



Board of Behavioral Sciences

1625 North Market Blvd., Suite S-200  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
(916) 574-7830  
[www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)

Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California | Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency | Department of Consumer Affairs

## MEMORANDUM

<b>DATE</b>	January 5, 2026
<b>TO</b>	Workforce Development Committee
<b>FROM</b>	Steve Sodergren, Executive Officer
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Summary and Discussion of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy "A Systemic Workforce for a Complex World" Report

In May 2025, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) conducted a national survey to better understand the current state of the marriage and family therapy profession. The survey included responses from more than 2,000 licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs), pre-licensed associates, and graduate students, and was designed to collect workforce data but also to capture practitioners' lived experiences and emerging trends shaping the future of the field. The findings were published in AAMFT's report, ["A Systemic Workforce for a Complex World: Strategic Insight from the 2025 Marriage and Family Workforce Study"](#). (Attachment A)

Overall, the report concludes that "the data paints a picture of a diverse, multi-faceted workforce that is deeply engaged in direct care, flexible in its practice settings and steadily growing through a strong pipeline of new professionals." While the sample size represents only a portion of the national MFT workforce, the findings offer useful insights, particularly regarding the integration of technology into clinical practice.

- **93%** of MFTs report offering telehealth services.
- The share of practices operating exclusively online rose **21%** between 2022 and 2025.
- **70%** of MFTs believe that in-person work delivers higher-quality care, particularly for couples and other relational cases.

When asked about the primary reason for offering telehealth, respondents cited expanded access and client demand as the most significant factors. Specifically, 66% indicated that telehealth allows them to see more clients, 57% identified client preference as the key driver, and 34% reported that telehealth enables them to reach individuals seeking their specific area of specialization.

The survey also explored the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in MFT practice. Results show that 52% of respondents already use AI tools for administrative and supportive functions, such as note taking, scheduling, summarizing content, and developing educational materials. Looking ahead, 85% of MFTs expect to incorporate AI into their practice within the next five years, signaling continued growth in the use of technology to support, though not replace, clinical work.

## **Attachment**

**Attachment A: “A Systemic Workforce for a Complex World: Strategic Insights from the 2025 Marriage and Family Therapy Workforce Study”**

# A SYSTEMIC WORKFORCE FOR A COMPLEX WORLD:

## Strategic Insights from the 2025 Marriage and Family Therapist Workforce Study

**OCTOBER 2025**



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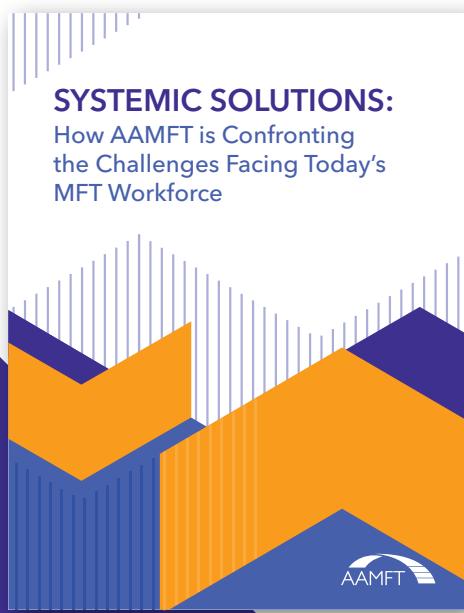
# Introduction

In May 2025, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) conducted a landmark national survey to better understand the current state of the marriage and family therapy profession. Drawing responses from more than 2,000 licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs), pre-licensed associates, and graduate students, **the study set out not only to gather statistics but to capture the lived experiences, shifting realities, and emerging trends shaping the future of the field.**

The result is a detailed portrait of a profession in motion – deeply impacted by social and technological change yet grounded in the unique systemic lens that defines MFTs. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of the mental healthcare industry has transformed. Rising demand for relational care, changes in how therapy is accessed and delivered, and shifting societal norms have all redefined the role of therapists and the systems in which they work.

MFTs are on the front lines of this evolution. **Trained to think systemically and treat holistically, MFTs support individuals, couples, and families as they navigate life's most complex emotional and relational challenges.** But as the need for this care has grown, so have the pressures on the MFT workforce – from increased caseloads that lead to burnout to structural obstacles like limited telehealth reimbursement, fragmented licensure systems, and changing business models.

