

Medical Surge and the Role of Urgent Care Centers

About Urgent Care Centers

- Medical clinics with expanded hours that are equipped to diagnose and treat a broad spectrum of non-life and limb threatening illnesses and injuries.
- More than 8,100 in the U.S.
- Vary in size, services offered, operations, and populations served.
- Appeal to consumers with acute but non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries.
- Offer extended hours, in convenient locations, at reasonable cost.
- Usually staffed by physicians supported by other trained professionals.

Methodology

- ASPR TRACIE conducted 18 interviews with leaders representing centers in 44 states and 1 territory.
- Centers represented ranged from single location to several hundred sites.
- No interviews with staff from retail clinics, free-standing emergency departments, or federally-funded clinics.
- Topics included: the role of urgent care centers during emergencies and their willingness to participate in the response; centers' capacity to engage in an emergency response; extent of emergency planning and preparation; and legal and financial impediments that might affect ability to respond.

Key Findings

- High level of **willingness** to participate in emergency preparedness and response.
- Urgent care centers have the **capabilities** to treat lower acuity patients and could contribute to decompression of hospital emergency departments during a surge response.
- Participants were eager to **engage** with local healthcare and emergency management stakeholders, but few had been formally approached.
- Urgent care centers can help support a community's emergency response effort in the short term, but it is unclear how long they can **sustain** their response.
- Urgent care centers have the **knowledge** to manage patients, but may not have an equal understanding of how to manage operations during an emergency.

Opportunities to Improve Preparedness

- Increase engagement of urgent care centers with healthcare coalitions and other partners.
- Explore the option of direct transport or secondary referral of low acuity patients to centers during emergencies.
- Provide tools to help centers build upon the protocols they have already developed for routine incidents.
- Highlight the experiences of those centers that have implemented emergency preparedness programs or that have gained experience in response to real-life incidents.
- Clarify identified questions about the legal and financial implications of participating in an emergency response.

Related Resources and Next Steps

Resources

- [Medical Surge and the Role of Urgent Care Centers](#) (full report)
- Urgent Care Association of America. (2017). [2016 Benchmarking Report Summary: Headlines on Growth](#).
- ASPR TRACIE Topic Collection: [Hospital Surge Capacity and Immediate Bed Availability](#).

ASPR TRACIE Will:

- Develop "Preparedness Tip Sheets" for urgent care centers interested in engaging in community response.
- Develop an "Engagement Tip Sheet" for community response partners interested in involving urgent care centers in emergency planning.
- Meet with freestanding emergency departments and retail clinics to discuss engagement in community emergency planning.