



Module 8: Access to Health Services

Part 5: Workforce

A fourth component of access to care is the workforce that takes care of our individual health needs. Who is going to provide this medical care? One of the great challenges for us in America is that we have a provider supply shortage, and we don't have enough individual physicians who want to provide primary care services.

Fortunately, we have more advanced practice nurse practitioners and physician assistants who are helping to provide some of this health shortage gap. But we have a challenge for us in terms of these health shortages that can have some impact in timeliness in getting access to health services.

For example, medical students in increasing numbers are choosing primary care as a specialty. But even the numbers that are choosing primary care will still leave us 46,000 short by the year 2020. That is a significant barrier to getting timely access to health care services.

One of the interesting observations is that this physician shortage could be exacerbated by the Affordable Care Act. Without the Affordable Care Act, we expect that by 2020, we will have a shortage of around 64,000 physicians, specialists, and primary care. But with the Affordable Care Act, and with increasing access to health care services and health coverage, that gap could be as much as 91,000.

The fact that we have so many physicians that we will need in the future suggests that we need to do a lot more to have more physicians come out of our medical schools. Fortunately with the Affordable Care Act, one of the goals is to expand the number of scholarships, loans and support to attract more individuals into our health professional schools.

One of the reasons why we have this impending physician shortage is the age distribution of physicians. With the average age is somewhere in their late 40's, and those numbers suggest that as they approach retirement age, we need to replace them. It's not only true for physicians, but it's also true for nurses. In fact, compared to our projected demand for nurses, our supply has not kept up with the number of nurses that we need.

Part of this is because, again, just like with physicians, we also have an aging nursing population. One of the great efforts we are trying with the Affordable Care Act is to increase nursing scholarships and to make more students choose Nursing as a career.

In summary, we can talk about access to health care as a crucial factor in our health policy for this country. There are currently several barriers to getting care that we talked about, including health insurance, health literacy, the workforce itself, cultural and linguistic barriers, transportation, location of our health care facilities and issues with how health insurance is carried out in this country.



Public Health Learning Modules

Using **Healthy People 2020**
to Improve Population Health



ASSOCIATION FOR PREVENTION TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Finding a health care provider, ideally a primary care provider, is a key part to accessing our health care system. Getting timely access to health care services is a key element to access to care. And once you have a health care provider, getting appropriate care, quality care is an essential component.

Our projected shortage of health care professionals is going to affect our ability to get access to health care. Fortunately, with the Affordable Care Act, we are trying to do a lot more in getting more health care professionals, and addressing this projected shortage so we can approve access to health care for all Americans.

Thank you.