

BIG NUMBER

Seniors spend the equivalent of 3 weeks a year on health care, study says

About 11 percent of people over 65 spend 50 or more days each year (nearly one day a week) obtaining routine health care

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Older adults spend an average of three weeks every year on doctor's appointments and other health care outside their homes, according to research published in the Annals of Internal Medicine.

Of those 21 "health care contact days," 17 involve ambulatory services, such as office visits with primary-care doctors or specialists, testing and imaging, procedures, treatments and therapy. The remaining four days included time spent in an emergency room, hospital, skilled nursing facility or hospice.

The study also found that about 11 percent of people 65 and over spend even more time — 50 or more days each year (nearly one day a week) — obtaining routine health care away from home. The research was based on Medicare data from a nationally representative sample of 6,619 people 65 and older.

The findings represent "not only access to needed care but also substantial time, efforts and cost, especially for older adults and their care partners," the researchers wrote.

They suggest better coordination to reduce the time burden for patients. For instance, the study found that roughly half the time, study participants' lab tests and imaging were not done on the same day as a doctor's office visit.

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The researchers also suggest expanding telemedicine and home-care capacities, adding more weekend options and encouraging physicians to call patients with test results rather than requiring an office visit for that purpose.

This article is part of The Post's "Big Number" series, which takes a brief look at the statistical aspect of health issues. Additional information and relevant research are available through the hyperlinks.