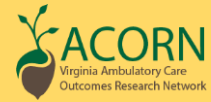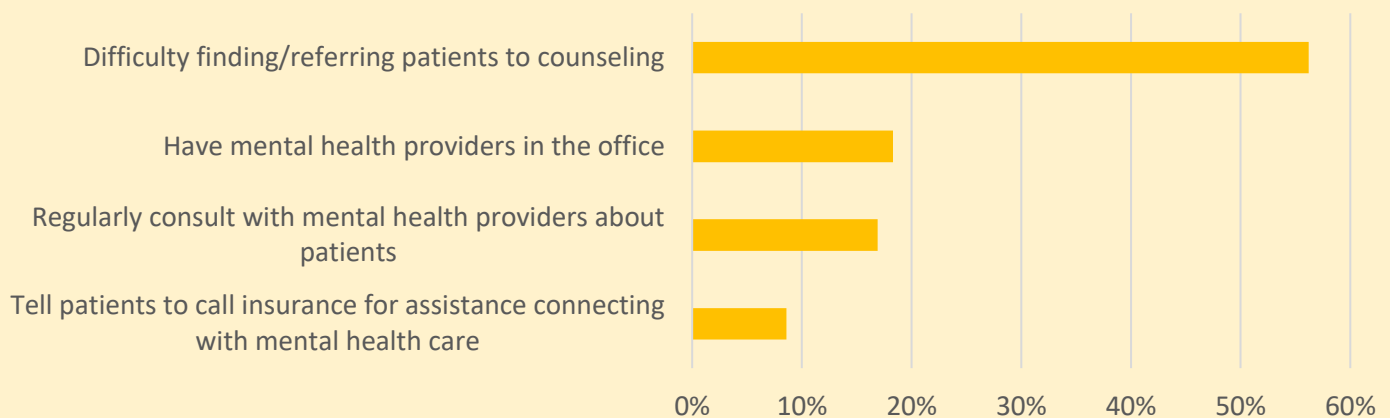# Primary care main provider of mental health care in Virginia

The United States is in the midst of a mental health crisis. After Virginia expanded Medicaid in 2019, over 500,000 Virginians enrolled in health coverage including enhanced behavioral health services. According to claims data, the majority of mental health care occurs in the primary care setting.

