

The Challenge of Primary Care Recruitment

The United States faces a rising physician shortage, significantly impacting the recruitment and retention of Family Medicine and Internal Medicine providers. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), there will be a shortage of 68,020 full-time equivalent (FTE) primary care physicians by 2036, a crisis that will hit nonmetro areas particularly hard.

This shortage has led to a yearly decrease in the percentage of successfully filled searches. Recruitment teams must innovate to attract top talent as healthcare organizations are all competing in the same limited candidate pool. Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Hospital Medicine physicians are among the most sought-after, making these positions highly competitive to fill.

A report published in February 2024, titled "The Health of US Primary Care: 2024 Scorecard Report – No One Can See You Now" by Milbank highlights the critical role of primary care in improving population health and reducing health disparities. Despite this, support for primary care remains insufficient.

National physician turnover has averaged around 8% over the past six years (AAPPR). This figure could shift dramatically as 20% of the physician workforce is aged 65 or older, and 22% are between 55 and 64. Consequently, a large number of physicians are expected to retire within the next decade. And with up to a decade required to educate and train a physician, the primary care workforce is not expanding quickly enough to meet the growing population's needs.

By 2036, the US population is projected to increase by 8.4%, with the population aged 65 and older growing by 34.1% and those 75 and older by 54.7% (AMA). This demographic shift will drive a higher demand for healthcare services and access to primary care physicians.

Healthcare organizations typically recruit providers from Internet Job Boards (38%), referrals (19%), organization websites (12%), and search firms (5%). Despite the high usage of Job Boards, only 14% of providers are actively seeking employment.

Notably, there is a severe shortage of geriatricians, with only 2% of all active primary care physicians specializing in geriatrics as of 2021. This is concerning given the substantial and growing number of older adults in the US.

High turnover, driven by burnout (51% of primary care physicians surveyed reported burnout) (TheDO) and an aging physician population, has led organizations to increase their recruitment efforts while waiting an average of 124 days to fill that primary care physician role (AAPPR).

Conclusion

The importance of primary care cannot be overstated. Healthcare organizations must develop robust recruitment strategies to secure primary care providers, benefiting the organization, specialists, and, most importantly, patients. Without accessible primary care, patient health issues can become significantly more challenging to address.

References

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2. [AAMC: Physician Shortage](#)
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4. [AAPPR: Benchmarking](#)
5. [AMA: Doctor Shortages](#)
6. [AAMC: Projected Physician Shortage](#)
7. [HRSA: State of Primary Care Workforce](#)