

WASHINGTON STATE: COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC ACCESS CRISIS



American Pain Foundation

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Washington State Community Health Clinics Are Turning Away People with Pain

The American Pain Foundation (APF) is exceedingly concerned about Washington state policy that reduces access to pain care and promotes denial of care – systematically discriminating against people with pain in Washington state. ***For the 1.7 million people in Washington who report issues with pain, time is running out for access to proven, safe and effective treatment options.***

It is apparent that Washington state is in the depths of a pain care crisis. After receiving numerous reports that Washington state community health clinics were no longer treating people with pain, it was critical to determine the extent of the problem. Washington state community health clinics provide primary health care services to consumers who are covered by Medicaid, many underserved populations or, in some cases, those who are uninsured. Such clinics are the only hope for health care for many individuals of lesser means — families with children, the frail and the elderly.

APF CONDUCTED A STUDY OF PAIN CARE ACCESS TO COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS

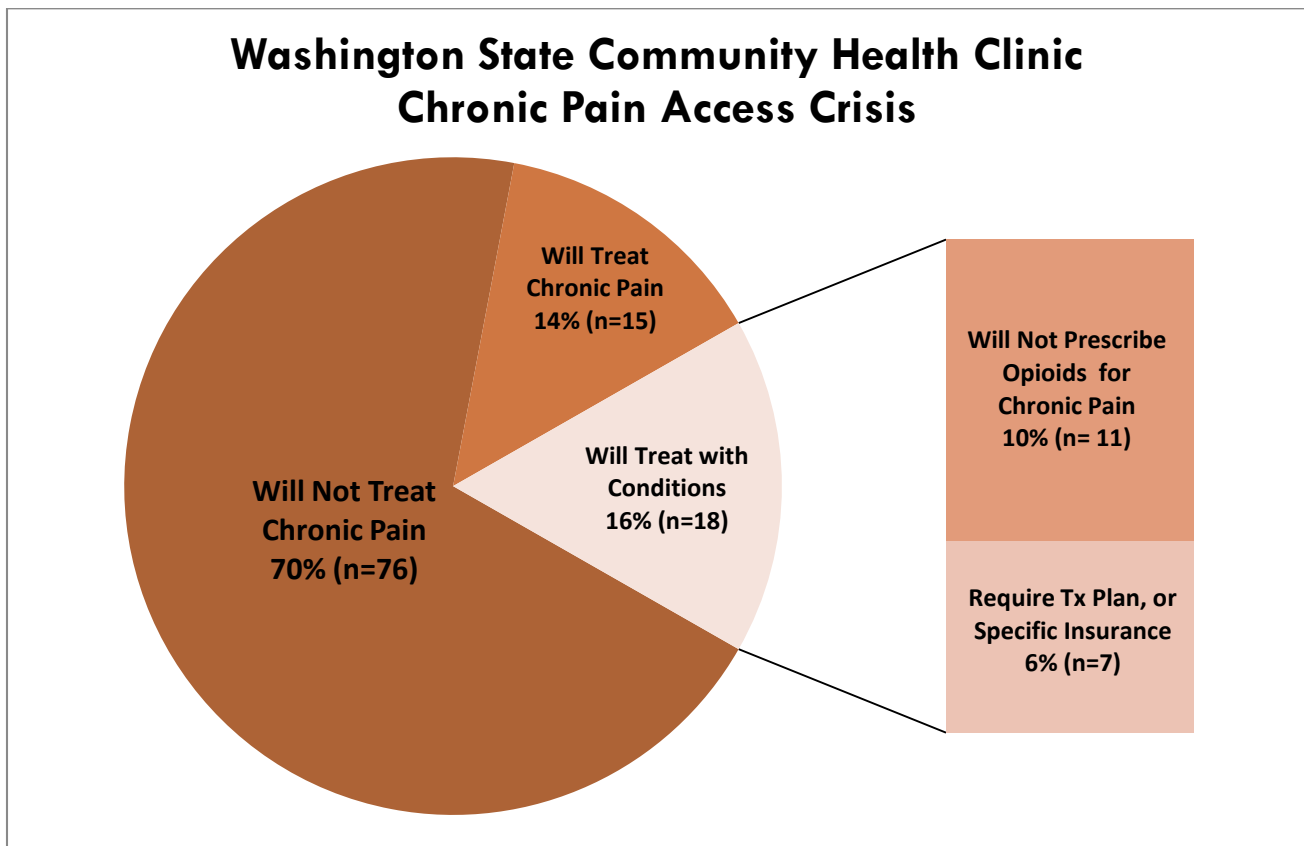
To better understand this access to care issue, APF conducted a telephone survey in September 2011. The main call center line for each clinic was used as the primary contact in order to mimic the approach patients would use if they were seeking appointments. APF contacted each of the 117 statewide medical community health clinics. Of those clinics, 108 (92 percent) were reached. Those clinics not included were either closed, failed to return the call, or were pediatric specific clinics. Clinic responses were recorded by APF staff and state volunteers.

