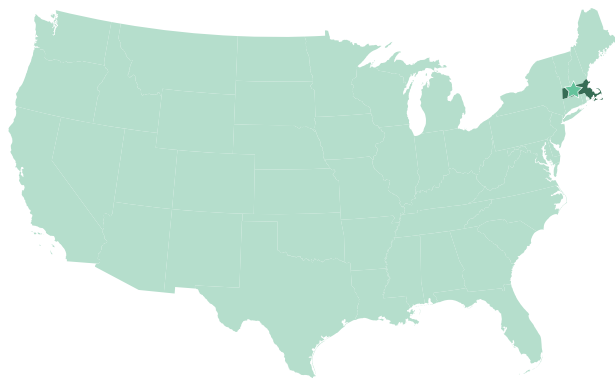


The Patient Experience

Perspectives on Today's Healthcare



Background

The American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) advocates for the physician associate/assistant (PA) profession and provides tools to improve the PA practice and patient care. Earlier this year, AAPA approached The Harris Poll to revisit work that had been conducted in 2014. Unlike the past survey, AAPA wanted to take a wider look at the state of the U.S. healthcare system and capture the issues patients are encountering within today's system. Additionally, the research seeks to understand attitudes toward PAs to reinforce the need for this group of expertly trained, high-quality, compassionate providers. This summary includes research findings from the national sample collected as well as the oversample of adults living in Massachusetts.

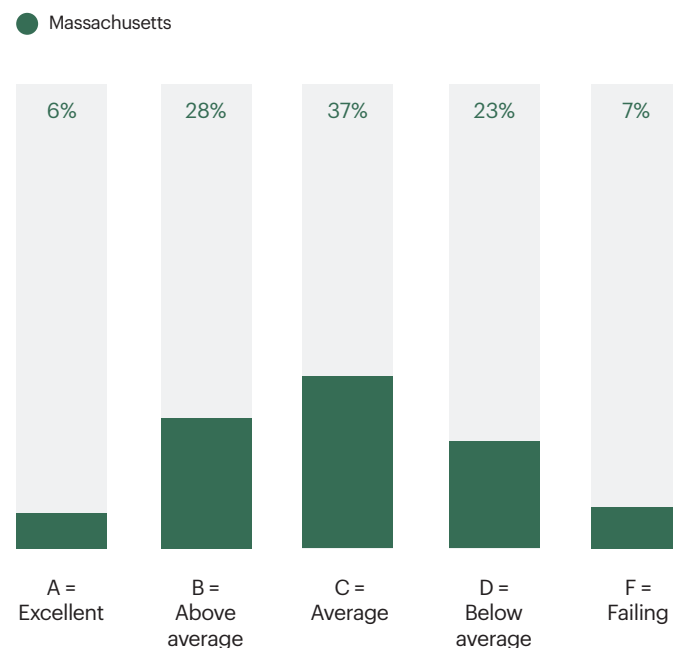
The research revealed that the U.S. healthcare system is stretched thin – a reality that was both illuminated during and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to healthcare provider burnout and staffing shortages, many feel that not everyone has equal access to care, and simply navigating the system can be overwhelming and time-consuming. This may contribute to the general lack of confidence that the U.S. healthcare system will be able to support the care they need in the future. Beyond the need to reduce the cost of healthcare, adults agree that having stronger relationships with providers – especially those whom they trust – has the potential to improve their health. This is where PAs, working to the full extent of their education and ability, have an opportunity to elevate healthcare within the U.S.

Views of the System

Nearly one-third of adults in Massachusetts rate the U.S. healthcare system poorly. Concerns about workforce shortages are significant in Massachusetts. Nationwide, widespread dissatisfaction with healthcare prevails.