This first report in a two-part series, *A Systemic Workforce for a Complex World* explores where MFTs work, who they serve, and how they are adapting to a rapidly changing landscape. It offers a window into the diversity, resilience, and innovation of today's MFTs, illuminating not just what the profession looks like now, but where it's headed.



## Want to explore more?

Our companion report, *Systemic Solutions: How AAMFT is Confronting the Challenges Facing Today's MFT Workforce*, builds on these findings by examining the systemic challenges MFTs face – from workforce shortages to licensure barriers – and outlines AAMFT's strategic vision to ensure the profession can thrive. Discover how data-informed advocacy and scalable solutions are shaping the future of relational mental health care.

# Background

This report builds on AAMFT's award-winning 2022 MFT Workforce Study ([American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#) (AAMFT), 2022). While the 2022 findings captured the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the early realities of a post-pandemic world, the 2025 survey provides a deeper look at how the profession has evolved. It explores changes in where and how MFTs provide care, who they are serving, the services their clients need, and how MFTs are adapting to meet those demands.

## Study Methodology (conducted in May 2025):<sup>1</sup>

- **Survey participants:** 2,023 licensed MFTs, associates, and graduate-level trainees
- **Format:** Online survey featuring both quantitative and open-ended questions
- **Focus areas:** Shifts in client populations, licensure experiences, work settings, areas of specialization, technology use, and professional challenges and opportunities
- **Narrative responses:** Participants shared their current motivations, frustrations, and perspectives on the future of the field
- **Multimedia insights:** In addition to written responses, AAMFT collected video submissions ("MFT Diaries") offering firsthand accounts of lived experiences, emotional realities, and advocacy needs



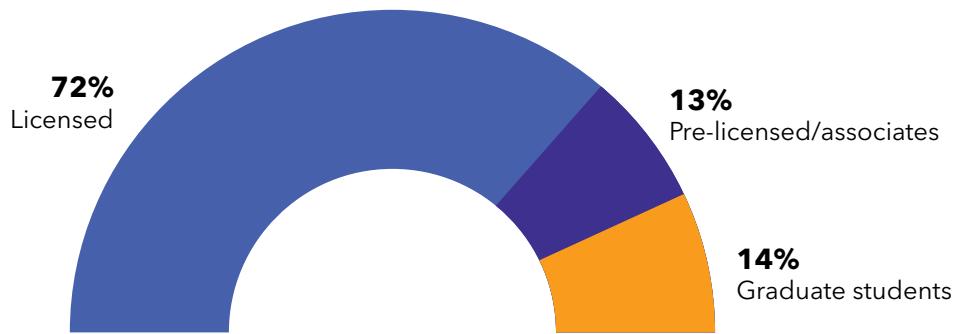
<sup>1</sup> Based on the data, these trends are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level with a +/- 2% margin of error (MOE). For sub-groups MOE's are higher, with academia having the highest MOE of +/- 10%.

# Today's Marriage and Family Therapist

MFTs – also known as systemic or relational therapists – are mission-driven clinicians who view mental and emotional health through the lens of relationships and systems. Rather than treating issues in isolation, MFTs consider the full context of a person's environment, including family, social, and cultural dynamics.

MFTs are trained and licensed to diagnose and treat a wide range of mental health conditions. They work with individuals, couples, and families, applying evidence-based approaches rooted in systems theory. Research has shown that marriage and family therapy is as effective – and in some cases more effective – than individual therapy for many common mental health concerns ([American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy \(AAMFT\)](#), n.d. ).

