



Potentially Preventable Emergency Department Visits

Provider Toolkit

Medicaid | Medicare | Marketplace

[SuperiorHealthPlan.com](https://www.SuperiorHealthPlan.com)

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Introduction

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving the health of the communities we serve, one person at a time, Superior HealthPlan has created this toolkit to help reduce Potentially Preventable Emergency Department Visits (PPV) in partnership with our providers. We recognize that patient populations and practices are different. The templates shared in this toolkit should be tailored to your clinic and population needs.

In 2022, there were approximately 1.58 million PPVs in Texas Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), resulting in Medicaid and CHIP expenditures of approximately \$754 million¹. If these visits were prevented or occurred in a primary care setting, a portion of these expenditures could have been reduced or avoided. For more information, review the full reference below: *Texas Health and Human Services Biannual Report on Initiatives to Reduce Avoidable Emergency Room Utilization and Improve Health Outcomes in Medicaid*.



Why addressing PPVs are important to Primary Care:

- PPVs are high intensity services that strain the healthcare system and increase costs.
- Recurrent Emergency Department (ED) visits can lead to a cycle where patients continue to rely on the ED for non-emergency care, while their underlying health issues are not adequately addressed.



High patient ED utilization can result in:

- Negative patient outcomes.
- Delays in care.
- Missed chronic conditions.



Diverting ED use for non-emergent diagnosis to the primary care setting can:

- Enhance patient experience.
- Ensure patients receive the right care at the right time, and in the right setting.
- Improve patient outcomes.

¹Biannual Report on Initiatives to Reduce Avoidable Emergency Room Utilization and Improve Health Outcomes in Medicaid, Texas Health and Human Services, August 2024, https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/initiatives-reduce-avoidable-er-utilization-improve-health-outcomes-medicaid-aug-2024.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.



Role of the Primary Care Provider

Primary care is integral to reducing ED visits. By providing comprehensive patient education on where to seek care, coordinating care, and connecting patients with community resources, the primary care provider (PCP) can reduce ED utilization.

Below are key strategies providers can implement to ensure continuity of care and help reduce ED utilization among Superior members:

- Increase access to primary care through same-day appointments and extension of weekend and evening hours.
- Improve the after-hours telephone message:
 - Delay emergency department language and consider putting this at the end of message.
 - Include contact information and what to do if the patient cannot wait until the office opens.
- Leverage telehealth services for quick access to a PCP.
- Address ER use and hospitalization risk during PCP appointments.
- Post-ED follow up: learning why patients use the ED will assist the practice in implementing the best strategies to address unnecessary ED utilization:
 - Implement a survey tool to understand ED use (see sample post-ED use questionnaire in *Provider Resources* section within this guide).
- Call patients 24 hours after an ED visit and schedule a follow-up appointment.
- Provide members with an after-hours nurse line or refer them to Superior's 24-Hour Nurse Advice Line using the phone number on the back of their Superior member ID card.
- Offer telehealth services though Teladoc Superior members can set up an account on: [SuperiorHealthPlan.com/Telehealth](https://www.superiorhealthplan.com/telehealth).
- Access Superior's Secure Provider Portal to identify your patients with frequent ED visits.

