

¹ Overview of the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge: ² Evaluating small molecule microscopic and ³ macroscopic pK_a predictions

⁴ Mehtap Işık (ORCID: [0000-0002-6789-952X](#))^{1,2*}, Ariën S. Rustenburg (ORCID: [0000-0002-3422-0613](#))^{1,3}, Andrea
⁵ Rizzi (ORCID: [0000-0001-7693-2013](#))^{1,4}, M. R. Gunner (ORCID: [0000-0003-1120-5776](#))⁶, David L. Mobley (ORCID:
⁶ [0000-0002-1083-5533](#))⁵, John D. Chodera (ORCID: [0000-0003-0542-119X](#))¹

⁷ ¹Computational and Systems Biology Program, Sloan Kettering Institute, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center,
⁸ New York, NY 10065, United States; ²Tri-Institutional PhD Program in Chemical Biology, Weill Cornell Graduate
⁹ School of Medical Sciences, Cornell University, New York, NY 10065, United States; ³Graduate Program in
¹⁰ Physiology, Biophysics, and Systems Biology, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, NY 10065, United States;
¹¹ ⁴Tri-Institutional PhD Program in Computational Biology and Medicine, Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical
¹² Sciences, Cornell University, New York, NY 10065, United States; ⁵Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and
¹³ Department of Chemistry, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, California 92697, United States; ⁶Department of
¹⁴ Physics, City College of New York, New York NY 10031

¹⁵ *For correspondence:
¹⁶ mehtap.isik@choderlab.org (MI)

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¹⁸ Abstract

The prediction of acid dissociation constants (pK_a) is a prerequisite for predicting many other properties of a small molecule, such as its protein-ligand binding affinity, distribution coefficient ($\log D$), membrane permeability, and solubility. The prediction of each of these properties requires knowledge of the relevant protonation states and solution free energy penalties of each state. The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge was the first time that a separate challenge was conducted for evaluating pK_a predictions as part of the Statistical Assessment of Modeling of Proteins and Ligands (SAMPL) exercises. This challenge was motivated by significant inaccuracies observed in prior physical property prediction challenges, such as the SAMPL5 $\log D$ Challenge, caused by protonation state and pK_a prediction issues. The goal of the pK_a challenge was to assess the performance of contemporary pK_a prediction methods for drug-like molecules. The challenge set was composed of 24 small molecules that resembled fragments of kinase inhibitors, a number of which were multiprotic. Eleven research groups contributed blind predictions for a total of 37 pK_a distinct prediction methods. In addition to blinded submissions, four widely used pK_a prediction methods were included in the analysis as reference methods. Collecting both microscopic and macroscopic pK_a predictions allowed in-depth evaluation of pK_a prediction performance. This article highlights deficiencies of typical pK_a prediction evaluation approaches when the distinction between microscopic and macroscopic pK_a s is ignored; in particular, we suggest more stringent evaluation criteria for microscopic and macroscopic pK_a predictions guided by the available experimental data. Top-performing submissions for macroscopic pK_a predictions achieved RMSE of 0.7–1.0 pK_a units and included both quantum chemical and empirical approaches, where the total number of extra or missing macroscopic pK_a s predicted by these submissions were fewer than 8 for 24 molecules. A large number of submissions had RMSE spanning 1–3 pK_a units. Molecules with sulfur-containing heterocycles or iodo and bromo groups were less accurately predicted on average considering all methods evaluated. For a subset of molecules, we utilized experimentally-determined microstates based on NMR to evaluate the dominant tautomer predictions for each macroscopic state. Prediction of dominant tautomers was a major source of error for microscopic pK_a predictions, especially errors in charged tautomers. The degree of inaccuracy in pK_a predictions observed in this challenge is detrimental to the protein-ligand binding affinity predictions due to errors in dominant protonation state predictions and the calculation of free energy corrections for multiple protonation states. Underestimation of ligand pK_a by 1 unit can lead to errors in binding

42 free energy errors up to 1.2 kcal/mol. The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge demonstrated the need for improving pK_a prediction methods
43 for drug-like molecules, especially for challenging moieties and multiprotic molecules.

44

45 **Keywords**

46 SAMPL · blind prediction challenge · acid dissociation constant · pK_a · small molecule · macroscopic pK_a · microscopic pK_a · macro-
47 scopic protonation state · microscopic protonation state

48 **Abbreviations**

49 **SAMPL** Statistical Assessment of the Modeling of Proteins and Ligands

50 **pK_a** $-\log_{10}$ of the acid dissociation equilibrium constant

51 **$\log P$** \log_{10} of the organic solvent-water partition coefficient (K_{ow}) of neutral species

52 **$\log D$** \log_{10} of organic solvent-water distribution coefficient (D_{ow})

53 **SEM** Standard error of the mean

54 **RMSE** Root mean squared error

55 **MAE** Mean absolute error

56 τ Kendall's rank correlation coefficient (Tau)

57 **R²** Coefficient of determination (R-Squared)

58 **MPSC** Multiple protonation states correction for binding free energy

59 **DL** Database Lookup

60 **LFER** Linear Free Energy Relationship

61 **QSPR** Quantitative Structure-Property Relationship

62 **ML** Machine Learning

63 **QM** Quantum Mechanics

64 **LEC** Linear Empirical Correction

65 **1 Introduction**

66 The acid dissociation constant (K_a) describes the protonation state equilibrium of a molecule given pH. More commonly, we
67 refer to $pK_a = -\log_{10} K_a$, its negative logarithmic form. Predicting pK_a is a prerequisite for predicting many other properties of
68 small molecules such as their protein binding affinity, distribution coefficient ($\log D$), membrane permeability, and solubility. As a
69 major aim of computer-aided drug design (CADD) is to aid in the assessment of pharmaceutical and physicochemical properties
70 of virtual molecules prior to synthesis to guide decision-making, accurate computational pK_a predictions are required in order
71 to accurately model numerous properties of interest to drug discovery programs.

72 Ionizable sites are found often in drug molecules and influence their pharmaceutical properties including target affinity,
73 ADME/Tox, and formulation properties [1]. It has been reported that most drugs are ionized in the range of 60-90% at physiolog-
74 ical pH [2]. Drug molecules with titratable groups can exist in many different charge and protonation states based on the pH of
75 the environment. Given that experimental data of protonation states and pK_a are often not available, we rely on predicted pK_a
76 values to determine which charge and protonation states the molecules populate and the relative populations of these states,
77 so that we can assign the appropriate dominant protonation state(s) in fixed-state calculations or the appropriate solvent state
78 weights/protonation penalty to calculations considering multiple states.

79 The pH of the human gut ranges between 1–8, and 74% of approved drugs can change ionization state within this physio-
80 logical pH range [3]. Because of this, pK_a values of drug molecules provide essential information about their physicochemical
81 and pharmaceutical properties. A wide distribution of acidic and basic pK_a values, ranging from 0 to 12, have been observed in
82 approved drugs [1, 3].

83 Drug-like molecules present difficulties for pK_a prediction compared with simple monoprotic molecules. Drug-like molecules
84 are frequently multiprotic, have large conjugated systems, often contain heterocycles, and can tautomerize. In addition, drug-
85 like molecules with significant conformational flexibility can form intramolecular hydrogen bonding, which can significantly shift
86 their pK_a values compared to molecules that cannot form intramolecular hydrogen bonds. This presents further challenges for
87 modeling methods, where deficiencies in solvation models may mispredict the propensity for intramolecular hydrogen bond

88 formation.

89 Accurately predicting pK_a s of drug-like molecules accurately is a prerequisite for computational drug discovery and design.
90 Small molecule pK_a predictions can influence computational protein-ligand binding affinities in multiple ways. Errors in pK_a
91 predictions can cause modeling the wrong charge and tautomerization states which affect hydrogen bonding opportunities
92 and charge distribution within the ligand. The dominant protonation state and relative populations of minor states in aqueous
93 medium is dictated by the molecule's pK_a values. The relative free energy of different protonation states in the aqueous state is
94 a function of pH, and contributes to the overall protein-ligand affinity in the form of a free energy penalty for populating higher
95 energy protonation states [4]. Any error in predicting the free energy of a minor aqueous protonation state of a ligand that
96 dominates the complex binding free energy will directly add to the error in the predicted binding free energy, and selecting
97 the incorrect dominant protonation state altogether can lead to even larger modeling errors. Similarly for $\log D$ predictions, an
98 inaccurate prediction of protonation states and their relative free energies will be detrimental to the accuracy of transfer free
99 energy predictions.

100 For a monoprotic weak acid (HA) or base (B)—whose dissociation equilibria are shown in Equation 1—the acid dissociation
101 constant is expressed as in Equation 2, or, commonly, in its negative base-10 logarithmic form as in Equation 3. The ratio of
102 ionization states can be calculated with Henderson-Hasselbalch equations shown in Equation 4.



$$K_a = \frac{[A^-][H^+]}{[HA]} ; K_a = \frac{[B][H^+]}{[B^+]} \quad (2)$$

$$pK_a = -\log_{10} K_a \quad (3)$$

$$pH = pK_a + \log_{10} \frac{[A^-]}{[HA]} ; pH = pK_a + \log_{10} \frac{[B]}{[BH^+]} \quad (4)$$

103 For multiprotic molecules, the definition of pK_a diverges into macroscopic pK_a and microscopic pK_a [5–7]. Macroscopic pK_a
104 describes the equilibrium dissociation constant between different charged states of the molecule. Each charge state can be
105 composed of multiple tautomers. Macroscopic pK_a is about the deprotonation of the molecule, rather than the location of the
106 titratable group. A microscopic pK_a describes the acid dissociation equilibrium between individual tautomeric states of different
107 charges. (There is no pK_a defined between tautomers of the same charge as they have the same number of protons and their
108 relative populations are independent of pH.) The microscopic pK_a determines the identity and distribution of tautomers within
109 each charge state. Thus, each macroscopic charge state of a molecule can be composed of multiple microscopic tautomeric
110 states. The microscopic pK_a value defined between two microstates captures the deprotonation of a single titratable group
111 with other titratable groups held in a fixed background protonation state. In molecules with multiple titratable groups, the
112 protonation state of one group can affect the proton dissociation propensity of another functional group, therefore the same
113 titratable group may have different proton affinities (microscopic pK_a values) based on the protonation state of the rest of the
114 molecule.

115 Different experimental methods are sensitive to changes in the total charge or the location of individual protons, so they
116 measure different definitions of pK_a s, as explained in more detail in prior work [8]. Most common pK_a measurement techniques
117 such as potentiometric and spectrophotometric methods measure macroscopic pK_a s, while NMR measurements can determine
118 microscopic pK_a s by measuring microstate populations with respect to pH. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the
119 source and definition of pK_a values in order to correctly interpret their meaning.

120 Many computational methods can predict both microscopic and macroscopic pK_a s. While experimental measurements more
121 often provide only macroscopic pK_a s, microscopic pK_a predictions are more informative for determining relevant microstates
122 (tautomers) of a molecule and their relative free energies. Predicted microstate populations can be converted to predicted
123 macroscopic pK_a s for direct comparison with experimentally obtained macroscopic pK_a s. In this paper, we explore approaches
124 to assess the performance of both macroscopic and microscopic pK_a predictions, taking advantage of available experimental
125 data.

Microscopic pK_a predictions can be converted to macroscopic pK_a predictions either directly with Equation 5 [9],

$$K_a^{\text{macro}} = \sum_{j=1}^{N_{\text{deprot}}} \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{N_{\text{prot}}} \frac{1}{K_{ij}^{\text{micro}}}} , \quad (5)$$

126 or through computing the macroscopic free energy of deprotonation between ionization states with charges N and $N - 1$ via
127 Boltzmann-weighted sum of the relative free energy of microstates (G_i) as in Equations 6 and 7 [10].

$$\Delta G_{N-1,N} = RT \ln \frac{\sum_i e^{-G_i/RT} \delta_{N_i, N-1}}{\sum_i e^{-G_i/RT} \delta_{N_i, N}} \quad (6)$$

$$pK_a = pH - \frac{\Delta G_{N-1,N}}{RT \ln 10} \quad (7)$$

128 In Equation 6 $\Delta G_{N-1,N}$ is the effective macroscopic protonation free energy. $\delta_{N_i, N-1}$ is equal to unity when the microstate i
129 has a total charge of $N - 1$ and zero otherwise. RT is the ideal gas constant times the absolute temperature.

130 1.1 Motivation for a blind p K_a challenge

131 SAMPL (Statistical Assessment of the Modeling of Proteins and Ligands) is a series of annual computational prediction challenges
132 for the computational chemistry community. The goal of the SAMPL community is to evaluate the current performance of
133 computational models and to bring the attention of the quantitative biomolecular modeling field on problems that limit the
134 accuracy of protein-ligand binding models. SAMPL Challenges aim to enable computer-aided drug discovery to make sustained
135 progress toward higher accuracy by focusing the community on critical challenges that isolate one accuracy-limiting problem at
136 a time. By conducting a series of blind challenges—which often feature the computation of specific physical properties critical
137 for protein-ligand modeling—and encouraging rapid sharing of lessons learned, SAMPL aims to accelerate progress toward
138 quantitative accuracy in modeling.

139 SAMPL Challenges that focus on physical properties have assessed intermolecular binding models of various protein-ligand
140 and host-guest systems, as well as the prediction of hydration free energies and distribution coefficients to date. These blind
141 challenges motivate improvements in computational methods by revealing unexpected sources of error, identifying features
142 of methods that perform well or poorly, and enabling the participants to share information after each successive challenge.
143 Previous SAMPL Challenges have focused on the limitations of force field accuracy, finite sampling, solvation modeling defects,
144 and tautomer/protonation state predictions on protein-ligand binding predictions.

145 During the SAMPL5 log D Challenge, the performance of models in predicting cyclohexane-water log D was worse than
146 expected—accuracy suffered when protonation states and tautomers were not taken into account [11, 12]. Many participants
147 simply submitted log P predictions as if they were equivalent to log D , and many were not prepared to account for the con-
148 tributions of different ionization states to the distribution coefficient in their models. Challenge results highlighted that log P
149 predictions were not an accurate approximation of log D without capturing protonation state effects. The calculations were
150 improved by including free energy penalty of the neutral state which relies on obtaining an accurate p K_a prediction [11]. With
151 the goal of deconvoluting the different sources of error contributing to the large errors observed in the SAMPL5 log D Challenge,
152 we organized separate p K_a and log P challenges in SAMPL6 [8, 13, 14]. For this iteration of the SAMPL challenge, we isolated the
153 problem of predicting aqueous protonation states and associated p K_a values.

154 This is the first time a blind p K_a prediction challenge has been fielded as part of SAMPL. In this challenge, we aimed to
155 assess the performance of current p K_a prediction methods for drug-like molecules, investigate potential causes of inaccurate
156 p K_a estimates, and determine how the current level of accuracy of these models might impact the ability to make quantitative
157 predictions of protein-ligand binding affinities.

158 1.2 Approaches to predict small molecule p K_a s

159 There are a large variety of p K_a prediction methods developed for the prediction of aqueous p K_a s of small molecules. Broadly,
160 we can divide p K_a predictions as knowledge-based empirical methods and physical methods. Empirical methods include the
161 following categories: Database Lookup (DL) [15], Linear Free Energy Relationship (LFER) [16–18], Quantitative Structure-Property
162 Relationship (QSPR) [19–22], and Machine Learning (ML) approaches [23, 24]. DL methods rely on the principle that structurally
163 similar compounds have similar p K_a values and utilize an experimental database of complete structures or fragments. The p K_a
164 value of the most similar database entry is reported as the predicted p K_a of the query molecule. In the QSPR approach, the p K_a
165 values are predicted as a function of various quantitative molecular descriptors, and the parameters of the function are trained
166 on experimental datasets. A function in the form of multiple linear regression is common, although more complex forms can
167 also be used such as the artificial neural networks in ML methods. The LFER approach is the oldest p K_a prediction strategy. They

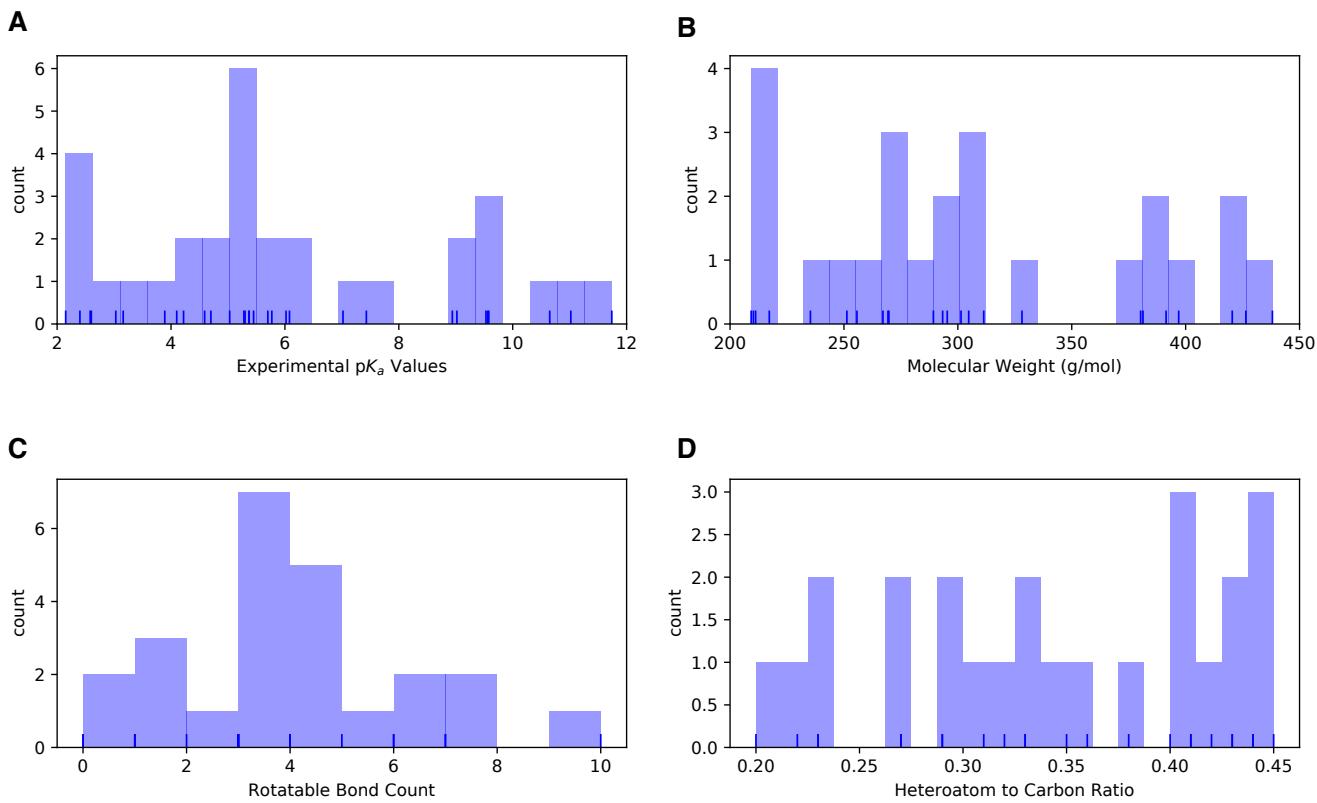


Figure 1. Distribution of molecular properties of the 24 compounds from the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge. **A** Histogram of spectrophotometric pK_a measurements collected with Sirius T3 [8]. The overlaid rug plot indicates the actual values. Five compounds have multiple measured pK_a s in the range of 2–12. **B** Histogram of molecular weights calculated for the neutral state of the compounds in SAMPL6 set. Molecular weights were calculated by neglecting counterions. **C** Histogram of the number of non-terminal rotatable bonds in each molecule. **D** The histogram of the ratio of heteroatom (non-carbon heavy atoms including O, N, F, S, Cl, Br, I) count to the number of carbon atoms.

use Hammett-Taft type equations to predict pK_a based on classification of the molecule to a parent class (associated with a base pK_a value) and two parameters that describe how the base pK_a value must be modified given its substituents. Physical modeling of pK_a predictions requires Quantum Mechanics (QM) models. QM methods are often utilized together with linear empirical corrections (LEC) that are designed to rescale and unbias QM predictions for better accuracy. Classical molecular mechanics-based pK_a prediction methods are not feasible as deprotonation is a covalent bond breaking event that can only be captured by QM. Constant-pH molecular dynamics methods can calculate pK_a shifts in large biomolecular systems where there is low degree of coupling between protonation sites and linear summation of protonation energies can be assumed [25]. However, this approach can not generally be applied to small organic molecule due to the high degree of coupling between protonation sites [26–28].

2 Methods

2.1 Design and logistics of the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge

The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge was conducted as a blind prediction challenge and focused on predicting aqueous pK_a values of 24 small molecules not previously reported in the literature. The challenge set was composed of molecules that resemble fragments of kinase inhibitors. Heterocycles that are frequently found in FDA-approved kinase inhibitors were represented in this set. The compound selection process was described in depth in the prior publication reporting SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge experimental data collection [8]. The distribution of molecular weights, experimental pK_a values, number of rotatable bonds, and heteroatom to

carbon ratio are depicted in Fig. 1. The challenge molecule set was composed of 17 small molecules with limited flexibility (less than 5 non-terminal rotatable bonds) and 7 molecules with 5–10 non-terminal rotatable bonds. The distribution of experimental pK_a values was roughly uniform between 2–12. 2D representations of all compounds are provided in Fig. 5. Drug-like molecules are often larger and more complex than the ones used in this study. We limited the size and the number of rotatable bonds of compounds to create molecule set of intermediate difficulty.

The dataset composition and experimental details—without the identity of the small molecules—were announced approximately one month before the challenge start date. Experimental macroscopic pK_a measurements were collected using a spectrophotometric method with the Sirius T3 (Sirius Analytical), at room temperature, in ionic strength-adjusted water with 0.15 M KCl [8]. The instructions for participation and the identity of the challenge molecules were released on the challenge start date (October 25, 2017). A table of molecule IDs (in the form of SM##) and their canonical isomeric SMILES was provided as input. Blind prediction submissions were accepted until January 22, 2018.

Following the conclusion of the blind challenge, the experimental data was made public on January 23, 2018. The SAMPL organizers and participants gathered at the Second Joint D3R/SAMPL Workshop at UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA on February 22–23, 2018 to share results. The workshop aimed to create an opportunity for participants to discuss the results, evaluate methodological choices by comparing the performance of different methods, and share lessons learned from the challenge. Participants reported their results and their own evaluations in a special issue of the Journal of Computer-Aided Molecular Design [29].

While designing this first pK_a prediction challenge, we did not know the optimal format to capture pK_a predictions of participants. We wanted to capture all necessary information that will aid the evaluation of pK_a predictions at the submission stage. Our strategy was to directly evaluate macroscopic pK_a predictions comparing them to experimental macroscopic pK_a values and to use collected microscopic pK_a prediction data for more in-depth diagnostics of method performance. Therefore, we asked participants to submit their predictions in three different submission types:

- **Type I:** microscopic pK_a values and related microstate pairs
- **Type II:** fractional microstate populations as a function of pH in 0.1 pH increments
- **Type III:** macroscopic pK_a values

For each submission type, a machine-readable submission file template was specified. For type I submissions, participants were asked to report the microstate ID of the protonated state, the microstate ID of deprotonated state, the microscopic pK_a , and the predicted microscopic pK_a standard error of the mean (SEM). The method of microstate enumeration and why it was needed are discussed further in Section 2.2 "Enumeration of Microstates". The SEM aims to capture the statistical uncertainty of the prediction method. Microstate IDs were preassigned identifiers for each microstate in the form of SM##_micro##. For type II submissions, the submission format included a table that started with a microstate ID column and a set of columns reporting the natural logarithm of fractional microstate population values of each predicted microstate for 0.1 pH increments between pH 2 and 12. For type III submissions participants were asked to report molecule ID, macroscopic pK_a , and macroscopic pK_a SEM.

We required participants to submit predictions for all fields for each prediction, but it was not mandatory to submit predictions for all the molecules or all three submission types. Although we accepted submissions with partial sets of molecules, it would have been a better choice to require predictions for all the molecules for a better comparison of overall method performance. The submission files also included fields for naming the method, listing the software utilized, and a free text section to describe the methodology used in detail.

Participants were allowed to submit predictions for multiple methods as long as they created separate submission files. While anonymous participation was allowed, all participants opted to make their submissions public. Blind submissions were assigned a unique 5-digit alphanumeric submission ID, which will be used throughout this paper. Unique IDs were also assigned when multiple submissions exist for different submissions types of the same method such as microscopic pK_a (type I) and macroscopic pK_a (type III). These submission IDs were also reported in the evaluation papers of participants to allow cross-referencing. Submission IDs, participant-provided method names, and method categories are presented in Table 1. In many cases, multiple types of submissions (type I, II, and III) of the same method were provided by participants as challenge instructions requested. Although each prediction set was assigned a separate submission ID, we matched the submissions that originated from the same method according to the reports of the participants for cases where multiple sets of predictions came from a given method. Submission IDs for both macroscopic (type III) and microscopic (type I) pK_a predictions for each method are shown in Table 1.

232 2.2 Enumeration of microstates

233 To capture both the pK_a value and titrating proton position for microscopic pK_a predictions, we needed microscopic pK_a values
234 to be reported together with a pair of microstates which describe the protonated and deprotonated states corresponding
235 to each microscopic transition. String representations of molecules such as canonical SMILES with explicit hydrogens can be
236 written, however, there can be inconsistencies between the interpretation of canonical SMILES written by different software
237 and algorithms. To avoid complications while reading microstate structure files from different sources, we decided that the
238 safest route was pre-enumerating all possible microstates of challenge compounds, assigning microstate IDs to each in the
239 form of SM##_micro##, and requiring participants to report microscopic pK_a values along with microstate pairs specified by
240 the provided microstates IDs.