- Dissatisfaction with healthcare system:** In both Massachusetts and nationally, a significant portion of respondents poorly rate the healthcare system, with 30% in Massachusetts and 26% nationally assigning the system a D or F grade.
- Impact of workforce shortages:** An overwhelming majority of Massachusetts adults (73%) express concerns that healthcare workforce shortages will affect their families, and a similar proportion (74%) worry about the impact to them personally. This sentiment is notably higher than the national average of 68%.
- Inequities and bias:** Massachusetts residents are more likely than their national counterparts to pinpoint inequities and bias within the healthcare system as the primary barriers to access in the U.S., with 19% of Massachusetts residents compared to 13% of adults nationally holding this view.

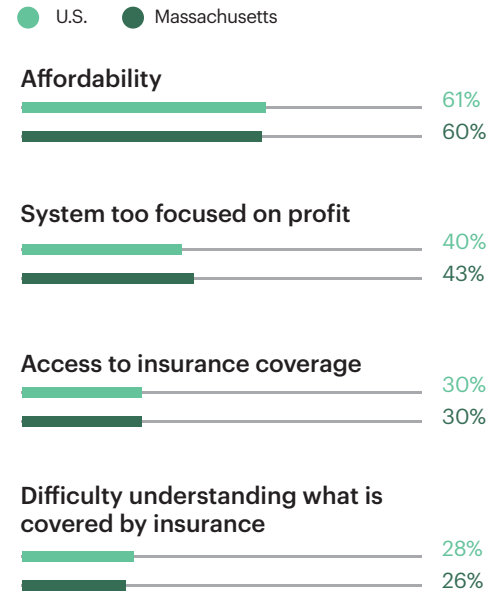
Healthcare Grades: U.S. Healthcare System



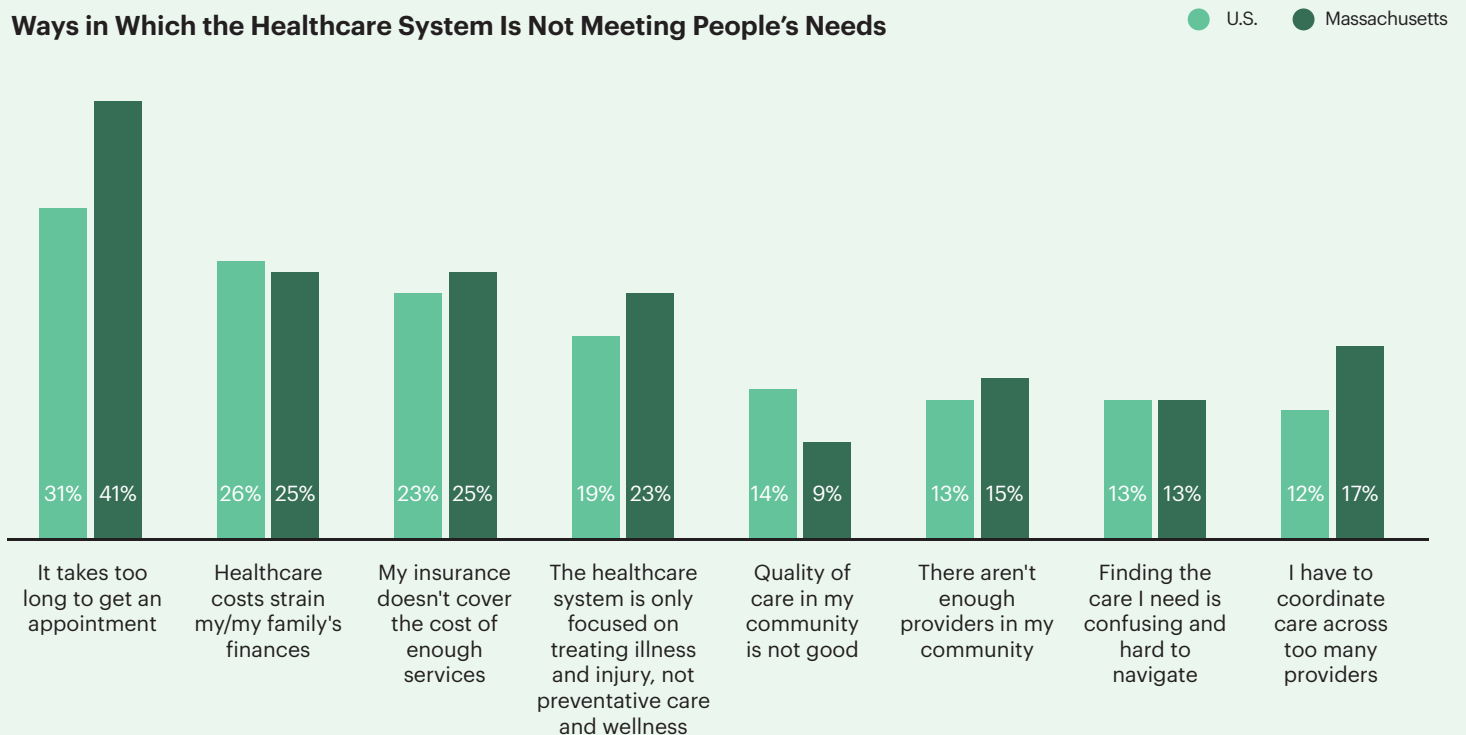
The healthcare system falls short in addressing patient needs in Massachusetts and nationally. Adults in Massachusetts cite provider shortages and affordability as main barriers to access.

