

The Physicians Foundation 2020 Survey of America's Physicians: COVID-19 Impact Edition

A Survey Examining How the Coronavirus Pandemic is Affecting and is Perceived by the Nation's Physicians



The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our entire health care system. In particular, our nation's physicians have been stretched like never before. With [nearly half \(49%\) of U.S. physicians](#) believing COVID-19 won't be under control until after June 1, 2021, America is experiencing a prolonged period of uncertainty and turmoil. Physicians are living through a historical shift in the way they practice and deliver care to patients. Not only is the delivery of care changing, but those delivering the care are also under more pressure than ever. Now is an opportunity for policymakers to rebuild a system with physicians and patients in mind.

To gauge physicians' perspective on the pandemic's impact, The Physicians Foundation conducted a three-part survey series:

- [Part One: The Impact of COVID-19 on Physicians' Practices and Their Patients](#)
- [Part Two: The Impact of COVID-19 on Physician Wellbeing](#)
- [Part Three: The Impact of COVID-19 and the Future of the Health Care System](#)

Physicians Have Spoken—It's Time Policymakers Listen

Physicians' Practices and Their Patients

Even before the pandemic, physicians were being unnecessarily burdened by practice demands and regulatory and reimbursement mandates. In the face of ongoing uncertainty, physician practices are closing at an alarming rate, further hindering patient access to care.

8% of physicians said their practices closed as a result of COVID-19—approximately 16,000 practices.

4% plan to close their practices in the next 12 months.

43% of physicians reduced staff due to COVID-19.

72% of physicians experienced a reduction in income due to COVID-19.

12% of physicians – approximately 100,000 – switched to a primarily telemedicine practice as a result of COVID-19.

52% of physicians plan to increase use of telemedicine in their practices.

72% of physicians indicated that COVID-19 will have serious consequences for patient health in their communities because many patients delayed getting care they needed during the pandemic.



Physician Wellbeing

Physician burnout was a public health crisis long before COVID-19. Now, we're seeing the pandemic exacerbating this issue, which is leading to higher rates of burnout, retirement and worsening physician shortages.

58% of physicians often have feelings of burnout, compared to 40 percent in 2018

22% of physicians know a physician who has committed suicide.

13% have sought medical attention for a mental health problem caused COVID-19's effects on their practice or employment situation.

37% of physicians would like to retire in the next year.



Future of the Health Care System

Physician insights are not being incorporated into national health care conversations. Instead, our current system is directed by policymakers and business executives. As the foundation of health care, physicians know what is best for our system and the patients they serve.

- When asked to rank their preferences for the future direction of the U.S. health care system,

67% of physicians ranked a two-tiered system featuring a single payer option plus private pay as the best direction.

As part of the same question, physicians overwhelmingly ranked a government funded and administered single payer/Medicare for All system **lowest among four potential options**.

- Physicians agree there are **immediate policy steps** that must be undertaken that are extremely important to ensure high-quality, cost-efficient care for all.
 - 60%** cite streamlining/simplifying prior authorizations;
 - 56%** report simplifying access to mental health services and;
 - 54%** of physicians said that providing insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19
- **73%** of physicians indicate that social determinants of health (SDOH), such as access to healthy food and safe housing will drive demand of healthcare services in 2021

Physicians Are Their Patients Strongest Advocates

Despite the immense amount of data, physician perspectives are not being incorporated into national health care conversations. Our current system is directed by policymakers and business executives who focus on profits, instead of physicians who care most about what is best for their patients. As the foundation of health care, physicians know what is best for our system and the patients we serve. These experiences must be included in any health care reform discussion and if we hope to improve access to quality care.