241 We created initial sets of microstates with Schrödinger Epik [30] and OpenEye QUACPAC [31] and took the union of results.
242 Microstates with Epik were generated using Schrödinger Suite v2016-4, running Epik to enumerate all tautomers within 20 pK_a
243 units of pH 7. For enumerating microstates with OpenEye QUACPAC, we had to first enumerate formal charges and for each
244 charge enumerate all possible tautomers using the settings of maximum tautomer count 200, level 5, with carbonyl hybridization
245 set to False. Then we created a union of all enumerated states written as canonical isomeric SMILES generated by OpenEye
246 OEChem [32]. Even though resonance structures correspond to different canonical isomeric SMILES, they are not different
247 microstates, therefore it was necessary to remove resonance structures that were replicates of the same tautomer. To detect
248 equivalent resonance structures, we converted canonical isomeric SMILES to InChI hashes with explicit and fixed hydrogen
249 layer. Structures that describe the same tautomer but different resonance states lead to explicit hydrogen InChI hashes that
250 are identical, allowing replicates to be removed. The Jupyter Notebook used for the enumeration of microstates is provided in
251 Supplementary Information.

252 We provided microstate ID tables with canonical SMILES and 2D depictions to aid participants in matching predicted structures
253 to microstate IDs. A canonical SMILES representation was selected over canonical isomeric SMILES, because resonance
254 and geometric isomerism do not lead to different microstates according to our working microstate definition. The only exception
255 was for molecule SM20, which should be consistently modeled as the E-isomer.

256 During the course of the SAMPL6 Challenge, participants identified new microstates that were not present in the initial list
257 that we provided. Despite combining enumerated charge states and tautomers generated by both Epik and OpenEye QUACPAC,
258 to our surprise, the microstate lists were still incomplete. Based on participant requests for new microstates, we iteratively
259 had to update the list of microstates and assign new microstate IDs. Every time we received a request, we shared the updated
260 microstate ID lists with all challenge participants. Some participants updated their pK_a prediction by including the newly added
261 microstates in their calculations. In the future, developing a better algorithm that can enumerate all possible microstates (not
262 just the ones with significant populations) would be very beneficial for anticipating microstates that may be predicted by pK_a
263 prediction methods.

264 A microscopic pK_a definition was provided in challenge instructions for clarity as follows: Physically meaningful microscopic
265 pK_a s are defined between microstate pairs that can interconvert by single protonation/deprotonation event of only one titrable
266 group. So, microstate pairs should have total charge (absolute) difference of 1 and only one heavy atom that differs in the
267 number of associated hydrogens, regardless of resonance state or geometric isomerism. All geometric isomer and resonance
268 structure pairs that have the same number of hydrogens bound to equivalent heavy atoms are grouped into the same microstate.
269 Pairs of resonance structures and geometric isomers (cis/trans, stereo) are not considered as different microstates, as long as
270 there is no change in the number of hydrogens bound to each heavy atom. Transitions where there are shifts in the position
271 of protons coupled to changes in the number of protons were also not considered as microscopic pK_a values [26]. Since we
272 wanted participants to report only microscopic pK_a s that describe single deprotonation events (in contrast to transitions between
273 microstates that are different in terms of two or more titratable protons), we have also provided a pre-enumerated list of allowed
274 microstate pairs.

275 Provided microstate ID and microstate pair lists were intended to be used for reporting microstate IDs and to aid parsing of
276 submissions. The enumerated lists of microstates were not created with the intent to guide computational predictions. This was
277 clearly stated in the challenge instructions. However, we noticed that some participants still used the microstate lists as an input
278 for their pK_a predictions as we received complaints from participants that due to our updates to microstate lists they needed
279 to repeat their calculations. This would not have been an issue if participants used pK_a prediction protocols that did not rely on
280 an external pre-enumerated list of microstates as an input. None of the participants reported this dependency in their method
281 descriptions explicitly, so it was also not obvious how participants were using the provided states in their predictions. We could

not identify which submissions used these enumerated microstate lists as input for predictions and which have followed the challenge instructions and relied only on their prediction method to generate microstates.

2.3 Evaluation approaches

Since the experimental data for the challenge was mainly composed of macroscopic pK_a values of both monoprotic and multiprotic compounds, evaluation of macroscopic and microscopic pK_a predictions was not straightforward. For a subset of 8 molecules, the dominant microstate sequence could be inferred from NMR experiments. For the rest of the molecules, the only experimental information available was the macroscopic pK_a value. The experimental data—in the form of macroscopic pK_a values—did not provide any information on which group(s) are being titrated, the microscopic pK_a values, the identity of the associated macrostates (which total charge), or microstates (which tautomers). Also, experimental data did not provide any information about the charge state of protonated and deprotonated species associated with each macroscopic pK_a . Typically charges of states associated with experimental pK_a values are assigned based on pK_a predictions, not experimental evidence, but we did not utilize such computational charge assignment. For a fair performance comparison between methods, we avoided relying on any particular pK_a prediction to assist the interpretation of the experimental reference data. This choice complicated the pK_a prediction analysis, especially regarding how to pair experimental and predicted pK_a values for error analysis. We adopted various evaluation strategies guided by the experimental data. To compare macroscopic pK_a predictions to experimental values, we had to utilize numerical matching algorithms before we could calculate performance statistics. For the subset of molecules with experimental data about microstates, we used microstate-based matching. These matching methods are described in more detail in the next section.

Three types of submissions were collected during the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge. We have only utilized the type I (microscopic pK_a value and microstate IDs) and the type III (macroscopic pK_a value) predictions in this article. Type I submissions contained the same prediction information as the type II submissions which reported the fractional population of microstates with respect to pH. We collected type II submissions in order to capture relative populations of microstates, not realizing they were redundant. The microscopic pK_a predictions collected in type I submissions capture all the information necessary to calculate type II submissions. Therefore, we did not use type II submissions for challenge evaluation. In theory, type III (macroscopic pK_a) predictions can also be calculated from type I submissions, but collecting type III submissions allowed the participation of pK_a prediction methods that directly predict macroscopic pK_a values without considering microspeciation and methods that apply special empirical corrections for macroscopic pK_a predictions.

2.3.1 Matching algorithms for pairing predicted and experimental pK_a values

Macroscopic pK_a predictions can be calculated from microscopic pK_a values for direct comparison to experimental macroscopic pK_a values. One major question must be answered to allow this comparison: How should we match predicted macroscopic pK_a values to experimental macroscopic pK_a values when there could multiple pK_a values reported for a given molecule? For example, experiments on SM18 showed three macroscopic pK_a s, but prediction of *xvxzd* method reported two macroscopic pK_a values. There were also examples of the opposite situation with more predicted pK_a values than experimentally determined macroscopic pK_a s: One experimental pK_a was measured for SM02, but two macroscopic pK_a values were predicted by *xvxzd* method. The experimental and predicted values must be paired before any prediction error can be calculated, even though there was not any experimental information regarding underlying tautomer and charge states.

Knowing the charges of macrostates would have guided the pairing between experimental and predicted macroscopic pK_a values, however, not all experimental pK_a measurements can determine determine the charge of protonation states. The potentiometric pK_a measurements just captures the relative charge change between macrostates, but not the absolute value of the charge. Thus, our experimental data did not provide any information that would indicate the titration site, the overall charge, or the tautomer composition of macrostate pairs that are associated with each measured macroscopic pK_a that can guide the matching between predicted and experimental pK_a values.

For evaluating macroscopic pK_a predictions taking the experimental data as reference, Fraczkiewicz [23] delineated recommendations for fair comparative analysis of computational pK_a predictions. They recommended that, in the absence of any experimental information that would aid in matching, experimental and computational pK_a values should be matched preserving the order of pK_a values and minimizing the sum of absolute errors.

We picked the Hungarian matching algorithm [33, 34] to match experimental and predicted macroscopic pK_a values with a squared error cost function as suggested by Kiril Lanevskij via personal communication. The algorithm is available in the SciPy package (*scipy.optimize.linear_sum_assignment*) [35]. This matching algorithm provides optimum global assignment that

minimizes the linear sum of squared errors of all pairwise matches. We selected the squared error cost function instead of the absolute error cost function to avoid misordered matches. For instance, for a molecule with experimental pK_a values of 4 and 6, and predicted pK_a values of 7 and 8, Hungarian matching with absolute error cost function would match 6 to 7 and 4 to 9. Hungarian matching with squared error cost would match 4 to 7 and 6 to 9, preserving the increasing pK_a value order between experimental and predicted values. A weakness of this approach would be failing to match the experimental value of 6 to predicted value of 7 if that was the correct match based on underlying macrostates. But the underlying pair of states were unknown to us both because the experimental data did not determine which charge states the transitions were happening between and also because we did not collect the pair of macrostates associated with each pK_a predictions in submissions. Requiring this information for macroscopic pK_a predictions in future SAMPL challenges would allow for better comparison between predictions, even if experimental assignment of charges is not possible. There is no perfect solution to the numerical pK_a assignment problem, but we tried to determine the fairest way to penalize predictions based on their numerical deviation from the experimental values.

For the analysis of microscopic pK_a predictions we adopted a different matching approach. For the eight molecules for which we had the requisite data for this analysis, we utilized the dominant microstate sequence inferred from NMR experiments to match computational predictions and experimental pK_a values. We will refer to this assignment method as microstate matching, where the experimental pK_a value is matched to the computational microscopic pK_a value which was reported for the dominant microstate pair observed for each transition. We have compared the results of Hungarian matching and microstate matching.

Inevitably, the choice of matching algorithms to assign experimental and predicted values has an impact on the computed performance statistics. We believe the Hungarian algorithm for numerical matching of unassigned pK_a values and microstate-based matching when experimental microstates are known were the best choices, providing the most unbiased matching without introducing assumptions outside of the experimental data.

2.3.2 Statistical metrics for submission performance

A variety of accuracy and correlation statistics were considered for analyzing and comparing the performance of prediction methods submitted to the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge. Calculated performance statistics of predictions were provided to participants before the workshop. Details of the analysis and scripts are maintained on the SAMPL6 GitHub Repository (described in Section 5).

Error metrics

There are six error metrics reported for the numerical error of the pK_a values: the root-mean-squared error (RMSE), mean absolute error (MAE), mean error (ME), coefficient of determination (R^2), linear regression slope (m), and Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient (τ). Uncertainty in each performance statistic was calculated as 95% confidence intervals estimated by non-parametric bootstrapping (sampling with replacement) over predictions with 10 000 bootstrap samples. Calculated errors statistics of all methods can be found in Table S2 for macroscopic pK_a predictions and Tables S4 and S4 for microscopic pK_a predictions.

Assessing macrostate predictions

In addition to assessing the numerical error in predicted pK_a values, we also evaluated predictions in terms of their ability to capture the correct macrostates (ionization states) and microstates (tautomers of each ionization state) to the extent possible from the available experimental data. For macroscopic pK_a s, the spectrophotometric experiments do not directly report on the identity of the ionization states. However, the number of ionization states indicates the number of macroscopic pK_a s that exists between the experimental range of 2.0–12.0. For instance, SM14 has two experimental pK_a s and therefore three different charge states observed between pH 2.0 and 12.0. If a prediction reported 4 macroscopic pK_a s, it is clear that this method predicted an extra ionization state. With this perspective, we reported the number of unmatched experimental pK_a s (the number of missing pK_a predictions, i.e., missing ionization states) and the number of unmatched predicted pK_a s (the number of extra pK_a predictions, i.e., extra ionization states) after Hungarian matching. The latter count was restricted to only predictions with pK_a values between 2 and 12 because that was the range of the experimental method. Errors in extra or missing pK_a prediction errors highlight failure to predict the correct number of ionization states within a pH range.

Assessing microstate predictions

For the evaluation of microscopic pK_a predictions, taking advantage of the available dominant microstate sequence data for a subset of 8 compounds, we calculated the dominant microstate prediction accuracy which is the ratio of correct dominant tautomer predictions for each charge state divided by the total number of dominant tautomer predictions. Dominant microstate

379 prediction accuracy was calculated over all experimentally detected ionization states of each molecule which were part of this
380 analysis. In order to extract the sequence of dominant microstates from the microscopic pK_a predictions sets, we calculated
381 the relative free energy of microstates selecting a neutral tautomer and pH 0 as reference following Equation 8. Calculation of
382 relative microstate free energies was explained in more detail in a previous publication [26].

383 The relative free energy of a state with respect to reference state B at pH 0.0 (arbitrary pH value selected as reference) can
384 be calculated as follows:

$$\Delta G_{AB} = \Delta m_{AB} RT \ln 10 (pH - pK_a) \quad (8)$$

385 Δm_{AB} is equal to the number protons in state A minus that in state B. R and T indicate the molar gas constant and temperature,
386 respectively. By calculating relative free energies of all predicted microstates with respect to the same reference state and pH,
387 we were able to determine the sequence of predicted dominant microstates. The dominant tautomer of each charge state
388 was determined as the microstate with the lowest free energy in the subset of predicted microstates of each ionization state.
389 This approach is feasible because the relative free energy of tautomers of the same ionization state is independent of pH and
390 therefore the choice of reference pH is arbitrary.

391 Identifying consistently top-performing methods

392 We created a shortlist of top-performing methods for macroscopic and microscopic pK_a predictions. The top macroscopic pK_a
393 predictions were selected if they ranked in the top 10 consistently according to two error metrics (RMSE, MAE) and two correlation
394 metrics (R-Squared, and Kendall's Tau), while also having fewer than eight missing or extra macroscopic pK_a s for the entire
395 molecule set (eight macrostate errors correspond to macrostate prediction mistake in roughly one third of the 24 compounds).
396 These methods are presented in Table 2. A separate list of top-performing methods was constructed for microscopic pK_a with
397 the following criteria: ranking in the top 10 methods when ranked by accuracy statistics (RMSE and MAE) and perfect dominant
398 microstate prediction accuracy. These methods are presented in Table 3.

399 Determining challenging molecules

400 In addition to comparing the performance of methods, we also wanted to compare pK_a prediction performance for each molecule
401 to determine which molecules were the most challenging for pK_a predictions considering all the methods in the challenge. For
402 this purpose, we plotted prediction error distributions of each molecule calculated over all prediction methods. We also calcu-
403 lated MAE for each molecule over all prediction sets as well as for predictions from each method category separately.

404 2.4 Reference calculations

405 Including a null model is helpful in comparative performance analysis of predictive methods to establish what the performance
406 statistics look like for a baseline method for the specific dataset. Null models or null predictions employ a simple prediction
407 model which is not expected to be particularly successful, but it provides a simple point of comparison for more sophisticated
408 methods. The expectation or goal is for more sophisticated or costly prediction methods to outperform the predictions from a
409 null model, otherwise the simpler null model would be preferable. In SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge there were two blind submissions
410 using database lookup methods that were submitted to serve as null predictions. These methods, with submission IDs 5nm4j and
411 5nm4j both used OpenEye pKa-Prospector database to find the most similar molecule to query molecule and simply reported its
412 pK_a as the predicted value. Database lookup methods with a rich experimental database do present a challenging null model to
413 beat, however, due to the accuracy level needed from pK_a predictions for computer-aided drug design we believe such methods
414 provide an appropriate performance baseline that physical and empirical pK_a prediction methods should strive to outperform.

415 We also included additional reference calculations in the comparative analysis to provide more perspective. Some widely
416 used methods by academia and industry were missing from the blind challenge submission. Therefore, we included those meth-
417 ods as reference calculations: Schrödinger/Epik (nb007, nb008, nb010), Schrödinger/Jaguar (nb011, nb013), Chemaxon/Chemicalize
418 (nb015), and Molecular Discovery/MoKa (nb016, nb017). Epik and Jaguar pK_a predictions were collected by Bas Rustenburg, Chem-
419 icalize predictions by Mehtap Isik, and MoKa predictions by Thomas Fox. All were done after the challenge deadline avoiding
420 any alterations to their respective standard procedures and any guidance from experimental data. Experimental data was pub-
421 licly available before these calculations were complete, therefore reference calculations were not formally considered as blind
422 submissions.

423 All figures and statistics tables in this manuscript include reference calculations. As the reference calculations were not formal
424 submissions, these were omitted from formal ranking in the challenge, but we present plots in this article which show them for
425 easy comparison. These are labeled with submission IDs of the form nb### to clearly indicate non-blind reference calculations.

3 Results and Discussion

Participation in the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge was high with 11 research groups contributing pK_a prediction sets for 37 methods. A large variety of pK_a prediction methods were represented in the SAMPL6 Challenge. We categorized these submissions into four method classes: database lookup (DL), linear free energy relationship (LFER), quantitative structure-property relationship or machine learning (QSPR/ML), and quantum mechanics (QM). Quantum mechanics models were subcategorized into QM methods with and without linear empirical correction (LEC), and combined quantum mechanics and molecular mechanics (QM + MM). Table 1 presents method names, submission IDs, method categories, and also references for each approach. Integral equation-based approaches (e.g. EC-RISM) were also evaluated under the Physical (QM) category. There were 2 DL, 4 LFER, and 5 QSPR/ML methods represented in the challenge, including the reference calculations. The majority of QM calculations include linear empirical corrections (22 methods in QM + LEC category), and only 5 QM methods were submitted without any empirical corrections. There were 4 methods that used a mixed physical modeling approach of QM + MM.

The following sections present a detailed performance evaluation of blind submissions and reference prediction methods for macroscopic and microscopic pK_a predictions. Performance statistics of all the methods can be found in Tables S2 and S4. Methods are referred to by their submission ID's which are provided in Table 1.

3.1 Analysis of macroscopic pK_a predictions

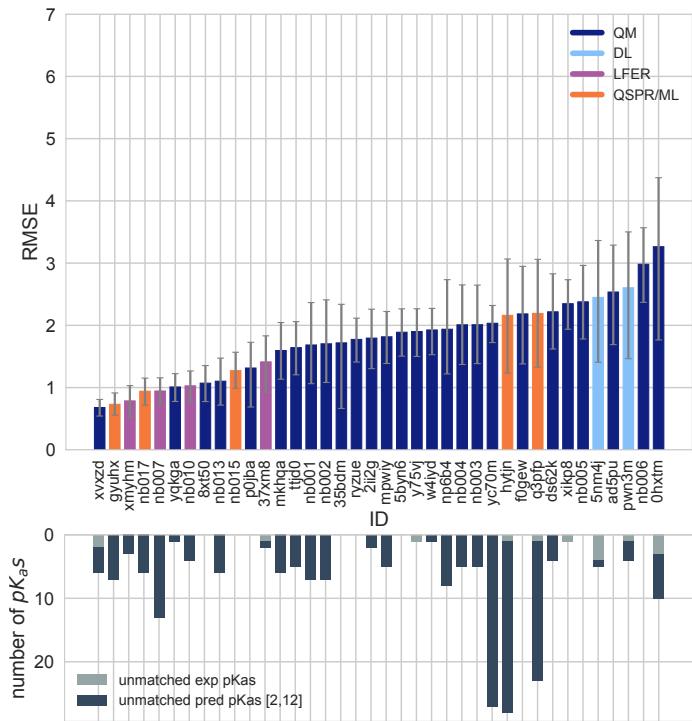


Figure 2. RMSE and unmatched pK_a counts vs. submission ID plots for macroscopic pK_a predictions based on Hungarian matching. Methods are indicated by submission IDs. RMSE is shown with error bars denoting 95% confidence intervals obtained by bootstrapping over challenge molecules. Submissions are colored by their method categories. Light blue colored database lookup methods are utilized as the null prediction method. QM methods category (navy) includes pure QM, QM+LEC, and QM+MM approaches. Lower bar plots show the number of unmatched experimental pK_a values (light grey, missing predictions) and the number of unmatched pK_a predictions (dark grey, extra predictions) for each method between pH 2 and 12. Submission IDs are summarized in Table 1. Submission IDs of the form nb### refer to non-blinded reference methods computed after the blind challenge submission deadline. All others refer to blind, prospective predictions.

The performance of macroscopic pK_a predictions was analyzed by comparison to experimental pK_a values collected by the spectrophotometric method via numerical matching following the Hungarian method. Overall pK_a prediction performance was worse than we hoped. Fig. 2 shows RMSE calculated for each prediction method represented by their submission IDs. Other performance statistics are depicted in Fig. 3. In both figures, method categories are indicated by the color of the error bars. The statistics depicted in these figures can be found in Table S2. Prediction error ranged between 0.7 to 3.2 pK_a units in terms of

Table 1. Submission IDs, names, category, and type for all the pKa prediction sets. Reference calculations are labeled as *nb###*. The method name column lists the names provided by each participant in the submission file. The “type” column indicates if a submission was or a post-deadline reference calculation, denoted by “Blind” or “Reference” respectively. The methods in the table are grouped by method category and not ordered by performance.

Method Category	Method	Microscopic pKa (Type I) Submission ID	Macroscopic pKa (Type III) Submission ID	Submission Type	Ref.
DL	Substructure matches to experimental data in pKa OpenEye pKa Prospector Database v1.0	<i>5nm4j</i>	Null	[36]	
DL	OpenEye pKa-Prospector 1.0.0.3 with Analog Search ion identification algorithm	<i>pwn3m</i>	Null	[36]	
LFER	ACD/pKa GALAS (ACD/Percepta Kernel v1.6)	<i>v8qph</i>	<i>37xm8</i>	Blind	[37]
LFER	ACD/pKa Classic (ACD/Percepta Kernel, v1.6)		<i>xmyhm</i>	Blind	[38]
LFER	Epik Scan (Schrödinger v2017-4)		<i>nb007</i>	Reference	[30]
LFER	Epik Microscopic (Schrödinger v2017-4)	<i>nb008</i>	<i>nb010</i>	Reference	[30]
QSPR/ML	OpenEye Gaussian Process	<i>6tvf8</i>	<i>hyjnj</i>	Blind	[12]
QSPR/ML	OpenEye Gaussian Process Resampled		<i>q3pfj</i>	Blind	[12]
QSPR/ML	S+pKa (ADMET Predictor v8.5, Simulations Plus)	<i>hdijq</i>	<i>gyuhx</i>	Blind	[24]
QSPR/ML	Chemicalize v18.23 (ChemAxon MarvinSketch v18.23)		<i>nb015</i>	Reference	[39]
QSPR/ML	Moka v3.1.3	<i>nb016</i>	<i>nb017</i>	Reference	[22, 40]
QM	Adiabatic scheme with single point correction: SMD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X//6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X//6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections	<i>ko8yx</i>	<i>ryzue</i>	Blind	[41]
QM	Direct scheme with single point correction: SMD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X//6-31G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X//6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections	<i>w4z0e</i>	<i>xikp8</i>	Blind	[41]
QM	Adiabatic scheme: thermodynamic cycle that uses gas phase optimized structures for gas phase free energy and solution phase geometries for solvent phase free energy. SMD/M06-2X//6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections	<i>wcvnu</i>	<i>5byn6</i>	Blind	[41]
QM	Vertical scheme: thermodynamic cycle that uses only gas phase optimized structures to compute gas phase and solvation free energy. SMD/M06-2X//6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-31G(d) for acids + Thermal corrections	<i>arcko</i>	<i>w4iyd</i>	Blind	[41]
QM	Direct scheme: solution phase free energy is determined by solution phase geometries without thermodynamic cycle SMD/M06-2X//6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections	<i>wexjs</i>	<i>y75vj</i>	Blind	[41]
QM + LEC	Jaguar (Schrödinger v2017-4)	<i>nb011</i>	<i>nb013</i>	Reference	[42]
QM + LEC	CPCM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p) and global fitting	<i>y4wws</i>	<i>35bdm</i>	Blind	[10]
QM + LEC	CPCM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p) and separate fitting for neutral to negative and for positive to neutral transformations	<i>qsicn</i>	<i>p0jba</i>	Blind	[10]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-q-noThiols-2par	<i>kxzt</i>	<i>ds62k</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-q-noThiols-2par	<i>ftc8w</i>	<i>2ii2g</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-all-2par	<i>ktpj5</i>	<i>nb001</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>wuuvc</i>	<i>nb002</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-phi-all-2par	<i>2umai</i>	<i>nb003</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>cm2yq</i>	<i>nb004</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-all-1par	<i>z7fhp</i>	<i>nb005</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-phi-all-1par	<i>8toyp</i>	<i>nb006</i>	Blind*	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>epvmk</i>	<i>tjld0</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-phi-all-2par	<i>xnoe0</i>	<i>mkhqa</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P3NI-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>4o0ia</i>	<i>mpwiy</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-q-noThiols-2par	<i>nxaaw</i>	<i>ad5pu</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>0xi4b</i>	<i>f0gew</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-noThiols-2par	<i>cwyk</i>	<i>np6b4</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	PCM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)	<i>gdqeg</i>	<i>yc70m</i>	Blind	[43]
QM + LEC	COSMOtherm_FINE17 (COSMOtherm C30_1701, BP/TZVPD/FINE//BP/TZVP/COSMO)	<i>t8ewk</i>	<i>0hxtm</i>	Blind	[44, 45]
QM + LEC	DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD//PBEh-3c[DCOSMO-RS] + RRHO[GFN-xTB[GBSA]] + Gsolv(COSMO-RS[TZVPD]) and linear fit		<i>xvxzd</i>	Blind	[46]
QM + LEC	ReScos conformations // DSD-BLYP-D3 reranking // COSMOtherm pKa: DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD// PBE-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVP/COSMO + RRHO[GFN-xTB + GBSA-water] + Gsolv[COSMO-RS(FINE17/TZVPD)] level and COSMOtherm pKa applied at the single conformer pair level (COSMOtherm17.0.5 release and BP-TZVPD-FINE-C30-1701 parameterization)	<i>eyetm</i>	<i>8xt50</i>	Blind	[46]
QM + LEC	ReScos conformations // COSMOtherm pKa: DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD// PBE-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVP/COSMO + RRHO[GFN-xTB + GBSA-water] + Gsolv[COSMO-RS(FINE17/TZVPD)] level and COSMOtherm pKa was applied directly on the resulting conformer sets with at least 5% Boltzmann weights for each microspecies (COSMOtherm17.0.5 release and BP-TZVPD-FINE-C30-1701 parameterization)	<i>ccpmw</i>	<i>yqkga</i>	Blind	[46]
QM + MM	M06-2X//6-31G*(for bases) or 6-31+G*(for acids) for gas phase, solvation free energy using TI with explicit solvent and GAFF, solvation free energy of proton -265.6 kcal/mol	<i>0wfzo</i>		Blind	[47]
QM + MM	M06-2X//6-31G*(for bases) or 6-31+G*(for acids) for gas phase, solvation free energy using TI with explicit solvent and GAFF, solvation free energy of proton -271.88 kcal/mol	<i>z3btx</i>		Blind	
QM + MM	M06-2X//6-31G*(for bases) or 6-31+G*(for acids) + thermal state correction for gas phase, solvation free energy using TI with explicit solvent and GAFF, solvation free energy of proton -265.6 kcal/mol	<i>758j8</i>		Blind	
QM + MM	M06-2X//6-31G*(for bases) or 6-31+G*(for acids) + thermal state correction for gas phase, solvation free energy using TI with explicit solvent and GAFF, solvation free energy of proton -271.88 kcal/mol	<i>hgn83</i>		Blind	

* Microscopic pKa submissions were blind, however, participant requested a correction after blind submission deadline for macroscopic pKa submissions. Therefore, these were assigned submission IDs in the form of *nb##*.

RMSE, while an RMSE between 2-3 log units was observed for the majority of methods (20 out of 38 methods). Only five methods achieved RMSE less than 1 pK_a unit. One is QM method with COSMO-RS approach for solvation and linear empirical correction (*xvxzd* (DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD//PBEh-3c[DCOSMO-RS] + RRHO(GFN-xTB[GBSA]) + Gsolv(COSMO-RS[TZVPD]) and linear fit)), and the remaining four are empirical prediction methods of LFER (*xmyhm* (ACD/pKa Classic), *nb007* (Schrödinger/Epk Scan)) and QSPR/ML categories (*gyuhx* (Simulations Plus), *nb017* (MoKa)). These five methods with RMSE less than 1 pK_a unit are also the methods that have the lowest MAE. *xvxzd* and *xmyhm* were the only two methods for which the upper 95% confidence interval of RMSE was lower than 1 pK_a unit.

In terms of correlation statistics, many methods have good performance, although the ranking of methods changes according to R^2 and Kendall's Tau. Therefore, many methods are indistinguishable from one another, considering the uncertainty of the correlation statistics. 32 out of 38 methods have R and Kendall's Tau higher than 0.7 and 0.6, respectively. 8 methods have R^2 higher than 0.9 and 6 methods have Kendall's Tau higher than 0.8. The overlap of these two sets are the following: *gyuhx* (Simulations Plus), *xvxzd* (DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD//PBEh-3c[DCOSMO-RS] + RRHO(GFN-xTB[GBSA]) + Gsolv(COSMO-RS[TZVPD]) and linear fit), *xmyhm* (ACD/pKa Classic), *ryzue* (Adiabatic scheme with single point correction: MD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X/6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X//6-311++G(d,p)//M06-2X/6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections), and *5byn6* (Adiabatic scheme: thermodynamic cycle that uses gas phase optimized structures for gas phase free energy and solution phase geometries for solvent phase free energy. SMD/M06-2X/6-31+G(d) for bases and SMD/M06-2X/6-31G(d) for acids + thermal corrections). It is worth noting that *ryzue* and *5byn6* are QM predictions without any empirical correction. Their high correlation and rank correlation coefficient scores signal that with an empirical correction their accuracy based performance could improve. Indeed, the participants have shown that this is the case in their own challenge analysis paper and achieved RMSE of 0.73 pK_a units after the challenge [41].

Null prediction methods based on database lookup (*5nm4j* and *pwn3m*) had similar performance, with an RMSE of roughly 2.5 pK_a units, an MAE of 1.5 pK_a units, R^2 of 0.2, and Kendall's Tau of 0.3. Many methods were observed to have a prediction performance advantage over the null predictions shown in light blue in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 considering all the performance metrics as a whole. In terms of correlation statistics, the null methods are the worst performers, except for *0hxtm*. From the perspective of accuracy-based statistics (RMSE and MAE), only the top 10 methods were observed to have significantly lower errors than the null methods considering the uncertainty of error metrics expressed as 95% confidence intervals.

The distribution of macroscopic pK_a prediction signed errors observed in each submission was plotted in Fig. 7A as ridge plots using the Hungarian matching scheme. *2ii2g*, *f0gew*, *np64b*, *p0jba*, and *yc70m* tended to overestimate, while *5byn6*, *ryzue*, and *w4iyd* tended to underestimate macroscopic pK_a values.

Four submissions in the QM+LEC category used the COSMO-RS implicit solvation model. While three of these achieved the lowest RMSE among QM-based methods (*xvxzd*, *yqkga*, and *8xt50*) [46], one of them showed the highest RMSE (*0hxtm* (COSMOterm_FINE17)) among all SAMPL6 Challenge macroscopic pK_a predictions. All four methods used COSMO-RS/FINE17 to compute solvation free energies. The major difference between the three low-RMSE methods and *0hxtm* seems to be the protocol for determining relevant conformations for each microstate. *xvxzd*, *yqkga*, and *8xt50* used a semi-empirical tight binding (GFN-xTB) method and GBSA continuum solvation model for geometry optimization, followed by high level single-point energy calculations with a solvation free energy correction (COSMO-RS(FINE17/TZVPD)) and rigid rotor harmonic oscillator (RRHO[GFN-xTB(GBSA)]) correction. *yqkga*, and *8xt50* selected conformations for each microstate with the Relevant Solution Conformer Sampling and Selection (ReSCoSS) workflow [46]. The conformations were clustered according to shape, and the lowest energy conformations from each cluster (according to BP86/TZVP/COSMO single point energies in any of the 10 different COSMO-RS solvents) were considered as relevant conformers. The *yqkga* method further filtered out conformers that have less than 5% Boltzmann weights at the DSD-BLYP-D3/def2-TZVPD + RRHO(GFNxTB) + COSMO-RS(fine) level. The *xvxzd* method used an MF-MD-GC//GFN-xTB workflow and energy thresholds of 6 kcal/mol and 10 kcal/mol, for conformer and microstate selection. On the other hand, the conformational ensemble captured for each microstate seems to be more limited for the *0hxtm* method, judging by the method description provided in the submission file (this participant did not publish an analysis of the results that they obtained for SAMPL6). The *0hxtm* method reported that relevant conformations were computed with the COSMOconf 4.2 workflow which produced multiple relevant conformers for only the neutral states of SM18 and SM22. In contrast to *xvxzd*, *yqkga*, and *8xt50*, the *0hxtm* method also did not include a RRHO correction. Participants who submitted the three low-RMSE methods report that capturing the chemical ensemble for each molecule including conformers and tautomers and high-level QM calculations led to more successful macroscopic pK_a prediction results and RRHO correction provided a minor improvement [46]. Comparing these results to other QM approaches in the SAMPL Challenge also points to the advantage of the COSMO-RS solvation approach compared to other implicit solvent models.

497 In addition to the statistics related to the pK_a value, we also analyzed missing or extra pK_a predictions. Analysis of the
498 pK_a values with accuracy- and correlation-based error metrics was only possible after the matching of predicted macroscopic
499 pK_a values to experimental pK_a values through Hungarian matching, although this approach masks pK_a prediction issues in
500 the form of extra or missing macroscopic pK_a predictions. To capture this class of prediction errors, we reported the number of
501 unmatched experimental pK_a s (missing pK_a predictions) and the number of unmatched predicted pK_a s (extra pK_a predictions)
502 after Hungarian matching for each method. Both missing and extra pK_a prediction counts were only considered for the pH
503 range of 2–12, which corresponds to the limits of the experimental assay. The lower subplot of Fig. 2 shows the total count
504 of unmatched experimental or predicted pK_a values for all the molecules in each prediction set. The order of submission IDs
505 in the x-axis follows the RMSD based ranking so that the performance of each method from both pK_a value accuracy and the
506 number of pK_a s can be viewed together. The omission or inclusion of extra macroscopic pK_a predictions is a critical error because
507 inaccuracy in predicting the correct number of macroscopic transitions shows that methods are failing to predict the correct set
508 of charge states, i.e., failing to predict the correct number of ionization states that can be observed between the specified pH
509 range.

510 In the analysis of these challenge results, extra macroscopic pK_a predictions were found to be more common than missing
511 pK_a predictions. In pK_a prediction evaluations, the accuracy of predicted ionization states within a pH range is usually neglected.
512 When predictions are only evaluated for the accuracy of the pK_a value with numerical matching algorithms, a larger number of
513 predicted pK_a s lead to greater underestimation of prediction errors. Therefore, it is not surprising that methods are biased to
514 predict extra pK_a values. The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge experimental data consists of 31 macroscopic pK_a s in total, measured for
515 24 molecules (6 molecules in the set have multiple pK_a s). Within the 10 methods with the lowest RMSE, only the *xvxzd* method
516 predicts too few pK_a values (2 unmatched out of 31 experimental pK_a s). All other methods that rank in the top 10 by RMSE
517 have extra predicted pK_a s ranging from 1 to 13. Two prediction sets without any extra pK_a predictions and low RMSE are *8xt50*
518 (ReSCoSS conformations // DSD-BLYP-D3 reranking // COSMOtherm pKa) and *nb015* (ChemAxon/Chemicalize).

519 3.1.1 Consistently well-performing methods for macroscopic pK_a prediction

520 Methods ranked differently when ordered by different error metrics, although there were a couple of methods that consistently
521 ranked in the top fraction. By using combinatorial criteria that take multiple statistical metrics and unmatched pK_a counts into
522 account, we identified a shortlist of consistently well-performing methods for macroscopic pK_a predictions, shown in Table 2.
523 The criteria for selection were the overall ranking in Top 10 according to RMSE, MAE, R^2 , and Kendall's Tau and also having a
524 combined unmatched pK_a (extra and missing pK_a s) count less than 8 (a third of the number of compounds). We ranked methods
525 in ascending order for RMSE and MAE and in descending order for R^2 , and Kendall's Tau to determine methods. Then, we took
526 the intersection set of Top 10 methods according to each statistic to determine the consistently-well performing methods. This
527 resulted in a list of four methods that are consistently well-performing across all criteria.

528 Consistently well-performing methods for macroscopic pK_a prediction included methods from all categories. Two methods in
529 the QM+LEC category were *xvxzd* (DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD//PBEh-3c[DCOSMO-RS] + RRHO(GFN-xTB[GBSA]) + Gsolv(COSMO-
530 RS[TZVPD]) and linear fit) and *(8xt50)* (ReSCoSS conformations // DSD-BLYP-D3 reranking // COSMOtherm pKa) and both used
531 COSMO-RS. Empirical pK_a predictions with top performance were both proprietary software. From QSPR and LFER categories,
532 *gyuhx* (Simulations Plus) and *xmyhm* (ACD/pKa Classic) were consistently well-performing methods. The Simulation Plus pK_a
533 prediction method consisted of 10 artificial neural network ensembles trained on 16,000 compounds for 10 classes of ionizable
534 atoms, with the ionization class of each atom determined using an assigned atom type and local molecular environment [48].
535 The ACD/pKa Classic method was trained on 17,000 compounds, uses Hammett-type equations, and captures effects related to
536 tautomeric equilibria, covalent hydration, resonance effects, and α , β -unsaturated systems [38].

537 Figure 4 plots predicted vs. experimental macroscopic pK_a predictions of four consistently well-performing methods, a re-
538 presentative average method, and the null method(*5nm4j*). We selected the method with the highest RMSE below the median of
539 all methods as the representative method with average performance: *2ii2g* (EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-q-noThiols-2par).

540 3.1.2 Which chemical properties are driving macroscopic pK_a prediction failures?

541 In addition to comparing the performance of methods that participated in the SAMPL6 Challenge, we also wanted to analyze
542 macroscopic pK_a predictions from the perspective of challenge molecules and determine whether particular compounds suffer
543 from larger inaccuracy in pK_a predictions. The goal of this analysis is to provide insight on which molecular properties or moieties
544 might be causing larger pK_a prediction errors. In Fig. 5, 2D depictions of the challenge molecules are presented with MAE
545 calculated for their macroscopic pK_a predictions over all methods, based on Hungarian match. For multiprotic molecules, the

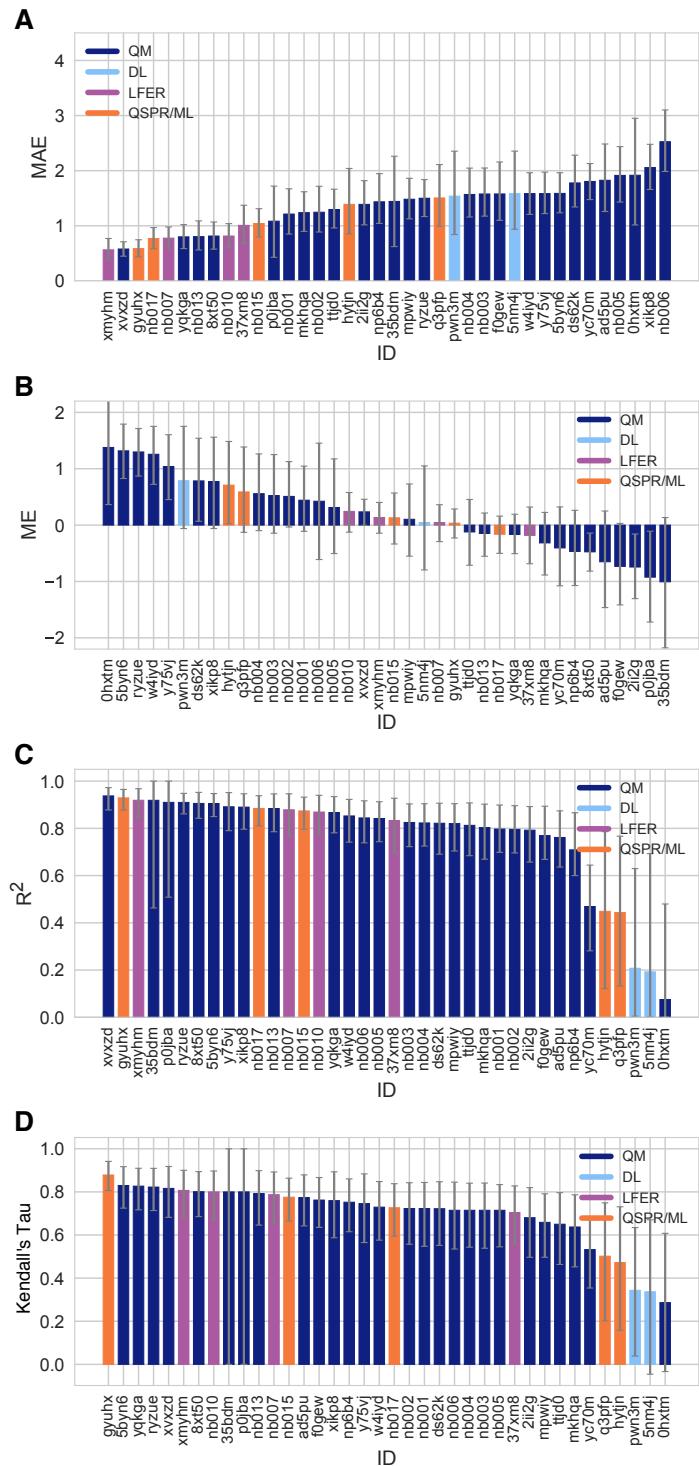


Figure 3. Additional performance statistics for macroscopic pK_a predictions based on Hungarian matching. Methods are indicated by submission IDs. Mean absolute error (MAE), mean error (ME), Pearson's R^2 , and Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient τ are shown, with error bars denoting 95% confidence intervals were obtained by bootstrapping over challenge molecules. Refer to Table 1 for the submission IDs and method names. Submissions are colored by their method categories. Light blue colored database lookup methods are utilized as the null prediction method.

546 MAE was averaged over all the pK_a values. For the analysis of pK_a prediction accuracy observed for each molecule, MAE is a
 547 more appropriate statistical value than RMSE for following global trends, as it is less sensitive to outliers than the RMSE.

Table 2. Four consistently well-performing prediction methods for macroscopic pK_a prediction based on consistent ranking within the Top 10 according to various statistical metrics. Submissions were ranked according to RMSE, MAE, R^2 , and τ . Consistently well-performing methods were selected as the ones that rank in the Top 10 in each of these statistical metrics. These methods also have less than 2 unmatched experimental pK_a s and less than 7 unmatched predicted pK_a s according to Hungarian matching. Performance statistics are provided as mean and 95% confidence intervals.

Submission ID	Method Name	RMSE	MAE	R^2	Kendall's Tau (τ)	Unmatched Exp. pK_a Count	Unmatched Pred. pK_a Count [2,12]
xvxzd	Full quantum chemical calculation of free energies and fit to experimental pK_a	0.68 [0.54, 0.81]	0.58 [0.45, 0.71]	0.94 [0.88, 0.97]	0.82 [0.68, 0.92]	2	4
gyuhx	S+pKa	0.73 [0.55, 0.91]	0.59 [0.44, 0.74]	0.93 [0.88, 0.96]	0.88 [0.8, 0.94]	0	7
xmyhm	ACD/pKa Classic	0.79 [0.52, 1.03]	0.56 [0.38, 0.77]	0.92 [0.85, 0.97]	0.81 [0.68, 0.9]	0	3
8xt50	ReSCoSS conformations // DSD-BLYP-D3 reranking // COSMOtherm pKa	1.07 [0.78, 1.36]	0.81 [0.58, 1.07]	0.91 [0.84, 0.95]	0.80 [0.68, 0.89]	0	0

548 A comparison of the prediction accuracy of individual molecules is shown in Fig. 6. In Fig. 6A, the MAE for each molecule is
 549 shown considering all blind predictions and reference calculations. A cluster of molecules marked orange and red have higher
 550 than average MAE. Molecules marked red (SM06, SM21, and SM22) are the only compounds in the SAMPL6 dataset with bromo
 551 or iodo groups and they suffered a macroscopic pK_a prediction error in the range of 1.7–2.0 pK_a units in terms of MAE. Molecules
 552 marked orange (SM03, SM10, SM18, SM19, and SM20) have sulfur-containing heterocycles, and all these molecules except SM18
 553 have MAE larger than 1.6 pK_a units. Despite containing a thiazole group, SM18 has a low prediction MAE. SM18 is the only
 554 compound with three experimental pK_a values, and we suspect the presence of multiple experimental pK_a values could have a
 555 masking effect on the errors captured by the MAE when the Hungarian matching scheme is used due to more potential pairing
 556 choices that may artificially lower the error.

557 We separately analyzed the MAE of each molecule for empirical (LFER and QSPR/ML) and QM-based physical methods (QM,
 558 QM+LEC, and QM+MM) to gain additional insight into prediction errors. Fig. 6B shows that the difficulty of predicting pK_a values
 559 of the same subset of molecules was a trend conserved in the performance of physical methods. For QM-based methods, sulfur-
 560 containing heterocycles, amides proximal to aromatic heterocycles, and compounds with iodo and bromo substitutions have
 561 lower pK_a prediction accuracy.

562 The SAMPL6 pK_a set consists of only 24 small molecules and lacks multiple examples of many moieties, limiting our ability
 563 to determine with statistical significance which chemical substructures cause greater errors in pK_a predictions. Still, the trends
 564 observed in this challenge point to molecules with iodo-, bromo-, and sulfur-containing heterocycles as having systematically
 565 larger prediction errors in macroscopic pK_a value. We hope that reporting this observation will lead to the improvement of
 566 methods for similar compounds with such moieties.

567 We have also looked for correlation with molecular descriptors for finding other potential explanations as to why macroscopic
 568 pK_a prediction errors were larger for certain molecules. While testing the correlation between errors and many molecular de-
 569 scriptors, it is important to account for the possibility of spurious correlations. We haven't observed any statistically significant
 570 correlation between numerical pK_a predictions and the descriptors we have tested. First, having more experimental pK_a values
 571 (Fig. 6A) did not seem to be associated with poorer pK_a prediction performance. Still, we need to keep in mind that multiprotic
 572 compounds were sparsely represented in the SAMPL6 set (5 molecules with 2 macroscopic pK_a values and one with 3 macro-
 573 scopic pK_a). Second, we checked the following other descriptors: presence of an amide group, molecular weight, heavy atom
 574 count, rotatable bond count, heteroatom count, heteroatom-to-carbon ratio, ring system count, maximum ring size, and the
 575 number of microstates (as enumerated for the challenge). Correlation plots and R^2 values can be seen in Fig. S2.

576 We had suspected that pK_a prediction methods may perform better for moderate values (4–10) than extreme values as
 577 molecules with extreme pK_a values are less likely to change ionization states close to physiological pH. To test this we look at
 578 the distribution of absolute errors calculated for all molecules and challenge predictions binned by experimental pK_a value 2 pK_a
 579 unit increments. As can be seen in Fig. S3B, the value of true macroscopic pK_a values was not a factor affecting the prediction
 580 error seen in SAMPL6 Challenge.

581 Fig. 7B is helpful to answer the question "Are there molecules with consistently overestimated or underestimated pK_a val-
 582 ues?". This ridge plots show the error distribution of each experimental pK_a . SM02_pKa1, SM04_pKa1, SM14_pKa1, and SM21_pKa1
 583 were underestimated, predicting lower protein affinity by more than 1 pK_a unit by majority of the prediction methods. SM03_pKa1,
 584 SM06_pKa2, SM19_pKa1, and SM20_pKa1 were overestimated by the majority of the prediction methods by more than 1 pK_a unit.
 585 SM03_pKa1, SM06_pKa2, SM10_pKa1, SM19_pKa1, and SM22_pKa1 have the highest spread of errors and were less accurately

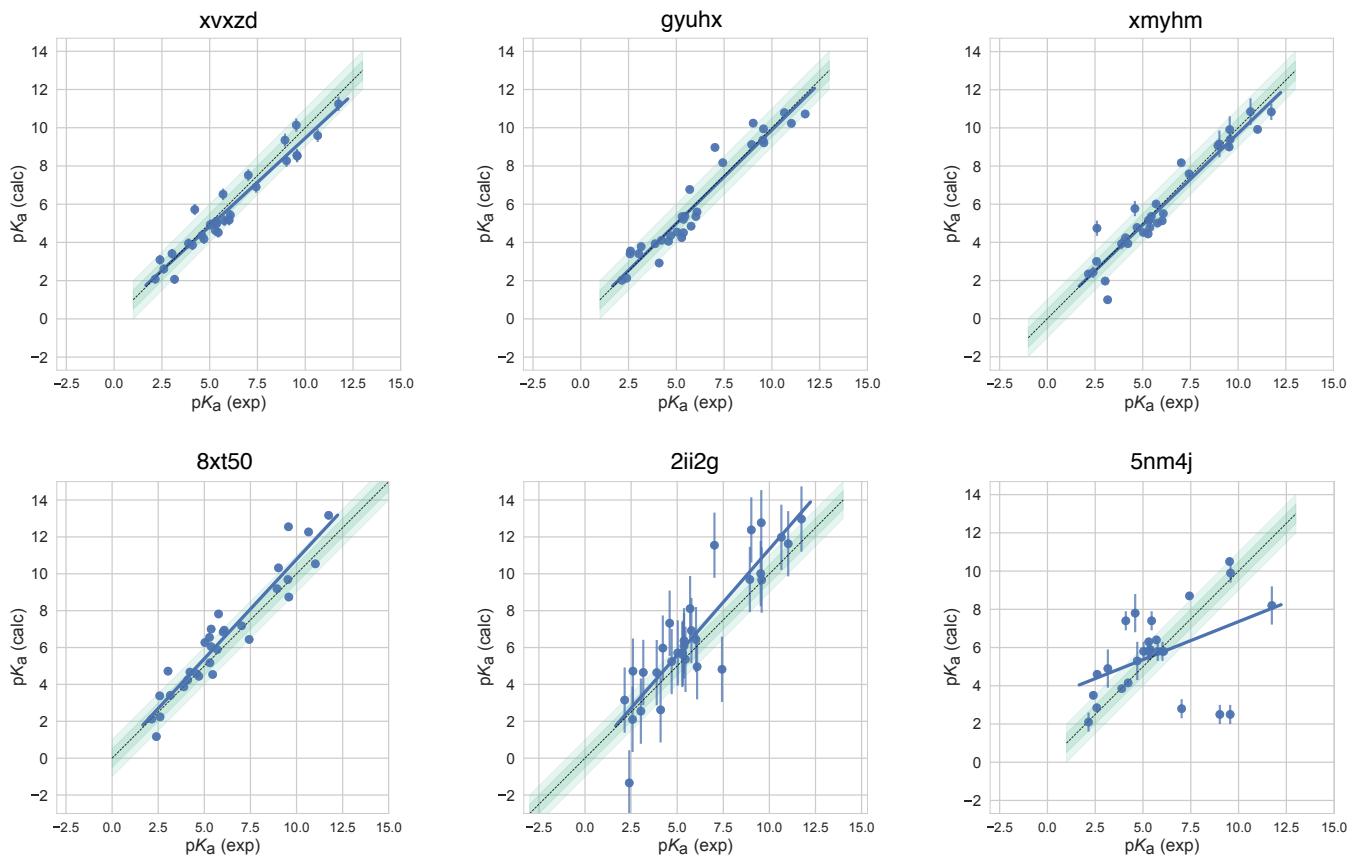


Figure 4. Predicted vs. experimental macroscopic pK_a prediction for four consistently well-performing methods, a representative method with average performance (2ii2g), and the null method (5nm4j). When submissions were ranked according to RMSE, MAE, R^2 , and τ , four methods ranked in the Top 10 consistently in each of these metrics. Dark and light green shaded areas indicate 0.5 and 1.0 units of error. Error bars indicate standard error of the mean of predicted and experimental values. Experimental pK_a SEM values are too small to be seen under the data points. EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-q-noThiols-2par method (2ii2g) was selected as the representative method with average performance because it is the method with the highest RMSE below the median.

predicted overall.