## Snapshot of the MFT Workforce (2025):



- **Workforce participation:** 78% of licensed MFTs work full time in the field
- **Client engagement:** 95% of licensed MFTs actively see clients
- **Multiple roles:** 46% of licensed MFTs work across more than one setting (e.g., private practice, supervision, academia)
- **Primary work settings:**
  - 53% individual private practice
  - 24% group private practice
  - The remainder work in nonprofits, healthcare systems, education, government, and corporate settings
- **Career stage:** 68% identify as mid-career professionals, with a strong pipeline of early-career and student MFTs entering the field

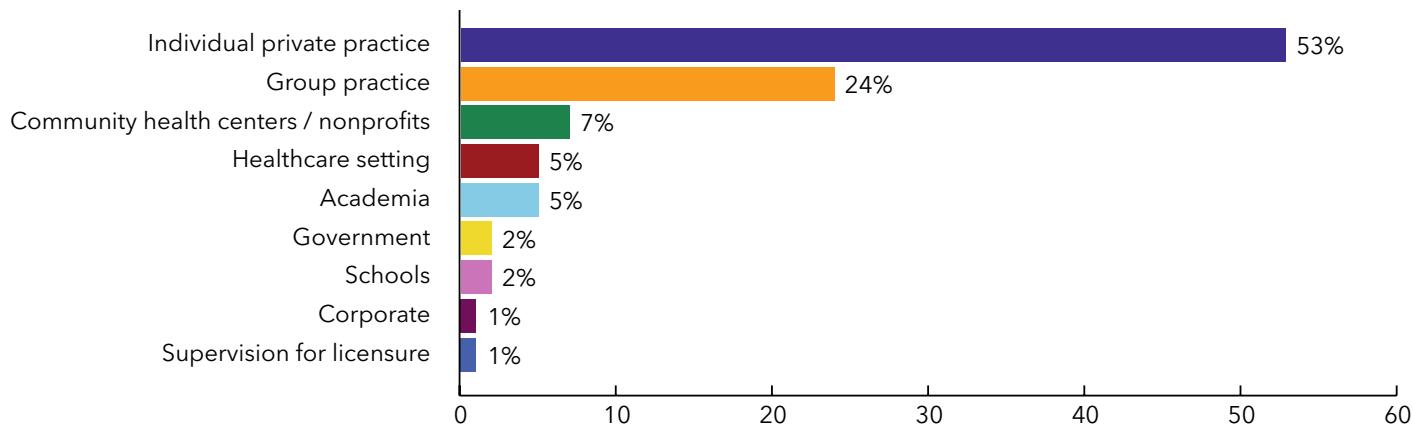
The data paint a picture of a diverse, multi-faceted workforce that is deeply engaged in direct care, flexible in its practice settings, and steadily growing through a strong pipeline of new professionals.

# MFT Career Trends

## Workplace Settings

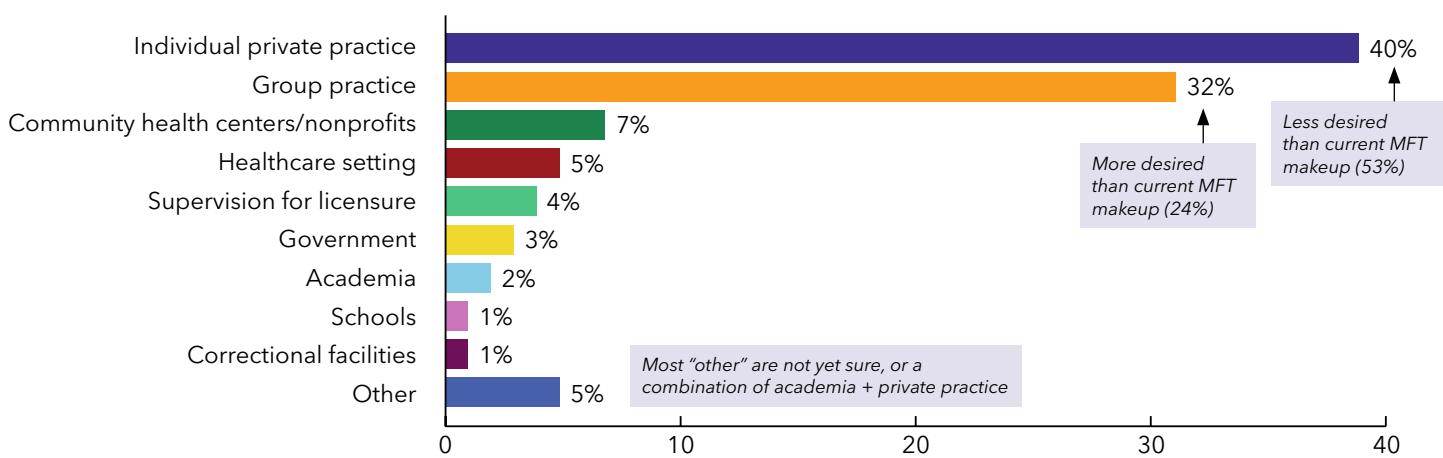
MFTs work in a wide range of settings, including private and group practices, agencies, hospitals, and schools. As of 2025, 53% of MFTs primarily practice in individual private settings, while 24% work in group practices. The remaining MFTs are spread across nonprofit organizations, healthcare systems, educational institutions, government, and corporate environments. Notably, 46% of MFTs report working across multiple settings.

