

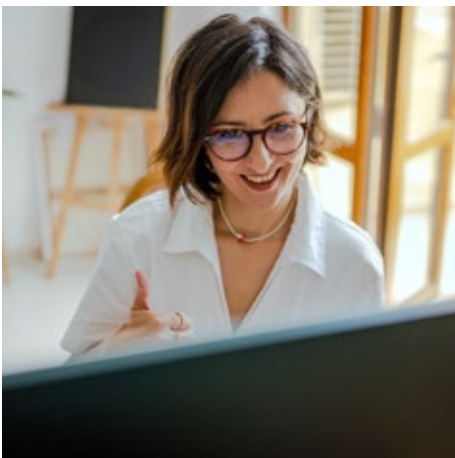


AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Barriers to Care in a Changing Practice Environment: 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey

Psychologists face challenges with capacity, insurance,
and the future of mental health care

DECEMBER 2024



Introduction

Psychologists continue to face capacity issues such as longer waitlists, patients with increasingly severe symptoms, increases in treatment course length, and a sense that they are unable to meet the demand for treatment, according to the 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey by the American Psychological Association and its companion organization, APA Services.

About half (53%) of psychologists this year did not have openings for new patients. And despite improvements in stress levels, work-life balance, and self-care practices, a third of psychologists still reported feeling burned out – a trend that seems to be disproportionately affecting early career psychologists. Early career psychologists reported higher levels of stress and burnout than psychologists later in their careers, which may have implications for the future of the mental health workforce.

Intensifying these capacity issues were psychologists' low participation rates in insurance plans – especially public insurance plans like Medicare and Medicaid. While about two-thirds of psychologists (66%) currently accepted some form of insurance, about one-third (34%) did not accept insurance. Those who did accept insurance were most likely to accept private or commercial insurance. Psychologists in private practices had lower participation rates in Medicaid than psychologists in most other work settings, such as hospitals and academic medical centers.

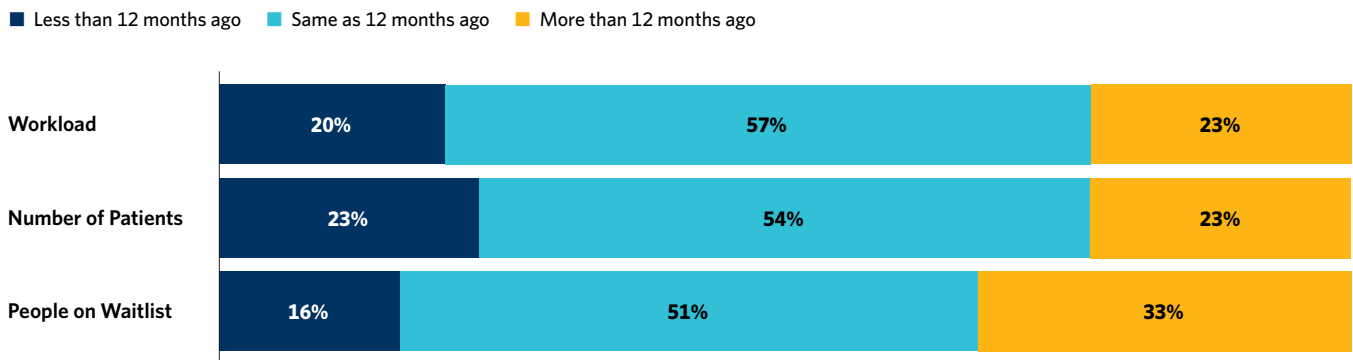
Meanwhile, the practice of psychology is changing. Telehealth has been broadly adopted by psychologists, opening new avenues for treatment. And while most psychologists had never used artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their practices (71%), approximately 1 in 10 psychologists (11%) used AI at least monthly for tasks such as note-taking or reducing administrative burdens. More than a quarter of psychologists (27%) were worried that AI may make some or all of their job duties obsolete in the future.

Workload and Capacity

AS SOME PSYCHOLOGISTS INCREASE THEIR WORKLOADS, HIGH DEMAND AND INSURANCE ISSUES ARE STILL BARRIERS TO CARE

Compared with previous years, more psychologists reported treating fewer patients and working fewer hours now than they did 12 months ago. This trend may be driven by psychologists in later career stages who, on average, reported reducing their patient caseloads and work hours. All other career stages overwhelmingly worked at the same level or higher than they did 12 months ago.

FIGURE 1.
PSYCHOLOGISTS SEEING CHANGES IN THEIR WORKLOADS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, 2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

More than half of psychologists (53%) did not have openings for new patients, suggesting prospective patients may have difficulty finding a psychologist with an opening. About 3 in 5 psychologists (61%) did not have a waitlist. Among psychologists with a waitlist, more than half (56%) reported new patients wait less than one month to get an appointment, while 17% reported waitlists of four months or longer.

EARLY CAREER PSYCHOLOGISTS STRUGGLE WITH STRESS AND BURNOUT, DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS IN SELF-CARE

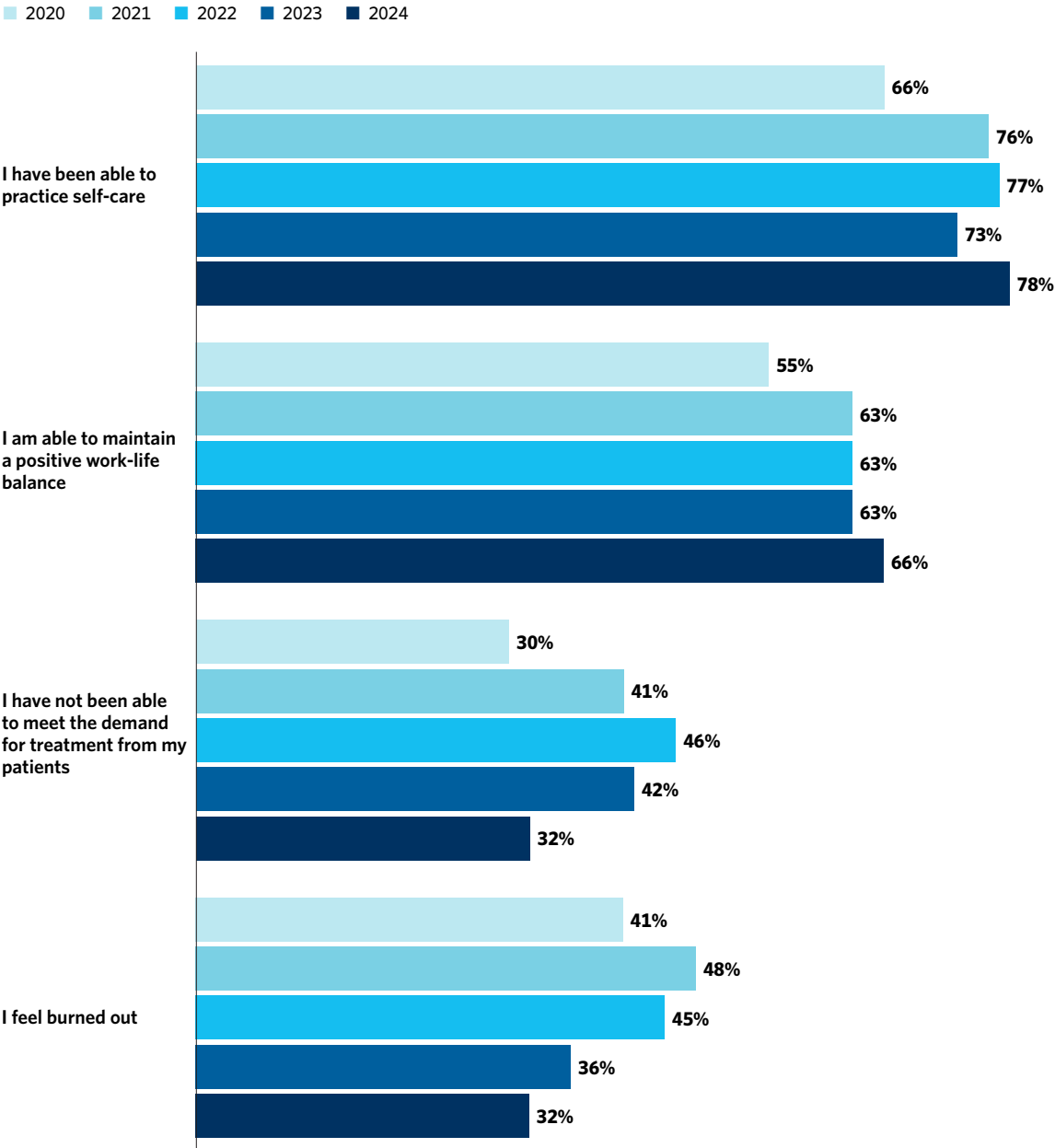
While levels of self-reported burnout were the lowest in five years, burnout was still high in 2024: Roughly one in three psychologists (32%) reported they feel burned out. However, these results varied by career stage,¹ as half of early career psychologists working within 10 years of receiving their doctorate (51%) agreed to feeling burned out, compared with fewer than one-fifth of psychologists (18%) in advanced career stages.

