

## Obstacles to Providing High-Quality Patient Care: Findings from a Survey of Wyoming's Medical Care Providers

This report examines obstacles to providing high-quality patient care identified by Wyoming's healthcare providers. As a barometer of the state's healthcare practice climate, the findings can suggest where action may be warranted to address healthcare system vulnerabilities and help guide Wyoming healthcare policies. The Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University of Washington analyzed data from surveys, conducted in 2009, of Wyoming physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses. This study was conducted for the Wyoming Healthcare Commission.

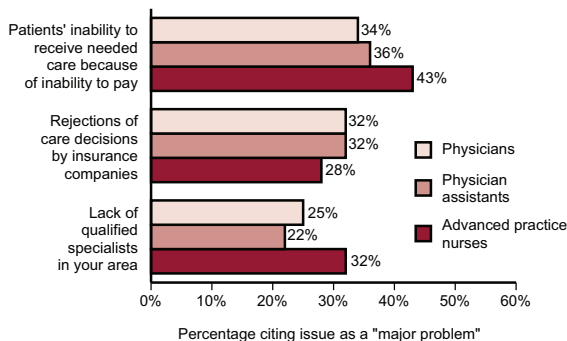
### Key Findings

Wyoming physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses responded to the question, "How much of a problem is each of the following issues with regard to your ability to provide high-quality care?" This brief focuses on the obstacles that ambulatory care providers, and other types of providers as noted, cited as "major" problems (from the options "not a problem," "minor problem," or "major problem").

### Patient Care and Service Delivery Obstacles

The three provider types—physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses—identified similar patient care and service delivery obstacles as major problems. The top three patient care and service delivery obstacles were reported as major problems by 22% to 43% of ambulatory care providers.

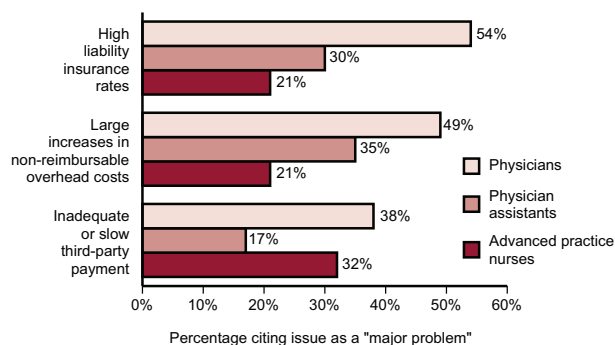
**Top 3 Obstacles to Patient Care and Service Delivery for Wyoming Ambulatory Care Providers**



### Financial Obstacles

Physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses frequently cited financial obstacles as major problems, though physicians were most likely to report these problems. The top three financial obstacles were reported as major problems by 17% to 54% of ambulatory care providers.

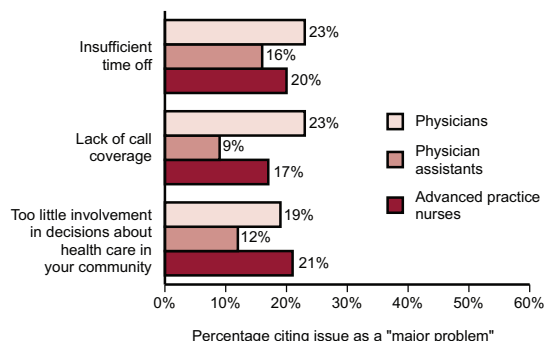
**Top 3 Financial Obstacles for Wyoming Ambulatory Care Providers**



### Professional and Management Obstacles

Physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice nurses perceived professional and management obstacles as less problematic than patient care and service delivery issues and financial issues. The top three professional and management obstacles were reported as major problems by 9% to 23% of ambulatory care providers.

**Top 3 Professional and Management Obstacles for Wyoming Ambulatory Care Providers**



## Policy Considerations

The obstacles that providers reported can lead to professional dissatisfaction and isolation that ultimately undermines efforts to recruit and retain healthcare providers in the state. Targeted policies, however, can help maintain and strengthen the health workforce and patient access to high-quality care. Strategies that could be implemented or expanded in Wyoming include:

### Improving Provider Finances

- Provide financial assistance to communities with persistent workforce shortages or to providers facing economic pressures that threaten the viability of their practices.
- Evaluate the limiting of malpractice suit award amounts as an option to reduce liability insurance premiums.

### Ensuring Financially and Medically Needy Patients' Access to Care

- Grant malpractice immunity for charity care to encourage providers to give free care to more uninsured or underinsured patients.
- Create new programs or expand existing ones (for example, under Medicaid) that increase the availability and affordability of health insurance.
- At the federal level, advocate for Medicare policies that allow increased reimbursement for targeted areas and populations with limited patient access to care.

## Alleviating the Time Squeeze

- Support provider partnerships and shared practice arrangements to give providers more time for direct patient care, allow for a healthy work-life balance, and increase providers' integration into professional communities.

## Connecting Providers to Specialist Referral Networks

- Encourage provider partnership arrangements that improve providers' connections to specialist referral networks.

## Including Providers in Community Healthcare Decision-Making

- Promote efforts to involve providers in community healthcare decisions that affect their practices. Identifying communities where providers feel well integrated in decision-making, and therefore more satisfied with their professional position, could provide models for other communities.

## Expanding the Healthcare Workforce

- Several obstacles that providers reported are related to health workforce shortages and the resulting burden on existing practices. Recruitment and retention strategies to improve the practice climate include continuing and expanding programs requiring service in exchange for education scholarships, grants, or loan repayment; increasing in-state educational capacity; recruiting more health professions students from the most rural areas of the state; and establishing new clinical training opportunities in rural areas.