3.2 Analysis of microscopic pK_a predictions using microstates determined by NMR for 8 molecules

The most common approach for analyzing microscopic pK_a prediction accuracy has been to compare it to experimental macroscopic pK_a data, assuming experimental pK_a values describe titrations of distinguishable sites and, therefore, correspond to microscopic pK_a s. But this typical approach fails to evaluate methods at the microscopic level.

Analysis of microscopic pK_a predictions for the SAMPL6 Challenge was not straightforward due to the lack of experimental data with microscopic resolution of the titratable sites and their associated microscopic pK_a s. For 24 molecules, macroscopic pK_a values were determined with the spectrophotometric method. For 18 molecules, a single macroscopic titration was observed, and for 6 molecules multiple experimental pK_a values were observed and characterized. For 18 molecules with a single experimental pK_a , it is probable that the molecules are monoprotic and, therefore, macroscopic pK_a value is equal to the microscopic pK_a . There is, however, no direct experimental evidence supporting this hypothesis aside from the support from computational predictions, such as the predictions by ACD/pKa Classic. There is always the possibility that the macroscopic pK_a observed is the result of two different titrations overlapping closely with respect to pH if any charge state has more than one tautomer. We did not want to bias the blind challenge analysis with any prediction method. Therefore, we believe analyzing the microscopic pK_a predictions via Hungarian matching to experimental values with the assumption that the 18 molecules have a single titratable site is not the best approach. Instead, an analysis at the level of macroscopic pK_a values is much more appropriate when a numerical matching scheme is the only option to evaluate predictions using macroscopic experimental data.

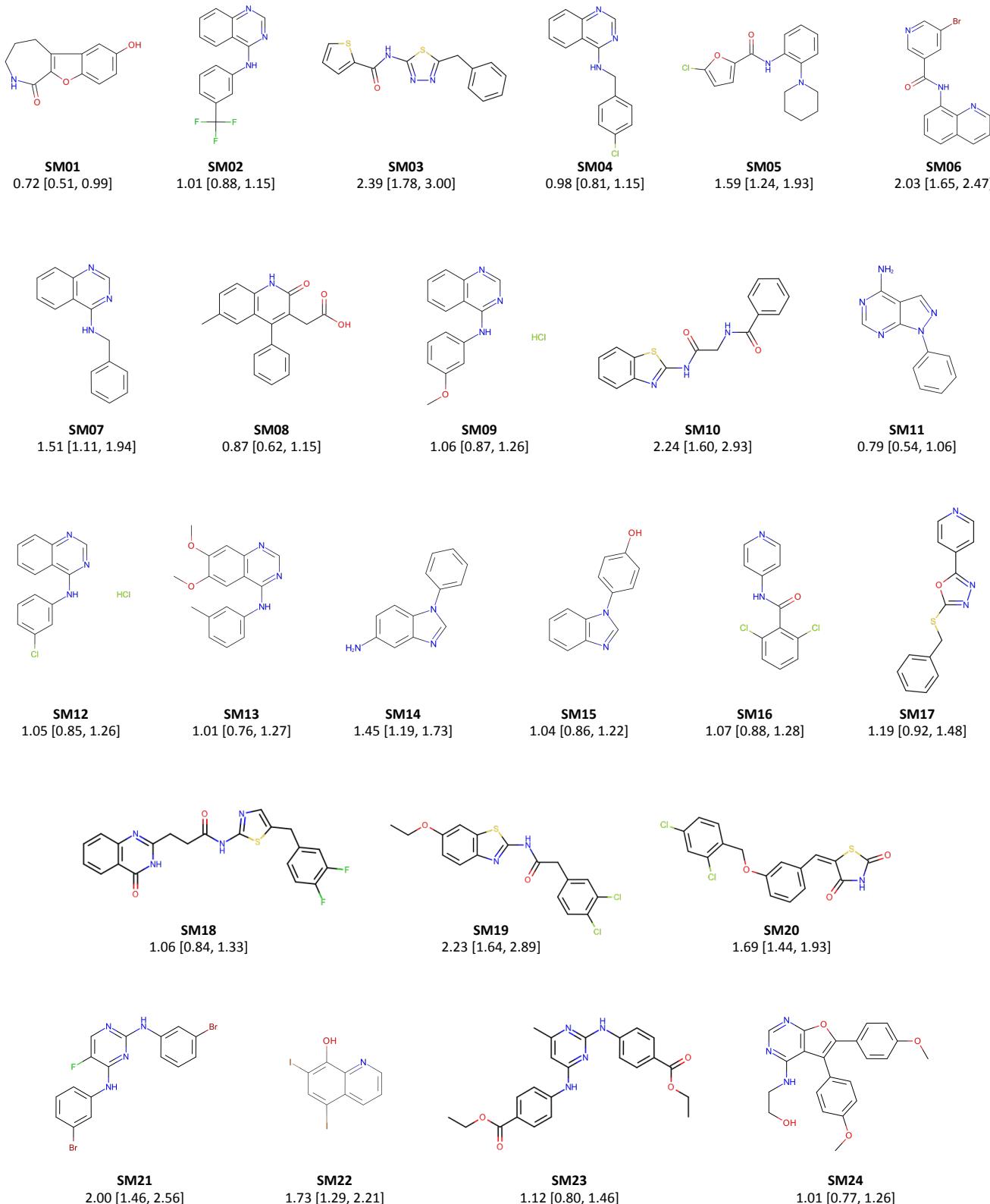
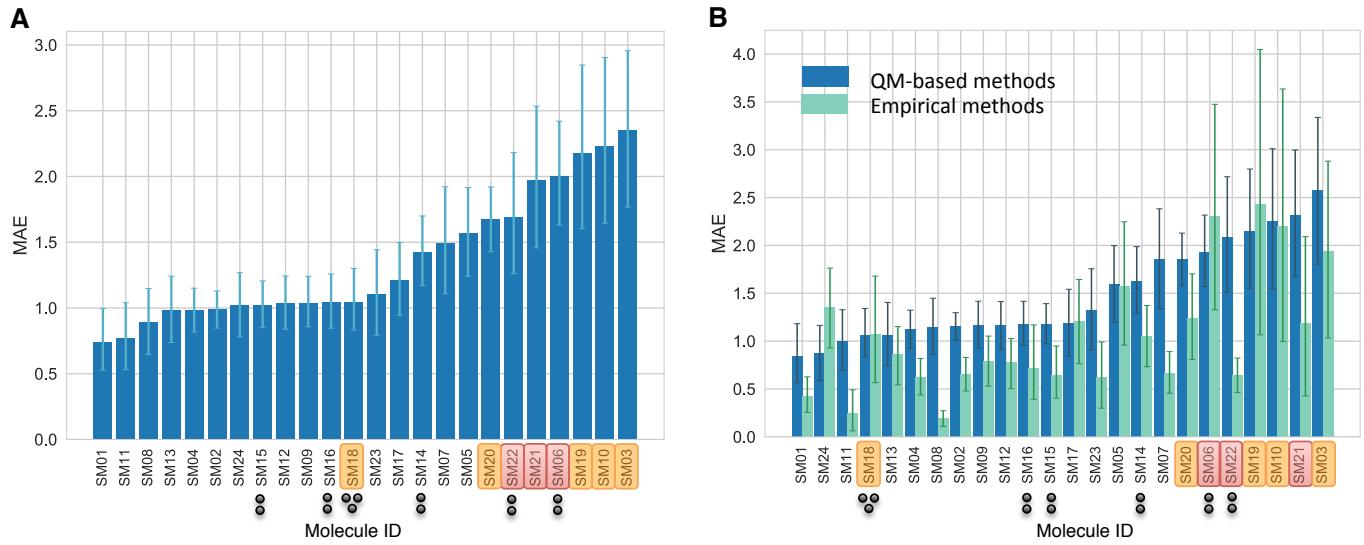
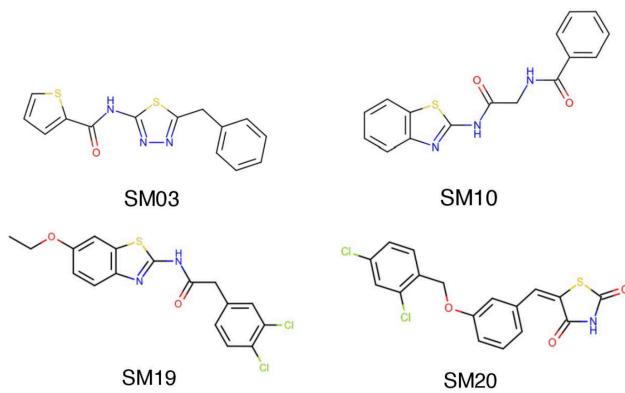


Figure 5. Molecules from the SAMPL6 Challenge with MAE calculated for all macroscopic pK_a predictions. The MAE calculated over all prediction methods indicates which molecules had the lowest prediction accuracy in the SAMPL6 Challenge. MAE values calculated for each molecule include all the matched pK_a values. SM06, SM14, SM15, SM16, SM18, and SM22 were multiprotic. Hungarian matching algorithm was employed for pairing experimental and predicted pK_a values. MAE values are reported with 95% confidence intervals.



C SAMPL6 molecules with sulfur-containing heterocycles



D SAMPL6 molecules with bromo and iodo groups

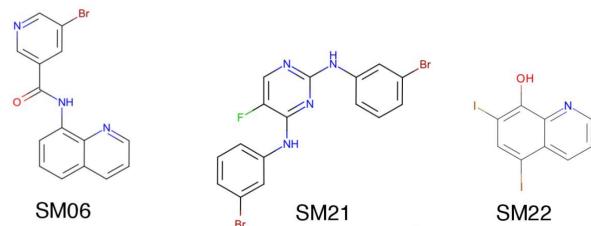


Figure 6. Average prediction accuracy calculated over all prediction methods was poorer for molecules with sulfur-containing heterocycles, bromo, and iodo groups. (A) MAE calculated for each molecule as an average of all methods. (B) MAE of each molecule broken out by method category. QM-based methods (blue) include QM predictions with or without linear empirical correction. Empirical methods (green) include QSAR, ML, DL, and LFER approaches. (C) Depiction of SAMPL6 molecules with sulfur-containing heterocycles. (D) Depiction of SAMPL6 molecules with iodo and bromo groups.

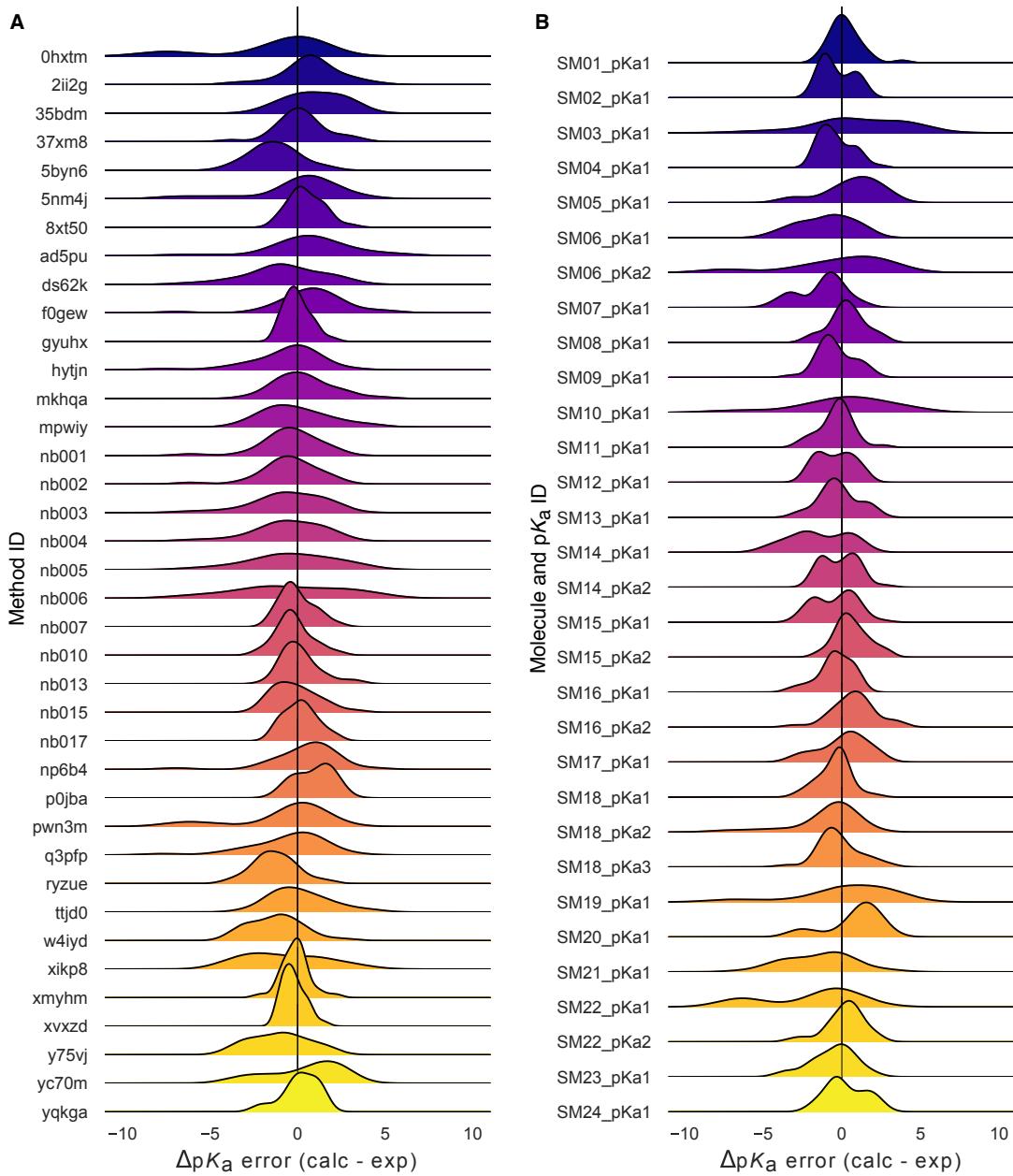


Figure 7. Macroscopic pKa prediction error distribution plots show how prediction accuracy varies across methods and individual molecules. (A) pKa prediction error distribution for each submission for all molecules according to Hungarian matching. (B) Error distribution for each SAMPL6 molecule for all prediction methods according to Hungarian matching. For multiprotic molecules, pKa ID numbers (pKa1, pKa2, and pKa3) were assigned in the direction of increasing experimental pKa value.

603 For a subset of eight molecules, dominant microstates were inferred from NMR experiments. Six of these molecules were
604 monoprotic and two were multiprotic. This dataset was extremely useful for guiding the assignment between experimental
605 and predicted pK_a values based on microstates. In this section, we present the performance evaluations of microscopic pK_a
606 predictions for only the 8 compounds with experimentally-determined dominant microstates.

607 3.2.1 Microstate-based matching revealed errors masked by pK_a value-based matching between experimental
608 and predicted pK_a s

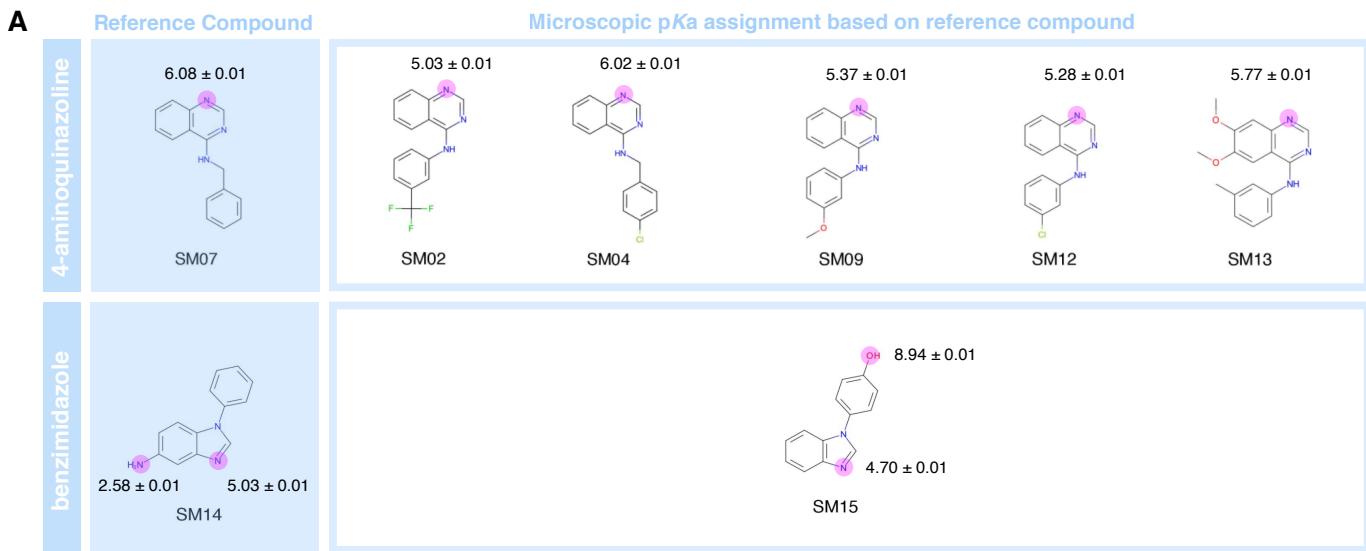
609 Comparing microscopic pK_a predictions directly to macroscopic experimental pK_a values with numerical matching can lead to
610 underestimation of errors. To demonstrate how numerical matching often masks pK_a prediction errors, we compared the per-
611 formance analysis done by Hungarian matching to that from microstate-based matching for 8 molecules presented in Fig. 8A.
612 RMSE calculated for microscopic pK_a predictions matched to experimental values via Hungarian matching is shown in Fig. 8B,
613 while Fig. 8C shows RMSE calculated via microstate-based matching. The Hungarian matching incorrectly leads to significantly
614 (and artificially) lower RMSE compared to microstate-based matching. The reason is that the Hungarian matching assigns exper-
615 imental pK_a values to predicted pK_a values only based on the closeness of the numerical values, without consideration of the
616 relative population of microstates and microstate identities. Because of this, a microscopic pK_a value that describes a transition
617 between very low population microstates (high energy tautomers) can be assigned to the experimental pK_a if it has the closest
618 pK_a value. This is not helpful because, in reality, the microscopic pK_a values that influence the observable macroscopic pK_a the
619 most are the ones with higher microstate populations (transitions between low energy tautomers).

620 The number of unmatched predicted microscopic pK_a s is shown in the lower bar plots of Fig. 8B and C, to emphasize the large
621 number of microscopic pK_a predictions submitted by many methods. In the case of microscopic pK_a , the number of unmatched
622 predictions does not indicate an error in the form of an extra predicted pK_a , because the spectrophotometric experiments do
623 not capture all microscopic pK_a s theoretically possible (transitions between all pairs of microstates that differ by one proton).
624 pK_a s of transitions to and from very high energy tautomers are very hard to measure by experimental methods, including the
625 most sensitive methods like NMR. Prediction of extra microscopic pK_a values can cause underestimation of prediction errors
626 when numerical matching algorithms such as Hungarian matching are used. We also checked how often Hungarian matching led
627 to the correct matches between predicted and experimental pK_a in terms of the microstate pairs, i.e., how often the microstate
628 pair of the Hungarian match recapitulates the dominant microstate pair of the experiment. The overall accuracy of microstate
629 pair matching was found to be low for the SAMPL6 Challenge submission. Fig. S4 shows that for most methods the predicted
630 microstate pair selected by the Hungarian match did not correspond to the experimentally-determined microstate pair. This
631 means lower RMSE (better accuracy) performance statistics obtained from Hungarian matching are artificially low. This problem
632 could be avoided by matching experimental and predicted values on the basis of microstate IDs, if experimental microscopic
633 assignments are available.

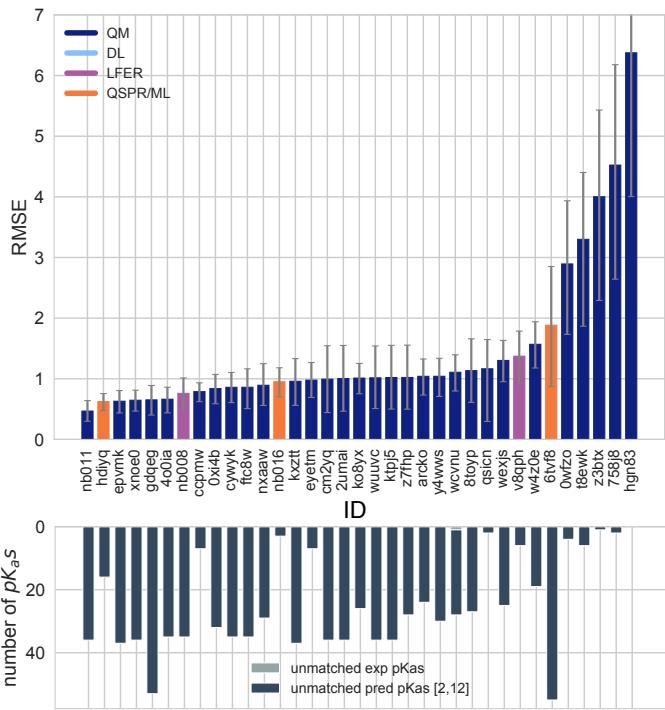
634 Unfortunately, we were only able to perform this more reliable microstate-based analysis for a subset of compounds. The
635 conclusions in this section reflect only eight compounds with limited structural diversity: Six molecules with 4-aminoquinazoline
636 and two with benzimidazole scaffolds, with a total of 10 pK_a values. The sequences of dominant microstates for SM07 and SM14
637 were determined by NMR experiments directly [8], while dominant microstates of their derivatives were inferred by taking them
638 as a reference (Fig. 8). Although we believe that microstate-based evaluation is more informative, the lack of a large experimental
639 dataset limits the conclusions to a very narrow chemical diversity. Still, microstate-based matching revealed errors masked by
640 pK_a value-based matching between experimental and predicted pK_a s.

641 3.2.2 Accuracy of pK_a predictions evaluated by microstate-based matching

642 Both accuracy- and correlation-based statistics were calculated for the predicted microscopic pK_a values after microstate-based
643 matching. RMSE, MAE, ME, R^2 , and Kendall's Tau results of each method are shown in Fig. 8C and Fig. 9. A table of the calculated
644 statistics can be found in Table S4. Due to the small number of data points in this set, correlation-based statistics have large
645 uncertainties and thus have less utility for distinguishing better-performing methods. Therefore, we focused more on accuracy-
646 based metrics for the analysis of microscopic pK_a s than correlation-based metrics. In terms of accuracy of predicted microscopic
647 pK_a values, all three QSPR/ML based methods (*nb016* (MoKa), *hdiyq* (Simulations Plus), *6tvf8* (OE Gaussian Process)), three QM-
648 based methods (*nb011* (Jaguar), *ftc8w* (EC-RISM/MP2/cc-pVTZ-P2-q-noThiols-2par), *t8ewk* (COSMOlogic_FINE17)), and one LFER
649 method (*v8qph* (ACD/pKa GALAS)) achieved RMSE lower than 1 pK_a unit. The same six methods also have the lowest MAE.



B Hungarian matching



C Microstate-based matching

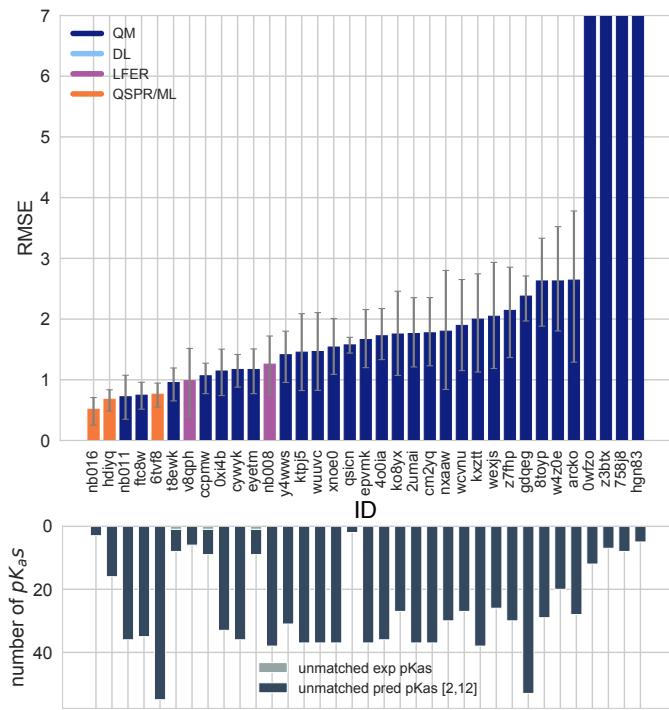


Figure 8. NMR determination of dominant microstates allowed in-depth evaluation of microscopic pKa predictions for 8 compounds.

