

Healthcare Takes on Clinician Burnout

THE 2023 BDO CLINICIAN EXPERIENCE SURVEY



Over the past several years, intense workloads, widespread clinician burnout, and difficult working environments have plagued healthcare organizations.

61%

of clinician leaders cite burnout as a top morale challenge



With 61% of clinician leaders citing burnout as one of their top three clinician morale challenges, it's understandable why addressing this issue is a top priority for so many U.S. healthcare organizations.

With healthcare providers already struggling to find sufficient staff, failure to address clinician burnout could be catastrophic. Fortunately, clinician leaders are taking steps to address clinician burnout by investing in improving the clinician experience, according to **BDO's 2023 Clinician Experience Survey**.

This survey of 153 clinician leaders reveals their top challenges, priorities, and plans related to the clinician experience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1

Clinician turnover, understaffing, and compassion fatigue/burnout are the **biggest challenges to clinician morale**.

2

Healthcare providers plan to fill clinician **staffing gaps** over the next year by increasing: automation of patient communication, telemedicine options, and full-time headcount.

3

Top **patient engagement challenges** include compliance, complications from comorbidities and deferral of care, and scheduling issues.

4

Organizations have high expectations for the **integration of technology** to allow for true interoperability and **automating communications** between patients, providers, and clinicians.



Read on to learn more about how you can address the challenges impacting the clinician experience.

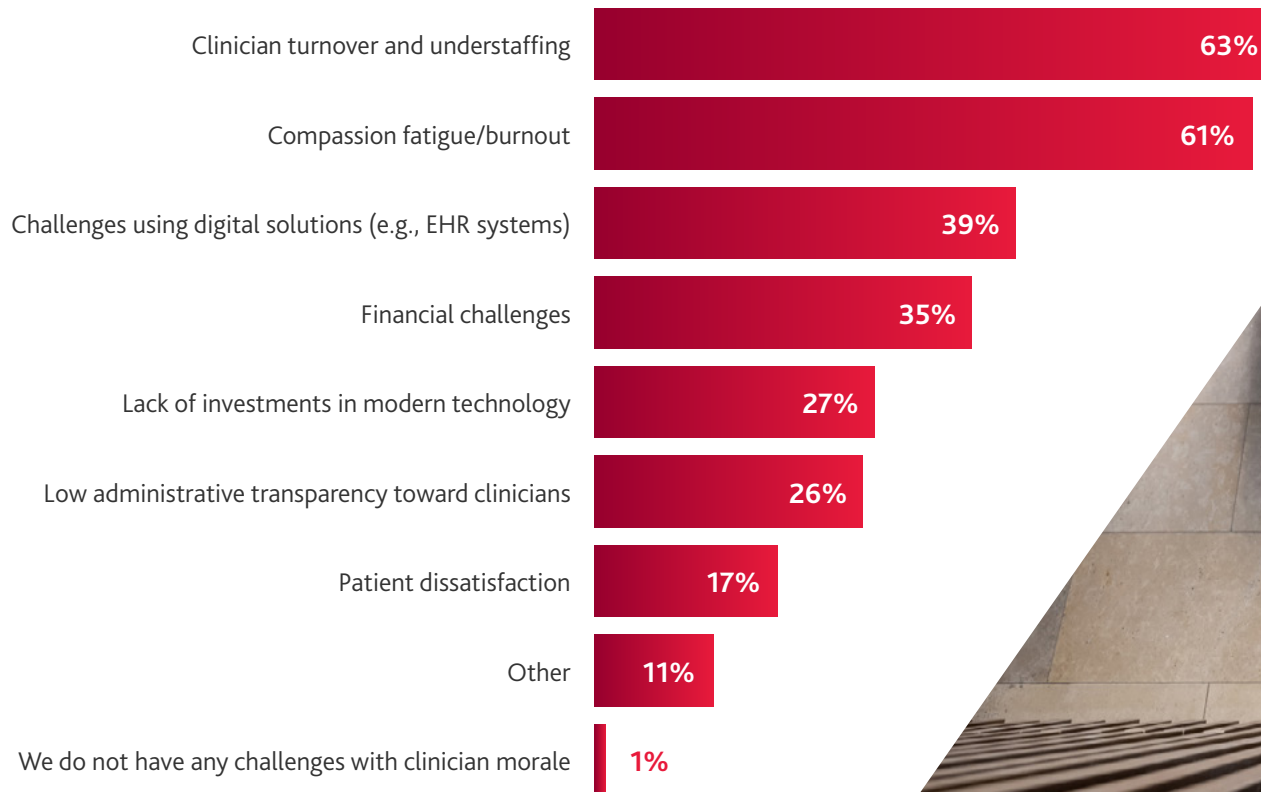
BDO's **2023 Clinician Experience Survey** is a survey of 153 clinician leaders, including clinical directors and executive leaders, on their organizations' top clinician experience challenges and their plans to address them. The survey was fielded by HIMSS Market Insights in June and July 2023 in the United States. Please see our appendix for the full demographic breakdown of our respondents.