The same patterns were seen in self-reported stress. In reporting their stress level on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning “little to no stress” and 10 meaning “a great deal of stress,” psychologists reported lower average stress than in most previous years of the survey (5.59 in 2024 vs. 5.88 in 2023, 4.94 in 2022 and 5.99 in 2021). However, early career psychologists reported an average stress level of 6.3, while psychologists in advanced career stages reported an average level of 4.9.

1 Career stages in the 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey: 0-10 years since doctorate (early career): 12%; 11-20 years since doctorate (mid-career): 24%; 21-30 years since doctorate (senior career): 28%; 31+ years since doctorate (late senior career): 36%. For more information about sample characteristics, see the document on the APA 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey Methodology.

2024 did show improvements in self-care, as nearly 8 in 10 psychologists (78%) agreed or strongly agreed they had been able to practice self-care. This coincided with an increase in psychologists who have improved their work-life balance in recent years; two-thirds of psychologists (66%) agreed or strongly agreed they maintained a positive work-life balance.

FIGURE 2.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' SELF-CARE AND BURNOUT, 2020-2024

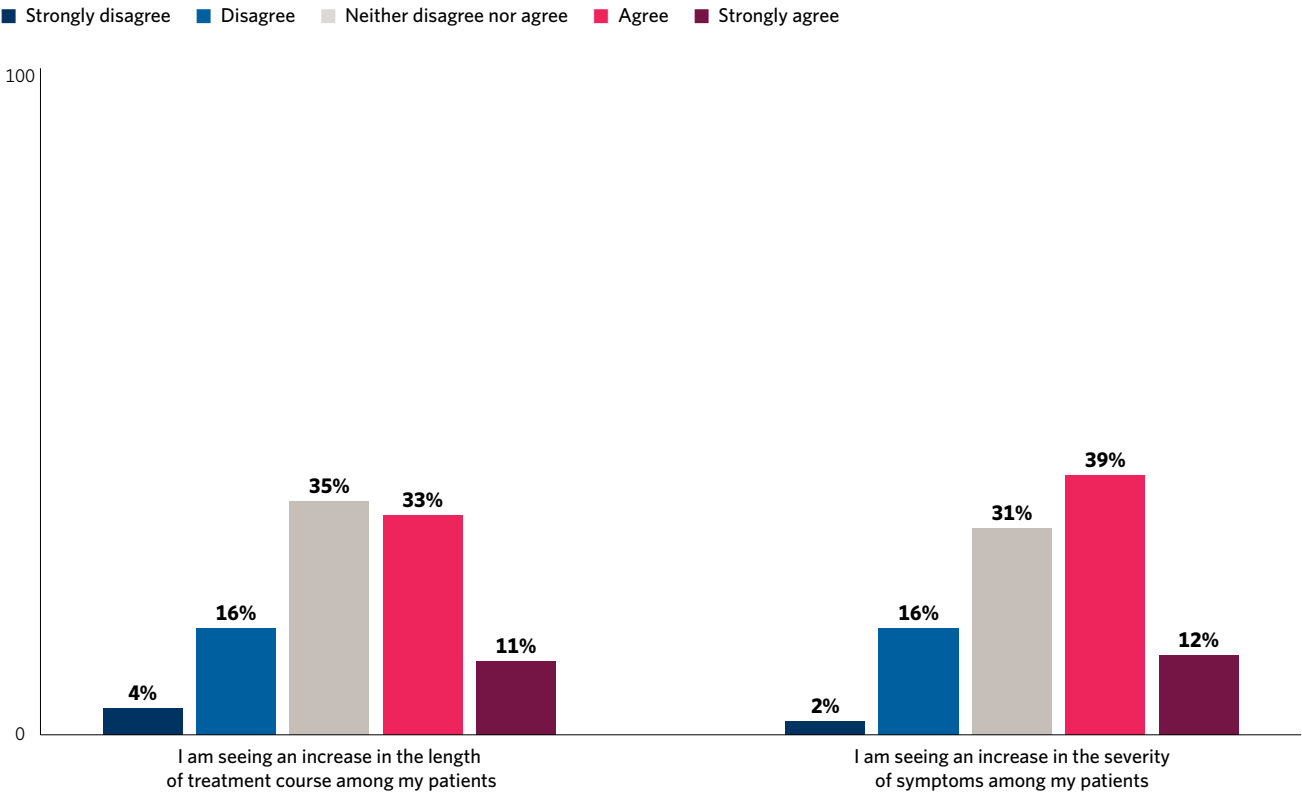


Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey; American Psychological Association, 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey; American Psychological Association, 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey; American Psychological Association, 2021 COVID-19 Practitioner Survey; American Psychological Association, 2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey.

EARLY CAREER PSYCHOLOGISTS FEEL LESS ABLE TO MEET GROWING DEMANDS FOR CARE

The stress felt by early career psychologists may be due to the ongoing mental health crisis. Half of psychologists (51%) reported an increase in symptom severity among patients and 44% reported increases in treatment course length. Yet, the numbers were significantly higher for early career psychologists; almost two-thirds of early career psychologists (64%) reported an increase in symptom severity among patients and close to 3 in 5 (58%) reported increases in treatment length. Psychologists of all career stages reported being contacted by an average of 8.8 people seeking services per month.