A Dominant microstate sequence of two compounds (SM07 and SM14) were determined by NMR [8]. Based on these reference compounds, the dominant microstates of 6 related compounds were inferred and experimental pKa values were assigned to titratable groups with the assumption that only the dominant microstates have significant contributions to the experimentally observed pKa. **B** RMSE vs. submission ID and unmatched pKa vs. submission ID plots for the evaluation of microscopic pKa predictions of 8 molecules by Hungarian matching to experimental macroscopic pKa values. **C** RMSE vs. submission ID and unmatched pKa vs. submission ID plots showing the evaluation of microscopic pKa predictions of 8 molecules by microstate-based matching between predicted microscopic pKaS and experimental macroscopic pKa values. Submissions *Owfzo*, *z3btx*, *758j8*, and *hgn83* have RMSE values bigger than 10 pKa units which are beyond the y-axis limits of subplot **C** and **B**. RMSE is shown with error bars denoting 95% confidence intervals obtained by bootstrapping over the challenge molecules. Lower bar plots show the number of unmatched experimental pKaS (light grey, missing predictions) and the number of unmatched pKa predictions (dark grey, extra predictions) for each method between pH 2 and 12. Submission IDs are summarized in Table 1.

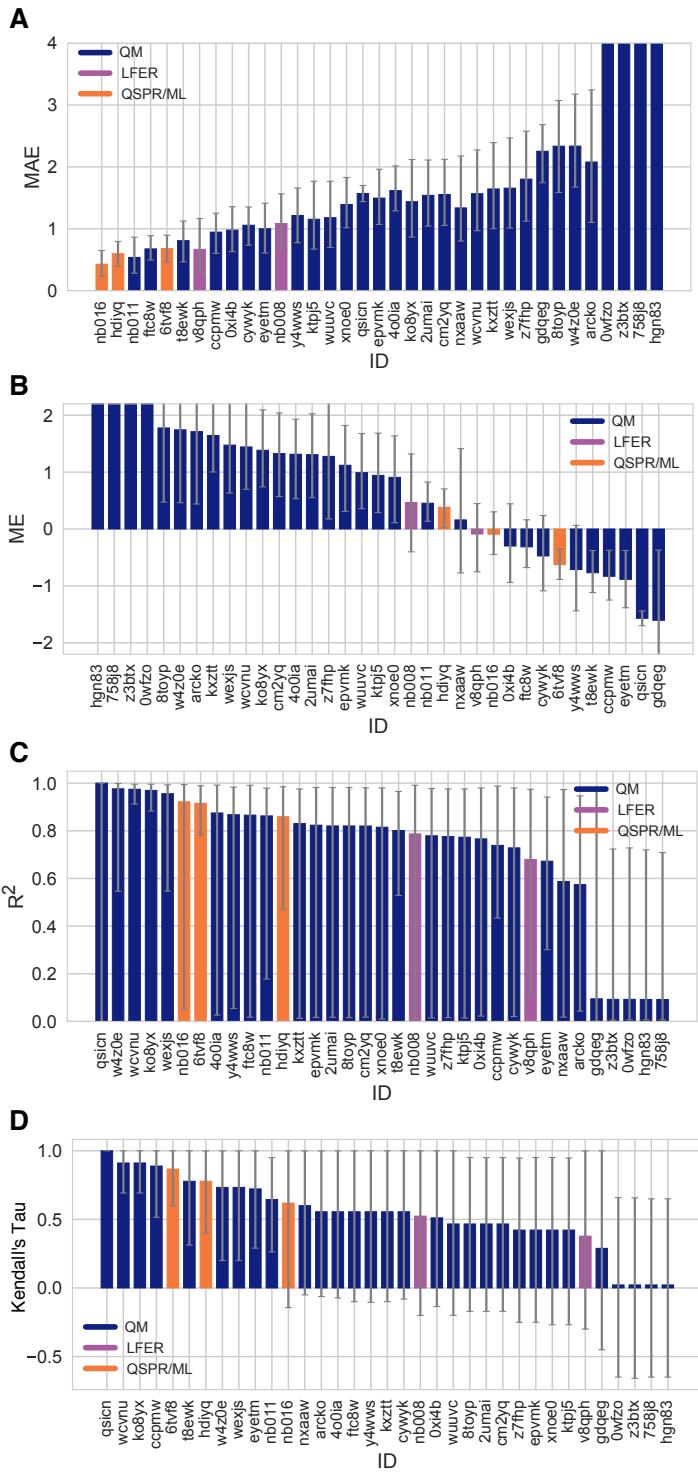


Figure 9. Additional performance statistics for microscopic pK_a predictions for 8 molecules with experimentally determined dominant microstates. Microstate-based matching was performed between experimental pK_a values and predicted microscopic pK_a values. Mean absolute error (MAE), mean error (ME), Pearson's R^2 , and Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient Tau (τ) are shown, with error bars denoting 95% confidence intervals obtained by bootstrapping over challenge molecules. Methods are indicated by their submission IDs. Submissions are colored by their method categories. Refer to Table 1 for submission IDs and method names. Submissions *0wfzo*, *z3btx*, *758j8*, and *hgn83* have MAE and ME values bigger than 10 pK_a units which are beyond the y-axis limits of subplots **A** and **B**. A large number and wide variety of methods have statistically indistinguishable performance based on correlation statistics (**C** and **D**), in part because of the relatively small dynamic range and small size of the set of 8 molecules.

650 3.2.3 Evaluation of dominant microstate prediction accuracy

651 For many computational chemistry approaches, including structure-based modeling of protein-ligand interactions, predicting
652 the ionization state and the exact position of protons is necessary to establish what to include in the modeled system. In
653 addition to being able to predict pK_a values accurately, we require pK_a prediction methods to be able to capture microscopic
654 protonation states accurately. Even when the predicted pK_a value is accurate, the predicted protonation sites can be incorrect,
655 leading to potentially large modeling errors in quantities such as the computed free energy of binding. Therefore, we assessed
656 whether methods participating in the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge were correctly predicting the sequence of dominant microstates,
657 i.e., dominant tautomers of each charge state observed between pH 2 and 12.

658 Fig. 10 shows how well methods perform for predicting the dominant microstate, as analyzed for eight compounds with
659 available experimental microstate assignments. The dominant microstate sequence is essentially the sequence of states that
660 are most visible experimentally due to their higher fractional population and relative free energy within the tautomers at each
661 charge. To extract the dominant tautomers predicted for the sequence of ionization states of each method, the relative free
662 energy of microstates were first calculated at reference pH 0 [26]. To subsequently determine the dominant microstate at each
663 formal charge, we selected the lowest energy tautomer for each ionization state based on the relative microstate free energies
664 calculated at pH 0. The choice of reference pH is arbitrary, as relative free energy difference between tautomers of the same
665 charge is always constant with respect to pH. This analysis was performed only for the charges -1, 0, 1, and 2—the charge range
666 captured by NMR experiments. Predicted and experimental dominant microstates were then compared for each charge state
667 to calculate the fraction of correctly predicted dominant tautomers. This value is reported as the *dominant microstate accuracy*
668 for all charge states (Fig. 10A).

669 Many of the methods which participated in the challenge made errors in predicting the dominant microstate. 10 QM and 3
670 QSPR/ML methods did not make any mistakes in dominant microstate predictions, although, they are expected to make mistakes
671 in the relative population of tautomers (free energy difference between microstates) as reflected by the pK_a value errors. While
672 all participating QSPR/ML methods showed good performance in dominant microstate prediction, LFER and some QM methods
673 made mistakes. The accuracy of the predicted dominant neutral tautomers was perfect for all methods, except *qsicn* (Fig. 10B),
674 but errors in predicting the major tautomer of charge +1 were much more frequent. 22 out of 35 prediction sets made at least
675 one error in predicting the lowest energy tautomer with +1 charge. We didn't include ionization states with charges -1 and +2 in
676 this assessment because we had only one compound with these charges in the dataset. Nevertheless, errors in predicting the
677 dominant tautomers seem to be a bigger problem for charged tautomers than the neutral tautomer.

678 Only eight compounds had data on the sequence of dominant microstates. Therefore conclusions on the performance of
679 methods in terms of dominant tautomer prediction are limited to this limited chemical diversity (benzimidazole and 4-aminoquinazoline
680 derivatives). We present this analysis as a prototype of how microscopic pK_a predictions should be evaluated. Hopefully, fu-
681 ture evaluations can be performed with larger experimental datasets following the strategy we demonstrated here in order to
682 reach broad conclusions about which methods are better for capturing dominant microstates and ratios of tautomers. Even
683 if experimental microscopic pK_a measurement data is not available, experimental dominant tautomer determinations are still
684 informative for assessing computational predictions.

685 The most frequent misprediction was the major tautomer of the SM14 cationic form, as shown in Fig. 10. This figure shows
686 the accuracy of the predicted dominant microstate calculated for individual molecules and for charge states 0 and +1, averaged
687 over all prediction methods. SM14, the molecule that exhibits the most frequent error in the predicted dominant microstate,
688 has two experimental pK_a values that were 2.4 pK_a units apart, and we suspect that could be a contributor to the difficulty of
689 predicting microstates accurately. Other molecules are monoprotic (4-aminoquinazolines) or their experimental pK_a values are
690 very well separated (SM14, 4.2 pK_a units). It would be very interesting to expand this assessment to a larger variety of drug-like
691 molecules to discover for which structures tautomer predictions are more accurate and for which structures computational
692 predictions are not as reliable.

693 3.2.4 Consistently well-performing methods for microscopic pK_a predictions

694 We have identified different criteria for determining consistently top-performing predictions of microscopic pK_a than macro-
695scopic pK_a ; having perfect dominant microstate prediction accuracy, unmatched pK_a count of 0, and ranking in the top 10
696 according to RMSE and MAE. Correlation statistics were not found to have utility for discriminating performance due to large
697 uncertainties in these statistics for a small dataset of 10 pK_a values. Unmatched predicted pK_a count was also not considered
698 since experimental data was only informative for the pK_a between dominant microstates and did not capture all the possible
699 theoretical transitions between microstate pairs. Table 3 reports six methods that have consistent good performance according

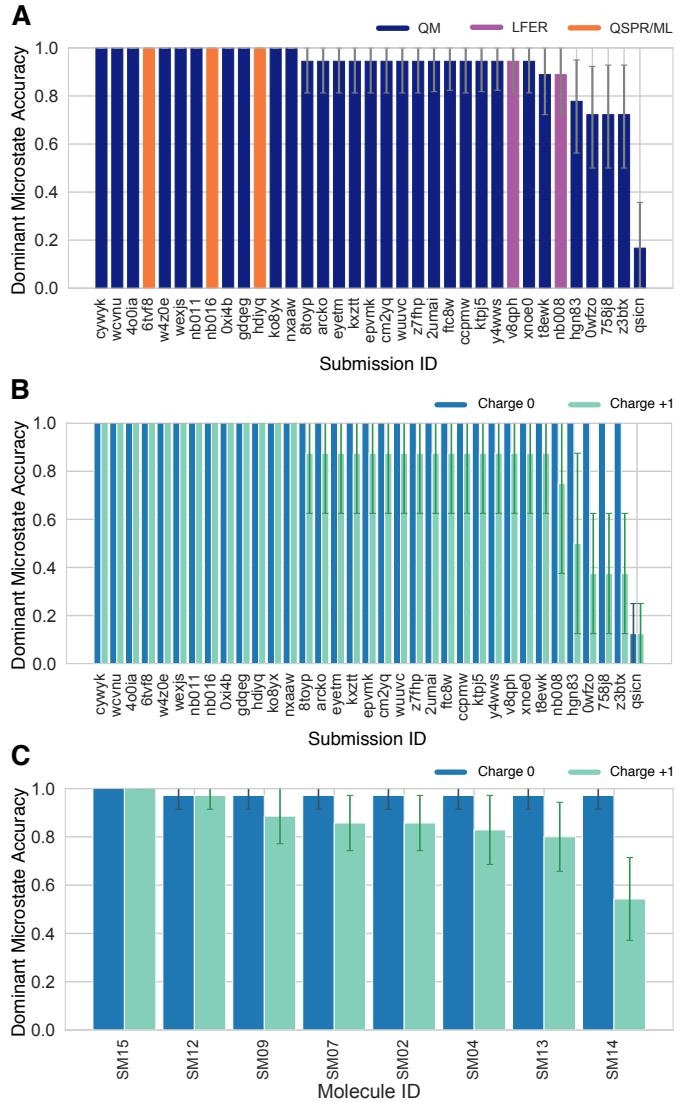


Figure 10. Some methods predicted the sequence of dominant tautomers inaccurately. Prediction accuracy of the dominant microstate of each charged state was calculated using the dominant microstate sequence determined by NMR for 8 molecules as reference. **(A)** Dominant microstate accuracy vs. submission ID plot was calculated considering all the dominant microstates seen in the experimental microstate dataset of 8 molecules. **(B)** Dominant microstate accuracy vs. submission ID plot was generated considering only the dominant microstates of charge 0 and +1 seen in the 8 molecule dataset. The accuracy of each molecule is broken out by the total charge of the microstate. **(C)** Dominant microstate prediction accuracy calculated for each molecule averaged over all methods. In **(B)** and **(C)**, the accuracy of predicting the dominant neutral tautomer is shown in blue and the accuracy of predicting the dominant +1 charged tautomer is shown in green. Error bars denoting 95% confidence intervals obtained by bootstrapping.

to many metrics, although evaluated only for the 8 molecule set due to limitations of the experimental dataset. Six methods were divided evenly between methods of QSPR/ML category and QM category. *nb016* (MoKa), *hdiyq* (Simulations Plus), and *6tvf8* (OE Gaussian Process) were QSPR and ML methods that performed well. *nb011* (Jaguar), *Oxi4b*(EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-noThiols-2par), and *cywyk* (EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-noThiols-2par) were QM predictions with linear empirical corrections with good performance with microscopic pK_a predictions.

The Simulations Plus pK_a prediction method is the only method that appeared to be consistently well-performing in both the assessment for macroscopic and microscopic pK_a prediction (*gyuhx* and *hdiyq*). However, it is worth noting that two methods that were in the list of consistently top-performing methods for macroscopic pK_a predictions lacked equivalent submissions of their underlying microscopic pK_a predictions, and therefore could not be evaluated at the microstate level. These methods were *xmyhm* (ACD/pKa Classic) and *vxxzd*(DSD-BLYP-D3(BJ)/def2-TZVPD//PBEh-3c[DCOSMO-RS] + RRHO(GFN-xTB[GBSA]) +

710 Gsolv(COSMO-RS[TZVPD]) and linear fit).

Table 3. Top-performing methods for microscopic pK_a predictions based on consistent ranking within the Top 10 according to various statistical metrics calculated for 8 molecule dataset. Performance statistics are provided as mean and 95% confidence intervals. Submissions that rank in the Top 10 according to RMSE and MAE and have perfect dominant microstate prediction accuracy were selected as consistently well-performing methods. Correlation-based statistics (R^2 , and Kendall's Tau), although reported in the table, were excluded from the statistics used for determining top-performing methods. This was because correlation-based statistics were not very discriminating due to the narrow dynamic range and the small number of data points in the 8 molecule dataset with NMR-determined dominant microstates.

Submission ID	Method Name	Dominant Microstate Accuracy	RMSE	MAE	R ²	Kendall's Tau	Unmatched Exp. pK _a Count	Unmatched Pred. pK _a Count [2,12]
nb016	MoKa	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	0.52 [0.25, 0.71]	0.43 [0.23, 0.65]	0.92 [0.05, 0.99]	0.62 [-0.14, 1.00]	0	3
hd1yq	S+pKa	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	0.68 [0.49, 0.83]	0.60 [0.39, 0.80]	0.86 [0.47, 0.98]	0.78 [0.40, 1.00]	0	16
nb011	Jaguar	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	0.72 [0.35, 1.07]	0.54 [0.28, 0.86]	0.86 [0.18, 0.98]	0.64 [0.26, 0.95]	0	36
6tvf8	OE Gaussian Process	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	0.76 [0.55, 0.95]	0.68 [0.46, 0.90]	0.92 [0.78, 0.99]	0.87 [0.6, 1.00]	0	55
0xi4b	EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P3NI-phi-noThiols-2par	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	1.15 [0.75, 1.50]	0.98 [0.63, 1.36]	0.77 [0.02, 0.98]	0.51 [-0.14, 1.00]	0	33
cwyk	EC-RISM/B3LYP/6-311+G(d,p)-P2-phi-noThiols-2par	1.0 [1.0, 1.0]	1.17 [0.88, 1.41]	1.06 [0.74, 1.35]	0.73 [0.02, 0.98]	0.56 [-0.08, 1.00]	0	36

711 3.3 How do pK_a prediction errors impact protein-ligand binding affinity predictions?

712 pK_a predictions provide a key input for computational modeling of protein-ligand binding with physical methods. The SAMPL6
713 pK_a Challenge focused only on small molecule pK_a prediction and showed how pK_a prediction accuracy observed can impact the
714 modeling of ligands. Many affinity prediction methods such as docking, MM/PBSA, MM/GBSA, absolute or alchemical relative
715 free energy calculation methods predict the affinity of the ligand to a receptor using a fixed protonation state for both ligand
716 and receptor. These models can sensitively depend upon pK_a and dominant tautomer predictions for determining possible
717 protonation states of the ligand in the aqueous environment and in a protein complex, as well as the free energy penalty to
718 access those states [4]. The accuracy of pK_a predictions can become a limitation for the performance of physical models that try
719 to quantitatively describe molecular association.

720 In terms of ligand protonation states, there are two ways in which pK_a prediction errors can influence the prediction accuracy
721 for protein-ligand binding free energies as depicted in Fig. 11. The first scenario is when a ligand is present in aqueous solution
722 in multiple protonation states (Fig. 11A). When only the minor aqueous protonation state contributes to protein-ligand complex
723 formation, the overall binding free energy (ΔG_{bind}) needs to be calculated as the sum of binding free energy of the minor state
724 and the protonation penalty of that state (ΔG_{prot}). ΔG_{prot} is a function of both pH and pK_a. A 1 unit of error in predicted pK_a would
725 lead to 1.36 kcal/mol error in overall binding free energy if the protonation state with the minor population binds the protein and
726 this minor protonation state is *correctly* selected to model the free energy of binding; if the incorrect dominant protonation state
727 for the complex is selected, the dominant contribution to the free energy of binding may be missed entirely, leading to much
728 larger modeling errors in the binding free energy. Other scenarios—in which multiple protonation states can be significantly
729 populated in complex—can lead to more complex scenarios in which the errors in predicted pK_a propagate in more complex
730 ways. The equations in Fig. 11A show the overall free energy for a simple thermodynamic cycle involving multiple protonation
731 states.

732 In addition to the presence of multiple protonation states in the aqueous environment, multiple charge states can contribute
733 to complex formation (Fig. 11B). Then, the overall free energy of binding needs to include a Multiple Protonation States Correction
734 (MPSC) term (ΔG_{corr}) [4]. MPSC is a function of pH, aqueous pK_a of the ligand, and the difference between the binding free energy
735 of charged and neutral species ($\Delta G_{bind}^C - \Delta G_{bind}^N$) as shown in Fig. 11B.

736 Using the equations in Fig. 11B, we can model the true MPSC (ΔG_{corr}) with respect to the difference between pH and the pK_a of
737 the ligand to see when this value has a significant impact on the overall binding free energy. In Fig. 12, the true MPSC that must be
738 added to ΔG_{bind}^N is shown for ligands with varying binding affinity difference between protonation states ($\Delta\Delta G = \Delta G_{bind}^C - \Delta G_{bind}^N$).
739 Fig. 12A shows the case of a monoprotic base in which the charged state has a lower affinity than the neutral state. Solid lines
740 depict the accurate correction value. In cases where the pK_a is lower than the pH, the correction factor disappears as the ligand
741 fully populates the neutral state ($\Delta G_{bind} = \Delta G_{bind}^N$). As the pH dips below the pK_a, the charged state is increasingly populated and
742 ΔG_{corr} increases to approach $\Delta\Delta G$.

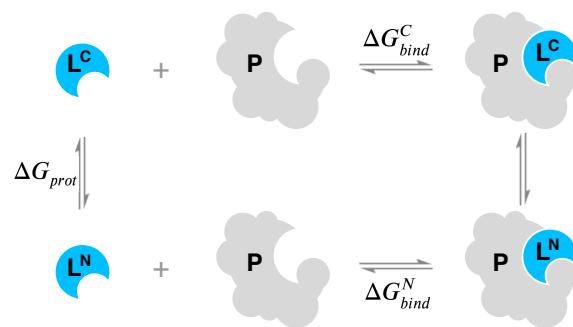
A When only the minor protonation state can bind to the protein



$$\Delta G_{bind} = \Delta G_{bind}^C + \Delta G_{prot}$$

$$\Delta G_{bind} = \Delta G_{bind}^C + RT(pH - pK_a) \ln(10)$$

B When multiple protonation states can bind to the protein



$$\Delta G_{bind} = \Delta G_{bind}^N + \Delta G_{corr}$$

$$\Delta G_{bind} = \Delta G_{bind}^N - RT \ln \frac{1 + e^{-\frac{\Delta G_{bind}^C - \Delta G_{bind}^N}{RT}} 10^{pK_a - pH}}{1 + 10^{pK_a - pH}}$$

Figure 11. Aqueous ligand pK_a can influence overall protein-ligand binding affinity. **A** When only the minor aqueous protonation state contributes to protein-ligand complex formation, the overall binding free energy (ΔG_{bind}) needs to be calculated as the sum of binding affinity of the minor state and the protonation penalty of that state. **B** When multiple charge states contribute to complex formation, the overall free energy of binding includes a multiple protonation states correction (MPSC) term (ΔG_{corr}). MPSC is a function of pH, aqueous pK_a of the ligand, and the difference between the binding free energy of charged and neutral species ($\Delta G_{bind}^C - \Delta G_{bind}^N$).

It is interesting to note the pH-pK_a range over which ΔG_{corr} changes significantly. It is often assumed that, for a basic ligand, if the pK_a of a ligand is more than 2 units higher than the pH, only 1% of the population is in the neutral state according to the Henderson-Hasselbalch equation, and it is safe to approximate the overall binding affinity with ΔG_{bind}^C . Based on the magnitude of the relative free energy difference between ligand protonation states, this assumption is not always correct. As seen in Fig. 12A, the responsive region of ΔG_{corr} can span 3 pH units for a system with $\Delta \Delta G = 1 \text{ kcal/mol}$, or 5 pH units for a system with $\Delta \Delta G = 4 \text{ kcal/mol}$. This highlights that the range of pK_a values that impact binding affinity predictions is wider than 2 pH units. Molecules with pK_a values several units away from the physiological pH can still impact the overall binding affinity significantly due to the MPSC.

Despite the need to capture the contributions of multiple protonation states by including the MPSC in binding affinity calculations, inaccurate pK_a predictions can lead to errors in ΔG_{corr} and overall free energy of binding prediction. In Fig. 12A dashed lines show predicted ΔG_{corr} based on pK_a error of -1 units. We have chosen a pK_a error of 1 unit as this is the average inaccuracy expected from the pK_a prediction methods based on the SAMPL6 Challenge. Underestimation of the pK_a causes the ΔG_{corr} to be underestimated as well and will result in overestimated affinities (i.e., too negative binding free energy) for a varying range of pH - pK_a values depending on the binding affinity difference between protonation states($\Delta \Delta G$). In Fig. 12B dashed lines show how the magnitude of the absolute error caused by calculating ΔG_{corr} with an inaccurate pK_a varies with respect to pH. Different colored lines show simulated results with varying binding free energy differences between protonation states. For a system whose charged state has higher binding free energy than the neutral state ($\Delta \Delta G = 2 \text{ kcal/mol}$), the absolute error caused by underestimating pK_a by 1 unit can be up to 0.9 kcal/mol. For a system whose charged state has an even lower affinity (more positive binding free energy) than the neutral state ($\Delta \Delta G = 4 \text{ kcal/mol}$), the absolute error caused by underestimating pK_a by 1 unit can be up to 1.2 kcal/mol. The magnitude of errors contributing to overall binding affinity is too large to be neglected. Improving the accuracy of small molecule pK_a prediction methods can help to minimize the error in predicted MPSC.

With the current level of pK_a prediction accuracy as observed in SAMPL6 Challenge, is it advantageous to include the MPSC in affinity predictions that may include errors caused by pK_a predictions? We provide a comparison of the two choices to answer this question: (1) Neglecting the MPSC completely and assuming overall binding affinity is captured by ΔG_{bind}^N , (2) including MPSC with a potential error in overall affinity calculation. The magnitude of error caused by Choice 1 (ignoring MPSC) is depicted as a solid line in Fig. 12B and the magnitude of error caused by MPSC computed with inaccurate pK_a is depicted as dashed lines. What is the best strategy? Error due to choice 1 is always larger than error due to choice 2 for all pH-pK_a values. In this scenario, including the MPSC improves overall binding affinity prediction accuracy. The error caused by the inaccurate pK_a is smaller than

771 the error caused by neglecting the MPSC.

772 We can also ask whether or not an MPSC calculated based on an inaccurate pK_a should be included in binding affinity predictions
773 in different circumstances, such as underestimated or overestimated pK_a values and charged states with higher or lower
774 affinities than the neutral states. We tried to capture these circumstances in four quadrants of Fig. 12. In the case of overestimated
775 pK_a values (Fig. 12E-H), it can be seen that for most of the pH- pK_a range, it is more advantageous to include the predicted
776 MPSC in affinity calculations, except a smaller window where the opposite choice would be more advantageous. For instance,
777 for the system with $\Delta\Delta G = 2$ kcal/mol and overestimated pK_a (Fig. 12E) for the pH- pK_a region between -0.5 and 2, including the
778 predicted ΔG_{corr} introduces more error than ignoring the MPSC.

779 In practice, we normally do not know the exact magnitude or the direction of the error of our predicted pK_a . Therefore, using
780 simulated MPSC error plots to decide when to include MPSC in binding affinity predictions is not possible. However, based on
781 the analysis of a case with 1 unit of pK_a error, including the MPSC correction would be more often than not helpful in improving
782 binding affinity predictions. The detrimental effect of pK_a inaccuracy is still significant. Hopefully, future improvements in pK_a
783 prediction methods will improve the accuracy of the MPSC and binding affinity predictions of ligands which have multiple proto-
784 nation states that contribute to aqueous or complex populations. Being able to predict pK_a values with 0.5 units accuracy, for
785 example, would significantly aid binding affinity models in computing more accurate MPSC terms.

