

# Patients with Medicaid Experience Increased Wait Times and Decreased Access when Seeking Subspecialty Orthopaedic Care

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## INTRODUCTION

- Medicaid provides affordable healthcare to individuals under 65 whose annual income is below 133% of the federal poverty level.
- As of September 2023, 88.4 million people were enrolled in Medicaid.
- Patients with Medicaid are **significantly less likely** to have success when scheduling an appointment with a physician compared to patients with private insurance.
- Mystery Caller studies are an effective way to acquire objective data and insight into patients' challenges when accessing healthcare.

## OBJECTIVES

**PURPOSE:** To evaluate access and new patient appointment wait times for subspecialty orthopaedic care based on insurance type and to identify factors influencing these wait times.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Largest study to date comparing access to care and new patient appointment wait times for orthopaedic sub-specialty care for patients with Medicaid or Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BCBS) insurance.

## METHODS

### Step 1

- Physician data pulled from American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) patient-facing database
- Included Specialties: Adult reconstruction, Foot & Ankle, General, Hand, Pediatric, Spine, Sports Medicine
- 672 unique physicians identified

### Step 2

- Calls were made to each of the 672 unique physician clinics to screen out incorrect phone numbers and physicians no longer practicing
- 501 physicians included following the initial screen

### Step 3

- 1,002 phone calls made to 501 unique orthopaedic clinics by trained Mystery Callers
- Mystery Callers posed as patients with a "textbook" clinical scenario for the respective specialty being called
- Mystery Callers posed as patients with either Medicaid or Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance and asked for the soonest available appointment with the physician of interest

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Univariate analysis of demographics of included physicians.

	Accept Medicaid and/or Blue Cross/Blue Shield (N = 219)	Do Not Accept Medicaid (N = 130)	Overall (N = 349)	p-value
<b>Age, year</b>	58 (IQR 52, 64)	61 (IQR 53, 65)	58 (IQR 52, 65)	0.03*
<b>Sex</b>				0.20
Male	204 (93%)	125 (96%)	329 (94%)	
Female	15 (6.8%)	5 (3.8%)	20 (5.7%)	
<b>Orthopaedic Specialty</b>				<0.01*
Adult Reconstructive	40 (18%)	18 (14%)	58 (17%)	
Foot & Ankle	30 (14%)	18 (14%)	48 (14%)	
General	48 (22%)	18 (14%)	66 (19%)	
Hand	27 (12%)	18 (14%)	45 (13%)	
Pediatric	21 (9.6%)	1 (0.8%)	22 (6.3%)	
Spine	24 (11%)	29 (22%)	53 (15%)	
Sports Medicine	29 (13%)	28 (22%)	57 (16%)	
<b>Academic Affiliation</b>				<0.01*
Academic	32 (15%)	6 (4.6%)	38 (11%)	
Not Academic	187 (85%)	124 (95%)	311 (89%)	
<b>Rurality</b>				<0.01*
Metropolitan area	183 (84%)	126 (97%)	309 (89%)	
Rural area	36 (16%)	4 (3.1%)	40 (11%)	

**Table 2.** Multivariate analysis results of factors impacting wait time for new patient appointment.

Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	CI	p - value
<b>(Intercept)</b>	9.53	5.96 – 15.23	<0.01*
<b>Insurance [Medicaid]</b>	1.1	1.05 – 1.15	<0.01*
<b>Orthopaedic Specialty [Adult Reconstructive]</b>			
Foot & Ankle	0.77	0.49 – 1.20	0.3
General	0.86	0.57 – 1.30	0.5
Hand	1.05	0.68 – 1.64	0.8
Pediatric	0.72	0.43 – 1.19	0.2
Spine	1.03	0.66 – 1.60	0.9
Sports Medicine	0.75	0.48 – 1.16	0.2
<b>Number of Transfers [Zero Transfers]</b>			
One	0.89	0.83 – 0.96	<0.01*
Two	1.02	0.89 – 1.16	0.8
More than two	1.05	0.83 – 1.32	0.7
<b>US Census Bureau Subdivision [East North Central]</b>			
Pacific (WA, OR, CA, AK)	1.75	1.12 – 2.73	0.01*
West North Central (ND, SD, MN, IA, NE, KS, MO)	1.7	1.05 – 2.76	0.03*
<b>Academic Affiliation [Academic]</b>	1.92	1.38 – 2.69	<0.01*
<b>Call Time (minutes)</b>	1.08	1.05 – 1.11	<0.01*

## Key Findings

- Medicaid was associated with a 10% longer wait for new patient appointments
- 37% of physicians did not accept Medicaid
- Academic affiliation was associated with a 92% longer wait for new patient appointments
- Certain regions and prolonged call times were associated with longer waits for new patient appointments, respectively
- Only one transfer was associated with an 11% decreased wait for new patient appointment

## CONCLUSION

When seeking a new patient appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon, patients with Medicaid experienced decreased access to care and prolonged wait times compared to patients with Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance.