

Physician shortage in Massachusetts may inhibit state from making healthcare law a success, data indicate.

The [AP](#) (10/7) reports that data released by the Massachusetts Medical Society indicate that "Massachusetts is facing a critical shortage of doctors needed to make its landmark healthcare law a success." At "least a dozen physician specialties -- including oncology, neurology, and dermatology -- are facing shortages," and physicians "practicing the primary care specialties of internal medicine and family medicine are also in short supply."

This shortage, "coupled with the success of the state's healthcare reform act, which led to 440,000 more Massachusetts residents having insurance, means more people will have to wait longer for certain medical care," the [Boston Herald](#) (10/6, McConville) pointed out. The medical society's president, Bruce Auerbach, said that "some of the shortages are due to the gap between the cost of living in Massachusetts, and what insurance companies and the government will pay for certain medical procedures." In addition, there are "widespread fears of being sued."

Such "news is ominous as the state seeks to expand coverage to nearly every resident under its health reform law," the [Boston Business Journal](#) (10/6) reiterated. These "newly insured patients, combined with an exodus of medical residents, are contributing to the problem."

Thousands of newly insured Massachusetts residents still rely on EDs for routine care. In a front-page story, the [Boston Globe](#) (10/6, A1, Lazar) reported that "thousands of newly insured Massachusetts residents are relying on emergency [departments] (EDs) for routine medical care, an expensive habit that drives up healthcare costs and thwarts a major goal of the state's first-in-the-nation health insurance law." That "law requires nearly everyone to have health insurance, coverage the law's framers hoped would ease overuse of [EDs] as the newly insured went instead to primary care doctors for non-urgent health needs." Data indicate, however, that "a sizable number of patients who obtained state-subsidized insurance have continued to use the [ED] -- at a rate 14 percent higher than Massachusetts residents overall." Physicians "and counselors working the front lines of emergency care say a major reason patients still flock to their doors for routine care is that there are too few primary care physicians in" the state. Meanwhile, "healthcare leaders say they...need to do more to connect patients with existing physicians and help them break the habit of heading to the local" ED.