

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Optimizing patient access and flow: strategies to improve capacity

January 2024 update: Health systems continue to navigate bottlenecks throughout the system of care. This report highlights some foundational strategies, as well as site-specific strategies, to optimize access and patient flow in the acute care setting.

Contributing factors to capacity constraints

Patient throughput, access, flow and capacity management continue to be priority optimization efforts for health systems across the country. Here, a summary of the full report outlines some new strategies, foundational considerations and innovative member examples. The full report is available to participants of Vizient® Member Networks.

Bottlenecks in patient access and flow at any point in the care continuum have impacts throughout the system of care. Insights from the **Vizient Operational Data Base (ODB)** show an increase in emergency department (ED) length of stay and more specifically boarder hours per admission, a steady increase in the inpatient length of stay, and a steady high occupancy rate across academic medical centers and large specialized complex care medical centers.

Future state

Current capacity constraints, coupled with dynamic service line demands forecasted over the next 10 years, call for both macro and micro levers to be accessed by health systems to remain agile and ensure that patients can receive the care they need, when they need it. **Sg2®**, a Vizient company, forecasts changes in demand across settings of care including acute care, home and outpatient settings (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sg2 10-year forecast



Note: Analysis excludes 0–17 age group.




Sources: Impact of Change®, 2023; HCUP National Inpatient Sample (NIS). Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) 2019. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD; Proprietary Sg2 All-Payer Claims Data Set, 2021; The following 2021 CMS Limited Data Sets (LDS): Carrier, Denominator, Home Health Agency, Hospice, Outpatient, Skilled Nursing Facility; Claritas Pop-Facts®, 2023; Sg2 Analysis, 2023.

Foundational strategies to consider when addressing capacity management include leveraging a system approach, utilization and application of advanced data and analytics, and assessment of space, technology and workflows (Figure 2). Ensuring these foundational strategies have solid footing are essential before addressing optimization opportunities across the system of care.

Strategies and levers to relieve acute care capacity constraints

Outlined in the full report are levers that can be pulled across the care continuum to ensure patients receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time. An overview of strategies are shared here, generated from Member Networks peer-to-peer discussions and Leadership Series, national subject matter experts, Performance Improvement Collaboratives and the Vizient Connections Summit.

Figure 2: Foundational strategies for addressing capacity management

 System approach	 Utilize advanced data and analytics	 Assess space, technology and workflows
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage multidisciplinary governance structure, tiered huddles with escalation and Gemba walks. • Consider co-location of key capacity players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure transparent access to capacity related metrics and key performance indicators • Leverage predictive modeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of facilities should include evaluation of current and forecasted patient volumes • Plan for change: a key to agility is standardization; environments should be designed to serve multiple functions volumes

In addition to foundational strategies for addressing capacity management, the full report outlines specific strategies, along with member examples, across the following areas:

- **Reduce avoidable readmissions:** Facilitate early patient-provider connections before reaching the inpatient setting.
- **Alleviate pressure in the inpatient setting:** Shift procedures, where appropriate, to the outpatient setting or ambulatory surgery centers.
- **Streamline inpatient flow:** Ensure throughput and schedule maximization with enterprise-wide command centers and routine meetings with front line representations across disciplines.
- **Focus efforts on post-acute pressure relief:** Streamline patient placement and review post-acute care strategy.

Related resources

- Vizient provides actionable insights that help close revenue gaps. We leverage our expertise, purchasing proficiency and technology to solve and improve your spend management. Optimize spend systemwide across supplies, services and capital with solutions that enhance spend visibility and expense management expertise. [Click here for more information.](#)
- Providing quality care while maximizing efficiencies and transforming cultures is challenging, especially in today's healthcare climate. Vizient experts help members improve their care delivery and advance clinical operations and quality across their organizations by leveraging industry-leading data and analytics. [Click here for more information.](#)
- Unrelenting cost pressure has many U.S. health systems running on empty. Operating revenue rebounded in 2021 from the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic when stoppages of elective surgery caused significant financial fallout. Yet expenses, led by soaring labor costs and supply chain challenges, still outpace top-line gains. Up-to-date data and seamlessly connected systems will be more important than ever for your organization's success. Vizient is here to help your organization be ready for what's coming. [Click here for more information.](#)

To learn more about Vizient Member Networks, visit <https://www.vizientinc.com/who-we-serve/our-networks> or contact membernetworks@vizientinc.com.