Top Drivers of Clinician Burnout and Morale Issues

Clinician leaders report that understaffing and turnover, burnout, and difficulties using digital solutions are the top challenges to clinician morale.

Understaffing and turnover are a worsening issue, as more and more healthcare facilities struggle to address their staffing gaps. Part of the challenge is financial — healthcare providers have weathered serious economic headwinds over the past several years, which have impacted their ability to improve employee retention by offering more attractive compensation and benefits packages or investing in upskilling and career development programs.

What have been your organization's top three clinician morale challenges in the past 12 months?



Workload expectations also contribute to clinician morale issues. Demanding workloads, compounded by increasing administrative responsibilities, are creating industry-wide burnout, which is only worsened by pre-existing staffing shortages. The resulting chronic burnout leads to increasing turnover, creating a cycle that can permanently damage providers, clinicians, and patients.

At the same time, the digital solutions that are intended to reduce administrative burdens are missing the mark. The technology implementation process can be particularly frustrating for clinicians — without a detailed change management plan, clinicians may find the new technology overwhelming and complicated, impacting their ability to learn how to use it effectively. Poor technology integration can also make it difficult for clinicians to use new technology effectively.

What are your organization's top three priority plans to boost clinician morale in the next 12 months?



To improve clinician morale, healthcare leaders plan to ease clinicians' burdens by implementing systems to improve effectiveness and efficiency. These systems may involve technology like automation and artificial intelligence (AI) to take certain tasks off clinicians' plates. However, healthcare leaders should also reconsider their integration strategy and change management plans. Otherwise, newly adopted technology could actually worsen clinician burnout.

BDO'S WAY FORWARD

Clinician leaders need to address morale challenges proactively to protect their clinicians and secure a more stable future. While the challenge may seem overwhelming, there are a few practical steps clinician leaders can take to get started:

- ▶ **Seek input from your clinicians.** Engaging clinicians through surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings can help providers secure buy-in for both large- and small-scale changes, ensuring they get morale improvement initiatives right the first time.
- ▶ **Increase access to wellness resources.** Establish diverse wellness resources to offer a range of support options for clinicians struggling with mental health issues. Take time to address the stigma surrounding mental illness and encourage clinicians to find a solution that works for them.
- ▶ **Create a change management plan.** Having a comprehensive change management plan that outlines a phased approach to implementation and deployment can help encourage clinician adoption of new technology.
- ▶ **Streamline technology.** Make your digital solutions — such as EHR systems — as easy as possible to use. Phase out redundant tools and offer training sessions to ensure clinicians feel confident using their day-to-day technology.

SPOTLIGHT: GETTING MORE OUT OF YOUR EHR SYSTEM

Electronic health record (EHR) systems are not only critical to a clinician's day-to-day work, but also play a key role in overall organization health. When an EHR system is not optimized, it can increase administrative costs, exacerbate clinician burnout, and worsen financial instability.

Currently, less than one in five healthcare CFOs are very satisfied with their EHR systems, according to [BDO's 2023 Healthcare CFO Outlook Survey](#). Fortunately, there are steps healthcare providers can take to optimize their EHR systems:

Understand Your System

Determine what capabilities your EHR system offers that your organization has not yet adopted, if any, and what is valuable to prioritize adopting in the near future. It's also crucial to ensure your EHR system is up to date — if not, you could be missing out on valuable capabilities.

Focus on Workflows

Healthcare CFOs cite workflow misalignment as their top EHR challenge. By improving workflows in EHR systems, healthcare leaders can reduce the administrative burden on clinicians, capture revenue more quickly, and improve the patient experience.

Work Closely With IT

Getting the most out of your EHR system requires IT and operations teams to work in tandem. An informatics leader can help bridge any gaps between the two departments to ensure everyone is speaking the same language.

Check Your Benchmarks

Benchmark yourself against your peers for important Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) like patient satisfaction and readmittance rates. Determine where your EHR system can help you address gaps or weaknesses.

Implement a Communication Plan

Changes to your EHR system require consistent communication with your staff. Otherwise, adoption of new capabilities or adherence to revised policies may be low. When communicating changes to your staff, consider offering training sessions and resources to help them use the EHR to its greatest effect.

