



Press Release

Examining Trends in Emergency Department Utilization and Costs

ANDREW EVANS | NOVEMBER 1, 2018

Overall health costs are rising, and policymakers and insurers have turned their attention to emergency departments as a possible cause. In a new primer, AAF's Deputy Director of Health Care Policy Tara O'Neill Hayes grapples with the nuanced data around emergency department utilization and costs. A growing number of people are using emergency departments, but there are a variety of reasons for this growth, she notes. She also breaks down emergency department use by demographic, insurance type, and symptom severity, among other analyses.

An excerpt:

Because health care costs vary so widely across regions and within regions, studies attempting to compare costs between [emergency departments, or EDs] and other sites of care produce varying results regarding the *magnitude* of the difference, but they all consistently find that care provided in an emergency room is more expensive than care provided elsewhere. According to [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality], the average cost of a primary care visit was \$199 in 2008 while the average cost of a doctor visit in the ED was \$922. Another study found the median charge for 10 different outpatient conditions treated in the ED between 2006-2008 was \$1,233. According to one insurer's charges in 2012, costs in urgent care ranged from 17 to 28 percent of the cost for treating the same condition in the ED. In Texas, costs in the ED were found to be 10 times greater than costs at urgent care centers from 2012-2015.

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