

A QUESTION OF PRACTICE:

Is There Really a Primary Care

PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE?



In the decade ahead, the nation's population is getting older and sicker, meaning the need for quality primary care is only growing. Many groups have estimated that the United States is on the cusp of a severe shortage of PCPs. But is the problem really with the numbers or in the way we practice primary care in the first place?

21,100 – 55,200

The projected shortage of primary care physicians in the U.S. by 2033.

Source: [AAMC](#)



190,000

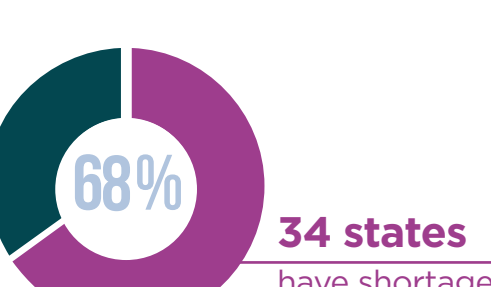
The number of non-pediatric primary care physicians estimated to be practicing in the U.S. by 2025 — more than enough to care for predicted population growth.

Source: [HBU](#)

State of the Shortage

PROJECTION:

By 2030, 34 out of 50 states will have severe physician shortages. Most of these states are located in the South and West.



States with the largest predicted physician shortage (ratio of doctors per 100,000 people) are:

- Mississippi
- New Mexico
- Louisiana

Source: [Human Resources for Health](#)

HOWEVER:

Demand for primary care is extremely difficult to forecast. A 2017 JAMA article states:

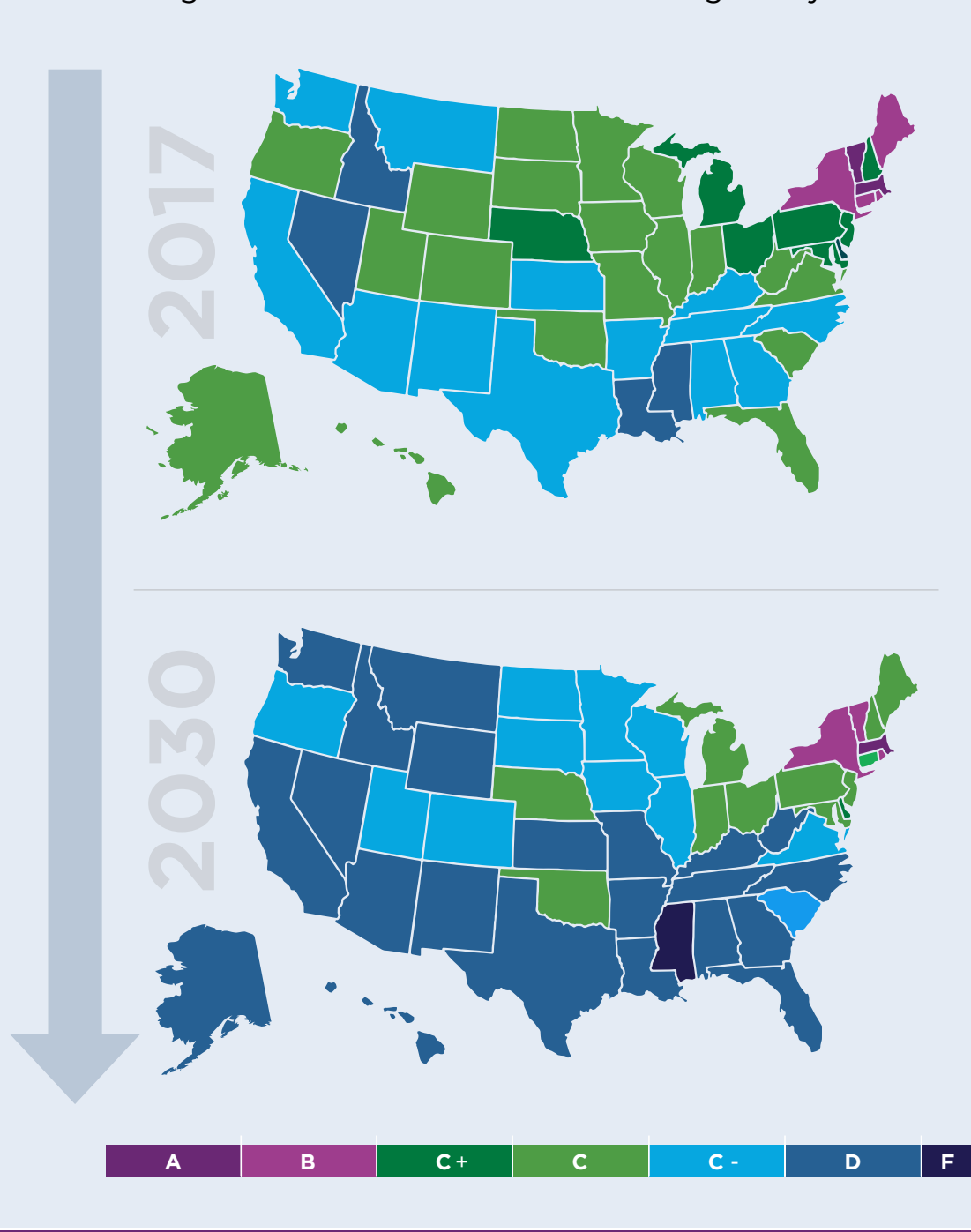
“The determination of physician supply is fraught with difficulty. With relative ease, overestimates, underestimates, and miscategorizations occur...”