786 The whole analysis presented in this section assumes that at least the dominant protonation state of the ligand is correctly
787 included in the modeling of the protein-ligand complex. We have not discussed the case of omitting this dominant state from
788 the free energy calculations entirely when it is erroneously predicted to be a minor state in solution. Such a mistake could be
789 the most problematic, and the errors in estimated binding free energy could be very large.

790 3.4 Take-away lessons from SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge

791 The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge showed that, in general, pK_a prediction accuracy of computational methods is lower than expected
792 for drug-like molecules. Our expectation prior to the blind challenge was that well-developed methods would achieve prediction
793 errors as low as 0.5 pK_a units, and make reliable predictions of dominant charge and tautomer states in solution. There are
794 many factors that complicate predicting pK_a values of drug-like molecules: multiple titratable sites, including tautomerization,
795 frequent presence of heterocycles, and extended conjugation patterns, as well as high numbers of rotatable bonds and the
796 possibility of intramolecular hydrogen bonds. Macroscopic pK_a predictions have not yet reached experimental accuracy (where
797 the inter-method variability of macroscopic pK_a measurements is around 0.5 pK_a units [23]). There was not a single method
798 in the SAMPL6 Challenge that achieved RMSE around 0.5 or lower for macroscopic pK_a predictions for the 24 molecule set of
799 kinase inhibitor fragment-like molecules. Smaller RMSEs were observed in the microscopic pK_a evaluation section of this study
800 for some methods; however, the 8 molecule set used for that analysis poses a very limited dataset to reach conclusions about
801 general expectations for drug-like molecules.

802 As the majority of experimental data was in the form of macroscopic pK_a values, we had to adopt a numerical matching
803 algorithm (Hungarian matching) to pair predicted and experimental values to calculate performance statistics of macroscopic
804 pK_a predictions. Accuracy, correlation, and extra/missing pK_a prediction counts were the main metrics for macroscopic pK_a
805 evaluations. An RMSE range of 0.7 to 3.2 pK_a units was observed for all methods. Only five methods achieved RMSE between
806 0.7–1 pK_a units, while an RMSE between 1.5–3 log units was observed for the majority of methods. All four methods of the LFER
807 category and three out of 5 QSPR/ML methods achieved RMSE less than 1.5 pK_a units. All the QM methods that achieved this
808 level of performance included linear empirical corrections to rescale and unbias their pK_a predictions.

809 Based on the consideration of multiple error metrics, we compiled a shortlist of consistently-well performing methods for
810 macroscopic pK_a evaluations. Two methods from QM+LEC methods, one QSPR/ML, two empirical methods achieved consistent
811 performance according to many metrics. The common features of the two empirical methods were their large training sets
812 (16000–17000 compounds) and commercial nature.

813 There were four submissions of QM-based methods that utilized the COSMO-RS implicit solvation model. While three of these
814 achieved the lowest RMSE among QM-based methods (*xvxzd*, *yqkga*, and *8xt50*) [46], one of them showed the highest RMSE
815 (*0hxtm* (COSMOtherm_FINE17)). The comparison of these methods indicates that capturing the conformational ensemble of
816 microstates, using high-level QM calculations, and including RRHO corrections contribute to better macroscopic pK_a predictions.
817 Linear empirical corrections applied QM calculations improved results, especially when the linear correction is calibrated for an
818 experimental dataset using the same level of theory as the deprotonation free energy predictions (as in *xvxzd*). This challenge
819 also points to the advantage of the COSMO-RS solvation approach compared to other implicit solvent models.

820 Molecules that posed greater difficulty for pK_a predictions were determined by comparing the macroscopic pK_a prediction

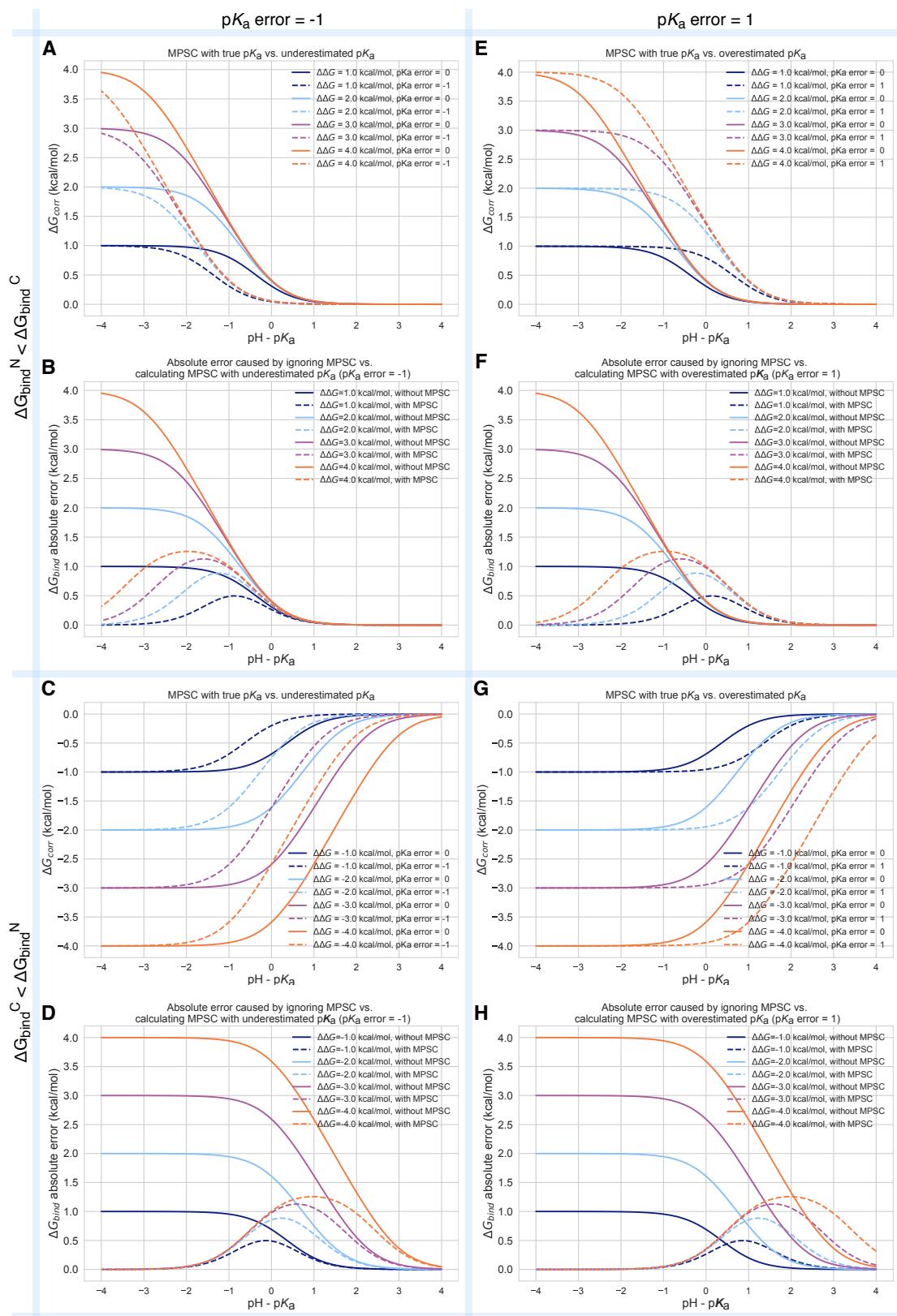


Figure 12. Inaccuracy of pK_a prediction (± 1 unit) affects the accuracy of MPSC and overall protein-ligand binding free energy calculations to varying degrees based on aqueous pK_a and relative binding affinity of individual protonation states ($\Delta\Delta G = \Delta G_{bind}^C - \Delta G_{bind}^N$). All calculations are made for 25°C, and a ligand with a single basic titratable group. **A, C, E, and G show MPSC (ΔG_{corr}) calculated with true vs. inaccurate pK_a . **B, D, F, and H** show the comparison of the absolute error to ΔG_{bind} caused by ignoring the MPSC completely (solid lines) vs. calculating MPSC based in inaccurate pK_a value (dashed lines). These plots provide guidance on when it is beneficial to include MPSC correction based on pK_a error, $pH - pK_a$, and $\Delta\Delta G$.**

accuracy of each molecule averaged over all methods submitted to the challenge. pK_a prediction errors were higher for compounds with sulfur-containing heterocycles, iodo, and bromo groups. This trend was also conserved when only QM-based methods were analyzed. The SAMPL6 pK_a dataset consisted of only 24 small molecules which limited our ability to statistically confirm this conclusion, however, we believe it is worth reporting molecular features that coincided with larger errors even if we can not evaluate the reason for these failures.

Utilizing a numerical matching algorithm to pair experimental and predicted macroscopic pK_a values was a necessity, however, this approach did not capture all aspects of prediction errors. Computing the number of missing or extra pK_a predictions remaining after Hungarian matching provided a window for observing macroscopic pK_a prediction errors such as the number of macroscopic transitions or ionization states expected in a pH interval. In pK_a evaluation studies, it is typical to just focus on pK_a value errors evaluated after matching and to ignore pK_a prediction errors that the matching protocol can not capture [49–53]. Frequently ignored prediction errors include predicting missing or extra pK_a s and failing to predict the correct charge states. The SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge results showed sporadic presence of missing pK_a predictions and very frequent tendency to make extra pK_a predictions. Both indicate failures to capture the correct ionization states. The traditional way of evaluating pK_a s that only focuses on the pK_a value error after some sort of numerical match between predictions and experimental values may have motivated these types of errors as there would be no penalty for missing a macroscopic deprotonation and predicting an extra one. This problem does not seem to be specific to any method category.

We used the eight molecule subset of SAMPL6 compounds with NMR-based dominant microstate sequence information to demonstrate the advantage of evaluating pK_a prediction on the level of microstates. Comparison of statistics computed for the 8 molecule dataset by Hungarian matching and microstate-based matching showed how Hungarian matching, despite being the best choice when only numerical matching is possible, can still mask errors in pK_a predictions. Errors computed by microstate-based matching were larger compared to numerical matching algorithms in terms of RMSE. Microscopic pK_a analysis with numerical matching algorithms may mask errors due to the higher number of guesses made. Numerical matching based on pK_a values also ignores information regarding the relative population of states. Therefore, it can lead to pK_a s defined between very low energy microstate pairs to be matched to the experimentally observable pK_a between microstates of higher populations. Of course, the predicted pK_a value could be correct however the predicted microstates would be wrong. Such mistakes caused by Hungarian matching were observed frequently in SAMPL6 results, and therefore we decided microstate-based matching of pK_a values provides a more realistic picture of method performance.

Some QM and LFER methods made mistakes in predicting the dominant tautomers of the ionization states. Dominant tautomer prediction seemed to be particularly difficult for charged tautomers compared with neutral tautomers. The easiest way to extract the dominant microstate sequence from predictions was to calculate the relative free energy of microstates at any reference pH, determining the lowest free energy state in each ionization state. Errors in dominant microstate predictions were very rare for neutral tautomers, but more frequent in cationic tautomers with +1 charge of the 8 molecule set. SM14 was the molecule with the lowest dominant microstate prediction accuracy, while dominant microstates predictions for SM15 were perfect for all molecules. SM14 and SM15 both possess two experimental pK_a s and a benzimidazole scaffold. The difference between them is the distance between the experimental pK_a values, which is smaller for SM14. These results make sense from the perspective of relative free energies of microstates. Closer pK_a values mean that the free energy difference between different microstates is smaller for SM14, and therefore any error in predicting the relative free energy of tautomers is more likely to cause reordering of relative populations of microstates and impact the accuracy of dominant microstate predictions. It would have been extremely informative to evaluate the tautomeric ratios and relative free energy predictions of microstates, however, the experimental data needed for this approach was not available. Tautomeric ratios could not be measured by the experimental methods available to us. Resolving tautomeric ratios would require extensive NMR measurements, but these measurements can suffer from lower accuracy especially when the free energy difference between tautomers is large.

The overall assessment of the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge captured non-stellar performance for microscopic and macroscopic pK_a predictions which can be detrimental to the accuracy of protein-ligand affinity predictions and other pH-dependent physicochemical property predictions such as distribution coefficients, membrane permeability, and solubility. Protein-ligand binding affinity predictions utilize pK_a predictions in two ways: determination of the relevant aqueous microstates and quantification of the free energy penalty to reach these states. More accurate microscopic pK_a predictions are needed to be able to accurately incorporate multiple protonation state corrections (MPSC) into overall binding affinity calculations.

We simulated the effect of overestimating or underestimating pK_a of a ligand by one unit on overall binding affinity prediction for a ligand where both cation and neutral states contribute to binding affinity. A pK_a prediction error of this magnitude (assuming dominant tautomers were predicted correctly) could cause up to 0.9 and 1.2 kcal/mol error in overall binding affinity when

872 the binding affinity of protonation states are 2 or 4 kcal/mol different, respectively. For the case of 4 kcal/mol binding affinity
873 difference between protonation states, the pH-p_a range that the error would be larger than 0.5 kcal/mol surprisingly spans
874 around 3.5 pH units. The worse case, of course, is where there is a significant difference in binding free energy between the
875 two protonation states, but we include the wrong one in our free energy calcuation. We demonstrated that the range of pH-p_a
876 value that the MPSC needs to be incorporated in binding affinity predictions can be wider than the widely assumed range of 2
877 pH units, based on the affinity difference between protonation states. At the level of 1 unit p_a error, incorporating the MPSC
878 would improve binding affinity predictions more often than not. If the microscopic p_a could be predicted with 0.5 p_a units of
879 accuracy, MPSC calculations would be much more reliable.

880 There are multiple factors to consider when deciding which p_a prediction method to utilize. These factors include the
881 accuracy of microscopic and macroscopic p_a values, the accuracy of the number and the identity of ionization states predicted
882 within the experimental pH interval, the accuracy of microstates predicted within the experimental pH interval, the accuracy of
883 tautomeric ratio (i.e., relative free energy between microstates), how costly is the calculation in terms of time and resources, and
884 whether one has access to software licenses that might be required.

885 All of the top-performing empirical methods were developed as commercial software that requires a license to run, and
886 there were not any open-source alternatives for empirical p_a predictions. Since the completion of the blind challenge, two
887 publications reported open-source machine learning-based p_a prediction methods, however, one can only predict the most
888 acidic or most basic macroscopic p_a values of a molecule [54] and the second one is only trained for predicting p_a values of
889 monoprotic molecules [55]. Recently, a p_a prediction methodology was published that describes a mixed approach of semi-
890 empirical QM calculations and machine learning that can predict macroscopic p_as of both mono- and polyprotic species [56].
891 The authors reported RMSE of 0.85 for the retrospective analysis performed on the SAMPL6 dataset.

892 **3.5 Suggestions for future blind challenge design and evaluation of p_a predictions**

893 This analysis helped us understand the current state of the field and led to many lessons informing future SAMPL challenges.
894 We believe the greatest benefit can be achieved if further iterations of small molecule p_a prediction challenges can be orga-
895 nized, creating motivation for improving protonation state prediction methods for drug-like molecules. In future challenges, it
896 is desirable to increase chemical diversity to cover more common scaffolds [57] and functional groups [58] seen in drug-like
897 molecules, gradually increasing the complexity of molecules.

898 Microscopic p_a measurements are needed for careful benchmarking of p_a predictions for multiprotic molecules.
899 Future challenges should promote stringent evaluation for p_a prediction methods from the perspective of microscopic p_a and
900 microstate predictions. It is necessary to assess the capability of p_a prediction methods to capture the free energy profile of
901 microstates of multiprotic molecules. This is critical because p_a predictions are often utilized to determine relevant protonation
902 states and tautomers of small molecules that must be captured in other physical modeling approaches, such as protein-ligand
903 binding affinity or distribution coefficient predictions. Different tautomers can have different binding affinities and partition
904 coefficients.

905 In this paper, we demonstrated how experimental microstate information can guide the analysis further than the typical p_a
906 evaluation approach that has been used so far. The traditional p_a evaluation approach focuses solely on the numerical error of
907 the p_a values and neglects the difference between macroscopic and microscopic p_a definitions. This is mainly caused by the
908 lack of p_a datasets with microscopic detail. To improve p_a and protonation state predictions for multiprotic molecules, it is
909 necessary to embrace the difference between macroscopic and microscopic p_a definitions and select strategies for experimen-
910 tal data collection and prediction evaluation accordingly. In the SAMPL6 Challenge, the analysis was limited by the availability of
911 experimental microscopic data as well. As is usually the case, macroscopic p_a values were abundant (24 molecules) and limited
912 data on microscopic states was available (8 molecules), although the latter opened new avenues for evaluation. For future blind
913 challenges for multiprotic compounds, striving to collect experimental datasets with microscopic p_as would be very beneficial,
914 despite the high cost of these measurements. Benchmark datasets of microscopic p_a values with assigned microstates are
915 currently missing because experimental determination of these are much more expensive and time-consuming than macro-
916 scopic p_a measurements. This limits the ability to improve p_a and tautomer prediction methods for multiprotic molecules.
917 If the collection of experimental microscopic p_as is not possible due to time and resource costs of such NMR experiments, at
918 least supplementing the more automated macroscopic p_a measurements with NMR-based determination of the dominant mi-
919 crostate sequence or tautomeric ratios of each ionization state can create very useful benchmark datasets. This supplementary
920 information can allow microstate-based assignment of experimental to predicted p_a values and a more realistic assessment

921 of method performance.

922 Evaluation strategy for pK_a predictions must be determined based on the nature of experimental pK_a measure-
923 ments available.

924 If the only available experimental data is in the form of macroscopic pK_a values, the best way to evaluate computational pre-
925 dictions is by calculating predicted macroscopic pK_a from microscopic pK_a predictions. With the conversion of microscopic pK_a
926 to macroscopic pK_a s, all structural information about the titration site is lost, and the only remaining information is the total
927 charge of macroscopic ionization states. Unfortunately, most macroscopic pK_a measurements—including potentiometric and
928 spectrophotometric methods—do not capture the absolute charge of the macrostates. The spectrophotometric method does
929 not measure charge at all. The potentiometric method can only capture the relative charge changes between macrostates. Only
930 pH-dependent solubility-based pK_a estimations can differentiate neutral and charged states from one another. It is, therefore,
931 very common to have experimental datasets of macroscopic pK_a without any charge or protonation position information regard-
932 ing the macrostates. This causes an issue of assigning predicted and experimental pK_a values before any error statistics can be
933 calculated.

934 As delineated by Fraczkiewicz [23], the fairest and most reasonable solution for the pK_a matching problem involves an
935 assignment algorithm that preserves the order of predicted and experimental microstates and uses the principle of smallest
936 differences to pair values. We recommend Hungarian matching with a squared-error penalty function. The algorithm is available
937 in SciPy package (`scipy.optimize.linear_sum_assignment`) [35]. In addition to the analysis of numerical error statistics following
938 Hungarian matching, at the very least, the number of missing and extra pK_a predictions must be reported based on unmatched
939 pK_a values. Missing or extra pK_a predictions point to a problem with capturing the right number of ionization states within
940 the pH interval of the experimental measurements. We have demonstrated that for microscopic pK_a predictions, performance
941 analysis based on Hungarian matching results in overly optimistic and misleading results—instead the employed microstate-
942 based matching provided a more realistic assessment when microstate data is available.

943 Lessons from the first pK_a blind challenge will guide future decisions on challenge rules, prediction reporting for-
944 mats, and challenge inputs.

945 We solicited three different submission types in SAMPL6 to capture all the necessary information related to pK_a predictions.
946 These were (1) macroscopic pK_a values, (2) microscopic pK_a values and microstate pair identities, and (3) fractional population
947 of microstates with respect to pH. We realized later that collecting fractional populations of microstates was redundant since
948 microscopic pK_a values and microstate pairs capture all the necessary information to construct fractional population vs. pH
949 curves [26]. Only microscopic and macroscopic pK_a values were used for the challenge analysis presented in this paper.

950 While exploring ways to evaluate SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge results, we developed a better way to capture microscopic pK_a
951 predictions, as presented in Gunner et al. [26]. This alternative reporting format consists of reporting the charge and relative
952 free energy of microstates with respect to an arbitrary reference microstate and pH. This approach presents the most concise
953 method of capturing all necessary information regarding microscopic pK_a predictions and allows calculation of predicted mi-
954 croscopic pK_a s, microstate population with respect to pH, macroscopic pK_a values, macroscopic population with respect to pH,
955 and tautomer ratios. Still, there may be methods developed to predict macroscopic pK_a s directly instead of computing them
956 from microstate predictions that justifies allowing a macroscopic pK_a reporting format. In future challenges, we recommend
957 collecting pK_a predictions with two submission types: (1) macroscopic pK_a values together with the charges of the macrostates
958 and (2) microstates, their total charge, and relative free energies with respect to a specified reference microstate and pH. This
959 approach is being used in SAMPL7.

960 In SAMPL6, we provided an enumerated list of microstates and their assigned microstate IDs because we were worried about
961 parsing submitted microstates in SMILES from different sources correctly. There were two disadvantages to this approach. First,
962 this list of enumerated microstates was used as input by some participants which was not our intention. (Challenge instructions
963 requested that predictions should not rely on these microstate lists and only use them for matching microstate IDs.) Second,
964 the first iteration of enumerated microstates was not complete. We had to add new microstates and assign them microstate
965 IDs for a couple of rounds until reaching a complete list. In future challenges, a better way of handling the problem of capturing
966 predicted microstates would be asking participants to specify the predicted protonation states themselves and assigning iden-
967 tifiers after the challenge deadline to aid comparative analysis. This would prevent the partial unblinding of protonation states
968 and allow the assessment of whether methods can predict all the relevant states independently, without relying on a provided
969 list of microstates. Predicted states can be submitted as mol2 files that represent the microstate with explicit hydrogens. The

970 organizers must only provide the microstate that was selected as the reference state for the relative microstate free energy
971 calculations.

972 In the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge, there was not a requirement that participants should report predictions for all compounds.
973 Some participants reported predictions for only a subset of compounds, which may have led these methods to look more
974 accurate than others due to missing predictions. In the future, it will be better to allow submissions of only complete sets for a
975 better comparison of method performance.

976 A wide range of methods participated in the SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge—from very fast QSPR methods to QM methods with a
977 high-level of theory and extensive exploration of conformational ensembles. In the future, it would be interesting to capture
978 computing costs in terms of average compute hours per molecule. This can provide guidance to future users of pK_a prediction
979 methods for selection of which method to use.

980 It is advantageous to field associated challenges with common set of molecules for different physicochemical prop-
981 erties.

982 Future blind challenges can maximize learning opportunities by evaluating predictions of different physicochemical properties
983 for the same molecules in consecutive challenges. In SAMPL6, we organized both pK_a and $\log P$ challenges. Unfortunately only
984 a subset of compounds in the pK_a datasets were suitable for the potentiometric $\log P$ measurements [8]. Still, comparing pre-
985 diction performance of common compounds in both challenges can lead to beneficial insights especially for physical modeling
986 techniques if there are common aspects that are beneficial or detrimental to prediction performance. For example, in SAMPL6
987 pK_a and $\log P$ Challenges COSMO-RS and EC-RISM solvation models achieved good performance. Having access to a variety of
988 physicochemical property measurements can also help the identification of error sources. For example, dominant microstates
989 determined for pK_a challenge can provide information to check if correct tautomers are modeling in a $\log P$ or $\log D$ challenge.
990 pK_a prediction is a requirement for $\log D$ prediction and experimental pK_a values can help diagnosing the source of errors in
991 $\log D$ predictions better. The physical challenges in SAMPL7, for which the blind portion of the challenges have just concluded on
992 October 8th, 2020, follow this principle and include both pK_a , $\log P$, and membrane permeability properties for a set of mono-
993 protic compounds. We hope that future pK_a challenges can focus on multiprotic drug-like compounds with microscopic pK_a
994 measurements for an in-depth analysis.

995 4 Conclusion

996 The first SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge focused on molecules resembling fragments of kinase inhibitors, and was intended to assess
997 the performance of pK_a predictions for drug-like molecules. With wide participation, we had an opportunity to prospectively
998 evaluate pK_a predictions spanning various empirical and QM based approaches. In addition to community participants, a small
999 number of popular pK_a prediction methods that were missing from blind submissions were added as reference calculations
1000 after the challenge deadline.

1001 Practical experimental limitations restricted the overall size and microscopic information available for the blind challenge
1002 dataset [8]. The experimental dataset consisted of spectrophotometric measurements of 24 molecules, some of which were
1003 multiprotic. For a subset of molecules there was also NMR data to inform the dominant microstate sequence, though micro-
1004 scopic pK_a measurements were not performed. We conducted a comparative analysis of methods represented in the blind
1005 challenge in terms of both macroscopic and microscopic pK_a prediction performance avoiding any assumptions about the inter-
1006 pretation of experimental pK_a s.

1007 Here, we used Hungarian matching to assign predicted and experimental values for the calculation of accuracy and cor-
1008 relation statistics, because the majority of experimental data was macroscopic pK_a values. In addition to evaluating error in
1009 predicted pK_a values, we also reported the macroscopic pK_a errors that were not captured by the match between experimental
1010 and predicted pK_a values. These were extra or missing pK_a predictions which are important indicators that predictions are failing
1011 to capture the correct ionization states.

