

SECTION

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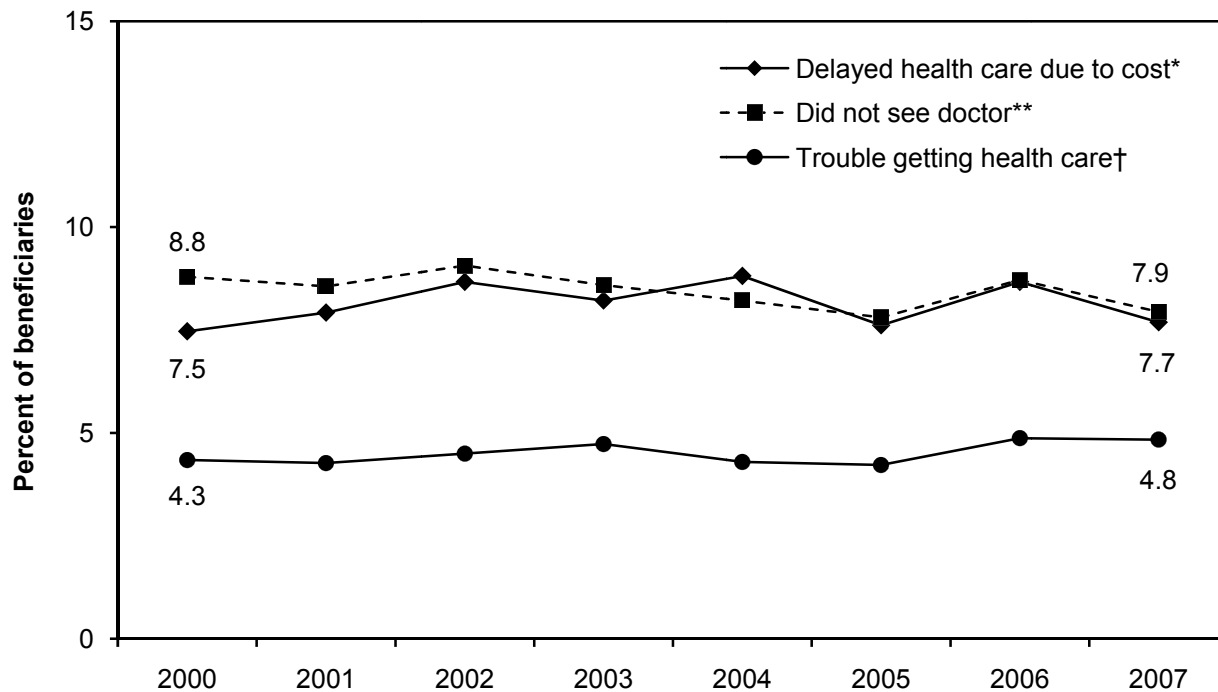
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**Access to care in the  
Medicare program**

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**Chart 5-1. Beneficiaries' reports of difficulties accessing care, 2000–2007**



Note: These data reflect the answers given by noninstitutionalized beneficiaries. These data are slightly different from analyses in past years because of a revised weighting procedure.

\* Answered "yes" when asked if they delayed seeking medical care because they were worried about the cost.