FIGURE 3.
PSYCHOLOGISTS REPORTING CHANGES IN PATIENT TREATMENT, 2024



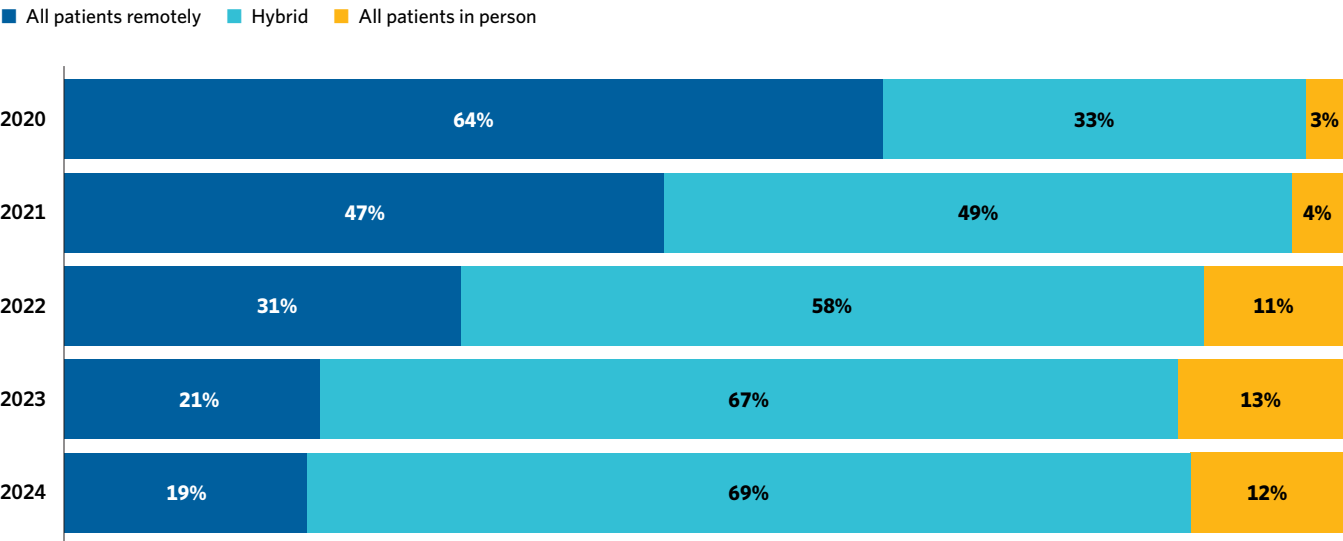
Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

And while 32% of psychologists reported being unable to meet patients' demands for treatment, this proportion was higher (39%) for early career psychologists.¹ About one-fifth (21%) of early career psychologists reported plans to increase their practice hours in the next 12 months compared with 1 in 10 psychologists (9%) working 31 or more years after receiving their doctorate.

MOST PSYCHOLOGISTS STILL RELY ON TELEHEALTH

Psychologists’ use of telehealth remained stable for the last two years, with 1 in 5 (19%) practicing fully remotely, 7 in 10 (69%) practicing partially in-person and partially remotely, and 1 in 10 (12%) practicing fully in-person. The most common form of telehealth was video conferencing technology, with 94% of telepsychologists using this method. Secure messaging saw the biggest increase in utilization among telepsychologists (19% in 2023 vs. 31% in 2024).

FIGURE 4.
PSYCHOLOGISTS OFFERING REMOTE OR IN-PERSON TREATMENT, 2020-2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey; American Psychological Association, 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey; American Psychological Association, 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey; American Psychological Association, 2021 COVID-19 Practitioner Survey; American Psychological Association, 2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey.

Telepsychologists’ use of audio-only telephone for telehealth dropped for the fourth consistent year. Psychologists using audio-only technology said their reasons included patient preference for audio-only over video conferencing, patient issues with connectivity or broadband access, and as a backup option for video telehealth. Nearly two-thirds of psychologists offering audio-only telehealth (64%) provided it to patients 65 years old or older.

One-fifth of psychologists (22%) held an approved certification from PSYPACT, a multistate compact that authorizes credentialed psychologists to care for patients in participating states. These credentials, as well as how readily psychologists have taken up telehealth in their practices, could increase access to care for patients in areas facing provider shortages. Since nearly 9 in 10 psychologists planned to maintain (81%) or increase (7%) their use of telehealth over the next 12 months, this remote access could remain similar in 2025.

Insurance Participation

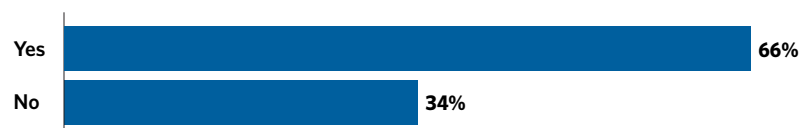
One-third of psychologists (34%) were not currently in-network with any form of insurance while two-thirds (66%) were currently in-network. Of those who were not currently in-network with any public or private insurance panels, 52% had not been in-network with insurance panels in the past and 48% had been. Close to 1 in 5 psychologists (18%) had never in their careers participated in insurance panels.

The survey specified insurance participation across six types of insurance: private or commercial insurance, traditional fee-for-service Medicare, Medicare Advantage, traditional fee-for-service Medicaid, managed Medicaid, and “something else,” which allowed respondents to fill in other forms of insurance.

FIGURE 5.

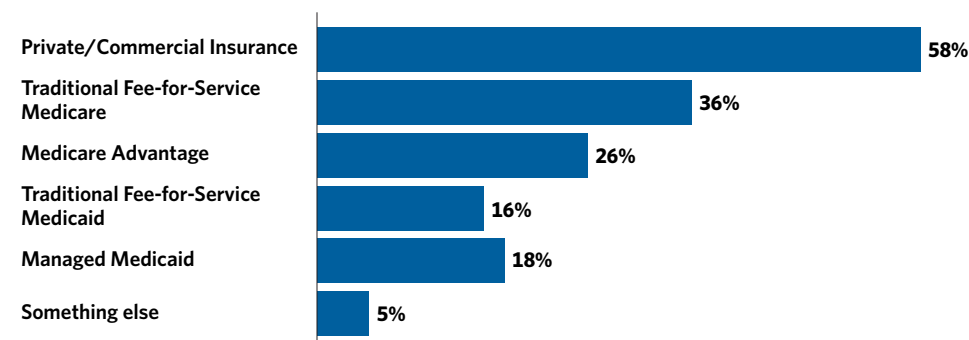
PSYCHOLOGISTS’ INSURANCE PARTICIPATION RATES, OVERALL AND BY TYPE OF PLAN, 2024

Are you currently in-network with any private or public insurance panels?



Which of the following plans do you participate in?

% of all psychologists



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey

PARTICIPATION IN INSURANCE TENDS NOT TO VARY BY SPECIALTY, WORK SETTING, OR SERVICES PROVIDED – BUT PARTICIPATION IN MEDICAID AND MEDICARE DOES

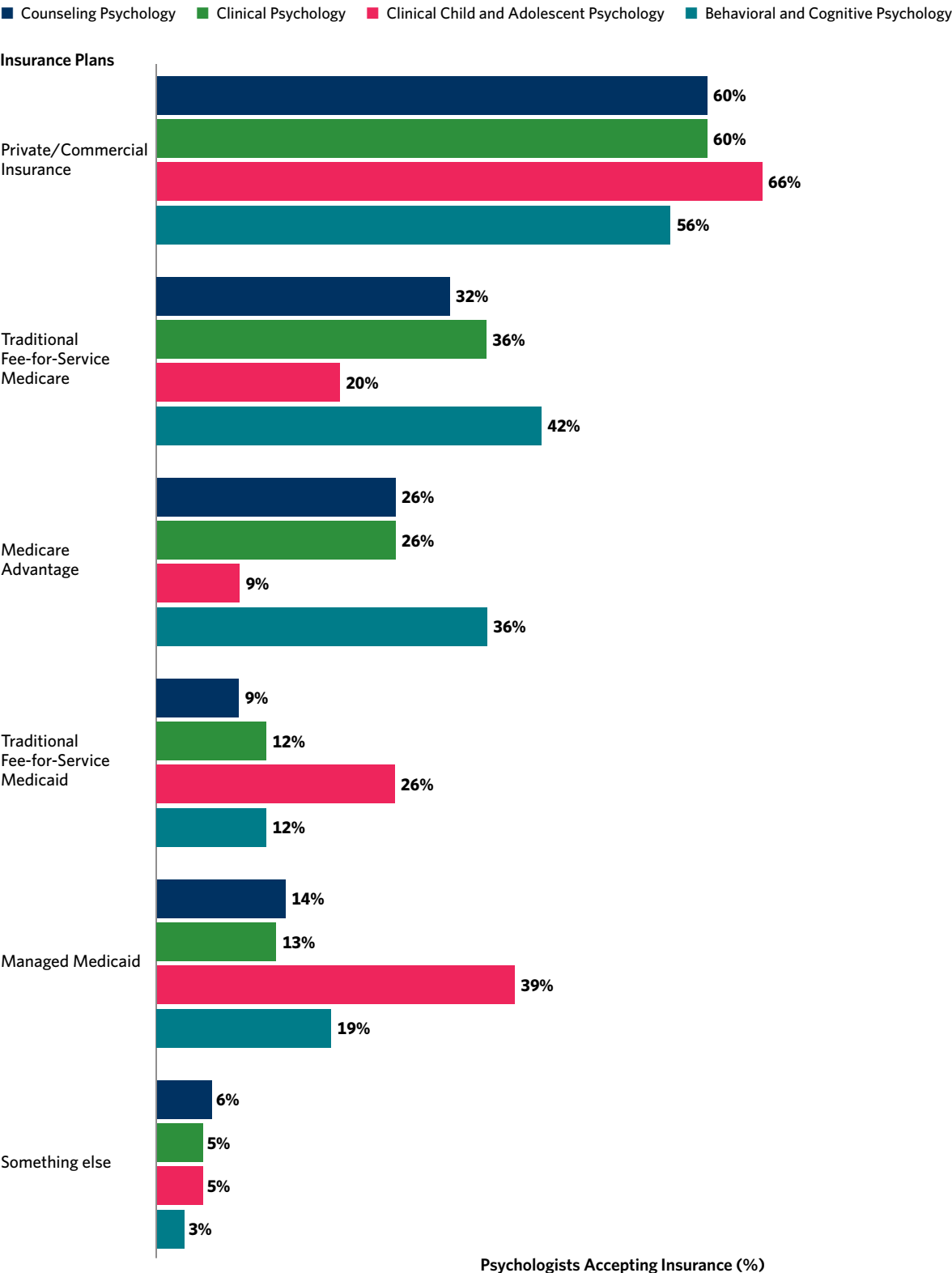
Overall insurance participation rates did not vary much by psychologists’ self-reported primary specialty, primary work setting, or service provision. Of the four most common primary specialties, these psychologists participated in insurance at similar rates as the overall sample: 72% of those specializing in clinical child and adolescent psychology, 72% those specializing in counseling psychology, 68% of those specializing in clinical psychology, and 67% of those specializing in behavioral and cognitive psychology were in-network with private and/or public insurance.

The same was true when examining the two most common work settings. About 7 in 10 psychologists (71%) working in hospitals, academic medical centers, and organized human services settings were in-network with private and/or public insurance, along with 68% of psychologists working in private settings. But psychologists working in private practices had the lowest participation rates in Medicaid.

Meanwhile, 65% of psychologists who provided testing services were in-network with private and/or public insurance, along with 68% of psychologists providing therapy services, and 71% of psychologists providing health behavior assessments and interventions.

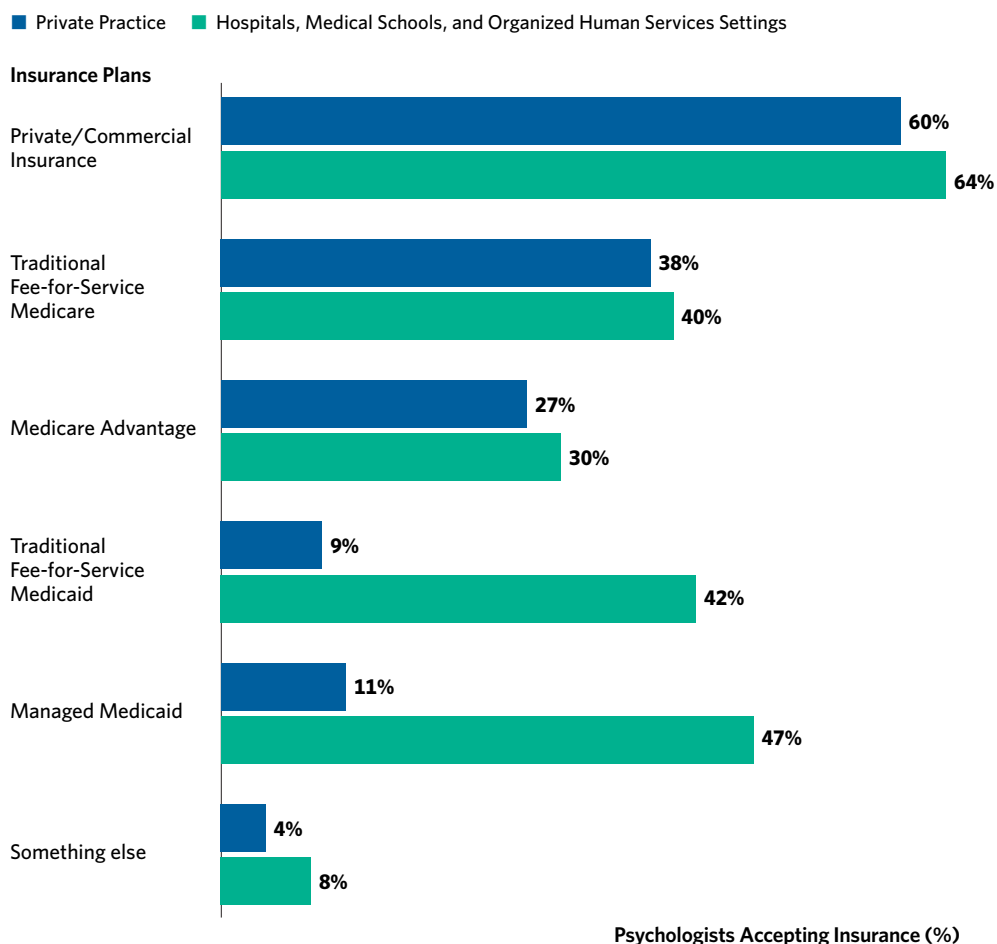
However, clinical child and adolescent psychologists had the lowest participation rates in Medicare and had the highest participation rates in Medicaid.