**What best describes your primary work setting?** n=1,643 for those who see clients



Although individual private practice remains the most common work setting for practicing MFTs in 2025, survey responses from students and pre-licensed professionals suggest a potential shift ahead. While 40% of students still express interest in individual private practice, a growing number (32%) indicate a preference for working in group practice settings.

**Which will be your preferred workplace setting?** n=289 for students only

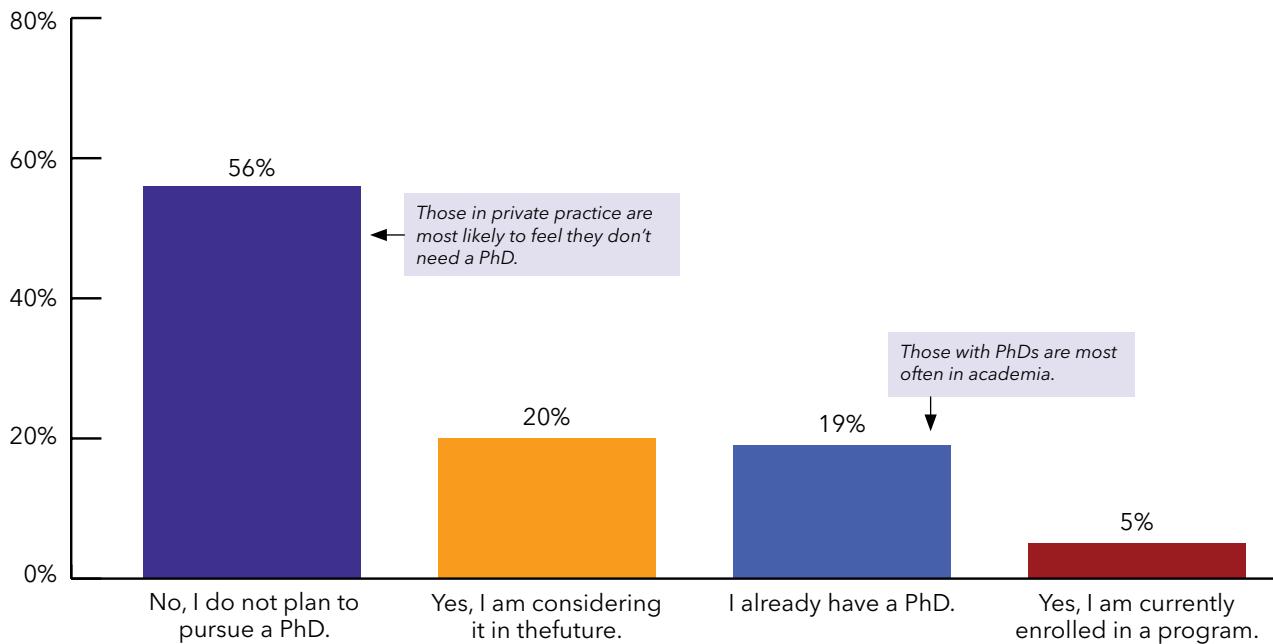


## Pursuing Doctoral Degrees

The 2025 data continue a trend observed in the 2022 study: declining interest in pursuing a PhD, raising concerns about the future of research within the field (AAMFT, 2022). **Among currently practicing MFTs, 56% neither hold nor plan to pursue a doctoral degree.** Of those not planning to pursue a PhD, 40% report that additional education is not necessary for their career goals, 34% are uncertain about the return on investment, and 29% cite cost as the primary barrier.