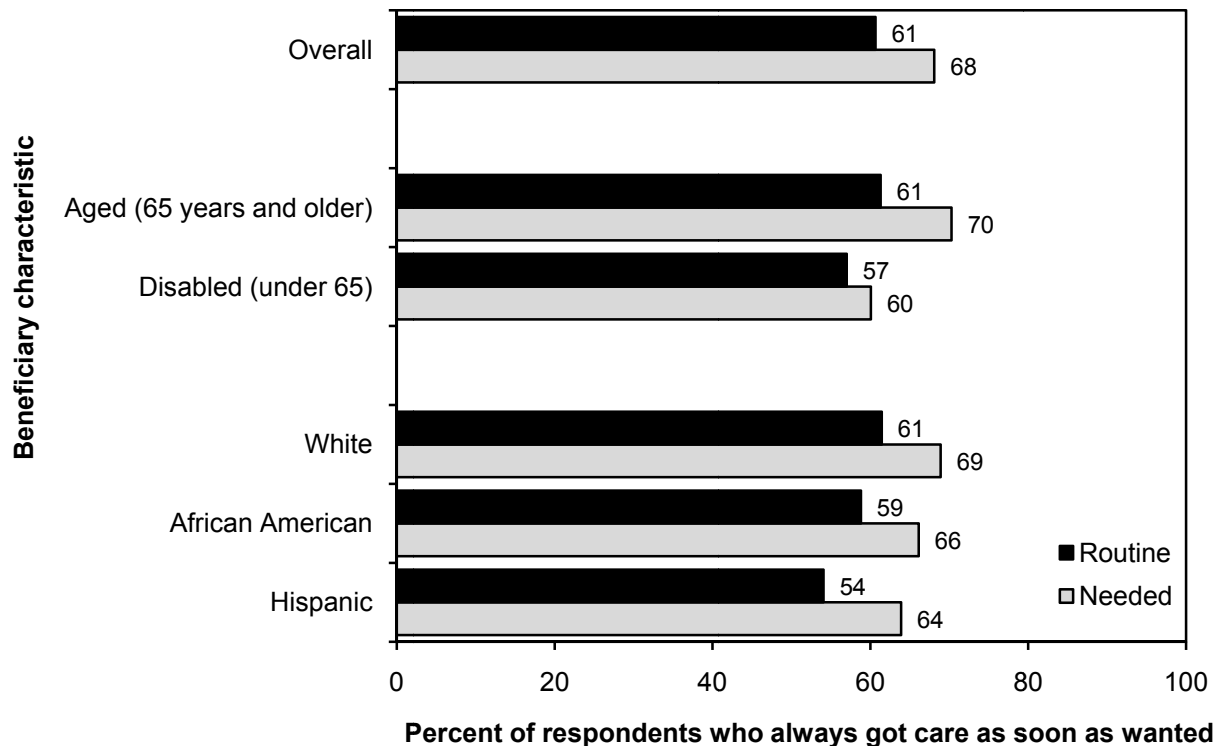
\*\* Answered "yes" when asked if they had a serious health problem or condition about which they should have seen a doctor or other medical person but did not.

† Answered "yes" when asked if they had any trouble getting health care that they wanted or needed.

Source: MedPAC analysis of Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey, Access to Care file, 2000–2007.

- In 2007—the most recent year for which we have data from the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey—more than 90 percent of beneficiaries reported good access to care, regardless of the question asked.
- The percentage of beneficiaries who reported trouble getting health care remained almost stable, from 4.9 percent in 2006 to 4.8 percent in 2007.
- When asked whether they delayed seeking medical care because of cost, 7.7 percent of beneficiaries answered yes in 2007, down from 8.7 percent in 2006.
- The percentage of beneficiaries reporting that they did not see a doctor despite having a serious health problem or condition decreased from 8.7 percent in 2006 to 7.9 percent in 2007.

**Chart 5-2. Beneficiaries differ in their reports of timeliness in getting needed or routine care, 2008**



Source: MedPAC analysis of CAHPS® (Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems®) for fee-for-service Medicare, 2008.

- Overall, 68 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who reported needing urgent care in a clinic, emergency room, or doctor’s office said that they always got care as soon as they wanted. For beneficiaries who reported making an appointment for routine care at a doctor’s office or clinic, 61 percent reported that they always got care as soon as they wanted.
- Compared with beneficiaries age 65 or older, smaller percentages of beneficiaries under age 65 and eligible for Medicare on the basis of disability reported that they always got needed or routine care as soon as they wanted.
- Compared with white beneficiaries, somewhat smaller percentages of African American and Hispanic beneficiaries reported that they always got needed or routine care as soon as they wanted.

