

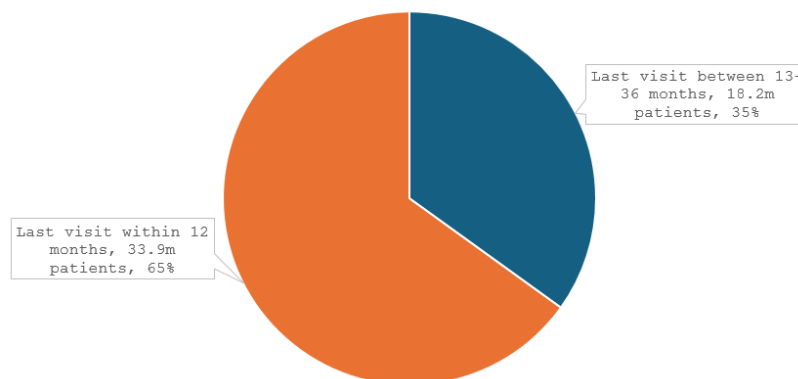
How many patients do Community Health Centers really care for? You'll be surprised!

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Across the country, Community Health Centers (CHCs) are widely recognized for serving 1 in 10 people. This figure, based on 33.9 million patients from 2024 Uniform Data System (UDS) reports, is an impressive statistic, but it understates the reach or value of CHCs. New analysis suggests that when considering unduplicated patients over a multi-year period, the true number of people CHCs support is millions higher.

The [Weitzman Institute](#) conducted a review of patient records from a single large CHC based in Connecticut. Over a three-year span from 2020-2023, the data showed that the CHC reached far more individuals than its annual patient count would suggest. When this kind of multi-year patient panel estimate is extrapolated to the national level, it suggests that CHCs may serve as many as 1 in 7 people or 52 million patients with active medical charts. (Figure)

Over 52 million CHC Active Patients



Source: 2024 UDS data and other active patient estimate based on data from a Connecticut CHC.

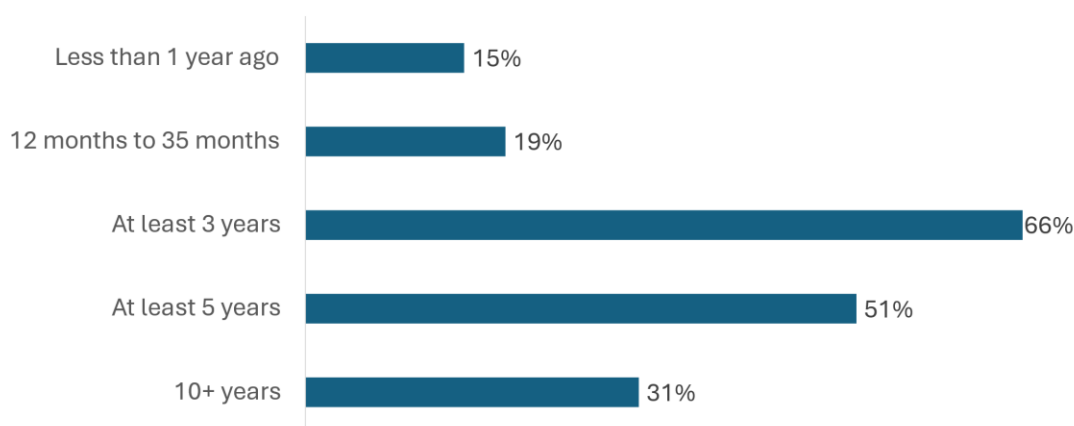
Additional reporting from high-performing CHCs nationally give further credence to the broader reach of CHCs. One CHC in the Pacific Northwest reported 57,000 unduplicated patients over the three-year span of 2022-2024, compared to 48,000 in 2024 alone. This means the CHC is reporting only 84% of active patients when relying on a single-year measure. Another CHC in the same region reported 195,000 unique

patients in 2023 and 308,000 over the three-year period of 2020-2023, further highlighting the limitations of annual reporting in capturing the full scope of CHC impact.

This matters because many patients [do not use](#) primary care services every year. According to a [2022 federal survey of CHC patients](#), approximately 30% wait more than a year for a general exam. And approximately 73% of those who waited got their exam at the CHC.

CHCs are designed to [meet patients where they are](#) offering accessible care when it is needed most. The HRSA survey further reports more than two out of three CHC patients have been going to their CHC for at least three years. Only 15% of patients are relatively new to the CHC. (Figure)

Length of Time As A CHC Patient



Source: 2022 Health Center Patient Survey, HRSA

These episodic but meaningful interactions are vital to individual and community health, yet they go unrecognized in annual reporting or funding formulas. [Insurers](#) and [value-based care](#) models are increasingly accounting for this reality by using [two-three](#) year lookback periods to [attribute](#) patient outcomes to providers. This approach reflects the way people actually use care and provides a more accurate picture of provider-patient relationships. The focus on annual visits and yearly headcounts underrepresents the actual demand and reach of CHCs.

A broader time horizon would offer a more accurate accounting of the role CHCs play in stabilizing access to care for patients who may move in and out of insurance or face chronic instability in other parts of their lives. Capturing and communicating this longitudinal view is essential because it reinforces the importance of sustained

investment in CHCs, not only as medical providers but as trust institutions that patients return to throughout their lives.

This finding points to an urgent need to revisit how the health care system measures access and allocates resources. While further research across diverse settings is necessary, the early evidence is clear: CHCs serve far more people than annual statistics suggest. This number is particularly important to get correct when resources are limited because underestimating their true footprint risks underfunding the very primary care infrastructure that serves as the front line for millions of underserved populations. Ensuring that metrics fully capture CHC reach is essential to guiding smarter, more sustainable investments in the nation's largest primary care safety net—that will be an article for a future piece.

To follow the work of the Weitzman Institute and the Moses/Weitzman Health System, [click here](#).