FIGURE 6.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' INSURANCE PLAN PARTICIPATION RATES BY SELF-REPORTED PRIMARY SPECIALTY, 2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

FIGURE 7.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' INSURANCE PLAN PARTICIPATION RATES BY PRIMARY WORK SETTING, 2024

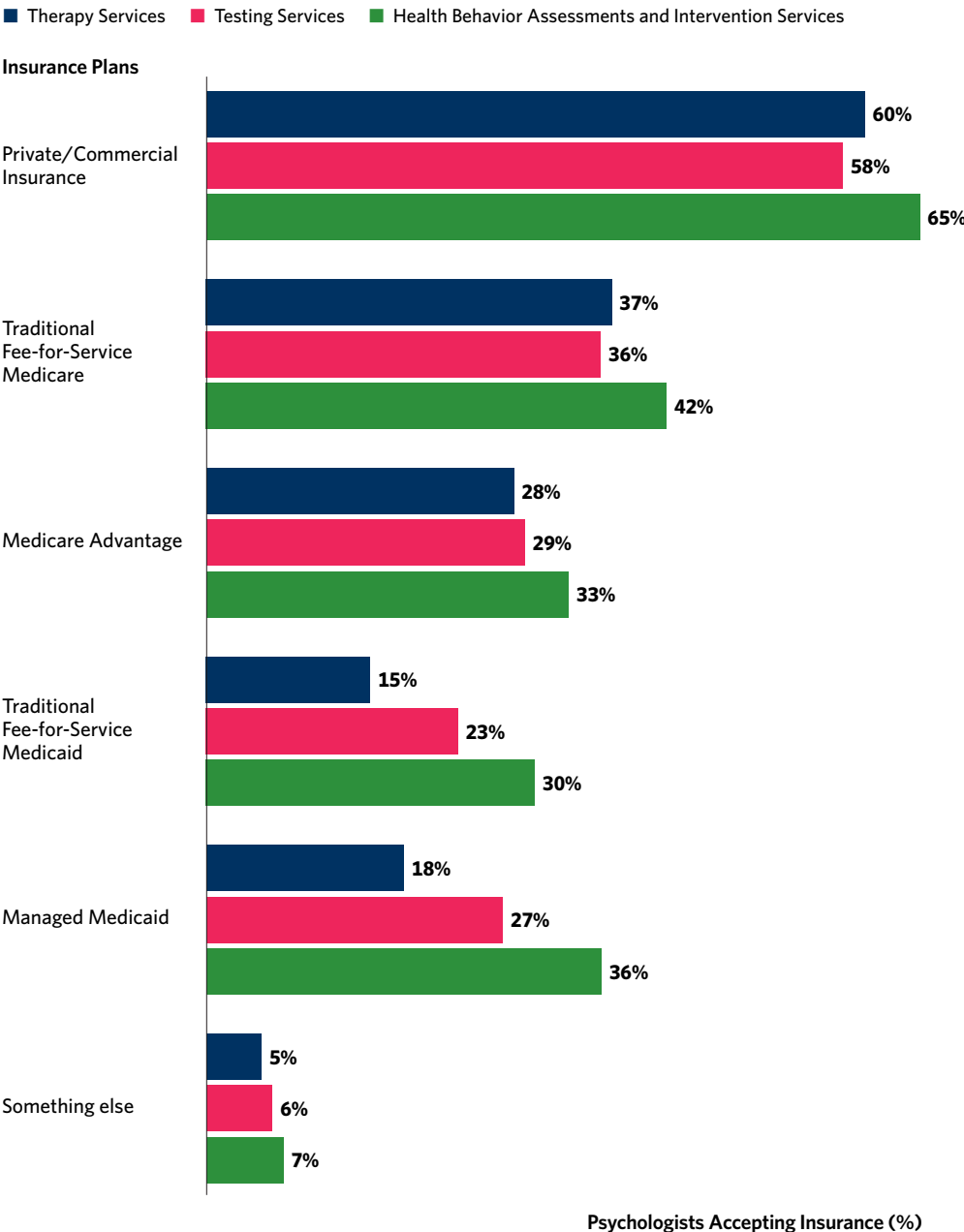


Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Psychologists providing health behavior assessments and interventions were in-network with Medicaid at nearly twice the rate of the entire sample.

Similarly, psychologists who provided testing services were in-network with managed Medicaid plans at higher-than-average rates. Psychologists providing therapy services had nearly identical rates of insurance plan participation to psychologists overall, however, this may be due to 90% of surveyed psychologists providing therapy services.

FIGURE 8.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' INSURANCE PLAN PARTICIPATION RATES BY SERVICES PROVIDED, 2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

REMIBURSEMENT RATES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES ARE TOP BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN INSURANCE NETWORKS

Psychologists who reported they have never accepted insurance, took insurance at one time but no longer do, or recently stopped taking a form of insurance were asked to identify their top three barriers to participating with insurance. Of the 374 psychologists who met these criteria, more than 4 in 5 (82%) reported insufficient reimbursement rates, 3 in 5 (62%) reported administrative issues such as pre-authorization requirements or audits, and half (52%) reported concerns about payment reliability such as delays in payment and refund demands.

TABLE 1.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN INSURANCE PLANS, 2024

What are the top three barriers to being in-network with private or public insurance? % of psychologists who do not currently participate in insurance	
Insufficient reimbursement rates	82%
Administrative issues (pre-authorization requirements, audits, inability to resolve issues with insurer, etc.)	62%
Concerns about payment reliability (refund demands, delays in payment, etc.)	52%
Denial of coverage for services I deem necessary and appropriate	37%
Issues joining the insurance panel (i.e. insurer says the panels are full, slow credentialing process, etc.)	9%
Something else	14%
Total N	374

Note: Respondents could select up to three barriers; percents do not sum to 100%.
 Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Artificial Intelligence in Practice

While half of psychologists agreed or strongly agreed they are knowledgeable about AI, more than 7 in 10 psychologists (71%) said they have not used AI tools at work in the last 12 months, and fewer than 1 in 10 psychologists (6%) reported they used them once. A similar percentage of psychologists reported using them several times in the past 12 months (12%) as those who used AI tools at work at least monthly (11%). This was lower than the general population of U.S. workers, more than one-third of whom (35%) reported using AI at least monthly in the 2024 Work in America survey.²

TABLE 2.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' OPINIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, 2024