Over half of the students say they do not plan to pursue a PhD.

### Are you considering or pursuing a PhD? n=1,734 non-students



Find out more about education costs for MFTs in our companion report, [Systemic Solutions](#).



[Watch Online](#)

*"I would say I definitely do [my different roles] out of love for what I do. I am able to fill my different cups in different ways and contribute to society in many different ways. And I'm never bored, so that keeps the burnout and the predictability from my routine."*

– Ivonne H.

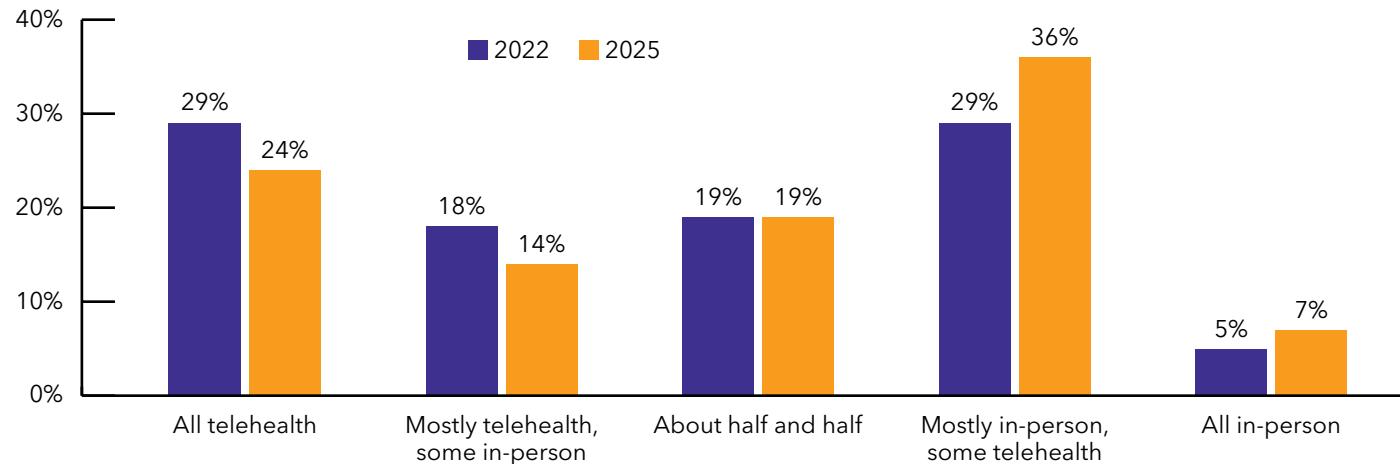
# Technology in Practice

Service demand and heavy administrative workloads have pushed many MFTs to look to technology for relief. While therapists are hopeful that virtual platforms and artificial intelligence (AI) can expand reach and streamline paperwork, they remain mindful of legal, ethical, and relational risks – especially the potential loss of in-person connection that is central to systemic work.