- Deterring care:** Affordability is a primary deterrent, with 60% of Massachusetts adults and 61% nationally identifying it as a major obstacle to healthcare access. This concern surpasses other factors impacting affordability, such as the system's profit-driven focus, insurance coverage access, and understanding coverage terms.
- Focus on profit:** The majority of Massachusettsans (86%) fear healthcare quality will suffer as care increasingly becomes focused on profit. This sentiment is more pronounced than it is nationwide (81%).
- Long wait times:** In Massachusetts, 41% of adults are more inclined than their national counterparts (31%) to cite extended appointment wait times as a system failing to meet their needs. In Massachusetts, securing a necessary healthcare appointment takes over five weeks on average, significantly longer than the national average. For those waiting more than a week, the average wait times stretch to 3.9 weeks nationally and 5.3 weeks in Massachusetts.

Biggest Barriers to Accessing Healthcare



Ways in Which the Healthcare System Is Not Meeting People's Needs

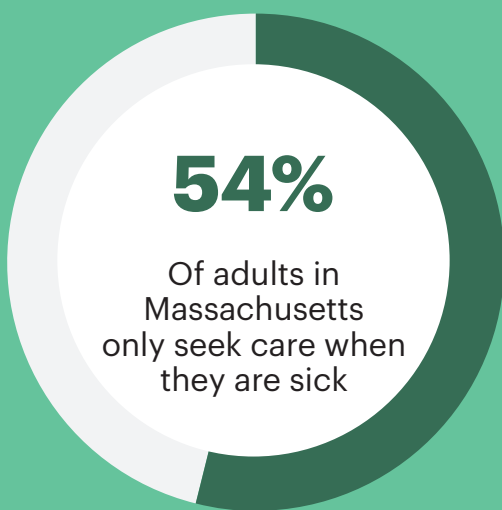


Coordinating care burdens patients and informal caregivers assisting family and friends navigate the healthcare system.

- **Coordinating care:** A significant majority of adults in Massachusetts (67%) and nationwide (65%) deem healthcare coordination as overwhelming and time-consuming. In Massachusetts, individuals spend an average of 1.5 hours coordinating their care or their family', and 2.5 hours if helping others navigate the system. Nationally, adults spend an average of 2.0 hours a week coordinating care for themselves or their families and an average of 3.3 hours helping someone else.
- **Fractured system:** In Massachusetts, 20% of adults identify the fragmented healthcare system as their primary access barrier, a figure notably higher than the national average (14%). Massachusetts residents are also more likely to cite the challenge of coordinating care across multiple providers compared to their national counterparts (17% vs. 12%).

