

# *Benchmarks in Reducing Avoidable ER Visits*

INDUSTRY PULSE FROM THE HEALTHCARE INTELLIGENCE NETWORK™  
Results of HIN monthly e-survey on trends shaping the healthcare industry.

## Executive Summary

Inappropriate and preventable use of the hospital emergency rooms (ERs) is not only an inefficient use of healthcare resources, but also a waste of payors' and consumers' healthcare dollars. As consumers and payors take on greater responsibility for the efficiency of the healthcare system, healthcare organizations are targeting avoidable ER use.

In its July 2010 **Reducing Avoidable Emergency Room Visits** e-survey, the Healthcare Intelligence Network captured the steps organizations are taking to reduce avoidable use of the hospital ER. Through responses provided by 90 healthcare organizations to 21 multiple choice and open-ended questions, the survey results reveal that the top three programs organizations use to prevent inappropriate use of the ER are patient education, promotion of urgent care or walk-in centers and medical home assignment.

### Survey Highlights

- ✓ About 94 percent of responding healthcare organizations said avoidable ER visits present a problem for them.
- ✓ The majority of preventable ER visits were for conditions that could have been treated more efficiently in another healthcare setting, according to 34.1 percent. About 29.3 percent said high utilizers were the top contributors to avoidable ER use.
- ✓ Sixty percent of respondents said funding is the greatest barrier to launching a program to reduce ER use.
- ✓ Many organizations said patients with chronic conditions were “frequent fliers” — patients who utilized the ER the most.
- ✓ To discourage avoidable ER use, organizations have made staffing changes such as establishing community collaborations and disease-specific care coordinators.
- ✓ About 40 percent of responding organizations said it is too early to determine ROI generated by their programs.
- ✓ Almost 72 percent of respondents without programs plan to implement strategies to target avoidable ER usage within the next 12 months.



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*Disclaimer: HIN survey  
results are not based  
on a scientific sampling  
but on the number of  
responses to the HIN  
monthly online survey at  
<http://www.hin.com>.*

## Key Findings

- ✓ Role of Primary Care Physician (PCP):
  - ▶ Many respondents said they are collaborating with the PCPs of recently discharged patients to coordinate successful follow-up care and reduce avoidable ER visits.
  - ▶ In an effort to reduce avoidable ER utilization, 63.2 percent of respondents are notifying the PCP of the patient's ED visit.
  - ▶ Fifty percent of respondents said they recommend that the recently discharged patient visit their PCP within three to five days of discharge as a strategy to reduce avoidable ER visits.
  
- ✓ Promoting Alternative Health Services:
  - ▶ Many respondents promote alternative health services, which directly reduces the rate of ER visits.
  - ▶ About 44 percent of respondents use online health education tools to promote alternative health services.
  - ▶ Mailing printed materials to the patient's home is utilized by 44.4 percent of respondents.
  - ▶ Nearly 42 percent of respondents contact the patient within 48 hours of their discharge from the ER.
  - ▶ Other programs include using magnets, stickers and reminders, as well as scripts for provider staff to promote appropriate ER use and alternative health services.
  - ▶ About 32 percent of respondents said it is too early to determine the percentage of ER visits that have been reduced by these efforts.

## About the Survey

The Reducing Avoidable Emergency Room Visits survey was administered in July 2010 via the Healthcare Intelligence Network Web site at <http://www.hin.com>. Respondents were invited to take the survey via e-mail, e-newsletter and social networking reminders throughout the month. A total of 90 healthcare organizations responded to the survey. The survey included 21 separate questions, with multiple responses possible on some questions. Some of the questions were open-ended, inviting participants to write in their responses. Not all surveys were fully completed. Survey results were compiled by the Healthcare Intelligence Network.



## Respondent Demographics

Responses to the July 2010 Reducing Avoidable Emergency Room Visits survey were submitted by 90 organizations. Of 65 respondents identifying their organization type, 30.8 percent were hospitals, 23.1 percent were health plans, 13.8 percent were physician organizations, 7.7 percent were employers and 1.5 percent were behavioral health. About 23 percent categorized their organization as 'Other' or 'Other healthcare provider.'

## About the Healthcare Intelligence Network

The Healthcare Intelligence Network (HIN) is an electronic publishing company providing high-quality information on the business of healthcare. In one place, healthcare executives can receive exclusive, customized up-to-the minute information in five key areas: the healthcare and managed care industry, hospital and health system management, health law and regulation, behavioral healthcare and long-term care.

## Related Resource

Need more data from this survey? **2010 Performance Benchmarks in Reducing Avoidable ER Visits**, documents trends and metrics from emergency departments across the country that are successfully managing ER utilization. This exclusive report analyzes the responses of 90 healthcare organizations to HIN's July 2010 Industry Survey on Reducing Avoidable ER Visits, presenting the data in more than 50 easy-to-follow graphs and tables. Besides an analysis of overall responses, this report drills down to the health plan and hospital perspectives presented by survey respondents.

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