To better understand primary care in Virginia, including provision of mental health care, we used data from the All-Payer Claims Database and National Plan and Provider Enumeration System to identify every primary care clinician and practice in the Commonwealth. We then surveyed all practices in 2018 and again in 2022, with a 30% and 23% response rate, respectively.
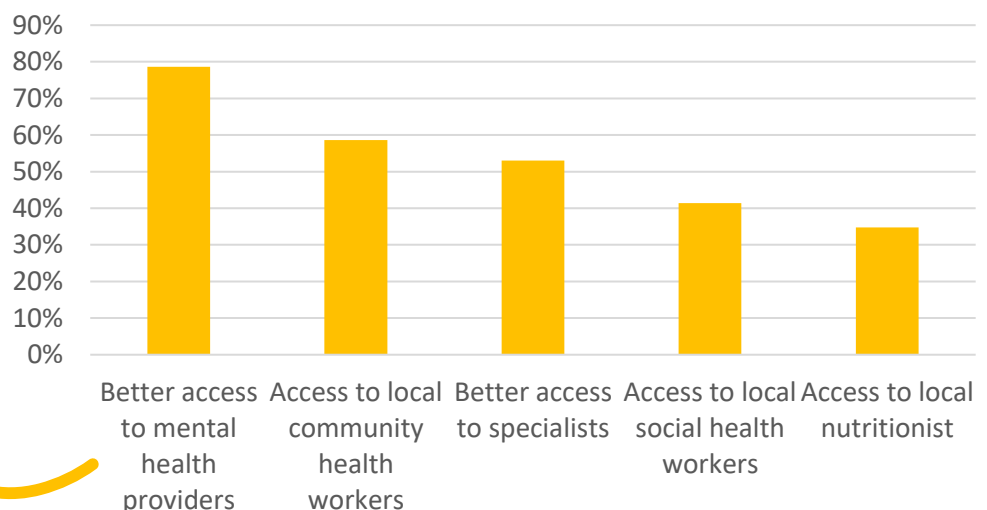
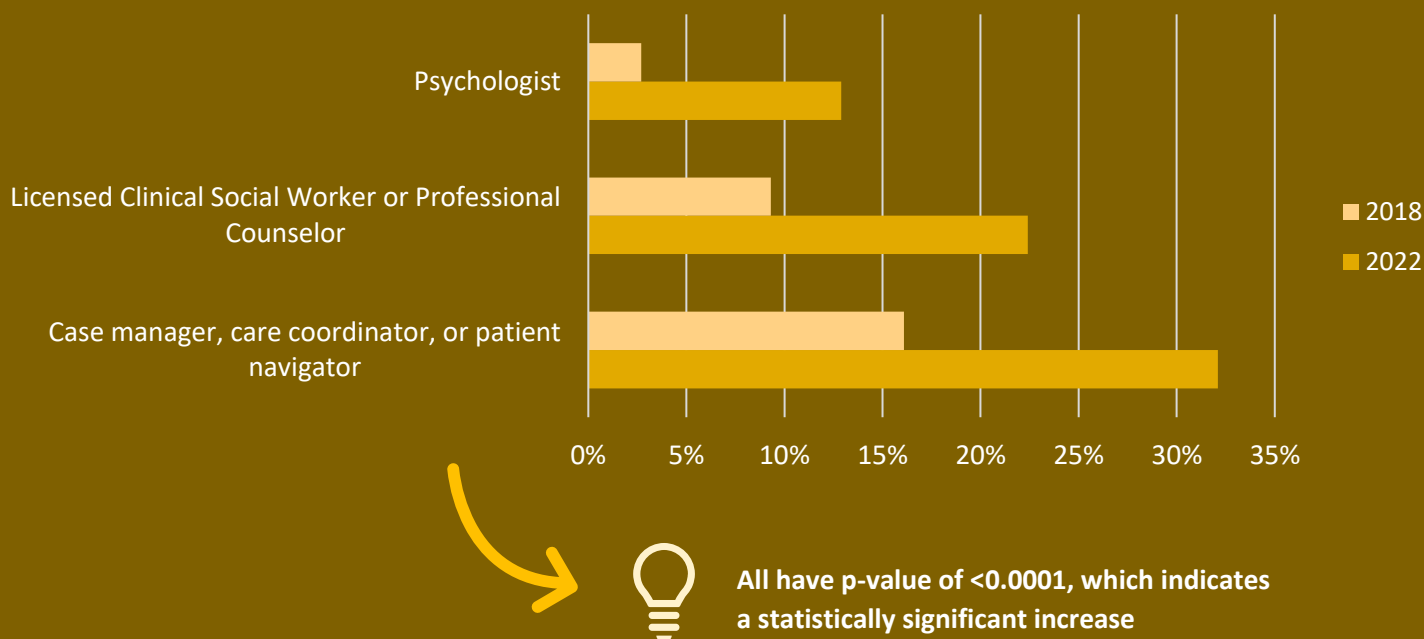## How practices care for their patients' mental health needs

Horizontal bar chart:
- Difficulty finding/referring patients to counseling: ~56%
- Have mental health providers in the office: ~18%
- Regularly consult with mental health providers about patients: ~17%
- Tell patients to call insurance for assistance connecting with mental health care: ~9%

(x-axis: 0% to 60%)

What would help practices see more patients with Medicaid?

#1

Better access to mental health providers

Bar chart:
- Better access to mental health providers: ~79%
- Access to local community health workers: ~59%
- Better access to specialists: ~53%
- Access to local social health workers: ~42%
- Access to local nutritionist: ~35%

(y-axis: 0% to 90%)

Practices with the following team members in house

Psychologist

Licensed Clinical Social Worker or Professional Counselor

Case manager, care coordinator, or patient navigator

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35%

■ 2018
■ 2022

All have p-value of <0.0001, which indicates a statistically significant increase

In 2019, **67%** of all mental health claims were made by primary care clinicians.

After Medicaid expansion, **5%** of practices hired mental health providers to improve care for patients with Medicaid.

Still, **21%** reported they would hire more mental health providers if they received a net increase in payment from Medicaid through an alternative payment model.

"I think the only barriers we've kind of run into [with mental health referrals] are, honestly, like probably every single clinic in the state: short staffing means that a lot of these facilities are just simply booked really far out. So, some patients do have to wait a long time for an appointment." Practice Manager, Family Medicine, Western Virginia

Implications

Primary care is a major provider of mental health services.

However, more than half of practices struggle to find and refer patients to counseling.

Many practices want help from Medicaid to hire more mental health providers and offer more mental health care for patients with Medicaid.

It's important to truly enable primary care teams – the home base and nucleus of patient care – to serve mental health needs.