

GUEST COLUMN: New Survey Shows Physician Appointment Wait Times Getting Longer

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The time it takes to schedule a new patient physician appointment continues to rise.

That is one key finding of the new AMN Healthcare/Merritt Hawkins 2022 *Survey of Physician Appointment Wait Times and Medicare and Medicaid Acceptance Rates*.

First conducted in 2004, the survey tracks the time it takes to schedule a physician appointment in five medical specialties in 15 major metropolitan areas. The average wait time has increased by 8% since 2017, the last year the survey was conducted, and by 24% from 2004, the first year the survey was conducted.

The 2022 survey indicates that it now takes an average of 26 days to schedule a new patient physician appointment in 15 of the largest cities in the United States, up from 24.1 days in 2017 and up from 21 days in 2004.

The survey includes physician appointment wait time data for Atlanta in five specialties: obstetrics and gynecology, cardiology, orthopedic surgery, dermatology and family medicine.

Major cities like those included in the survey have some of the highest ratios of physicians per capita in the country, yet the survey indicates physician appointment wait times are increasing. That is a sobering sign for the rest of the country where there often are few physicians per population than in large cities.

Appointment Wait Times Down in Family Medicine

Family medicine is the only specialty in which average appointment wait times were down relative to 2017, according to the survey. The average wait time for a family medicine appointment is 20.6 days for all cities, down from 29.3 days in 2017, a 30% decrease.

The decline in family medicine appointment wait times can be attributed to a major shift in how patients access primary care that has taken place over the last several years. A growing number of patients are accessing primary care through urgent care centers, retail clinics, and telemedicine, venues that typically are staffed by nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs).

The number of urgent care centers and retail clinics is growing rapidly, creating a new front door to the health care system. As a result, accessing a family physician, while still challenging, can be less difficult.

The survey includes appointment wait time and Medicare and Medicaid acceptance data from 1,034 physician offices located in 15 metropolitan areas, including Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Minnesota, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, San Diego, Seattle and Washington, D.C.



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A complete copy of this new AMN Healthcare/Merritt Hawkins thought leadership resource can be obtained by contacting [Nathan Piller](#).

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