Source: [JAMA](#)



National grade distribution in 2017 and 2030

The results below show that there are currently physician shortages in some states, and these shortages are forecasted to increase through the year 2030.



Hard to Find a Doctor

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, physician shortages were already being felt by Americans nationwide.

In September 2019, 35% of voters said they had trouble finding a doctor in the past two or three years. This is a 10-point jump from when the question was asked in 2015.

Source: [Public Opinion Strategies](#)

But PCPs are unevenly distributed

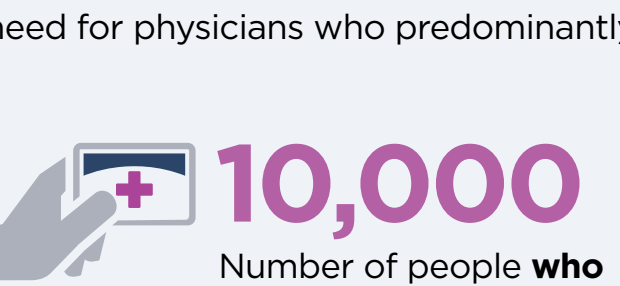
68 vs. 84

The number of PCPs per 100,000 people in rural areas vs. urban areas, respectively. The most pressing problem may not be the overall number of PCPs — but that they're unevenly distributed across the country.

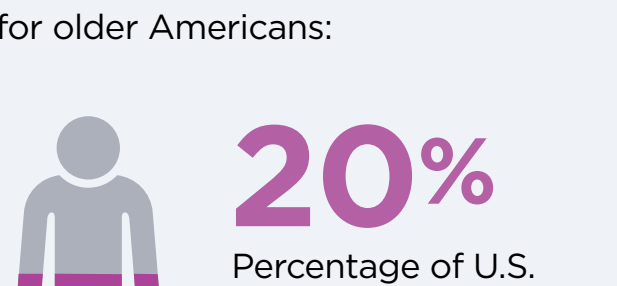
Source: [AAFP](#)

Supply and Demand

It is certainly true that the U.S. population is graying, placing big demands on the need for physicians who predominantly care for older Americans:



Source: [AAMC](#)



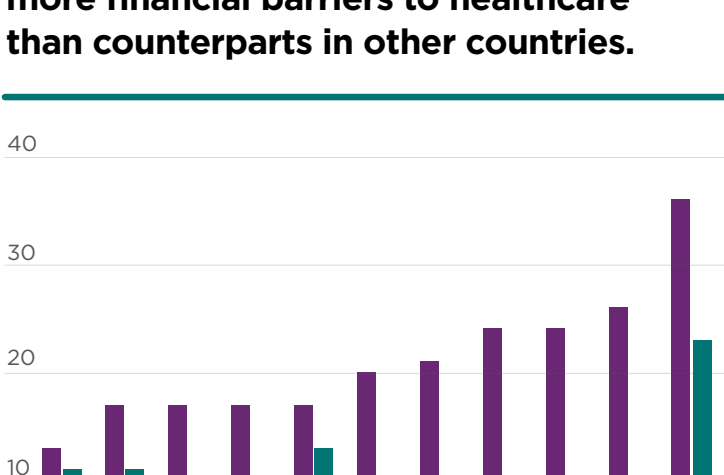
Compared to seniors in other nations around the world, older people in the United States are more likely to be sick and have trouble paying for medical care.

Older Americans were sicker and faced more financial barriers to healthcare than counterparts in other countries.

The graying of the physician workforce will mean more doctors retiring from the field.

More than 2 of 5 currently active physicians will be 65 or older within the next decade.

Source: [AAMC](#)



Source: [AAMC](#)

Source: [Annals of Family Medicine](#)
Also see our [Rx for Physician Burnout eBook](#)

Choosing Primary Care

THE PROBLEM:

Young physicians entering the field of medicine are currently not choosing primary care fields:



In 2019, 8,116 internal medicine positions were offered in the U.S. during residency match. Only 45% were filled by seniors pursuing their M.D.s from U.S. medical schools.

Source: [The Match](#)

THE SOLUTION:

Change the practice environment.

The challenges which dissuade physicians from choosing primary care can be fixed. PCPs with a broader scope of practice have more control over their work and report less burnout.

Source: [Annals of Family Medicine](#)
Also see our [Rx for Physician Burnout eBook](#)

Is there really a brewing primary care shortage?

The answer is far more complex than reported — and even sophisticated analyses must rely on a host of very uncertain assumptions. Whether the United States truly faces a shortage will depend on finding solutions to 6 problems:



At ChenMed, we believe that our model of full risk value-based care can begin to address each of these problems — and that a future primary care physician shortage is far from inevitable.