**Chart 5-3. Medicare beneficiaries report as good or better ability to get timely appointments with physicians, compared with privately insured individuals, 2006–2009**

Survey question	Medicare (age 65 or older)				Private insurance (age 50–64)			
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Unwanted delay in getting an appointment:</b> Among those who needed an appointment, “How often did you have to wait longer than you wanted to get a doctor’s appointment?”								
<b>For routine care</b>								
Never	75%*	75%*	76%*	77%*	69%*	67%*	69%*	71%*
Sometimes	18*	18*	17*	17*	21*	24*	24*	22*
Usually	3*	3	3*	2*	5*	4	5*	3*
Always	3	3	2	2	4	3	2	3
<b>For illness or injury</b>								
Never	84*	82*	84*	85*	79*	76*	79*	79*
Sometimes	11*	13*	12*	11*	15*	17*	16*	17*
Usually	2	3	1	2	2	3	2	2
Always	1*	2	1*	1	2*	3	2*	2

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Missing responses (“Don’t Know” or “Refused”) are not presented. Overall sample sizes for each group (Medicare and privately insured) were 2,000 in years 2006 and 2007, 3,000 in 2008, and 4,000 in 2009. Sample sizes for individual questions varied.  
\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the Medicare and privately insured samples in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

Source: MedPAC-sponsored telephone surveys, conducted August–September 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

- Most Medicare beneficiaries have one or more doctor appointments in a given year. Therefore, one access indicator we examine is their ability to schedule timely appointments.
- Medicare beneficiaries report better access to physicians for appointments compared with privately insured individuals age 50 to 64. For example, in 2009, 77 percent of Medicare beneficiaries and 71 percent of privately insured individuals reported “never” having to wait longer than they wanted to get an appointment for routine care.
- Medicare beneficiaries also report more timely appointments for injury and illness compared with their privately insured counterparts.
- As expected, appointment scheduling for illness or injury is better than for routine care appointments for both Medicare beneficiaries and privately insured individuals.

## Chart 5-4. Medicare and privately insured patients who are looking for a new physician report more difficulty finding one in primary care, 2006–2009

Survey question	Medicare (age 65 or older)				Private insurance (age 50–64)			
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Looking for a new physician:</b> “In the past 12 months, have you tried to get a new primary care doctor?”								
Yes	10%	9%	6%	6%	10%	10%	7%	8%
No	89	91	93	93	90	90	93	92
<b>Getting a new physician:</b> Among those who tried to get an appointment with a new physician, “How much of a problem was it finding a primary care doctor/specialist who would treat you? Was it...”								
<b>Primary care physician</b>								
No problem	76	70*	71	78	75	82*	72	71
Small problem	10	12	10	10	15	7	13	8
Big problem	14	17	18	12*	10	10	13	21*
<b>Specialist</b>								
No problem	80	85	88	88	83	79	83	84
Small problem	7	6	7	7	9	11	9	9
Big problem	11	9	4	5	7	10	7	7

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Missing responses (“Don’t Know” or “Refused”) are not presented. Overall sample sizes for each group (Medicare and privately insured) were 2,000 in years 2006 and 2007, 3,000 in 2008, and 4,000 in 2009. Sample sizes for individual questions varied.

\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the Medicare and privately insured samples in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

Source: MedPAC-sponsored telephone surveys, conducted August–September 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009.

- In 2009, only 6 percent of Medicare beneficiaries and 8 percent of privately insured individuals reported looking for a new primary care physician. This finding suggests that most people are either satisfied with their current physician or did not see a need to look for one.
- Of the 6 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who were looking for a new primary care physician in 2008, 22 percent reported problems finding one. Although this number amounts to less than 2 percent of the total Medicare population reporting problems, the Commission is concerned about the continuing trend of greater access problems for primary care. While 22 percent is down from the 28 percent of Medicare beneficiaries reporting problems finding a new primary care physician in 2008, this year-to-year difference is not statistically significant.
- Among the privately insured individuals who were looking for a new primary care physician, 29 percent reported problems finding one. The difference (in percentage experiencing a “big problem” finding a primary care physician) between the Medicare and privately insured groups is statistically significant.
- For 2008, Medicare beneficiaries and privately insured individuals were more likely to report problems accessing primary care physicians compared with specialists.