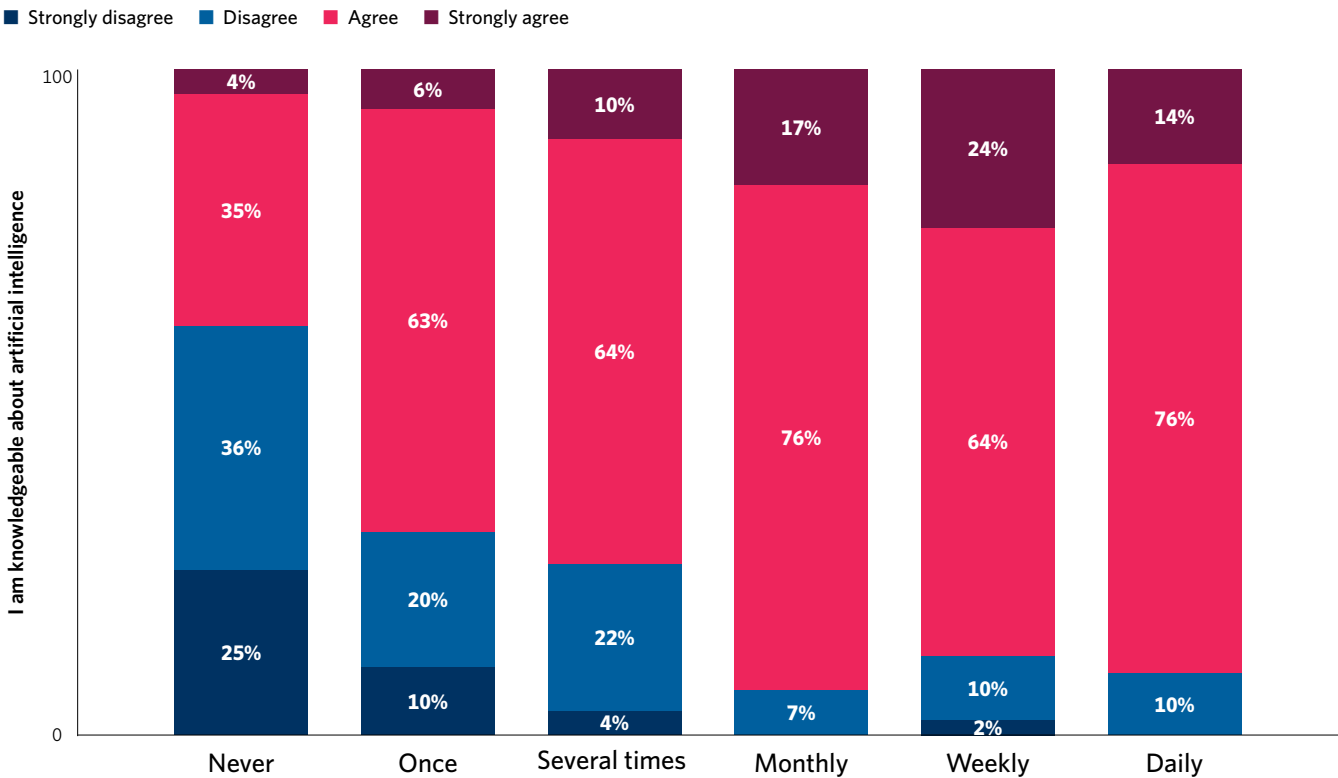
I am knowledgeable about artificial intelligence		I worry artificial intelligence may make some or all of my job duties obsolete in the future	
Strongly agree	6.6%	Strongly agree	3.6%
Somewhat agree	43.7%	Somewhat agree	23.5%
Somewhat disagree	30.7%	Somewhat disagree	39.5%
Strongly disagree	18.8%	Strongly disagree	33.3%
Total	846	Total	850

Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

2 American Psychological Association. (2024). U.S. workers adjust to the changing nature of employment: Highlights from the 2024 Work in America survey. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-in-america/2024>

FIGURE 9.

PSYCHOLOGISTS' KNOWLEDGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPARED WITH FREQUENCY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE, 2024



Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Of the 247 psychologists who reported using AI tools at least once in the past 12 months, 58% used AI for writing assistance (email drafting, etc.), 36% used AI for content generation (generating images, text, or other media), 29% used AI for summarization (clinical notes, digital articles, etc.), and 27% used it for note-taking or dictation. They were less likely to use AI tools for task automation, clinical diagnosis assistance, data analysis, and chatbot assistance for patients or clients.

Overall, about a quarter of psychologists (27%) reported being worried that AI would make some or all of their job duties obsolete in the future, lower than the 41% of U.S. workers who reported the same in the 2024 Work in America survey.²

When asked if they saw themselves using AI tools at work in the next three years, psychologists overall were almost evenly split, with 35% reporting yes, 27% reporting no, and 38% reporting they did not know. Psychologists who had used AI tools at least once in the last year were more likely to agree that they would use them again in the next three years than psychologists who had never used AI tools.

TABLE 3.

PSYCHOLOGISTS’ INTENTIONS OF USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE FUTURE COMPARED WITH THEIR CURRENT USE, 2024

	Do you foresee yourself using AI tools at work in the next 3 years?		
Frequency of AI Use in Last 12 Months	Yes	No	I don’t know
Never	17%	35%	48%
Once	63%	16%	20%
Several times	76%	4%	20%
Monthly	87%	3%	10%
Weekly	95%	2%	2%
Daily	90%	0%	10%

Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

EARLY CAREER PSYCHOLOGISTS USE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AT HIGHER RATES THAN LATER CAREER PSYCHOLOGISTS

Psychologists who were earlier in their careers reported being knowledgeable about AI at higher rates than psychologists who were more advanced in their careers. No patterns by career stage were found when analyzing psychologists’ reported worries about AI replacing some or all of their job duties.

TABLE 4.

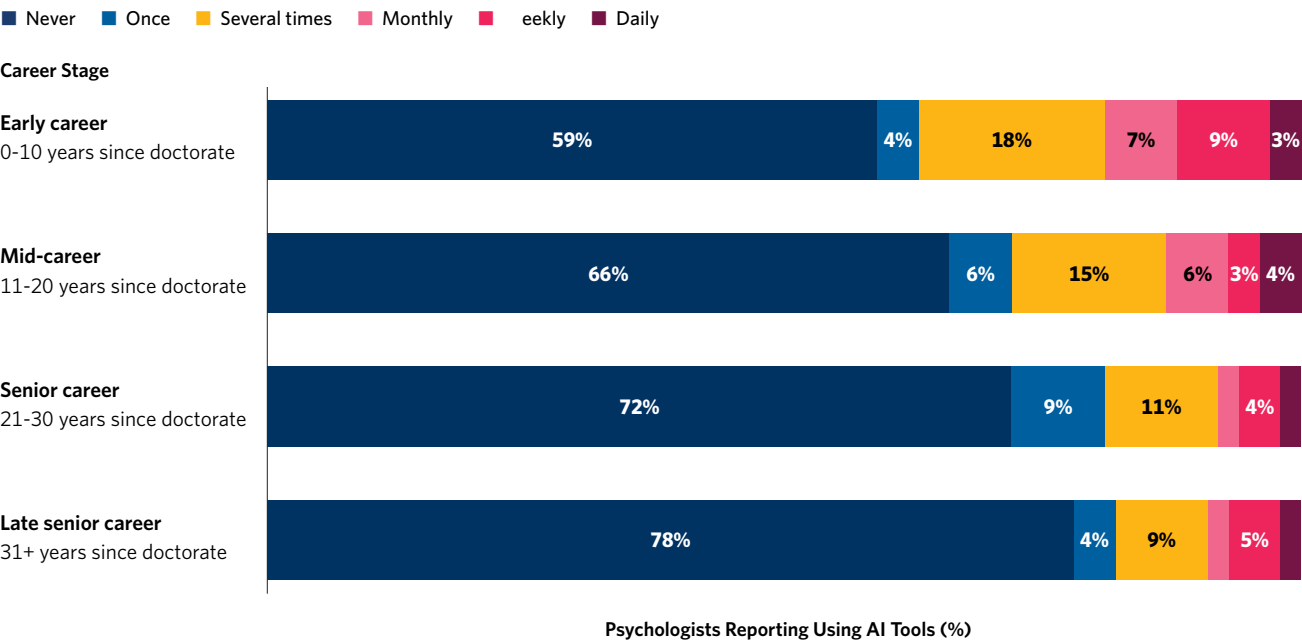
PSYCHOLOGISTS’ OPINIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BY CAREER STAGE, 2024

	I am knowledgeable about artificial intelligence		I worry artificial intelligence may make some or all of my job duties obsolete in the future	
Career Stage	Strongly / Somewhat agree	Strongly / Somewhat disagree	Strongly / Somewhat agree	Strongly / Somewhat disagree
Early career (0-10 years since doctorate)	58%	42%	26%	74%
Mid-career (11-20 years since doctorate)	51%	49%	30%	70%
Senior career (21-30 years since doctorate)	53%	47%	27%	73%
Late senior career (31+ years since doctorate)	46%	54%	26%	74%

Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Early career psychologists also reported more frequent use of AI in their practices than psychologists further into their careers.

