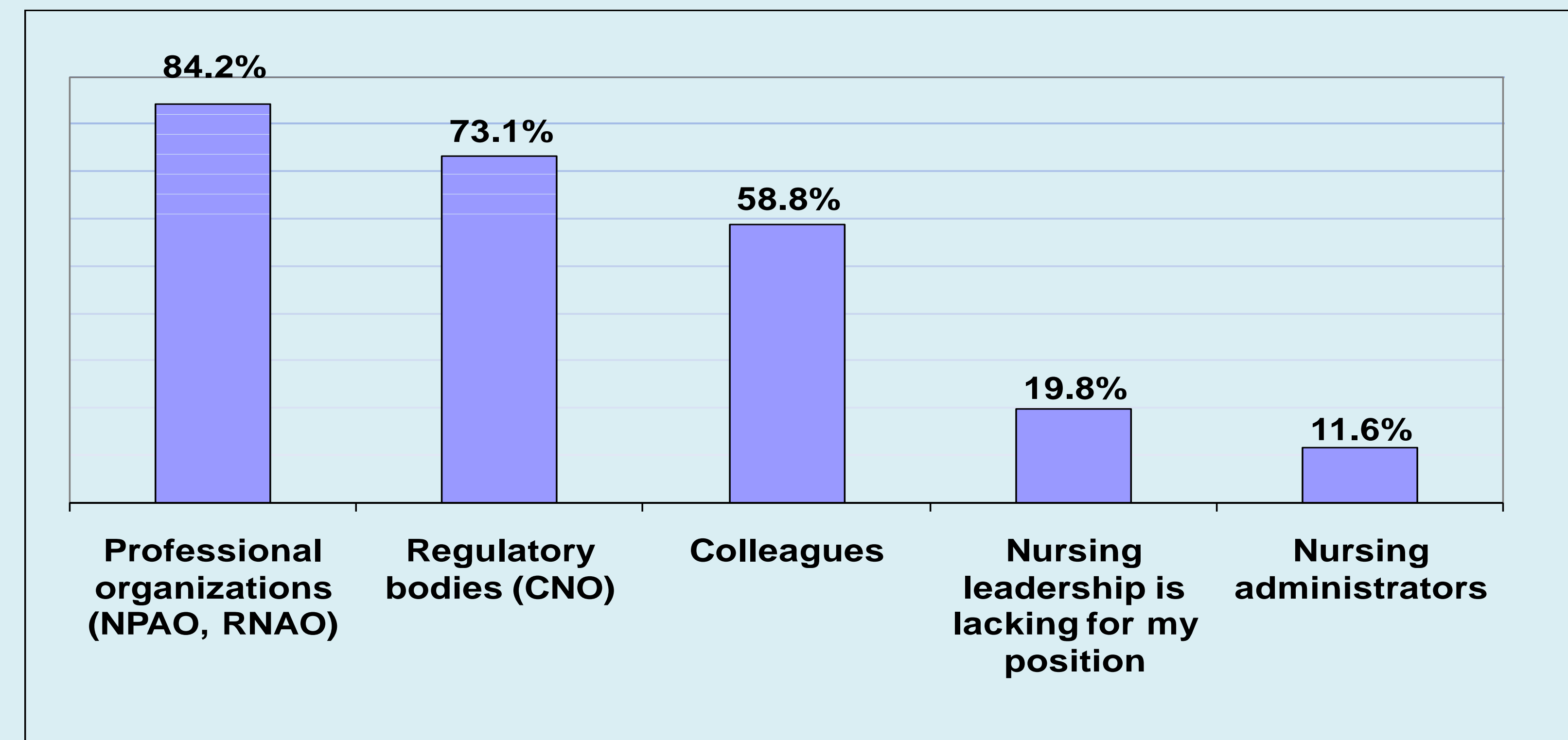


### NPs' client profile (n=378)

- On average, an NP was the primary health care provider for 500 clients, the number ranged from 0 to 18,000.

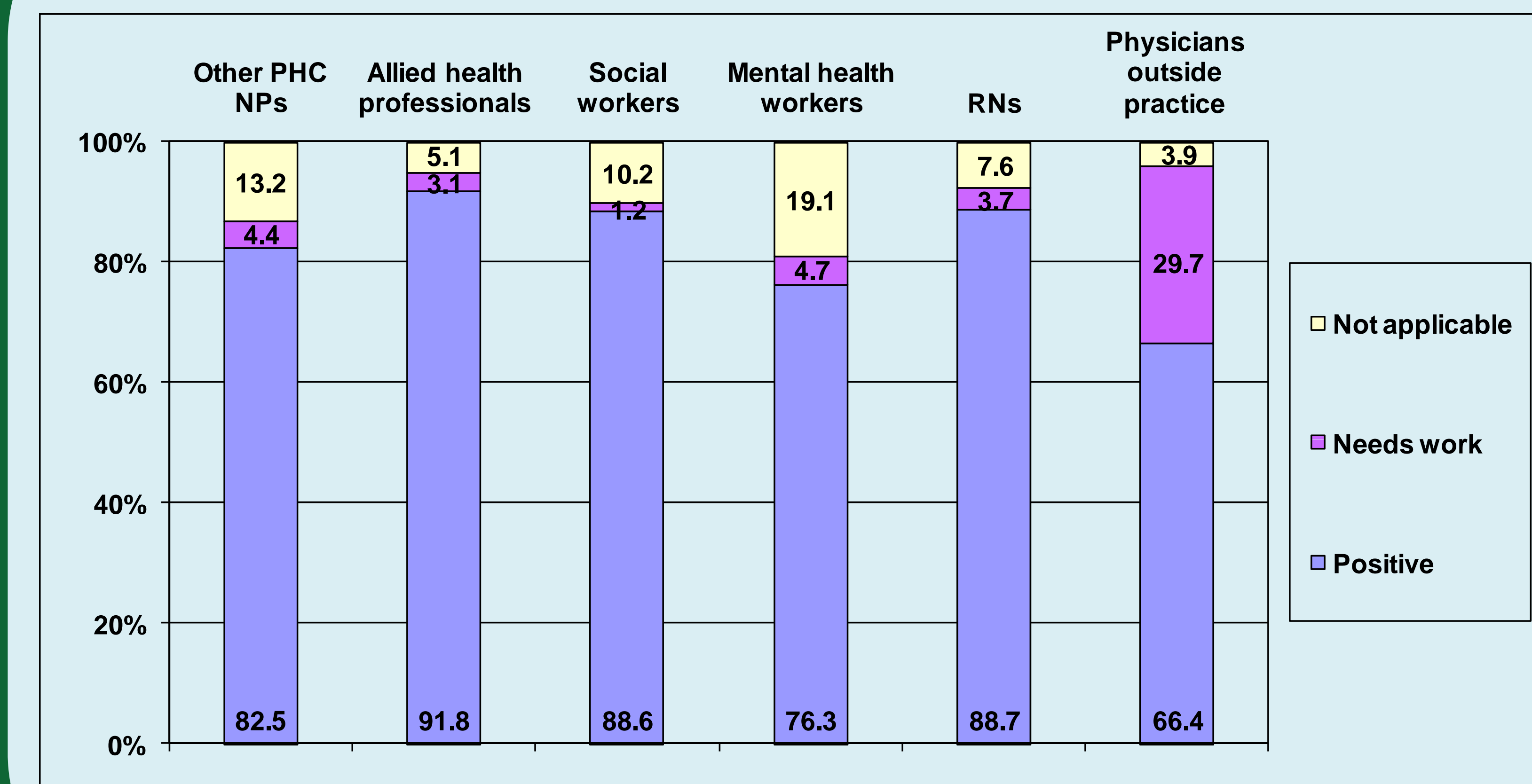


### Nursing leadership



Who provides nursing leadership to you in your current NP position?

### Interprofessional collaboration (n=358)



**Researchers:** Irene Koren, Oxana Mian, Ellen Rukholm, Raymond Pong

**Acknowledgements:** The Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner Tracking Study was funded by the Nursing Secretariat of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. We thank the College of Nurses of Ontario for their assistance in identifying the study population.