## Telehealth

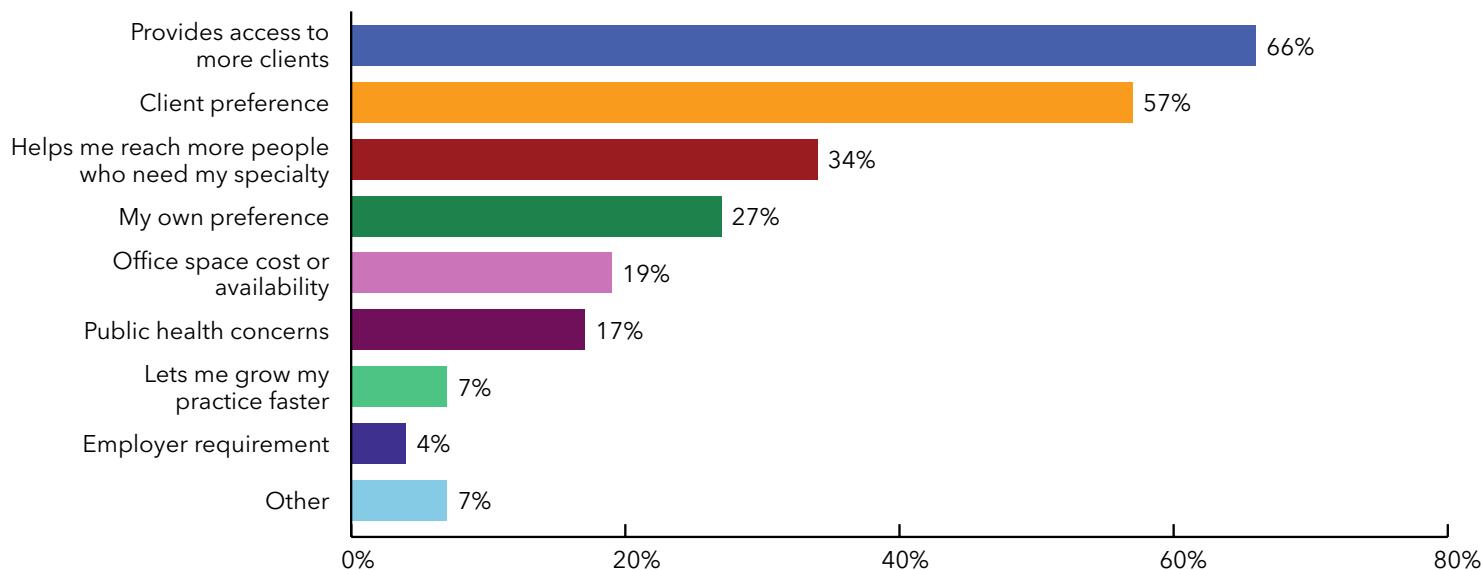
- **Near-universal adoption:** By 2025, 93% of MFTs offer telehealth, making virtual care a core part of everyday practice.
- **Rapid growth:** The share of practices operating exclusively online rose 21% between 2022 and 2025.
- **Complement, not replace:** In-person therapy is still prized, with the proportion of therapists offering face-to-face sessions climbing 5% over the same period.
- **Quality perception:** 70% of MFTs believe in-person work delivers higher-quality care, particularly for couples and other relational cases.

**How do you currently see clients?** n=1,644 for those who see clients



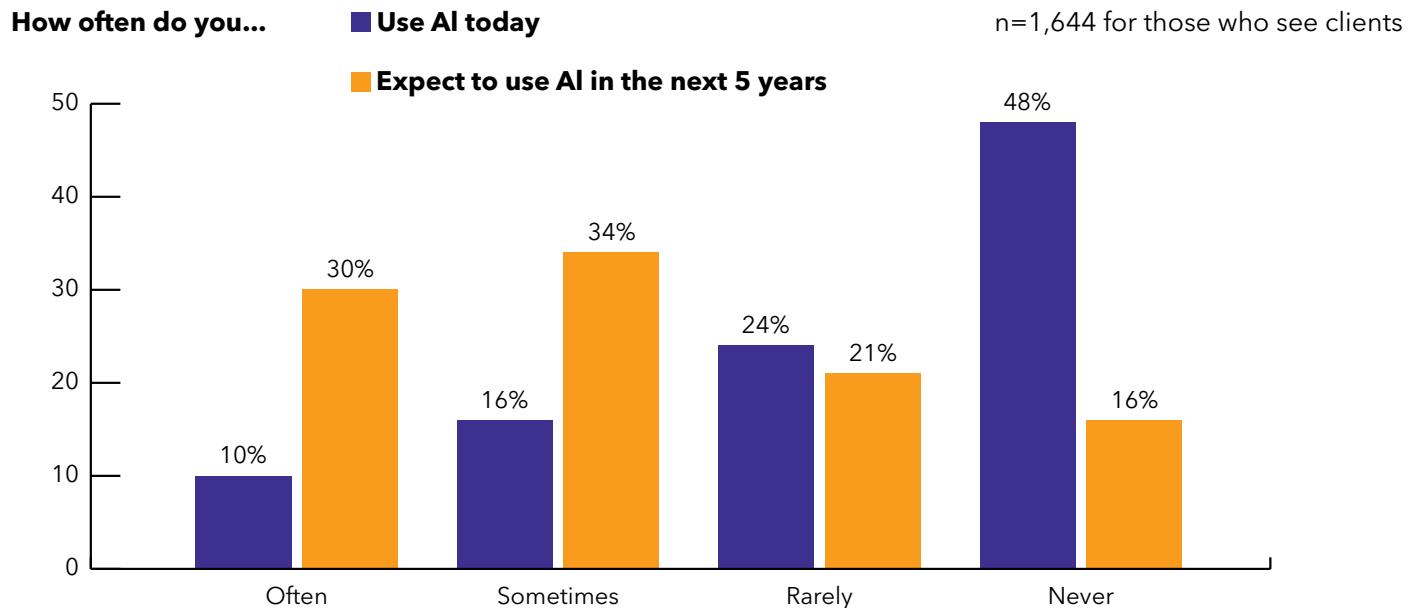
**What are the top reasons you offer telehealth sessions? (select up to 3)**

