



MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF PRIMARY CARE CLINICIANS NOT READY FOR NEXT COVID-19 SURGE

PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON, July 1, 2020 – The Larry A. Green Center, in collaboration with the Primary Care Collaborative (PCC) and 3rd Conversation, today released new data showing that more than 35 percent of primary care clinicians report practices are not ready to address the increased patient need as the U.S. experiences a summer surge in COVID-19 cases. Alarming, nearly half of practices continue to lack personal protective gear (PPE), and 25 percent say local labs are struggling to keep up with COVID-19 testing demands.

This data comes at a time when nearly 30 states report rising COVID-19 numbers and 40 percent of practices say there has been an increase in patients suspected of having the virus. In addition, health burdens from chronic disease are on the rise, with 56 percent of clinicians reporting that patients are requiring more care as their existing health issues are exacerbated by lack of access during the pandemic.

“This is disaster recovery 101. As a nation, we needed to look at the gap analysis from day one, figure out where our weaknesses lie, and work to address them so we are not as vulnerable next time. However, we’ve failed to do that,” said Rebecca Etz, PhD, co-director of The Larry A. Green Center. “We already have had preventable patient morbidity and mortality. It’s shocking to see that half of practices say if things do not turn around it is likely they will not be here at end of year.”

The survey conducted by the Larry A. Green Center is part of an ongoing series looking at the attitudes of primary care clinicians and patients over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This week’s data also showed that practices report resorting to reusing PPE, although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports this practice being unsafe for some PPE types.

“While new federal, state and health plan virtual health policies have helped primary care, these turn out to be necessary, but not sufficient support,” said Ann Greiner, president and CEO of the Primary Care Collaborative. “These policies should absolutely not sunset. Plus, more financial support from the Provider Relief Fund is needed as is testing and PPE. You can draw a straight line between lack of primary care support and bad patient outcomes, particularly for patients of color.”

“Primary care is holding on by a thread as our country faces a surge in COVID-19 cases,” said Christine Bechtel, patient advocate and co-founder of 3rd Conversation. “Anyone – whether a policy maker, an insurer or patient – should be totally alarmed. This surge is a preview of what’s to come during the impending second wave, and this data tells us that we are in deep trouble. I don’t know how much longer we can shout at the wind, but I’ll say it again -- health care is only going to get more expensive and less available from here on out, unless policy makers and insurers act fast to prevent even larger economic and health catastrophes resulting from the imminent collapse of primary care.”

The survey of clinicians was fielded June 26-29, 2020 and received 735 responses from clinicians in 49 states. 64% of respondents identified their practice as family medicine, 17% as internal medicine, 8% as pediatrics, 6% as geriatrics, and 5% as other. Settings included 22% rural, 12% community health centers, 8% in schools/offices. 36% had 1-3 clinicians; 28% had 4-9 clinicians; 36% had 10+ clinicians. 35% self-owned, 13% independent and large group, 39% owned by a health system. 7% were convenience settings and 6% were membership-based.

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About the Primary Care Collaborative:

Founded in 2006, the [Primary Care Collaborative](#) (PCC) is a nonprofit multi-stakeholder membership organization dedicated to advancing an effective and efficient health system built on a strong foundation of primary care and the patient-centered medical home. Representing a broad group of public and private organizations, PCC's mission is to unify and engage diverse stakeholders in promoting policies and sharing best practices that support growth of high-performing primary care and achieve the "Quadruple Aim": better care, better health, lower costs, and greater joy for clinicians and staff in delivery of care.

About The Green Center:

The Larry A. Green Center for the Advancement of Primary Health Care for the Public Good is a research group founded by Rebecca Etz, PhD at Virginia Commonwealth University and Kurt Stange, MD, PhD at Case Western Reserve University. The Green Center works to reclaim and reconstitute the intellectual foundations of primary care, to advance the science of medicine learned and practiced within layered and competing social frameworks of meaning, and to deliver on a now 50 year old promise: better health and improved health care through a synergistic focus on both humanism and healing. We are nimble, inquisitive, curious, and open. We make personal doctoring and innovation visible.

About 3rd Conversation:

[3rd Conversation](#) is a national initiative reimagining the future of health care by reinventing the clinician-patient relationship for the modern era. Powered by X4 Health, 3rd Conversation works at both the local and national levels to address health professional burnout, improve patient experience and realize the promise of humanity and connection in our health care system. Funding support is provided by the Morris-Singer Foundation and the New York State Health Foundation.