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Primary care practices lose patients to alternative sites of care

Article

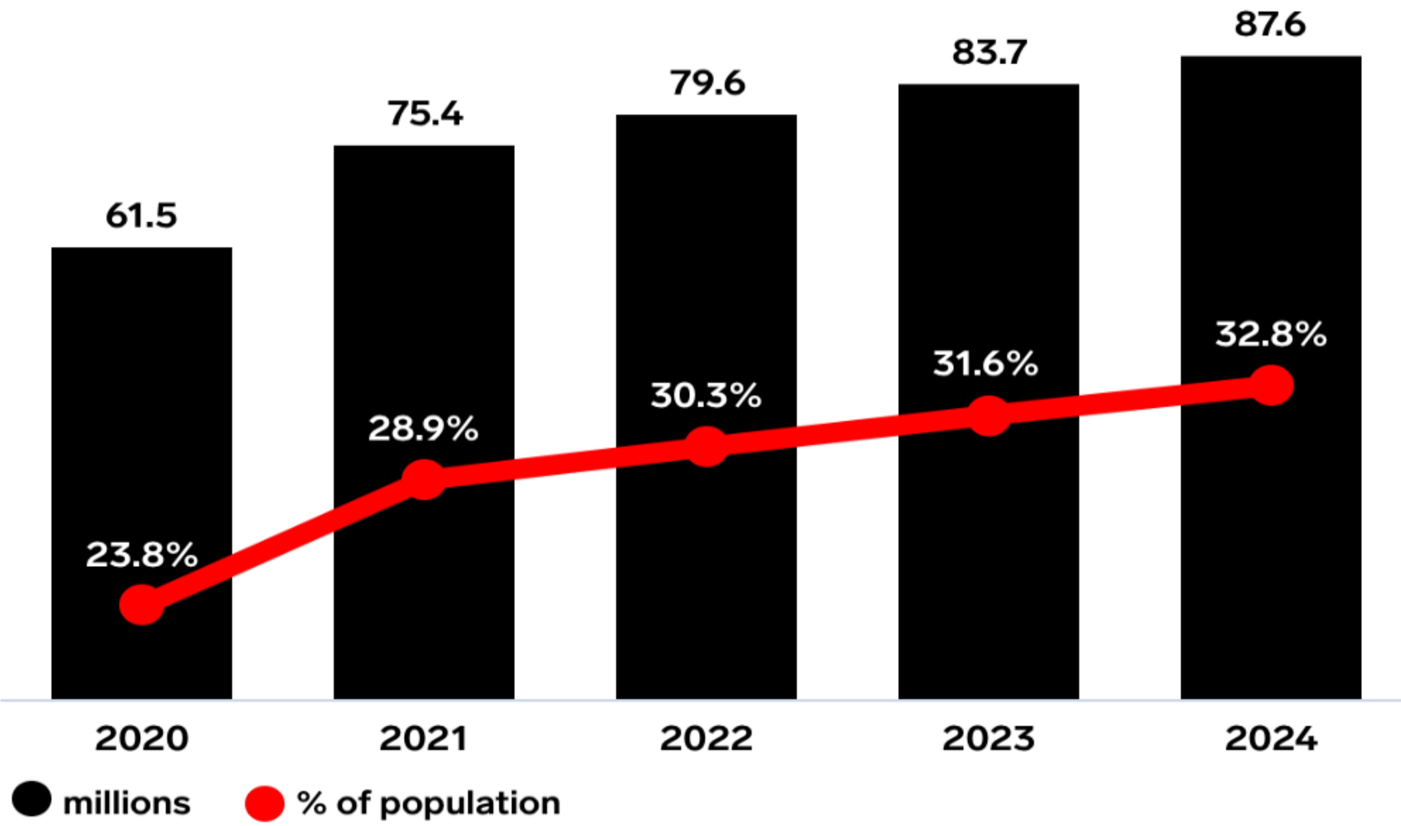
The news: Consumer preferences for where to get in-person care have shifted in recent years as more convenient options crop up, per Insider Intelligence's "Healthcare Patients by Walk-in Facility" forecast.

Where patients are getting in-person care: Our forecast, freshly updated this week, shows that more patients are choosing retail health clinics and urgent care centers over traditional primary care practices.

- **154.8 million US adults, or 59.3% of the population**, got in-person care at a **primary care practice** at least once in 2021. But that number **slightly decreased in 2022 (58.9%)** and is projected to continue dropping in 2023 **(57.9%)** and 2024 **(56.9%),** per our estimates.
- Conversely, while **just 23.8% (61.5 million)** of US adults received in-person care at a **retail health clinic in 2020**, that number **spiked to 30.3% this year (79.6 million adults)**, and we project it to **rise to 32.8%** in 2024 (**87.6 million adults)**.
- More adult patients also turned to **urgent care clinics in 2022 (95.9 million, 36.5% of the population)** than they did in 2020 (**89.3 million, 34.5%)**. We project that to **increase to 98.2 million** adult patients, or **36.7%** of the population, in 2024.

Retail Clinic Patients

US, 2020-2024



Note: ages 18+; adults who visit retail clinics in-person at least once during the calendar year; examples include CVS MinuteClinic, Walgreens Healthcare Clinic, Kroger's The Little Clinic, Walmart Care Clinic, etc.
Source: eMarketer, November 2022

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Spotlighting retail health: Our forecast provides estimates on which groups of patients are getting care at retail health clinics and how the market leaders in this space stack up against each other.

- Most retail clinic patients in 2022 **(60.8%)** are either **Millennials (29.1 million)** or **Gen Xers (19.3 million).** Just **12.4 million**, or **15.5%** of all retail clinic patients in 2022 are **Boomers.**
- **CVS (53.1%)** and **Walgreens (24.4%)** account for more than three-quarters **(77.5%)** of all retail clinic patients in 2022. We expect each of these clinics to attract more consumers in the

next two years: in 2024, they'll combine to draw **78.7%** of all retail health patients, per our estimates.

Convenience over loyalty: Retail clinics and urgent care centers typically offer same-day appointments and many have online tools that enable patients to check prices, verify insurance eligibility, and schedule visits. These care delivery sites earned consumers' trust by being go-to locations for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations.

- **92% of consumers said convenience** is the most important factor when choosing their primary care provider, per CVS' 2022 Health Care Insights study.
- New patients deal with an **average wait time of 20.6 days to get an appointment with a family medicine doctor**, a September 2022 survey from Merritt Hawkins found. That average duration extends to **26 days** when including other specialties.
- **36% of consumers have no healthcare brand preference**, and **45%** said their loyalty has already shifted since the pandemic began, per NRC Health's 2021 Healthcare Consumer Trend Report.

What this means for providers: Non-traditional entrants are disrupting the primary care status quo by creating accessible front doors to the healthcare system. Several of these players have a retail background with tech-driven business models that let patients act like consumers.

Incumbent primary care providers will need to get a better grasp of which factors matter most to patients when deciding where to get care and adjust their business accordingly. Otherwise, consumers will simply pick another option.

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