n=1,534 those who offer telehealth sessions

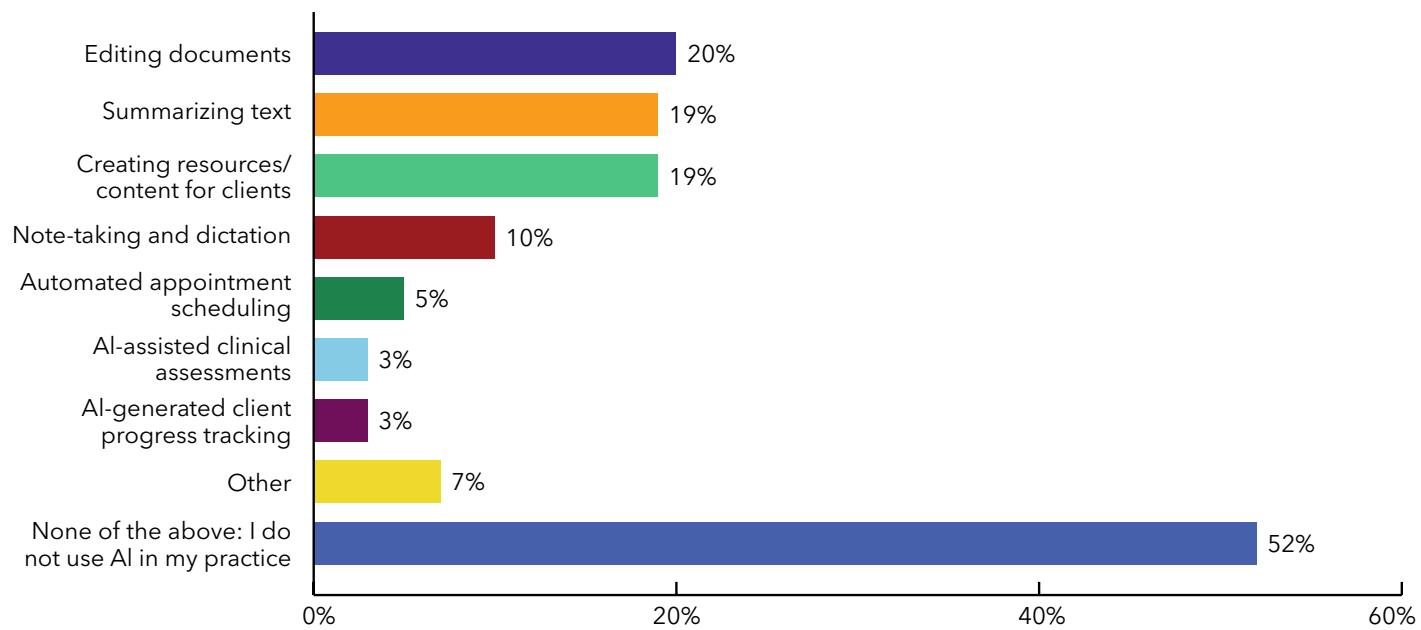


## Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- **Current use:** 52% of MFTs already incorporate AI tools into their administrative tasks like notetaking, scheduling, summarizing content, and creating educational materials for clients.
- **Outlook:** 85% expect to be using AI within five years, signaling a rapid shift toward tech-enabled practice.