FIGURE 10.
FREQUENCY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY CAREER STAGE, 2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Higher rates of psychologists in earlier career stages also foresaw themselves using AI at work in the next three years than psychologists in advanced career stages.

TABLE 5.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' INTENTION OF USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE FUTURE BY CAREER STAGE, 2024

	Do you foresee yourself using AI tools at work in the next 3 years?		
Career Stage	Yes	No	I don't know
Early career (0-10 years since doctorate)	46%	16%	38%
Mid-career (11-20 years since doctorate)	40%	20%	40%
Senior career (21-30 years since doctorate)	32%	28%	39%
Late senior career (31+ years since doctorate)	29%	33%	38%

Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CONCERNS TEND TO OUTWEIGH BENEFITS

Over half of psychologists (52%) were unsure about the benefits of using AI tools in psychology. The most frequently cited benefits included improving operational efficiencies/reducing administrative burden (33%) and helping providers consume and summarize publicized, scientifically validated data (21%), which is in keeping with the most commonly cited AI tools used by psychologists (writing assistance tools, summarization, content generation, and note-taking).

TABLE 6.
PSYCHOLOGISTS' REPORTED BENEFITS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS IN PSYCHOLOGY, 2024

What, if any, are the biggest benefits of using AI tools in psychology?	
Area of Benefit	%
I don't know	52%
Improves operational efficiencies/reduces administrative burden	33%
Helps providers consume and summarize publicized, scientifically validated data	21%
Improves patient education	20%
Provides clinical decision support	12%
Reduces burnout	12%
Increases precision and personalized treatment	10%
Improved population health and care access	9%
Fosters early and accurate disease detection	6%
Improves clinician and patient engagement	5%
Other	5%
Total	824

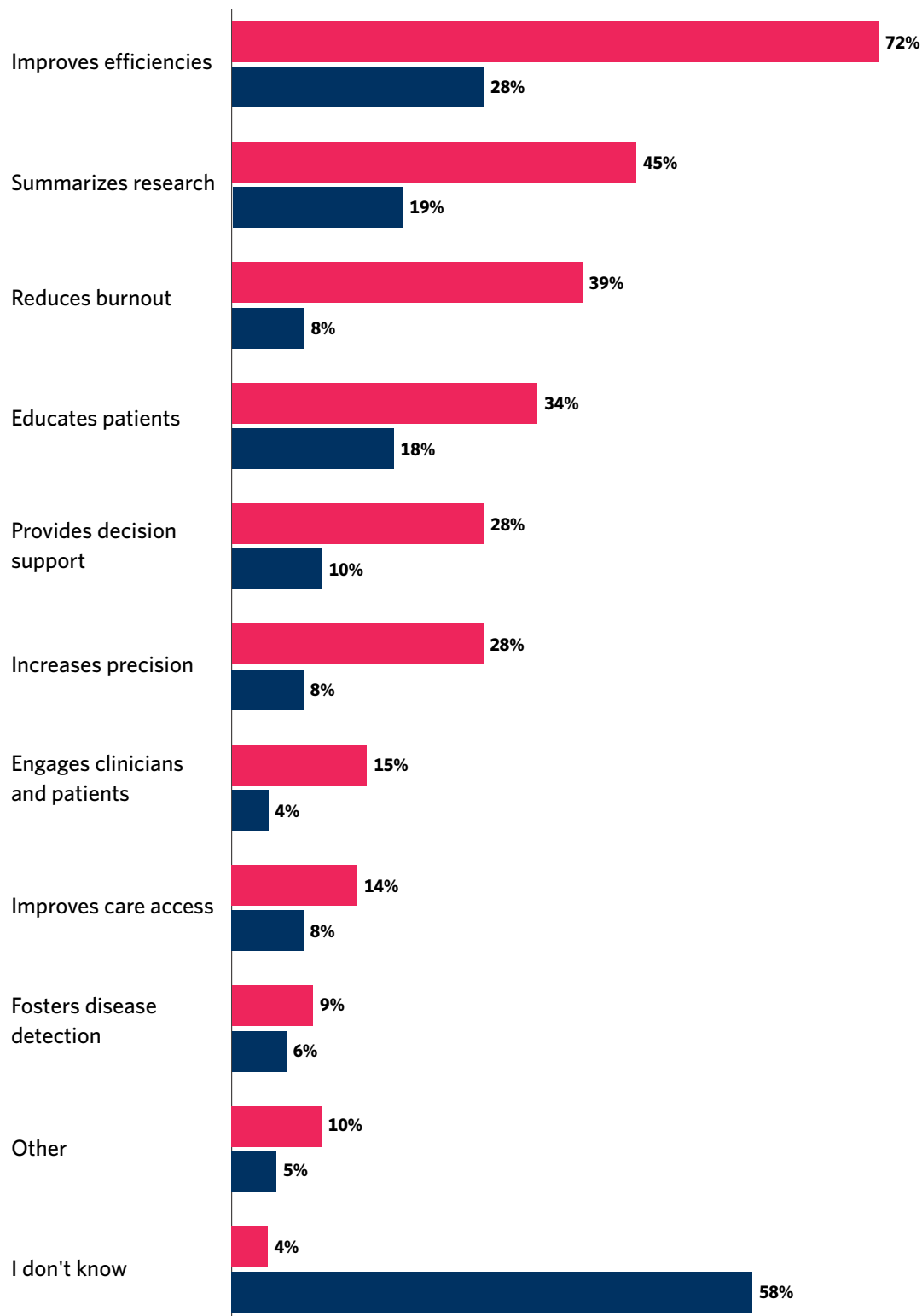
Note: Respondents could select multiple options; percents do not sum to 100%.
Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

However, respondents who used AI at least monthly cited benefits of these tools at higher frequencies than those who used AI less frequently or not at all. Particularly, nearly three-quarters of frequent AI users (72%) cited its improvement of operational efficiencies as a benefit, compared with 28% of infrequent or non-users of AI. This is similar to the general population of U.S. workers, as 76% of workers in the 2024 Work in America survey who used AI reported it had a positive or very positive impact on their productivity.²

FIGURE 11.
**PSYCHOLOGISTS' REPORTED BENEFITS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
 BY FREQUENCY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE, 2024**

■ Frequent users ■ Infrequent or non-users

Potential Benefits of AI Tools



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

When asked about the biggest concerns about using AI tools in psychology, psychologists reported concerns at greater frequencies than they did benefits. Fewer psychologists said they “don’t know” what the biggest concerns are (23% vs. 52% who said the same about benefits of AI use). More than half of psychologists said their concerns include potential breaches of sensitive data (59%), unanticipated social harms (54%), biased input leading to biased output (54%), and lack of rigorous testing and validation to mitigate risks (51%). Given the relatively higher frequencies of cited concerns with the high frequency of psychologists reporting they did not know any benefits, the majority of psychologists seemed skeptical of using AI in their practices.