Each clinic contact person was asked the following questions:

Question: Are you currently accepting new patients who live with chronic pain?

→ If no, "If contacted by a person with chronic pain in need of a pain care provider, where do you refer them for treatment?"

→ If yes, "Do you accept new patients with pain who are currently on an opioid treatment plan?"



CHRONIC PAIN ACCESS CRISIS: TELEPHONE SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE AMERICAN PAIN FOUNDATION IN SEPTEMBER 2011; GRAPH REPRESENTS RESPONSES FROM ALL COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINICS REACHED BY TELEPHONE (N =108).

70% of the community health clinics contacted stated that they do not treat patients with chronic pain (n=76). Sample comments:

"Absolutely not, we are not a pain clinic and we are accepting no new chronic pain patients." (Ferry County)

"No, we don't do pain management." (Franklin County)

"Our doctors are unable to take on chronic pain patients." (Stevens County)

"No, we accept no chronic pain patients at any of our clinics." (King County)

10% of community clinics said they would treat patients with chronic pain but would not provide opioid therapy for chronic pain (n=11). Sample comments:

"No - our pharmacy does not provide any opioids. No patients can get opioids [in our clinic]." (Adams County)

"This clinic has only an ARNP who does not prescribe opioids." (Stevens County)

6% of community clinics said they would take patients with chronic pain if they met certain conditions.

These conditions included having an existing treatment plan designed by a pain specialist, willingness to discontinue an opioid treatment plan, or having a specific type of insurance (n=7). Sample comment:

"Only if the patients are committed to weaning off [opioids]." (Stevens County)

"We can take a new pain patient if they are insured by our contracted insurance policy." (Pierce County)

14% of the community clinics will still see patients with chronic pain (n=15). Sample comments:

"We are not closed to pain patients. Some providers shy away, but the clinic itself has made no blanket decision." (Spokane County)

"We are currently accepting pain patients. However, we are about to change our policies. It's under discussion right now as to whether or not we'll continue to prescribe opioids." (Kittitas County)

Unfortunately, most of the clinics that do not treat chronic pain also had no referral for people with chronic pain. Sample comments:

"No, we have no referral for patients seeking pain care." (King County)

"We can't refer because we don't know of anyone who does pain care." (Spokane County)

"We do not have any referral process for these patients." (Kitsap County)

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION IN WASHINGTON STATE

These data are disconcerting. Where are people with pain of little financial means expected to receive appropriate, effective and safe pain care? ***With this new information, APF is asking Washington state stakeholders and legislators to come together to further investigate the gap in care and work with others to create solutions to address this pain care crisis.*** Pain care is a human right.

The American Pain Foundation is gravely concerned about the deterioration of access to pain care for people in Washington state and is committed to working with others to dismantle the barriers that impede access to quality pain care for all. **We call on all concerned stakeholders to address the needs and interests of millions of people with pain who need a voice where pain policy and practice decisions are made.** Refusing to treat or abandoning people with pain severely affects the quality and dignity of life; this practice is unethical and discriminatory.

American Pain Foundation

www.painfoundation.org

An independent nonprofit organization serving people with pain through information, advocacy, and support.

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