

Walmart Health could throw a lifeline to rural patients who need better access to speciality care

Article

The news: Healthcare providers say there are major gaps in accessibility to care for rural patients compared with non-rural patients, according to a new **Walmart** and **Medscape**

survey of 10,000 US clinicians.

- **33% of all clinicians** believe **rural patients have strong access** to specialty care.
- **71% of all clinicians** say **non-rural patients have strong access** to the same.

Breaking down the data: Clinicians say the best ways to improve quality of care for patients is to increase the number of healthcare staff and offer patient financial assistance.

- **48% of healthcare providers** indicate **rural patients would benefit from more healthcare staff** in their communities.
- **53% of clinicians** said **more staff** would **also improve care quality** for **non-rural patients**.

There's a shortage of healthcare providers across both rural and non-rural US regions. A constant revolving door of healthcare talent means nurses and doctors aren't able to uphold the same standard of care and efficiency as a consistent staff who's familiar with hospital protocols, patient population, and workflows.

Many healthcare providers also believe financial assistance programs would help improve quality of care for both rural (34%) and non-rural (40%) patients, per Walmart.

- That's not surprising considering inability to afford meds is a top reason patients don't stick to their drug regimens.
- **Nearly 19% of health consumers** say **they've delayed their refill** after running out of meds due to high costs, per GoodRx.

What's next for Walmart Health? Walmart plans to slowly expand its retail clinic presence over the next few years. Especially in rural areas.

Walmart now has 24 clinics across four states (Georgia, Arkansas, Florida, and Illinois). The retail giant pumped the brakes on its original aggressive plan to build 4,000 clinics, but it still plans to open up more than 20 more Walmart Health locations in addition to the ones it already has.

Rural patients could gain more access to healthcare staff as Walmart Health expands across the US.

- Walmart says **90% of the US population is located within 10 miles of a Walmart**, many of which are rural locations.

- Plus, Walmart has a **\$4 low-cost prescription drug program** that could provide financial assistance to rural patients and improve care quality.