Role of the Primary Care Provider

- Post information your practice has about where to go for care in strategic sections of the office.
- Implement care management programs to connect patients with the right resources and support their ability to manage their health effectively.
- Redirect frequent ED users to Superior's Care Management program to develop a more robust patient plan.
 - A provider's role in Superior's Care Management program is extremely important. Practitioners who have identified a member who they think would benefit from disease or care management should submit a referral request using the Superior's Secure Provider Portal at: Provider.SuperiorHealthPlan.com or by contacting the Care Management Department at [1-855-757-6567](tel:1-855-757-6567):
 - Option 1 – Ambetter
 - Option 2 – STAR/CHIP
 - Option 3 – STAR+PLUS
 - Option 4 – STAR Health (Foster Care)
 - Option 5 - Medicare
 - Option 7 – STAR Kids
 - For more information, please visit SuperiorHealthPlan.com/CareManagement.
- Provide tools and resources that empower patients to manage their conditions and understand when to seek care outside the ED (see *Provider Resources* section within this guide).
- Access provider data from your Superior Quality Practice Advisor to identify patient populations at high risk for preventable ED visits and address care gaps.
- Collaborate with specialists and other clinicians to integrate care and improve communication, creating a seamless healthcare experience for patients.
- Recognize patient vulnerabilities and understand that social factors like housing instability and transportation challenges increase the likelihood of preventable ED visits.
- Connect to community resources and work with community partners to help address social needs, improve access to care and reduce ED reliance.
- Recognize behavioral health needs and refer appropriately.
 - Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) contracts with 37 Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) and 2 Local Behavioral Health Authorities (LBHAs) to deliver mental health services in communities across Texas:
 - To learn more, visit: www.hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-resources/find-your-local-mental-health-or-behavioral-health-authority



Best Practices

We encourage providers to offer patient education and self-management tools, as well as collaborate with other healthcare providers and community services to create a strong “medical neighborhood.” It is also a best practice to implement education efforts to re-direct members to the most appropriate setting.

Education Topics

Consider the following education topics:

- Make after-hours care a point of conversation. Discuss availability of evening, weekend and walk-in options.
- Reinforce the ways your patients can interact with care team members.
- Recommend alternative care options like urgent care clinics or telehealth.
- Refer members to their health plan nurse advice line:

- **Ambetter from Superior HealthPlan:** [1-877-687-1196](tel:1-877-687-1196)
- **Ambetter Health (Solutions):** [1-833-543-3145](tel:1-833-543-3145)
- **STAR/CHIP:** [1-800-783-5386](tel:1-800-783-5386)
- **STAR Health:** [1-866-912-6283](tel:1-866-912-6283)
- **STAR Kids:** [1-844-590-4883](tel:1-844-590-4883)
- **STAR+PLUS:** [1-877-277-9772](tel:1-877-277-9772)
- **Wellcare By Allwell: HMO:** [1-800-977-7522](tel:1-800-977-7522), **HMO SNP:** [1-855-445-3556](tel:1-855-445-3556)
- **Wellcare By Superior HealthPlan (Dual Align):** [1-855-445-3556](tel:1-855-445-3556)



- Promote urgent care centers or other non-emergency settings as alternatives to the ED for certain conditions.
- Educate patients on when and how to contact the care team during and after regular hours.
- Consider sending welcome letters to new patients and encourage them to receive appropriate care from your office rather than seeking ED care.
- Consider sending primary care reminder letters to patients who have had recent ED encounters for preventable reasons. It can help redirect patients to your clinic before heading to the ED. Prompt patients to call your office to set up a follow-up visit.

Best Practices

Workflow Interventions

Review of current workflows can also uncover care patterns that can potentially drive ED overutilization such as patients not being able to make timely appointments, not understanding where to go for urgent care, lack of chronic disease support and transportation barriers. Consider implementing these targeted solutions:

- Develop a written access-to-care plan.
- Implement morning huddles with staff to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- Implement a timely response policy that outlines how quickly calls must be answered.
- Determine who can offer clinical advice to patients on the phone.
- Outline staff actions when the practice is notified of an ED visit by patients.
- Define how quickly patients can be seen (allow for same-day, evenings, or weekend appointments).
- Survey patients about their experience with your practice.
- Include after-hours instructions in new patient materials.
- Contact patients after an ED visit and schedule a follow-up appointment.
- Ensure two HEDIS rates are reported:
 - Follow-up within 7 days of discharge.
 - Follow-up within 30 days of discharge.
- Survey patients after ED visits to identify care patterns.
- Coordinate care with a specialist.
- Take every opportunity to educate patients, such as when medical assistants bring patients to exam rooms.
- Suggest that patients add the practice's phone number to their cell phone contacts.
- Use on-hold messages and posters to inform patients about when it is appropriate to go to the ED.
- Engage patients in chronic disease management.
- Leverage the following resources to educate and engage patients:

- **Asthma:** www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/health-wellness/asthma-help.html
- **Behavioral Health:** SuperiorHealthPlan.com/ProviderBehavioralHealth
- **Diabetes:** www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/health-wellness/diabetes-help.html



Member Education Talking Points

Accessing the right type of care at the right time helps ensure patients receive timely treatment while keeping healthcare coordinated. Consider these talking points as you speak to your patients regarding ED utilization:

- Your primary doctor should be your first call for anything that isn't life threatening. Your doctor's office can often offer same-day or next-day appointments.
- Urgent care clinics or walk-in clinics are another option. Most locations hold clinic hours beyond 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and are open on the weekends.
- To locate an urgent care clinic near you visit: [SuperiorHealthPlan.com/FindAProvider](https://www.superiorhealthplan.com/FindAProvider).
- Please inform our office if you are receiving care from any specialists.
- Do you feel confident in your ability to determine where to seek care in the future?
 - **If no**, to locate an urgent care clinic near you visit: [SuperiorHealthPlan.com/FindAProvider](https://www.superiorhealthplan.com/FindAProvider).
 - Example language:
 - *"There are some clear signs that a person should consider a trip to the Emergency Room. Sometimes you may be unsure of where you should go if you have certain symptoms. We want you to be able to find the right place for your healthcare and one that is close to you. This will help to make sure you can receive care quickly, and find a place that makes sense for you financially. To locate an urgent care clinic near you visit: [SuperiorHealthPlan.com/FindAProvider](https://www.superiorhealthplan.com/FindAProvider)."*



Provider Resources

Please use the sample after-hours messaging below, to ensure patients know their care options when your office is closed or unavailable:



If your practice has a voicemail system and a doctor or nurse on call:

"Thank you for calling <practice name>. We are currently closed, but if you have an urgent medical need, please stay on the line to reach the doctor or nurse on call. If your concern is less urgent and could be addressed when our clinic opens, please call back during normal office hours. Our office is open from <list your practice's office hours here>. If you are calling about a life-threatening emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department."



If your practice has an answering service:

"Thank you for calling <practice name>. The office is currently closed." If the patient has an urgent medical need that can't wait until the office opens, inform the patient if there is a doctor or nurse available. "Please call <list the on-call phone number> to reach the doctor or nurse on call. If you would like to be seen when the office opens, I will take a message and have someone from the office contact you to schedule an appointment, or you may call back during normal business hours. Our office hours are <list your practice office hours>. The staff will do their very best to address your needs as promptly as possible. If this is a life-threatening emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department"



If your practice does not have someone on call after hours:

"Thank you for calling <practice name>. We are currently closed. If you are calling about a medical problem that is not an emergency, please call back during normal office hours, and we will do our very best to address your needs. Our office is open from <list your practice's office hours here>. If you need care today, you can find a walk-in or urgent care clinic near you at <list web address here>. If you are calling about a life-threatening emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department."

Sample Patient Access Survey

Patient feedback can help identify barriers such as difficulty scheduling appointments, limited availability, or communication challenges. The sample survey below can provide valuable insight into how well your practice is meeting patients' needs.

Please answer the following questions about your overall experience with <practice name> during the past year.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is easy to schedule an appt in a timely manner.				
When I call <practice name>, my needs are met in a timely manner.				
When I have an urgent medical issue, I am offered a same-day or next-day appointment.				
I know how to get in touch with someone from my doctor's office after normal business hours.				
If <practice name> offered appointments during evening hours, I would use them.				
If <practice name> offered appointments during weekend hours, I would use them.				

Sample Patient Post-ED Use Questionnaire

It is important to understand why patients seek emergency care and whether the visit could have been prevented or managed in a different setting. The questionnaire below can help identify care patterns, barriers to appropriate care settings, and uncertainty about where to go for care.