1012 We evaluated microscopic pK_a predictions utilizing the experimental dominant microstate sequence data of eight molecules.
1013 This experimental data allowed us to use microstate-based matching for evaluating the accuracy of microscopic pK_a values
1014 in a more realistic way. We have determined that QM and LFER predictions had lower accuracy in determining the dominant
1015 tautomer of the charged microstates than the neutral states. For both macroscopic and microscopic pK_a predictions we have
1016 determined methods that were consistently well-performing according to multiple statistical metrics. Focusing on the com-
1017 parison of molecules instead of methods for macroscopic pK_a prediction accuracy indicated molecules with sulfur-containing
1018 heterocycles, iodo, and bromo groups suffered from lower pK_a prediction accuracy.

1019 The overall performance of pK_a predictions as captured in this challenge is concerning for the application of pK_a prediction
1020 methods in computer-aided drug design. Many computational methods for predicting target affinities and physicochemical
1021 properties rely on pK_a predictions for determining relevant protonation states and the free energy penalty of such states. 1 unit
1022 of pK_a error is an optimistic estimate of current macroscopic pK_a predictions for drug-like molecules based on SAMPL6 Challenge
1023 where errors in predicting the correct number of ionization states or determining the correct dominant microstate were also
1024 common to many methods. In the absence of other sources of errors, we showed that 1 unit over- or underestimation of the
1025 pK_a of a ligand can cause significant errors in the overall binding affinity calculation due to errors in multiple protonation state
1026 correction factor.

1027 The SAMPL6 GitHub Repository contains all information regarding the challenge structure, experimental data, blind prediction
1028 submission sets, and evaluation of methods. The repository will be useful for future follow up analysis and the experimental
1029 measurements can continue to serve as a benchmark dataset for testing methods.

1030 In this article, we aimed to demonstrate not only the comparative analysis of the pK_a prediction performance of contemporary
1031 methods for drug-like molecules, but also to propose a stringent pK_a prediction evaluation strategy that takes into account
1032 differences in microscopic and macroscopic pK_a definitions. We hope that this study will guide and motivate further improvement
1033 of pK_a prediction methods.

1034 5 Code and data availability

- 1035 • SAMPL6 pK_a challenge instructions, submissions, experimental data and analysis is available at
SAMPL6 GitHub Repository: <https://github.com/samplchallenges/SAMPL6>

1036 6 Overview of supplementary information

1037 Contents of the Supplementary Information:

- 1038 • TABLE S1: SMILES and InChI identifiers of SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge molecules.
- 1039 • TABLE S2: Evaluation statistics calculated for all macroscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on Hungarian match for
24 molecules.
- 1040 • TABLE S3: Evaluation statistics calculated for all microscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on Hungarian match for 8
molecules with NMR data.
- 1041 • TABLE S4: Evaluation statistics calculated for all microscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on microstate match for 8
molecules with NMR data.
- 1042 • FIGURE S1: Dominant microstates of 8 molecules were determined based on NMR measurements.
- 1043 • FIGURE S2: MAE of macroscopic pK_a predictions of each molecule did not show any significant correlation with any molec-
ular descriptor.
- 1044 • FIGURE S3: The value of macroscopic pK_a was not a factor affecting prediction error seen in SAMPL6 Challenge according
to the analysis with Hungarian matching.
- 1045 • FIGURE S4: There was low agreement between experimental dominant microstate pairs and the predicted microstate pairs
selected by Hungarian algorithm for microscopic pK_a predictions.

1052 Extra files included in *supplementary-documents.tar.gz*:

- 1053 • An archive copy of the pK_a Challenge directory of SAMPL6 GitHub Repository (*SAMPL6-repository-pKa-directory.zip*)
- 1054 • Table S1 in CSV format (*SAMPL6-pKa-chemical-identifiers-table.csv*)
- 1055 • Table S2 in CSV format (*macroscopic-pKa-statistics-24mol-hungarian-match.csv*)
- 1056 • Table S3 in CSV format (*microscopic-pKa-statistics-8mol-hungarian-match-table.csv*)
- 1057 • Table S4 in CSV format (*microscopic-pKa-statistics-8mol-microstate-match-table.csv*)
- 1058 • Figure S1 in CSV format (*experimental-microstates-of-8mol-based-on-NMR.csv*)
- 1059 • The Jupyter Notebook used for the enumeration of microstates (*enumerate-microstates-with-Epik-and-OpenEye-QUACPAC.ipynb*)
- 1060 • A CSV table of SAMPL6 molecule IDs and OpenEye OEChem generated SMILES (*molecule_ID_and_SMILES.csv*)

1061 7 Author Contributions

1062 Conceptualization, MI, JDC ; Methodology, MI, JDC, ASR ; Software, MI, AR, ASR ; Formal Analysis, MI, ASR ; Investigation, MI ;
1063 Resources, JDC, DLM; Data Curation, MI ; Writing-Original Draft, MI; Writing - Review and Editing, MI, JDC, ASR, AR, DLM, MRG;
1064 Visualization, MI, AR ; Supervision, JDC, DLM ; Project Administration, MI ; Funding Acquisition, JDC, DLM, MI.

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1081 9 Disclaimers

1082 The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National
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¹²¹⁴ 11 Supplementary Information

Table S1. SMILES and InChI identifiers of SAMPL6 pK_a Challenge molecules. A CSV version of this table can be found in *SAMPL6-supplementary-documents.tar.gz*. SMILES were generated by OpenEye OEChem [32]

SAMPL6 Molecule ID	Isomeric SMILES	InChI
SM01	c1cc2c(cc1O)c3c(o2)C(=O)NCCC3	InChI=1S/C12H11NO3/c14-7-3-4-10-9(6-7)8-2-1-5-13-12(15)11(8)16-10/h3-4,6,14H,1-2,5H2,(H,13,15)
SM02	c1ccc2c(c1)c(ncn2)Nc3cccc(c3)C(F)(F)F	InChI=1S/C15H10F3N3/c16-15(17,18)10-4-3-5-11(8-10)21-14-12-6-1-2-7-13(12)19-9-20-14/h1-9H,(H,19,20,21)
SM03	c1ccc(cc1)Cc2nnc(s2)NC(=O)c3cccs3	InChI=1S/C14H11N3OS2/c18-13(11-7-4-8-19-11)15-14-17-16-12(20-14)9-10-5-2-1-3-6-10/h1-8H,9H2,(H,15,17,18)
SM04	c1ccc2c(c1)c(ncn2)NCc3ccc(cc3)Cl	InChI=1S/C15H12ClN3/c16-12-7-5-11(6-8-12)9-17-15-13-3-1-2-4-14(13)18-10-19-15/h1-8,10H,9H2,(H,17,18,19)
SM05	c1ccc(c1)NC(=O)c2ccc(o2)Cl)N3CCCCC3	InChI=1S/C16H17ClN2O/c17-15-9-8-14(21-15)16(20)18-12-6-2-3-7-13(12)19-10-4-1-5-11-19/h2-3,6-9H,1,4-5,10-11H2,(H,18,20)
SM06	c1cc2cccnnc2c(c1)NC(=O)c3cc(cnc3)Br	InChI=1S/C15H10BrN3O/c16-12-7-11(8-17-9-12)15(20)19-13-5-1-3-10-4-2-6-18-14(10)13/h1-9H,(H,19,20)
SM07	c1ccc(cc1)CNc2c3cccc3ncn2	InChI=1S/C15H13N3/c1-2-6-12(7-3-1)10-16-15-13-8-4-5-9-14(13)17-11-18-15/h1-9,11H,10H2,(H,16,17,18)
SM08	Cc1ccc2c(c1)c(c(c=O)[nH]2)CC(=O)O)c3cccc3	InChI=1S/C18H15NO3/c1-11-7-8-15-13(9-11)17(12-5-3-2-4-6-12)14(10-16(20)21)18(22)19-15/h2-9H,10H2,1H3,(H,19,22)H,20,21)
SM09	COc1cccc(c1)Nc2c3cccc3ncn2.Cl	InChI=1S/C15H13N3O.CIH/c1-19-12-6-4-5-11(9-12)18-15-13-7-2-3-8-14(13)16-10-17-15;/h2-10H,1H3,(H,16,17,18);1H
SM10	c1ccc(cc1)C(=O)NCC(=O)Nc2nc3cccc3s2	InChI=1S/C16H13N3O2S/c20-14(10-17-15(21)11-6-2-1-3-7-11)19-16-18-12-8-4-5-9-13(12)22-16/h1-9H,10H2,(H,17,21)(H,18,19,20)
SM11	c1ccc(cc1)n2c3c(cn2)c(ncn3)N	InChI=1S/C11H9N5/c12-10-9-6-15-16(11(9)14-7-13-10)8-4-2-1-3-5-8/h1-7H,(H,2,12,13,14)
SM12	c1ccc2c(c1)c(ncn2)Nc3cccc(c3)Cl.Cl	InChI=1S/C14H10ClN3.CIH/c15-10-4-3-5-11(8-10)18-14-12-6-1-2-7-13(12)16-9-17-14;/h1-9H,(H,16,17,18);1H
SM13	Cc1cccc(c1)Nc2c3cc(c(c3ncn2)OC)OC	InChI=1S/C17H17N3O2/c1-11-5-4-6-12(7-11)20-17-13-8-15(21-2)16(22-3)9-14(13)18-10-19-17/h4-10H,1-3H3,(H,18,19,20)
SM14	c1ccc(cc1)n2nc3c2ccc(c3)N	InChI=1S/C13H11N3/c14-10-6-7-13-12(8-10)15-9-16(13)11-4-2-1-3-5-11/h1-9H,14H2
SM15	c1ccc2c(c1)ncn2c3ccc(cc3)O	InChI=1S/C13H10N2O/c16-11-7-5-10(6-8-11)15-9-14-12-3-1-2-4-13(12)15/h1-9,16H
SM16	c1cc(c(c1)Cl)C(=O)Nc2ccncc2Cl	InChI=1S/C12H8Cl2N2O/c13-9-2-1-3-10(14)11(9)12(17)16-8-4-6-15-7-5-8/h1-7H,(H,15,16,17)
SM17	c1ccc(cc1)CSc2nnc(o2)c3ccncc3	InChI=1S/C14H11N3OS/c1-2-4-11(5-3-1)10-19-14-17-16-13(18-14)12-6-8-15-9-7-12/h1-9H,10H2
SM18	c1ccc2c(c1)C(=O)[nH]c(n2)CCC(=O)Nc3ncc(s3)Cc4ccc(c(c4)F)F	InChI=1S/C21H16F2N4O2S/c22-15-6-5-12(10-16(15)23)9-13-11-24-21(30-13)27-19(28)8-7-18-25-17-4-2-1-3-14(17)20(29)26-18/h1-6,10-11H,7-9H2,(H,24,27,28)(H,25,26,29)
SM19	CCOc1ccc2c(c1)sc(n2)NC(=O)Cc3cccc(c3)Cl.Cl	InChI=1S/C17H14Cl2N2O2S/c1-2-23-11-4-6-14-15(9-11)24-17(20-14)21-6(22)8-10-3-5-12(18)13(19)7-10/h3-7H,2,8H2,1H3,(H,20,21,22)
SM20	c1cc(cc(c1)OCc2ccc(cc2)Cl)/C=3/C(=O)NC(=O)S3	InChI=1S/C17H11Cl2NO3S/c18-12-5-4-11(14(19)8-12)9-23-13-3-1-2-10(6-13)7-15-16(21)20-17(22)24-15/h1-8H,9H2,(H,20,21,22)/b15-7+
SM21	c1cc(cc(c1)Br)Nc2c(cnc(n2)Nc3cccc(c3)Br)F	InChI=1S/C16H11Br2FN4/c17-10-3-1-5-12(7-10)21-15-14(19)9-20-16(23-15)22-13-6-2-4-11(18)8-13/h1-9H,(H,20,21,22,23)
SM22	c1cc2c(cc(c(c2nc1)O))l	InChI=1S/C9H5I2NO/c10-6-4-7(11)9(13)8-5(6)2-1-3-12-8/h1-4,13H
SM23	CCOC(=O)c1ccc(cc1)Nc2cc(cnc(n2)Nc3cccc(c3)C(=O)OCC)C	InChI=1S/C23H24N4O4/c1-4-30-21(28)16-6-10-18(11-7-16)25-20-14-15(3)24-23(27-20)26-19-12-8-17(9-13-19)22(29)31-5-2/h6-14H,4-5H2,1-3H3,(H2,24,25,26,27)
SM24	COc1ccc(cc1)c2c3c(ncncc2c4ccc(cc4)OC)NCCO	InChI=1S/C22H21N3O4/c1-27-16-7-3-14(4-8-16)18-19-21(23-11-12-26)24-13-25-22(19)29-20(18)15-5-9-17(28-2)10-6-15/h3-10,13,26H,11-12H2,1-2H3,(H,23,24,25)

Microstate ID of Deprotonated State (A)	Microstate ID of Protonated State (HA)	Molecule ID	pKa (exp)	pKa SEM (exp)	pKa ID	Microstate identification source
		SM07	6.08	0.01	SM07_pKa1	NMR measurement
		SM14	5.3	0.01	SM14_pKa2	NMR measurement
		SM14	2.58	0.01	SM14_pKa1	NMR measurement
		SM02	5.03	0.01	SM02_pKa1	Estimated based on SM07 NMR measurement
		SM04	6.02	0.01	SM04_pKa1	Estimated based on SM07 NMR measurement
		SM09	5.37	0.01	SM09_pKa1	Estimated based on SM07 NMR measurement
		SM12	5.28	0.01	SM12_pKa1	Estimated based on SM07 NMR measurement
		SM13	5.77	0.01	SM13_pKa1	Estimated based on SM07 NMR measurement
		SM15	8.94	0.01	SM15_pKa2	Estimated based on SM14 NMR measurement
		SM15	4.7	0.01	SM15_pKa1	Estimated based on SM14 NMR measurement

Figure S1. Dominant microstates of 8 molecules were determined based on NMR measurements. Dominant microstate sequence of 6 analogues were determined taking SM07 and SM14 as reference. Matched experimental pK_a values were determined by spectrophotometric pK_a measurements [8]. A CSV version of this table can be found in SAMPL6-supplementary-documents.tar.gz.

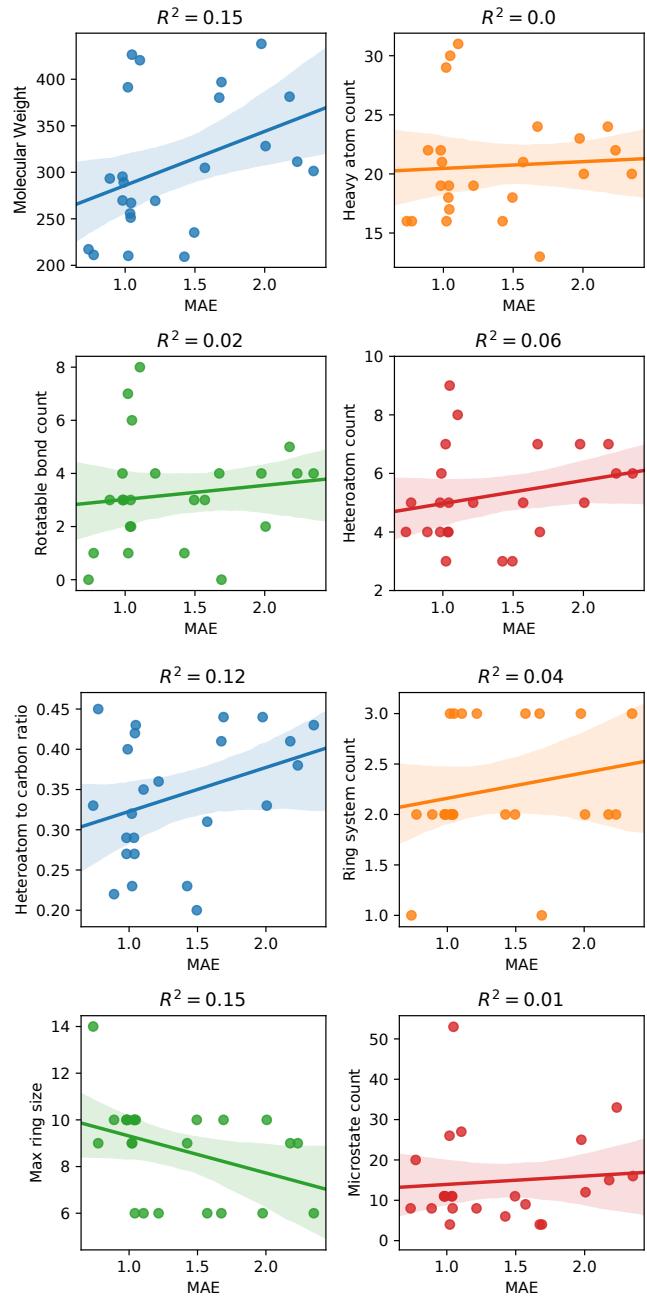


Figure S2. MAE of macroscopic pK_a predictions of each molecule did not show any significant correlation with any molecular descriptor.
 Plots show regression lines, 95% confidence intervals of the regression lines, and R^2 . The following molecular descriptors were calculated using OpenEye OEMolProp Toolkit [59]: molecular weight, non-terminal rotatable bond count, heteroatom to carbon ratio, maximum ring size, heavy atom count, heteroatom count, ring system count. Microstate count is based on the enumerated microstates for each compounds including additional microstates requested by participants.

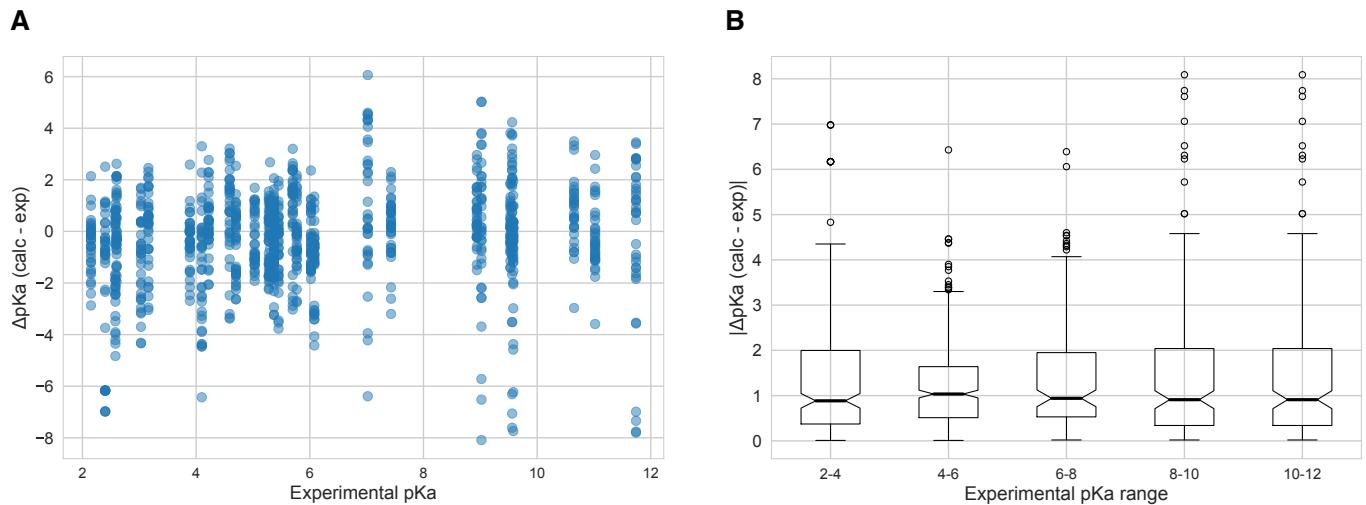


Figure S3. The value of macroscopic pK_a s was not a factor affecting prediction error seen in SAMPL6 Challenge according to the analysis with Hungarian matching. There was not clear trend between pK_a prediction error and the true pK_a error. Very high and very low pK_a values have similar inaccuracy compared to pK_a values close to 7. **A** Scatter plot of macroscopic pK_a prediction error calculated with Hungarian matching vs. experimental pK_a value **B** Box plot of absolute error of macroscopic pK_a predictions binned into 2 pK_a unit intervals of experimental pK_a .

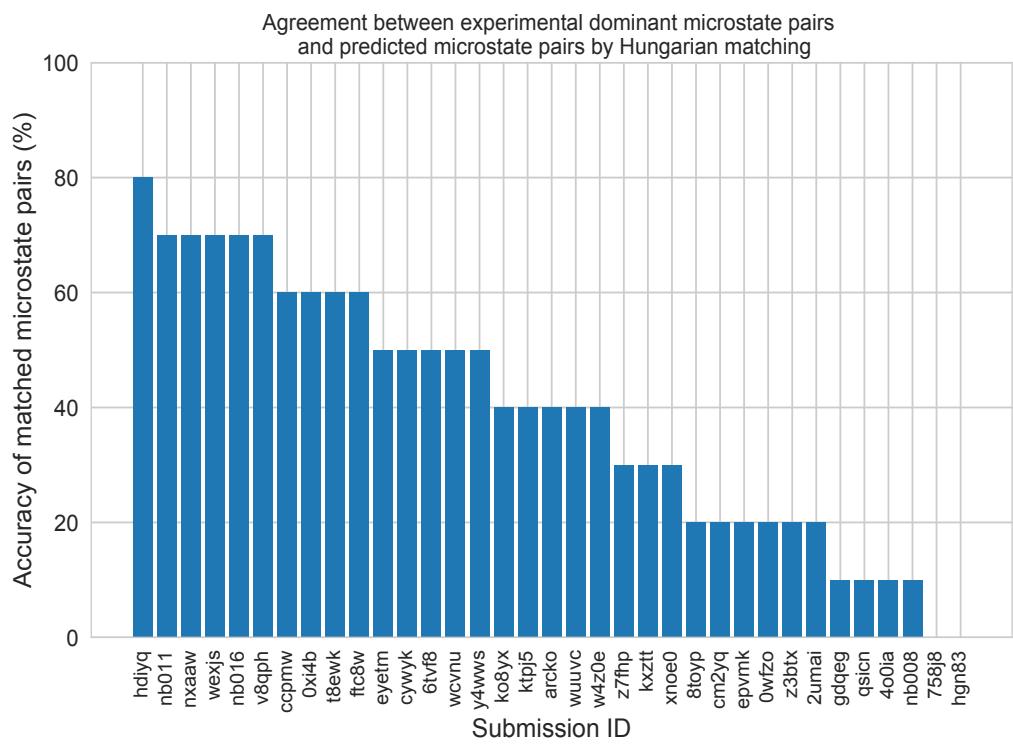


Figure S4. There was low agreement between experimental dominant microstate pairs and the predicted microstate pairs selected by Hungarian algorithm for microscopic pK_a predictions. This analysis could only be performed for 8 molecules with NMR data. Hungarian matching algorithm which matches predicted and experimental values considering only the closeness of the numerical value of pK_a and it often leads to predicted pK_a matches that described a different microstates pair than the experimentally observed dominant microstates.

Table S2. Evaluation statistics calculated for all macroscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on Hungarian match for 24 molecules. Methods are represented via their SAMPL6 submission IDs which can be cross-referenced with Table 1 for method details. There are eight error metrics reported: the root-mean-squared error (RMSE), mean absolute error (MAE), mean (signed) error (ME), coefficient of determination (R^2), linear regression slope (m), Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient (τ), unmatched experimental pK_as (number of missing pK_a predictions) and unmatched predicted pK_as (number of extra pK_a predictions between 2 and 12. This table is ranked by increasing RMSE. A CSV version of this table can be found in *SAMPL6-supplementary-documents.tar.gz*.

