

9 patients made nearly 2,700 ER visits in Texas

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(AP) -- Just nine people accounted for nearly 2,700 of the emergency room visits in the Austin area during the past six years at a cost of \$3 million to taxpayers and others, according to a report. The patients went to hospital emergency rooms 2,678 times from 2003 through 2008, said the report from the nonprofit Integrated Care Collaboration, a group of health care providers who care for low-income and uninsured patients.

"What we're really trying to do is find out who's using our emergency rooms ... and find solutions," said Ann Kitchen, executive director of the group, which presented the report last week to the Travis County Healthcare District board.

The average emergency room visit costs \$1,000. Hospitals and taxpayers paid the bill through government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, Kitchen said.

Eight of the nine patients have drug abuse problems, seven were diagnosed with mental health issues and three were homeless. Five are women whose average age is 40, and four are men whose average age is 50, the report said, the Austin American-Statesman reported Wednesday.

"It's a pretty significant issue," said Dr. Christopher Ziebell, chief of the emergency department at University Medical Center at Brackenridge, which has the busiest ERs in the area.

Solutions include referring some frequent users to mental health programs or primary care [doctors](#) for future care, Ziebell said.

"They have a variety of complaints," he said. With mental illness, "a lot of anxiety manifests as chest pain."

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