

# Independent physician practices can keep up with larger consolidated practices in a pandemic

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Large health systems are acquiring smaller physician practices at what some consider an alarming rate, leaving fewer independent practices.

When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, it was unclear whether the independent practices would be able to "keep up" (maintain the same level of patient care) with larger practices, which have more resources, and if care for patients with chronic conditions might be disrupted by the pandemic.

A new study from George Mason University's Associate Dean of Research Alison Cuellar has found that independent practices experienced a smaller drop in patient volume than their larger counterparts during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was true for patients with and without [chronic conditions](#). However, doctors in larger group practices had a higher proportion of telehealth visits initially, but the differences between group and independent practices declined with time.

The article, titled "[Volume of Care for Primary Care Physicians in Integrated vs. Independent Practices Through the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)," was published in *JAMA Health Forum*.

These findings also show that both integrated physician practices and independent practices can still thrive and help their patients during times of crisis and stress for the public.

"Policymakers have raised concerns about the increased consolidation of physicians into large practices. This study finds that [doctors](#) at large practices had fewer patients and higher rates of telehealth visits in the early pandemic compared to independent practices. This may indicate that integrated physician practices faced less financial pressure, had greater resources to implement new technologies such as telehealth, or that they have fundamentally different [practice](#) cultures," said Cuellar, the principal investigator.

Anupam Jena of Harvard Medical School is the co-investigator and co-

author. For this study, Cuellar and Jena analyzed administrative data using claims data from FAIR Health.

**More information:** Alison Cuellar et al, Volume of Care for Primary Care Physicians in Integrated vs Independent Practices Through the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Health Forum* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.2883](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.2883)

Provided by George Mason University

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