Submission ID	RMSE	MAE	ME	R ²	m	Kendall's Tau	Unmatched exp. pK _a s	Unmatched pred. pK _a s [2,12]
xvxzd	0.68 [0.54, 0.81]	0.58 [0.45, 0.71]	0.24 [-0.01, 0.45]	0.94 [0.88, 0.97]	0.92 [0.84, 1.02]	0.82 [0.68, 0.92]	2	4
gyuhx	0.73 [0.55, 0.91]	0.59 [0.44, 0.74]	0.03 [-0.23, 0.28]	0.93 [0.88, 0.96]	0.98 [0.90, 1.08]	0.88 [0.80, 0.94]	0	7
xmyhm	0.79 [0.52, 1.03]	0.56 [0.38, 0.77]	0.13 [-0.14, 0.41]	0.92 [0.85, 0.97]	0.96 [0.86, 1.08]	0.81 [0.68, 0.90]	0	3
nb017	0.94 [0.72, 1.16]	0.77 [0.58, 0.97]	-0.16 [-0.49, 0.16]	0.88 [0.81, 0.94]	0.94 [0.82, 1.08]	0.73 [0.60, 0.84]	0	6
nb007	0.95 [0.73, 1.15]	0.78 [0.60, 0.97]	0.05 [-0.29, 0.37]	0.88 [0.77, 0.95]	0.84 [0.77, 0.92]	0.79 [0.65, 0.89]	0	13
yqkga	1.01 [0.78, 1.23]	0.80 [0.59, 1.03]	-0.17 [-0.51, 0.19]	0.87 [0.78, 0.93]	0.93 [0.77, 1.08]	0.83 [0.72, 0.91]	0	1
nb010	1.03 [0.77, 1.26]	0.81 [0.61, 1.04]	0.24 [-0.11, 0.59]	0.87 [0.77, 0.94]	0.95 [0.83, 1.08]	0.80 [0.67, 0.90]	0	4
8xt50	1.07 [0.78, 1.36]	0.81 [0.58, 1.07]	-0.47 [-0.82, -0.14]	0.91 [0.84, 0.95]	1.08 [0.94, 1.22]	0.80 [0.68, 0.89]	0	0
nb013	1.10 [0.72, 1.47]	0.80 [0.56, 1.09]	-0.15 [-0.55, 0.22]	0.88 [0.78, 0.95]	1.09 [0.90, 1.25]	0.79 [0.64, 0.90]	0	6
nb015	1.27 [0.98, 1.56]	1.04 [0.80, 1.31]	0.13 [-0.32, 0.56]	0.87 [0.80, 0.93]	1.16 [0.94, 1.34]	0.78 [0.66, 0.86]	0	0
p0jba	1.31 [0.69, 1.73]	1.08 [0.43, 1.72]	-0.92 [-1.72, -0.11]	0.91 [0.51, 1.00]	1.18 [0.36, 1.72]	0.80 [0.00, 1.00]	0	0
37xm8	1.41 [0.93, 1.84]	1.01 [0.68, 1.38]	-0.18 [-0.69, 0.32]	0.83 [0.70, 0.93]	1.16 [0.98, 1.33]	0.70 [0.56, 0.83]	1	1
mkhqa	1.60 [1.13, 2.05]	1.24 [0.90, 1.62]	-0.32 [-0.89, 0.21]	0.80 [0.67, 0.91]	1.14 [0.98, 1.34]	0.64 [0.44, 0.79]	0	6
ttjd0	1.64 [1.20, 2.06]	1.30 [0.96, 1.67]	-0.12 [-0.70, 0.45]	0.81 [0.69, 0.91]	1.2 [1.03, 1.40]	0.65 [0.47, 0.80]	0	5
nb001	1.68 [1.05, 2.37]	1.21 [0.84, 1.68]	0.44 [-0.10, 1.03]	0.80 [0.70, 0.90]	1.16 [0.95, 1.42]	0.72 [0.55, 0.85]	0	7
nb002	1.70 [1.08, 2.38]	1.25 [0.89, 1.70]	0.51 [-0.04, 1.10]	0.80 [0.70, 0.90]	1.15 [0.95, 1.42]	0.72 [0.56, 0.84]	0	7
35bdm	1.72 [0.66, 2.34]	1.44 [0.62, 2.26]	-1.01 [-2.18, 0.13]	0.92 [0.46, 1.00]	1.45 [0.73, 2.15]	0.80 [0.00, 1.00]	0	0
ryzue	1.77 [1.42, 2.12]	1.50 [1.17, 1.84]	1.30 [0.86, 1.72]	0.91 [0.86, 0.95]	1.23 [1.06, 1.41]	0.82 [0.71, 0.91]	0	0
2ii2g	1.80 [1.31, 2.24]	1.39 [1.01, 1.82]	-0.74 [-1.29, -0.15]	0.79 [0.65, 0.89]	1.15 [0.96, 1.37]	0.68 [0.59, 0.82]	0	2
mpwiy	1.82 [1.39, 2.23]	1.48 [1.14, 1.88]	0.10 [-0.54, 0.73]	0.82 [0.70, 0.91]	1.29 [1.12, 1.51]	0.66 [0.49, 0.80]	0	5
5byn6	1.89 [1.50, 2.27]	1.59 [1.24, 1.97]	1.32 [0.84, 1.80]	0.91 [0.85, 0.95]	1.28 [1.10, 1.48]	0.83 [0.72, 0.92]	0	0
y75vj	1.90 [1.50, 2.26]	1.58 [1.21, 1.97]	1.04 [0.46, 1.60]	0.89 [0.79, 0.95]	1.34 [1.16, 1.53]	0.75 [0.57, 0.88]	1	0
w4iyd	1.93 [1.53, 2.28]	1.58 [1.20, 1.98]	1.26 [0.72, 1.76]	0.85 [0.74, 0.92]	1.21 [1.00, 1.40]	0.73 [0.57, 0.85]	0	1
np6b4	1.94 [1.21, 2.71]	1.44 [1.04, 1.94]	-0.47 [-1.08, 0.24]	0.71 [0.60, 0.87]	1.08 [0.81, 1.43]	0.75 [0.62, 0.86]	0	8
nb004	2.01 [1.38, 2.63]	1.57 [1.16, 2.04]	0.56 [-0.10, 1.27]	0.82 [0.72, 0.90]	1.35 [1.15, 1.60]	0.71 [0.54, 0.84]	0	5
nb003	2.01 [1.39, 2.64]	1.58 [1.18, 2.04]	0.52 [-0.14, 1.22]	0.82 [0.73, 0.91]	1.36 [1.16, 1.61]	0.71 [0.54, 0.84]	0	5
yc70m	2.03 [1.73, 2.33]	1.80 [1.48, 2.13]	-0.41 [-1.09, 0.31]	0.47 [0.28, 0.64]	0.56 [0.35, 0.83]	0.53 [0.35, 0.68]	0	27
hytjn	2.16 [1.24, 3.06]	1.39 [0.86, 2.04]	0.71 [0.03, 1.48]	0.45 [0.13, 0.78]	0.62 [0.26, 1.00]	0.47 [0.16, 0.73]	1	27
f0gew	2.18 [1.38, 2.95]	1.58 [1.09, 2.16]	-0.73 [-1.42, 0.04]	0.77 [0.67, 0.89]	1.29 [1.01, 1.63]	0.76 [0.63, 0.86]	0	0
q3pfp	2.19 [1.33, 3.09]	1.51 [0.99, 2.13]	0.59 [-0.10, 1.37]	0.44 [0.13, 0.77]	0.66 [0.27, 1.07]	0.50 [0.20, 0.75]	1	22
ds62k	2.22 [1.62, 2.81]	1.78 [1.34, 2.27]	0.78 [0.06, 1.52]	0.82 [0.70, 0.90]	1.41 [1.20, 1.63]	0.72 [0.55, 0.85]	0	4
xikp8	2.35 [1.94, 2.73]	2.06 [1.66, 2.47]	0.77 [-0.02, 1.58]	0.89 [0.80, 0.95]	1.59 [1.40, 1.81]	0.76 [0.59, 0.89]	1	0
nb005	2.38 [1.79, 2.95]	1.91 [1.44, 2.43]	0.31 [-0.49, 1.15]	0.84 [0.74, 0.91]	1.56 [1.34, 1.82]	0.71 [0.54, 0.83]	0	0
5nm4j	2.45 [1.42, 3.34]	1.58 [0.94, 2.34]	0.05 [-0.80, 1.07]	0.19 [0.00, 0.70]	0.40 [-0.06, 0.81]	0.34 [-0.04, 0.67]	4	1
ad5pu	2.54 [1.68, 3.30]	1.83 [1.24, 2.49]	-0.65 [-1.48, 0.25]	0.76 [0.64, 0.88]	1.43 [1.12, 1.78]	0.77 [0.63, 0.88]	0	0
pwn3m	2.60 [1.45, 3.53]	1.54 [0.83, 2.37]	0.79 [-0.06, 1.77]	0.21 [0.00, 0.63]	0.37 [0.01, 0.78]	0.34 [0.04, 0.63]	1	3
nb006	2.98 [2.37, 3.56]	2.53 [2.00, 3.10]	0.42 [-0.60, 1.47]	0.84 [0.74, 0.92]	1.78 [1.55, 2.06]	0.71 [0.54, 0.84]	0	0
0hxtm	3.26 [1.81, 4.39]	1.92 [1.03, 2.98]	1.38 [0.37, 2.56]	0.08 [0.00, 0.48]	0.28 [-0.17, 0.83]	0.29 [-0.04, 0.61]	3	7

Table S3. Evaluation statistics calculated for all microscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on Hungarian match for 8 molecules with NMR data. Methods are represented via their SAMPL6 submission IDs which can be cross-referenced with Table 1 for method details. There are eight error metrics reported: the root-mean-squared error (RMSE), mean absolute error (MAE), mean (signed) error (ME), coefficient of determination (R^2), linear regression slope (m), Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient (τ), unmatched experimental pK_as (number of missing pK_a predictions) and unmatched predicted pK_as (number of extra pK_a predictions between 2 and 12). This table is ranked by increasing RMSE. A CSV version of this table can be found in *SAMPL6-supplementary-documents.tar.gz*.

Submission ID	RMSE	MAE	ME	R ²	m	Kendall's Tau	Unmatched exp. pK _a s	Unmatched pred. pK _a s [2,12]
nb011	0.47 [0.30, 0.64]	0.33 [0.22, 0.46]	-0.02 [-0.18, 0.14]	0.97 [0.94, 0.99]	1.01 [0.97, 1.06]	0.90 [0.78, 0.96]	0	36
hdlyq	0.62 [0.47, 0.76]	0.47 [0.33, 0.62]	0.13 [-0.09, 0.34]	0.95 [0.92, 0.97]	0.34 [0.92, 1.09]	0.87 [0.79, 0.93]	0	16
epvmk	0.63 [0.43, 0.81]	0.47 [0.32, 0.63]	-0.02 [-0.25, 0.21]	0.95 [0.89, 0.98]	0.21 [0.91, 1.04]	0.81 [0.68, 0.91]	0	37
xnoe0	0.65 [0.47, 0.82]	0.50 [0.36, 0.66]	-0.1 [-0.32, 0.13]	0.95 [0.89, 0.98]	0.13 [0.92, 1.05]	0.82 [0.69, 0.91]	0	36
gdqeg	0.65 [0.41, 0.89]	0.43 [0.27, 0.62]	0.11 [-0.10, 0.35]	0.94 [0.88, 0.98]	0.35 [0.87, 1.02]	0.83 [0.67, 0.95]	0	53
400ia	0.66 [0.44, 0.86]	0.47 [0.31, 0.64]	0.00 [-0.22, 0.24]	0.94 [0.88, 0.98]	0.24 [0.87, 1.05]	0.85 [0.73, 0.94]	0	35
nb008	0.76 [0.48, 1.02]	0.52 [0.34, 0.73]	-0.08 [-0.37, 0.17]	0.93 [0.85, 0.98]	0.17 [0.79, 0.93]	0.84 [0.73, 0.92]	0	35
ccpmw	0.79 [0.62, 0.94]	0.62 [0.46, 0.80]	-0.17 [-0.44, 0.11]	0.92 [0.86, 0.96]	0.11 [0.82, 1.05]	0.80 [0.67, 0.89]	0	7
0xi4b	0.84 [0.58, 1.07]	0.61 [0.42, 0.83]	0.22 [-0.07, 0.51]	0.92 [0.84, 0.97]	0.51 [0.91, 1.09]	0.81 [0.65, 0.92]	0	32
cwyk	0.86 [0.60, 1.10]	0.62 [0.42, 0.84]	0.13 [-0.16, 0.44]	0.90 [0.82, 0.96]	0.44 [0.86, 1.08]	0.81 [0.64, 0.92]	0	35
ftc8w	0.86 [0.51, 1.17]	0.59 [0.39, 0.83]	0.10 [-0.19, 0.41]	0.90 [0.77, 0.97]	0.41 [0.84, 0.98]	0.75 [0.57, 0.88]	0	35
nxaaw	0.89 [0.56, 1.25]	0.61 [0.41, 0.87]	-0.02 [-0.35, 0.28]	0.89 [0.75, 0.97]	0.28 [0.85, 1.00]	0.79 [0.63, 0.91]	0	29
nb016	0.95 [0.71, 1.18]	0.77 [0.57, 0.98]	-0.23 [-0.56, 0.12]	0.89 [0.83, 0.95]	0.12 [0.82, 1.07]	0.75 [0.62, 0.85]	0	3
kxzt	0.96 [0.56, 1.33]	0.64 [0.41, 0.92]	0.00 [-0.32, 0.36]	0.90 [0.76, 0.97]	0.36 [0.96, 1.13]	0.79 [0.63, 0.91]	0	37
eyetm	0.98 [0.69, 1.27]	0.72 [0.50, 0.97]	-0.32 [-0.65, 0.00]	0.91 [0.86, 0.96]	0.00 [0.94, 1.22]	0.78 [0.64, 0.88]	0	7
cm2yq	0.99 [0.44, 1.54]	0.56 [0.31, 0.90]	0.10 [-0.21, 0.50]	0.91 [0.83, 0.98]	0.50 [0.96, 1.25]	0.89 [0.80, 0.96]	0	36
2umai	1.00 [0.46, 1.54]	0.57 [0.33, 0.91]	0.07 [-0.25, 0.46]	0.91 [0.82, 0.98]	0.46 [0.96, 1.26]	0.87 [0.76, 0.95]	0	36
ko8yx	1.01 [0.76, 1.25]	0.78 [0.56, 1.01]	0.35 [0.01, 0.67]	0.91 [0.82, 0.96]	0.67 [0.96, 1.19]	0.78 [0.64, 0.89]	0	26
wuuvc	1.02 [0.51, 1.53]	0.62 [0.38, 0.93]	0.19 [-0.13, 0.58]	0.88 [0.80, 0.96]	0.58 [0.85, 1.19]	0.90 [0.81, 0.96]	0	36
ktpj5	1.02 [0.51, 1.56]	0.61 [0.37, 0.95]	0.17 [-0.16, 0.57]	0.88 [0.80, 0.96]	0.57 [0.87, 1.22]	0.89 [0.80, 0.96]	0	36
z7fhp	1.02 [0.49, 1.55]	0.61 [0.36, 0.94]	0.08 [-0.24, 0.48]	0.90 [0.82, 0.97]	0.48 [0.97, 1.26]	0.88 [0.80, 0.95]	0	28
arcko	1.04 [0.73, 1.32]	0.77 [0.53, 1.02]	0.37 [0.05, 0.72]	0.89 [0.80, 0.94]	0.72 [0.90, 1.14]	0.78 [0.62, 0.90]	0	24
y4wws	1.04 [0.70, 1.33]	0.74 [0.49, 1.00]	-0.31 [-0.66, 0.05]	0.91 [0.85, 0.96]	0.05 [1.02, 1.26]	0.79 [0.68, 0.88]	0	30
wcvnu	1.11 [0.80, 1.39]	0.84 [0.59, 1.11]	0.28 [-0.10, 0.66]	0.89 [0.77, 0.95]	0.66 [0.98, 1.22]	0.73 [0.54, 0.88]	1	27
8toyp	1.13 [0.61, 1.65]	0.70 [0.42, 1.05]	0.13 [-0.25, 0.56]	0.88 [0.81, 0.96]	0.56 [0.98, 1.29]	0.83 [0.72, 0.92]	0	27
qsicn	1.17 [0.30, 1.65]	0.88 [0.23, 1.54]	-0.76 [-1.54, 0.01]	0.91 [0.46, 1.00]	0.01 [0.52, 1.59]	0.80 [0.00, 1.00]	0	2
wexjs	1.30 [0.95, 1.62]	0.98 [0.68, 1.29]	0.27 [-0.17, 0.74]	0.86 [0.74, 0.93]	0.74 [1.00, 1.29]	0.73 [0.55, 0.86]	0	25
v8qph	1.37 [0.92, 1.79]	0.98 [0.66, 1.34]	-0.15 [-0.64, 0.34]	0.84 [0.70, 0.93]	0.34 [0.97, 1.32]	0.70 [0.55, 0.82]	0	6
w420e	1.57 [1.18, 1.94]	1.23 [0.90, 1.58]	0.09 [-0.48, 0.62]	0.85 [0.76, 0.91]	0.62 [1.08, 1.46]	0.72 [0.60, 0.82]	0	19
6tvf8	1.88 [0.87, 2.85]	1.02 [0.54, 1.66]	0.45 [-0.14, 1.18]	0.51 [0.16, 0.87]	1.18 [0.26, 0.89]	0.61 [0.34, 0.82]	0	55
0wfzo	2.89 [1.73, 3.89]	1.88 [1.17, 2.68]	0.76 [-0.15, 1.77]	0.48 [0.21, 0.75]	1.77 [0.60, 1.37]	0.51 [0.30, 0.70]	0	4
t8ewk	3.30 [1.89, 4.39]	1.98 [1.06, 3.00]	1.32 [0.27, 2.49]	0.07 [0.00, 0.45]	2.49 [-0.17, 0.79]	0.28 [-0.03, 0.6]	0	6
z3btx	4.00 [2.30, 5.45]	2.49 [1.47, 3.65]	1.48 [0.26, 2.86]	0.29 [0.04, 0.60]	2.86 [0.31, 1.44]	0.43 [0.19, 0.63]	0	1
758j8	4.52 [2.64, 6.18]	2.95 [1.85, 4.25]	1.85 [0.48, 3.38]	0.24 [0.02, 0.58]	3.38 [0.20, 1.51]	0.34 [0.08, 0.57]	0	2
hgn83	6.38 [4.04, 8.47]	4.11 [2.52, 5.93]	2.13 [0.07, 4.28]	0.08 [0.00, 0.39]	4.28 [-0.18, 1.43]	0.32 [0.07, 0.56]	0	0

Table S4. Evaluation statistics calculated for all microscopic pK_a prediction submissions based on microstate pair match for 8 molecules with NMR data. Methods are represented via their SAMPL6 submission IDs which can be cross-referenced with Table 1 for method details. There are eight error metrics reported: the root-mean-squared error (RMSE), mean absolute error (MAE), mean (signed) error (ME), coefficient of determination (R^2), linear regression slope (m), Kendall's Rank Correlation Coefficient (τ), unmatched experimental pK_as (number of missing pK_a predictions) and unmatched predicted pK_as (number of extra pK_a predictions between 2 and 12. This table is ranked by increasing RMSE. A CSV version of this table can be found in *SAMPL6-supplementary-documents.tar.gz*.

Submission ID	RMSE	MAE	ME	R ²	m	Kendall's Tau	Unmatched exp. pK _a s	Unmatched pred. pK _a s [2,12]
nb016	0.52 [0.25, 0.71]	0.43 [0.23, 0.65]	-0.09 [-0.45, 0.30]	0.92 [0.05, 0.99]	0.99 [0.14, 1.16]	0.62 [-0.14, 1.00]	0	3
hdijq	0.68 [0.49, 0.83]	0.60 [0.39, 0.80]	0.38 [0.02, 0.70]	0.86 [0.47, 0.98]	0.91 [0.45, 1.26]	0.78 [0.4, 1.00]	0	16
nb011	0.72 [0.35, 1.07]	0.54 [0.28, 0.86]	0.45 [0.14, 0.83]	0.86 [0.18, 0.98]	0.93 [0.50, 1.21]	0.64 [0.26, 0.95]	0	36
ftc8w	0.75 [0.52, 0.96]	0.68 [0.50, 0.89]	-0.31 [-0.68, 0.16]	0.87 [0.02, 0.99]	1.12 [-0.11, 1.39]	0.56 [-0.10, 1.00]	0	35
6vf8	0.76 [0.55, 0.95]	0.68 [0.46, 0.90]	-0.63 [-0.89, -0.35]	0.92 [0.78, 0.99]	0.94 [0.69, 1.41]	0.87 [0.6, 1.00]	0	55
t8ewk	0.96 [0.65, 1.19]	0.81 [0.46, 1.13]	-0.77 [-1.12, -0.38]	0.80 [0.53, 0.96]	0.96 [0.76, 2.26]	0.78 [0.31, 1.00]	1	7
v8qph	0.99 [0.40, 1.52]	0.67 [0.29, 1.17]	-0.09 [-0.75, 0.45]	0.68 [0.11, 0.97]	0.96 [-1.26, 1.16]	0.38 [-0.3, 1.00]	0	6
ccpmw	1.07 [0.78, 1.27]	0.95 [0.60, 1.25]	-0.83 [-1.25, -0.37]	0.74 [0.43, 0.99]	0.95 [0.70, 2.32]	0.89 [0.52, 1.00]	1	8
Oxi4b	1.15 [0.75, 1.50]	0.98 [0.63, 1.36]	-0.30 [-0.94, 0.44]	0.77 [0.02, 0.98]	1.26 [0.09, 2.10]	0.51 [-0.14, 1.00]	0	33
cywyk	1.17 [0.88, 1.41]	1.06 [0.74, 1.35]	-0.47 [-1.09, 0.24]	0.73 [0.02, 0.98]	1.15 [-0.04, 2.00]	0.56 [-0.08, 1.00]	0	36
eyetm	1.17 [0.77, 1.52]	1.00 [0.61, 1.41]	-0.89 [-1.38, -0.38]	0.67 [0.30, 0.94]	0.93 [0.65, 2.59]	0.72 [0.29, 1.00]	1	8
nb008	1.26 [0.74, 1.71]	1.09 [0.63, 1.57]	0.47 [-0.40, 1.32]	0.79 [0.01, 0.99]	1.21 [-0.59, 1.85]	0.52 [-0.2, 1.00]	0	38
y4wws	1.41 [0.95, 1.80]	1.22 [0.78, 1.66]	-0.71 [-1.44, 0.06]	0.87 [0.05, 0.98]	1.55 [0.41, 2.02]	0.56 [-0.11, 1.00]	0	31
ktpj5	1.46 [0.83, 2.10]	1.15 [0.67, 1.77]	0.94 [0.29, 1.68]	0.77 [0.01, 0.98]	1.28 [-0.26, 1.60]	0.42 [-0.27, 0.95]	0	37
wuuvc	1.47 [0.84, 2.09]	1.18 [0.70, 1.77]	0.99 [0.36, 1.68]	0.78 [0.01, 0.98]	1.27 [-0.24, 1.58]	0.47 [-0.20, 1.00]	0	37
xnoe0	1.54 [1.09, 2.00]	1.39 [1.02, 1.83]	0.91 [0.11, 1.64]	0.82 [0.01, 0.98]	1.47 [-0.30, 1.79]	0.42 [-0.27, 0.95]	0	37
qsicn	1.58 [1.44, 1.70]	1.57 [1.44, 1.70]	-1.57 [-1.7, -1.44]	1.00 [0.00, 1.00]	1.06		0	2
epvmk	1.66 [1.20, 2.15]	1.50 [1.07, 1.96]	1.12 [0.31, 1.82]	0.82 [0.02, 0.98]	1.47 [-0.21, 1.8]	0.42 [-0.25, 0.95]	0	37
400ia	1.73 [1.33, 2.17]	1.62 [1.29, 2.02]	1.31 [0.53, 1.93]	0.87 [0.03, 0.99]	1.50 [0.07, 1.84]	0.56 [-0.07, 1.00]	0	36
ko8yx	1.75 [1.08, 2.45]	1.44 [0.87, 2.12]	1.38 [0.74, 2.10]	0.97 [0.88, 1.00]	1.66 [1.46, 2.28]	0.91 [0.69, 1.00]	0	27
Zumai	1.76 [1.21, 2.35]	1.54 [1.04, 2.11]	1.31 [0.55, 2.03]	0.82 [0.02, 0.98]	1.43 [-0.02, 1.77]	0.47 [-0.17, 0.95]	0	37
cm2yq	1.77 [1.22, 2.36]	1.55 [1.06, 2.12]	1.33 [0.57, 2.04]	0.82 [0.02, 0.98]	1.43 [-0.02, 1.76]	0.47 [-0.17, 0.95]	0	37
nxaaw	1.80 [0.84, 2.80]	1.34 [0.80, 2.18]	0.16 [-0.77, 1.41]	0.59 [0.02, 0.97]	1.37 [-0.08, 2.92]	0.6 [-0.05, 1.00]	0	30
wcvnu	1.90 [1.14, 2.64]	1.57 [0.97, 2.27]	1.44 [0.70, 2.24]	0.97 [0.91, 1.00]	1.78 [1.58, 2.48]	0.91 [0.69, 1.00]	0	27
kxzt	2.00 [1.13, 2.73]	1.64 [1.00, 2.39]	1.64 [1.00, 2.39]	0.83 [0.01, 0.98]	1.42 [-0.21, 1.99]	0.56 [-0.10, 1.00]	0	38
wexjs	2.05 [1.18, 2.93]	1.66 [1.01, 2.47]	1.48 [0.63, 2.39]	0.96 [0.55, 0.99]	1.87 [1.54, 2.29]	0.73 [0.20, 1.00]	0	26
z7fhp	2.14 [1.38, 2.87]	1.80 [1.12, 2.58]	1.28 [0.18, 2.34]	0.78 [0.02, 0.98]	1.71 [-0.41, 2.13]	0.42 [-0.25, 0.95]	0	30
gdqeg	2.38 [1.97, 2.71]	2.25 [1.74, 2.68]	-1.61 [-2.46, -0.37]	0.10 [0.00, 0.98]	0.31 [-0.60, 1.63]	0.29 [-0.45, 1.00]	0	53
8toyp	2.63 [1.89, 3.29]	2.34 [1.59, 3.07]	1.78 [0.47, 2.89]	0.82 [0.02, 0.98]	1.94 [-0.06, 2.39]	0.47 [-0.17, 0.95]	0	29
w4z0e	2.63 [1.81, 3.53]	2.34 [1.67, 3.18]	1.74 [0.46, 2.92]	0.98 [0.55, 1.00]	2.28 [1.52, 2.41]	0.73 [0.20, 1.00]	0	20
arcko	2.64 [1.23, 3.78]	2.08 [1.10, 3.24]	1.71 [0.44, 3.10]	0.57 [0.04, 0.95]	1.42 [0.56, 2.93]	0.56 [-0.06, 1.00]	0	28
0wfzo	18.72 [11.21, 25.03]	15.80 [9.9, 22.35]	15.09 [8.28, 22.12]	0.09 [0.01, 0.73]	2.35 [-10.18, 8.12]	0.02 [-0.65, 0.66]	0	12
z3btv	22.60 [15.03, 29.00]	19.70 [12.97, 26.69]	19.70 [12.97, 26.69]	0.09 [0.01, 0.72]	2.35 [-10.00, 8.28]	0.02 [-0.66, 0.66]	0	7
758j8	23.76 [16.33, 30.24]	21.00 [14.26, 28.00]	21.00 [14.26, 28.00]	0.09 [0.01, 0.71]	2.35 [-10.34, 8.12]	0.02 [-0.65, 0.65]	0	8
hgn83	27.91 [20.54, 34.52]	25.60 [18.9, 32.64]	25.60 [18.9, 32.64]	0.09 [0.01, 0.72]	2.35 [-10.21, 8.00]	0.02 [-0.65, 0.65]	0	5