Access barriers related to the lack of providers impact patient behaviors and, ultimately, shape health outcomes.

- **Skipping care:** Nearly half (49%) of adults in Massachusetts report delaying or forgoing care within the past two years, a trend comparable to the national level (44%).
- **Appointment availability:** Among those who delayed or skipped care, the primary reason in Massachusetts is prolonged appointment wait times (31%). Additionally, residents in Massachusetts were notably more likely to report that they had to forgo care because they couldn't secure an appointment at all (22%), in contrast to the national rate of 13%.
- **Impact of skipping care:** Fifty-three percent of adults in Massachusetts who delayed or skipped care within the past two years experienced some kind of impact as a result, including negative impact on mental health (28%), worsening condition (22%), and/or losing faith in the healthcare system (20%). Results were directionally higher nationally, with 60% reporting some kind of impact.
- **Access challenges:** Nearly a third of Massachusettsans (32%) say they think their health would improve if it wasn't so difficult to get an appointment. This barrier is more pronounced than it is nationally (23%).



49% OF ADULTS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Have either skipped or delayed healthcare services within the past two years

While many adults provide positive assessments of their personal interactions with providers, around half observe that their healthcare provider(s) appear burned out or overburdened. This can lead to patients feeling rushed and not listened to during appointments.

- Demands on healthcare providers:** Around three-quarters of adults in Massachusetts (77%) worry that the demands on providers are too great. A substantial 74% in Massachusetts agree that healthcare providers appear more rushed than in the past, a sentiment even more prevalent than among adults nationally (66%).
- Patient sentiment:** In Massachusetts, more than a third of adults (35%) say that they have felt rushed during healthcare appointments and about half (48%) acknowledge that they don't always feel listened to by healthcare providers. Additionally, adults in Massachusetts are more likely than the national average to report providers dismissing their concerns (29% vs. 23%).

The Value of Physician Associates/Assistants

Positive patient-provider relationships are crucial to keeping people active within the healthcare system, bolstering faith in the system, and improving health outcomes overall.

- Primary care:** Nationally, a significant 86% of adults have a primary care provider, with a matching 90% in Massachusetts. At a national level, those who have a primary care provider are twice as likely than those who do not to give healthcare they received in the past 12 months an A or B grade.

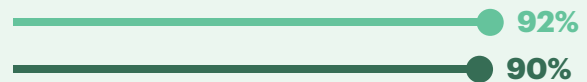
- Navigating the system:** More than six in ten adults nationally who have a primary care provider (63%) say that healthcare providers help them navigate the healthcare system – compared with less than half of those who do not have a primary care provider (48%).
- Preventing health conditions:** More than two-fifths of care coordinators nationally (45%) agree that better primary or preventative healthcare could have prevented the health condition, injury, or major illness for the patient.

Support for PAs

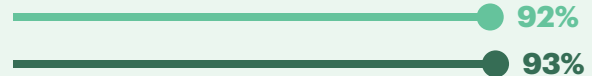
(Strongly/Somewhat Support)

● U.S. ● Massachusetts

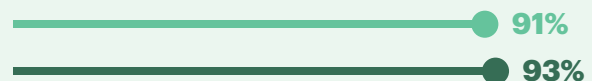
PAs should be allowed to provide care to the fullest extent of their education, training, and experience



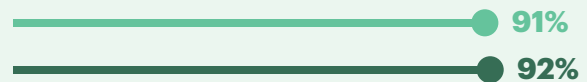
PAs should be utilized to address healthcare workforce shortages



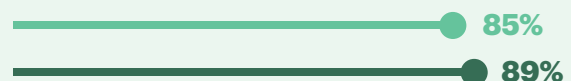
Fully utilizing all trained and educated healthcare providers, including PAs, improves patient health



PA practice laws should be updated to allow states and healthcare systems to fully utilize their healthcare workforce



Patient access to care should not be restricted by laws that place limits on the care a PA has been educated and trained to provide



Patients with an ongoing relationship with a PA report feeling valued because the PA takes the time to listen, understand their unique needs, communicate clearly, and empower them to take control of their health.