## Chart 5-5. Access to physician care is similar or better for Medicare beneficiaries compared with privately insured individuals, but minorities in both groups report problems more frequently, 2009

Survey question	Medicare (age 65 or older)			Private insurance (age 50–64)		
	All	White	Minority	All	White	Minority
<b>Unwanted delay in getting an appointment:</b> Among those who needed an appointment, “How often did you have to wait longer than you wanted to get a doctor’s appointment?”						
<b>For routine care</b>						
Never	77%*	78%*†	72%*†	71%*	72%*†	67%*†
Sometimes	17*	17*	18*	22*	22*	23*
Usually	2*	2	2	3*	3	4
Always	2	2†	4†	3	2†	5†
<b>For illness or injury</b>						
Never	85*	86*†	81*†	79*	80*†	75*†
Sometimes	11*	11*	11*	17*	17*	19*
Usually	2	1†	3†	2	2	2
Always	1	1†	2†	2	1†	3†

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Missing responses (“Don’t Know” or “Refused”) are not presented. Overall sample sizes for each group (Medicare and privately insured) were 2,000 in years 2006 and 2007, 3,000 in 2008, and 4,000 in 2009. Sample sizes for individual questions varied.

\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the Medicare and privately insured samples in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

† Indicates a statistically significant difference by race within the same insurance coverage category in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

Source: MedPAC-sponsored telephone surveys, conducted August–September 2009.

- In 2009, Medicare beneficiaries report better access to physicians for appointments compared with privately insured individuals age 50 to 64.
- Access varies by race, with minorities more likely than whites to report access problems in both insurance categories. For example, in 2009, 72 percent of minority Medicare beneficiaries and 78 percent of white Medicare beneficiaries reported “never” having to wait longer than they wanted to get an appointment for routine care.
- Although minorities experienced more access problems, those with Medicare experienced fewer problems compared with privately insured minorities.

**Chart 5-6. Differences in access to new physicians are most apparent among minority Medicare and privately insured patients who are looking for a new specialist, 2009**

Survey question	Medicare (age 65 or older)			Private insurance (age 50–64)		
	All	White	Minority	All	White	Minority
<b>Looking for a new physician:</b> “In the past 12 months, have you tried to get a new primary care doctor?”						
Yes	6%	6%*	8%	8%	8%*	8%
No	93	94	92	92	92	92
<b>Getting a new physician:</b> Among those who tried to get an appointment with a new physician, “How much of a problem was it finding a primary care doctor/specialist who would treat you? Was it...”						
<b>Primary care physician</b>						
No problem	78	82*	69	71	70*	69
Small problem	10	7	17	8	8	11
Big problem	12*	11*	12	21*	22*	19
<b>Specialist</b>						
No problem	88	91†	75†	84	86†	73†
Small problem	7	5†	13†	9	9	11
Big problem	5	4†	11†	7	5†	16†

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Missing responses (“Don’t Know” or “Refused”) are not presented. Overall sample sizes for each group (Medicare and privately insured) were 2,000 in years 2006 and 2007, 3,000 in 2008, and 4,000 in 2009. Sample sizes for individual questions varied.

\* Indicates a statistically significant difference between the Medicare and privately insured samples in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

† Indicates a statistically significant difference by race within the same insurance coverage category in the given year at a 95 percent confidence level.

Source: MedPAC-sponsored telephone surveys, conducted August–September 2009.

- In 2009, Medicare and privately insured minorities were not more likely to report looking for a new primary care physician, nor were they significantly more likely than white Medicare beneficiaries and privately insured individuals to report problems finding one.
- Among the small percentage of Medicare beneficiaries and privately insured individuals looking for a new specialist, minorities were more likely than whites to report problems finding one. For example, in 2009, 11 percent of minority Medicare beneficiaries and 4 percent of white Medicare beneficiaries reported a “big problem” finding a new specialist.
- Although minorities experienced more access problems, those with Medicare experienced fewer problems compared with privately insured minorities.

## Web links. Access to care in the Medicare program

- Chapter 2B of the MedPAC March 2010 Report to the Congress provides more information on beneficiary access to physicians.

[http://www.medpac.gov/chapters/Mar10\\_Ch02B.pdf](http://www.medpac.gov/chapters/Mar10_Ch02B.pdf)

- The Commonwealth Fund released results from their 2007 Biennial Health Insurance Survey, which have further information on access in the Medicare program.

<http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/In-the-Literature/2009/May/Meeting-Enrollees-Needs.aspx>

- The Government Accountability Office issued a report in August 2009 about access to physician services within Medicare.

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09559.pdf>

- The Center for Studying Health System Change also conducts research on patient access to health care.

<http://www.hschange.org>