### How do you currently use AI-based tools in your work? (select all that apply) n=1,644 for those who see clients



MFTs see AI's potential to cut administrative burden and personalize care, but adoption is measured. Concerns about confidentiality, bias, and professional standards continue to shape how – and how quickly – these tools integrate into systemic therapy.

**Explore how MFTs are impacted by administrative burden** in our companion report, [Systemic Solutions](#).

# Client Profiles

As of 2025, the average breakdown of an MFT's practice consists of 61% individuals, 29% couples, and 10% families. Just 1% exclusively see couples, and no respondents reported exclusively treating families.

## Average makeup of an MFT's practice:



MFTs are trained to treat individuals, couples, and families, but insurance reimbursement privilege individual care.

**Among MFTs who accept insurance, 59% say individual therapy is reimbursed at higher rates than family or couple sessions** – an economic reality that may be driving this imbalance. Given the many challenges, a growing number of MFTs are avoiding insurance altogether by choosing to accept private pay only. **In 2025, one in three MFTs do not accept insurance in their practice.**

*To learn more about how insurance reimbursement affects MFTs, read our companion report, [Systemic Solutions](#).*



[Watch Online](#)

*"I live in an area with limited diversity among providers, so I hope to attract clients from a variety of backgrounds—not just from my immediate community."*

– Jurdene C.

## Emerging Client Trends

Over the past five years, MFTs have reported notable changes in the clients they serve. Many are seeing more couples, men, gender-diverse clients (including trans, non-binary, and gender-expansive individuals), and older adults. At the same time, fewer MFTs are working with families, children, and adolescents – raising potential concerns about access to care for younger populations.

- **Couples therapy** is on the rise.
- **Fewer family and child clients** may reflect shifting access or changing demand.
- **More gender-diverse clients** point to growing demand for affirming, inclusive care.

In terms of presenting issues, **62% of MFTs report an increase in clients grappling with broader societal challenges, while 56% are seeing more cases involving anxiety disorders.**

- Clients are increasingly affected by **political, economic, and social stressors**.
- There is growing demand for treatment related to **anxiety, trauma, and work-related stress**.

# Conclusion

MFTs are navigating a moment of profound transformation. As this report illustrates, they are innovating to meet rising demand, integrating technology into their practices, and expanding their reach to serve a broader, more diverse client base. They are balancing the promise of new tools with the core values of relational, systemic care – remaining deeply committed to the individuals, couples, and families they serve.

Yet this moment also brings critical challenges: shifting care models, burnout, inequitable reimbursement, and barriers to entering and advancing in the profession. The data show both the resilience of MFTs and the structural changes needed to sustain that resilience in the years ahead.

This is just the beginning of the story.

To explore the systemic issues shaping the profession – and the bold steps needed to address them – read our companion report, [Systemic Solutions: How AAMFT is Confronting the Challenges Facing Today's MFT Workforce](#). Building on the insights shared here, it outlines AAMFT's strategic priorities to grow the MFT workforce, modernize licensure, and strengthen support systems for today's therapists. Together, these reports offer a roadmap for a profession rising to meet a complex world with clarity, compassion, and systemic insight.

## Want to Continue Advancing the Field of Marriage and Family Therapy?

Whether you're just starting your journey or are a seasoned professional, AAMFT provides the resources, advocacy, and support you need to thrive. As a member, you'll gain access to cutting-edge research, continuing education, networking opportunities, and the opportunity to become a powerful voice helping to shape the future of the MFT profession. **Become an AAMFT member today and help move the field forward – together.**

Contact AAMFT via email at [central@aamft.org](mailto:central@aamft.org) for more information about this report.

**“The most gratifying part [of my job] for me is seeing people make progress in their own journey and begin to implement the changes they had so desperately talked about wanting.”**

– Ivonne H.

# References

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (2022). *Marriage and family therapist workforce study 2022*. <https://aamft.org/workforcestudy>

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (n.d.) About marriage and family therapists. [https://www.aamft.org/About\\_AAMFT/About\\_Marriage\\_and\\_Family\\_Therapists.aspx?hkey=1c77b71c-0331-417b-b59b-34358d32b909](https://www.aamft.org/About_AAMFT/About_Marriage_and_Family_Therapists.aspx?hkey=1c77b71c-0331-417b-b59b-34358d32b909)