- PA trust:** Two-thirds of adults (64%) adults nationally and 69% of adults in Massachusetts say that they would trust a PA to serve as their primary care provider.
- High marks for PA care:** Around eight in ten (79% nationally and in Massachusetts, respectively) who have seen a PA rate the medical care they received from a PA in the past 12 months as either good or excellent. Nationally, those with an ongoing relationship with a PA are more likely to grade their recent healthcare as an A or B (89% compared to 76% who have seen a PA but do not have an ongoing relationship).

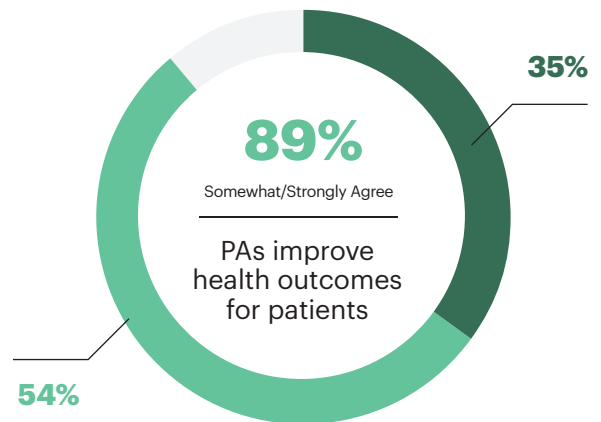
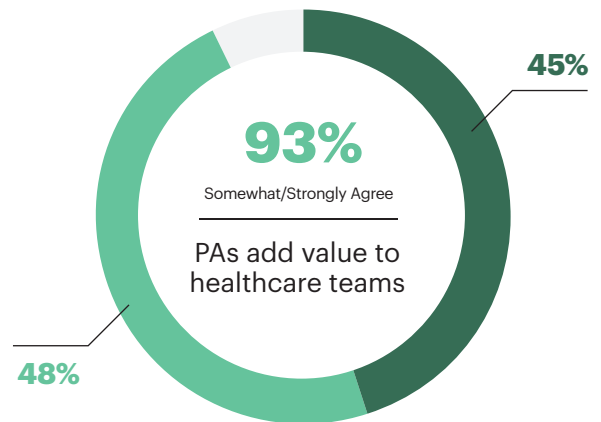
The public supports better utilizing PAs to improve the healthcare system and better address an aging population, the rise in chronic disease, and a significant healthcare workforce shortage.

- Maximizing PA care:** Overwhelming majorities agree that PAs should be allowed to provide care to the fullest extent of their education, training, and experience (92% nationally and 90% in Massachusetts).
- Updating PA practices:** Majorities also support PA practice laws being updated to allow states and healthcare systems to fully utilize their healthcare workforce (91% nationally and 92% of those in Massachusetts).

Agreement with Statements about PAs

(Among U.S. Adults)

● Somewhat Support ● Strongly Support



Unlocking the potential of all trained healthcare providers, including PAs, holds the key to enhancing patient well-being. However, maximizing this approach mandates updating PA practice laws, enabling states and healthcare systems to fully harness their workforce.

Research Method

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of The American Academy of Physician Associates among n=2,519 adults age 18+. In addition to the national sample, oversamples were collected in six states including Massachusetts (n=505). The survey was conducted from February 23 – March 9, 2023. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Data from the national sample was weighted by race where necessary and by gender, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income, language proficiency (for Hispanic respondents only), and propensity to be online to bring respondents in line with their actual proportions in the population, and then combined using a post-weight.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, as subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the national sample data is accurate to within +2.8 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