TABLE 7.
PSYCHOLOGISTS’ REPORTED CONCERNS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS IN PSYCHOLOGY, 2024

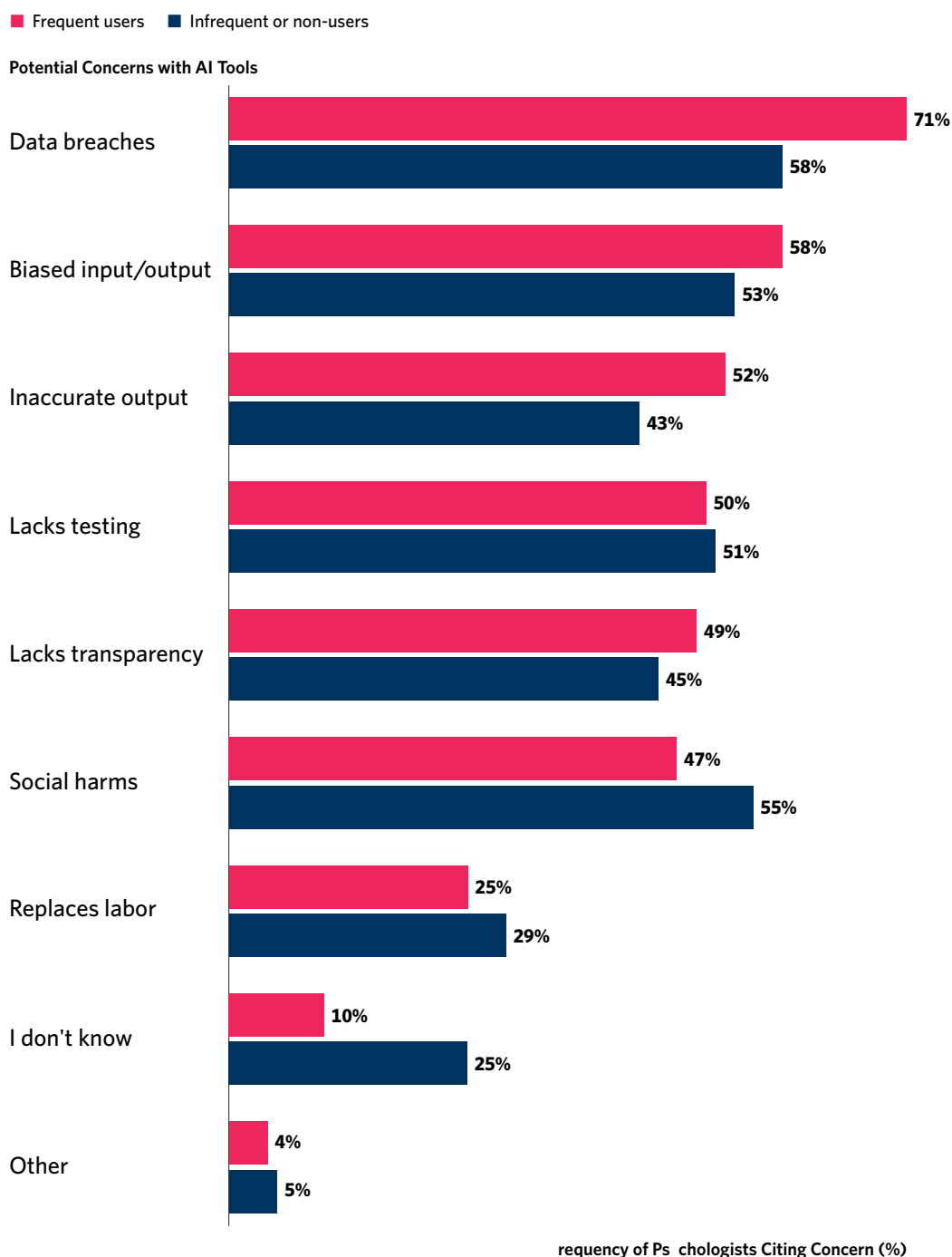
What, if any, are the biggest concerns of using AI tools in psychology?	
Area of Concern	%
Potential breaches of sensitive data	59%
Unanticipated social harms	54%
Biased input (training data) leads to biased output	54%
Lack of rigorous testing and validation to mitigate risks	51%
Lack of transparency of how AI tools work	46%
Inaccurate outputs (“hallucinations”)	44%
Replacement of human labor	28%
I don’t know	23%
Other	5%
Total	840

Note: Respondents could select multiple options; percents do not sum to 100%.
Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

Psychologists who use AI frequently still reported concerns about the use of AI tools in psychology, often at higher rates than psychologists who use AI infrequently or not at all. For example, more than 7 in 10 psychologists who frequently use AI (71%) indicated breaches of sensitive data were one of the biggest concerns about using AI compared with 58% of psychologists who used AI infrequently or not at all. Frequent users of AI were also much less likely to say they “don’t know” what the biggest concerns about using AI may be (10% vs. 25% of infrequent or non-users of AI).

FIGURE 12.

PSYCHOLOGISTS' REPORTED CONCERNS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BY FREQUENCY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE, 2024



Source: American Psychological Association, 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey.

About 27% of psychologists reported being worried about AI making some or all of their job duties obsolete in the future, compared with 41% of U.S. workers, generally.² This may be due to the complexity of the practice of psychology, the need to consider individualized circumstances, and psychology's human-centered focus. However, psychologists may need to be prepared for a future of work that includes greater use of AI tools and the shaping/implementation of these tools for the good of society.

ABOUT THE DATA

The APA Practitioner Pulse Survey series has been conducted annually since 2020. The surveys were originally intended to track changes in psychological practices' characteristics during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Since the public health emergency expired in 2023, the survey has been revised to track ongoing changes in the workforce.

The 2024 Practitioner Pulse Survey was conducted online through the Alchemer survey platform and distributed via email. The survey utilized a probability-based random sample, giving all potential survey invitees an equal opportunity to be selected for the survey. Those targeted for inclusion were psychologists licensed in at least one U.S. state. Emails were gathered both from APA membership data and from state licensing data purchased from a data vendor.

Invitations were sent to the sample of 35,000 on September 4, 2024, and several reminder emails were sent to encourage survey completion. Of the 35,000 in the sample population, 7,685 did not receive the invitation due to email bounces or other errors, and 127 unsubscribed from notifications and did not complete the survey. Of the remaining 27,188 licensed psychologists, 853 psychologists completed the survey. The survey closed on September 30, 2024, with a completion rate of 3.1%.

PREVIOUS CYCLES OF THE PRACTITIONER PULSE SURVEY

American Psychological Association. (2020). *2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey*. <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/response-coronavirus>

American Psychological Association. (2021). *Worsening mental health crisis pressures psychologist workforce: 2021 COVID-19 Practitioner survey*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/covid-19-2021>

American Psychological Association. (2022). *Psychologists struggle to meet demand amid mental health crisis: 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2022-covid-psychologist-workload>

American Psychological Association. (2023). *Psychologists reaching their limits as patients present with worsening symptoms year after year: 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2023-psychologist-reach-limits>



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