1. What medical problem or symptoms were you having?
2. Which ED did you visit?
3. What day of the week did you go?
4. What time of day?
5. How did you get there (called 911/ambulance, drove yourself, got a ride, etc.)?
6. What did the doctors in the ED tell you was the cause of the problem?
7. Did the ER recommend any follow-up with our clinic or other doctor?
8. Did you or a family member try to call your doctor before you went to the ED?
 - If yes, who did you talk with (nurse, doctor, receptionist, etc.)?
 - If no, why not?
9. Why did you decide on the ED?
10. Did you consider going to an urgent care or walk-in clinic instead of the ED?
 - Why or why not?
 - Are you familiar with urgent care options in your area?
11. Is there anything our practice can do to better help you with urgent needs in the future?



Sample Post-ED Visit Patient Interview

Staff can use this set of interview questions to understand practice processes that may create barriers to accessing care.

	Yes	No	Unsure	Notes
Did you try to call your doctor before you went to the ED?				
If yes, did you talk to a nurse or doctor?				
Did you consider urgent care, retail clinics or walk-in options prior to going to the ED?				
If yes, what made you decide on the ED?				
Did anyone tell you to go to the ED?				
If yes, who?*				
If yes, why (conditions, to see a specialist)?*				
Did you know we offer sick/same day appointments for urgent needs?				

**Please answer in the Notes section of this questionnaire.*

Member Resources

By providing patients with resources to equip them with education, support and resources they need to manage their health, practices can help prevent avoidable emergencies, improve patient outcomes, and ensure the ED is used for true medical emergencies.



Flu Information: Getting a flu shot helps protect members and those around them from getting seriously sick. It reduces the risk of severe complications, missed work or school, and helps prevent the flu from spreading in the community, especially to those who are more vulnerable. For more information, visit SuperiorHealthPlan.com/Flu.



Superior Care Management: This team helps Superior members with complex health issues get the care and support they need. Superior has Care Managers who can work with members, their families, their doctors and caregivers to help them get well and stay well. For more information, visit www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/health-wellness/care_management_service_coordination.html.



Disease Management Programs: These programs help members take action to manage ongoing conditions or healthcare needs. The goal is to help members become a better, more informed and more active manager of their own health. For more information, visit www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/health-wellness/disease-management.html.



Member Tips: For information that provides Superior members with clear, practical guidance on navigating their doctor visits, insurance services, transportation options, medication adherence, etc., Superior has practical tips to help them overcome common barriers to care and stay engaged in their treatment. This ultimately helps members achieve better health outcomes while making it easier for doctors to support informed, prepared patients. For more information, visit www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/resources/member-tips.html.



Start Smart for Your Baby: This program supports pregnant Superior members from prenatal to delivery and postpartum care. For more information, visit, www.superiorhealthplan.com/members/medicaid/health-wellness/start-smart-for-your-baby.html.



Where to Go for Care: Your patients should consider all options when choosing where to go for medical care. Many are surprised to learn that this is often not the ED. Help prepare them by sharing the best place to go depending on their medical condition. For more information, visit SuperiorHealthPlan.com/WhereToGoForCare.

Conclusion

Reducing potentially preventable ED visits is a shared responsibility and one that requires coordinated, proactive care across every clinical setting. By strengthening outpatient management, improving patient education, and ensuring timely follow-up and access to alternatives, clinicians can significantly decrease unnecessary ED utilization while maintaining patient safety. Thoughtful application of these strategies supports continuity of care, improves patient outcomes, and preserves emergency resources for those who need them most. Consistent implementation at the point of care is a critical step toward a more efficient and patient-centered health system.

Superior's Clinical Engagement team is here to partner in your efforts to reduce PPVs.



For more detailed information please contact your Quality Practice Advisor or email: ClinicalEngagementTeam@SuperiorHealthPlan.com.