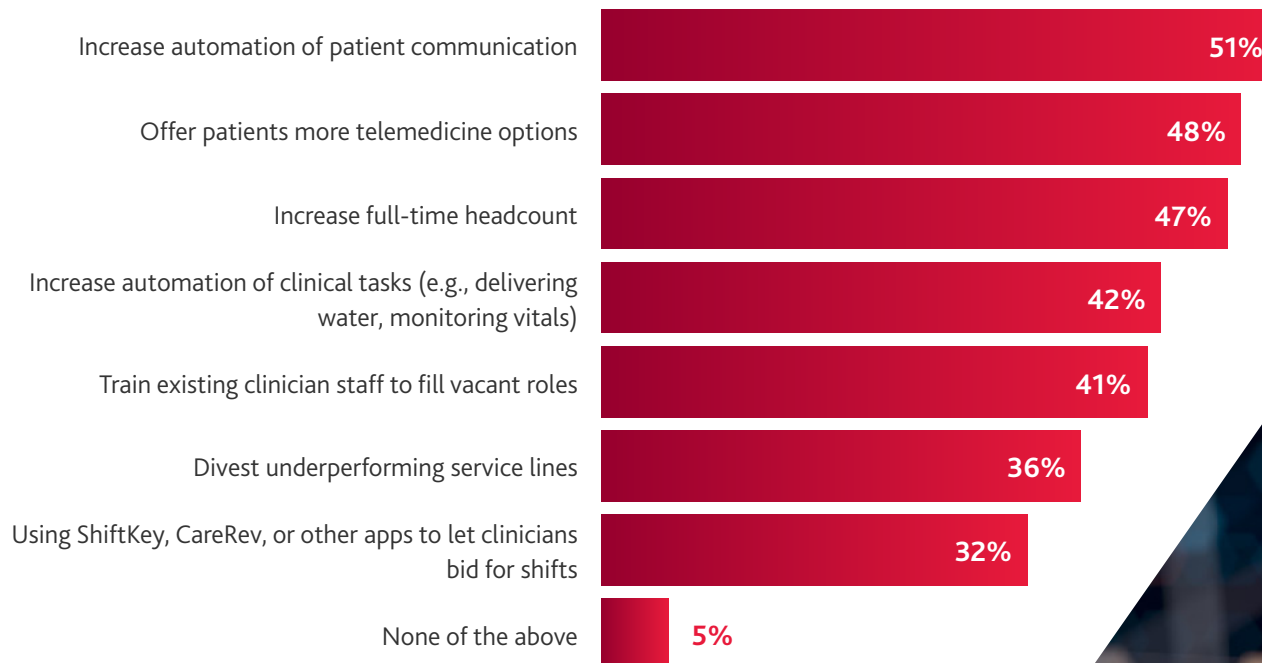
An optimized EHR system is critical to clinician success. To learn how you can optimize your EHR system to improve effectiveness and efficiency, [read our insight on eight ways to get the most out of your EHR system](#).

Closing the Staffing Gap

Staffing gaps can make it difficult to meet patient needs and put an overwhelming burden on clinicians. The result is higher turnover and increased expenses for the organization in the long term.

While 63% of clinician leaders cite turnover and understaffing as their top morale challenge, just 47% plan to increase their full-time headcount in the next 12 months. Instead, more clinician leaders are focused on technology-enabled solutions to fill staffing gaps.

How does your organization plan to fill clinician staffing gaps in the next 12 months?



While technology can address workload issues [by automating tasks](#) and allowing more clinicians to work from home, it cannot fully address staffing gaps. Unfortunately, challenges like the aging workforce, financial instability, and shortages of qualified clinicians exacerbate the issue. As more clinicians explore leaving the industry, this problem will only get worse.

BDO'S WAY FORWARD

When it comes to addressing staffing gaps, there is no room for a technology-only solution, nor a staffing-only solution. Here's how healthcare providers can enable clinicians to enjoy the satisfaction of delivering outstanding patient care while also saving time and money:

- ▶ **Expand virtual care options.** Consider using automated chatbots to address minor or non-urgent patient questions and assign some appointment requests to clinicians dedicated to telehealth. These options can help patients feel heard while reducing the burden on clinicians.
- ▶ **Make the most with your current staff.** Ensure you're using automation to allow all your clinicians to work at the top of their licenses and spend less time on administrative tasks. You can also consider offering your current staff opportunities to upskill so they can fill critical vacancies and grow in their careers.
- ▶ **Prioritize key services.** If staffing gaps are impacting your ability to offer care, consider whether it is necessary to divest from certain service lines to focus on the most in-demand services. Always approach divestment decisions with caution and ensure you continue offering care that is critical to the community.

SPOTLIGHT: HARNESSING AI TO IMPROVE THE CLINICIAN EXPERIENCE

In the next two years, clinician leaders are looking to leverage AI and analytics across the care spectrum, from back-office management to clinical decision-making, to streamline repetitive and simple tasks.

To use AI to transform the clinician experience, clinician leaders will need to take the following steps:

Revisit Digital Investments



Just 42% of clinician leaders report they're already investing in AI or machine learning, with more planning to invest in the future.

However, these investments can't wait — healthcare organizations need to invest in AI today if they want to use it to improve the clinician experience tomorrow.

Assess Data



Effectively using AI depends on having access to high-quality data that is centrally located and regularly audited.

Clinician leaders need to understand how their organization handles and manages data. It's possible these practices will need to be updated to support AI capabilities.

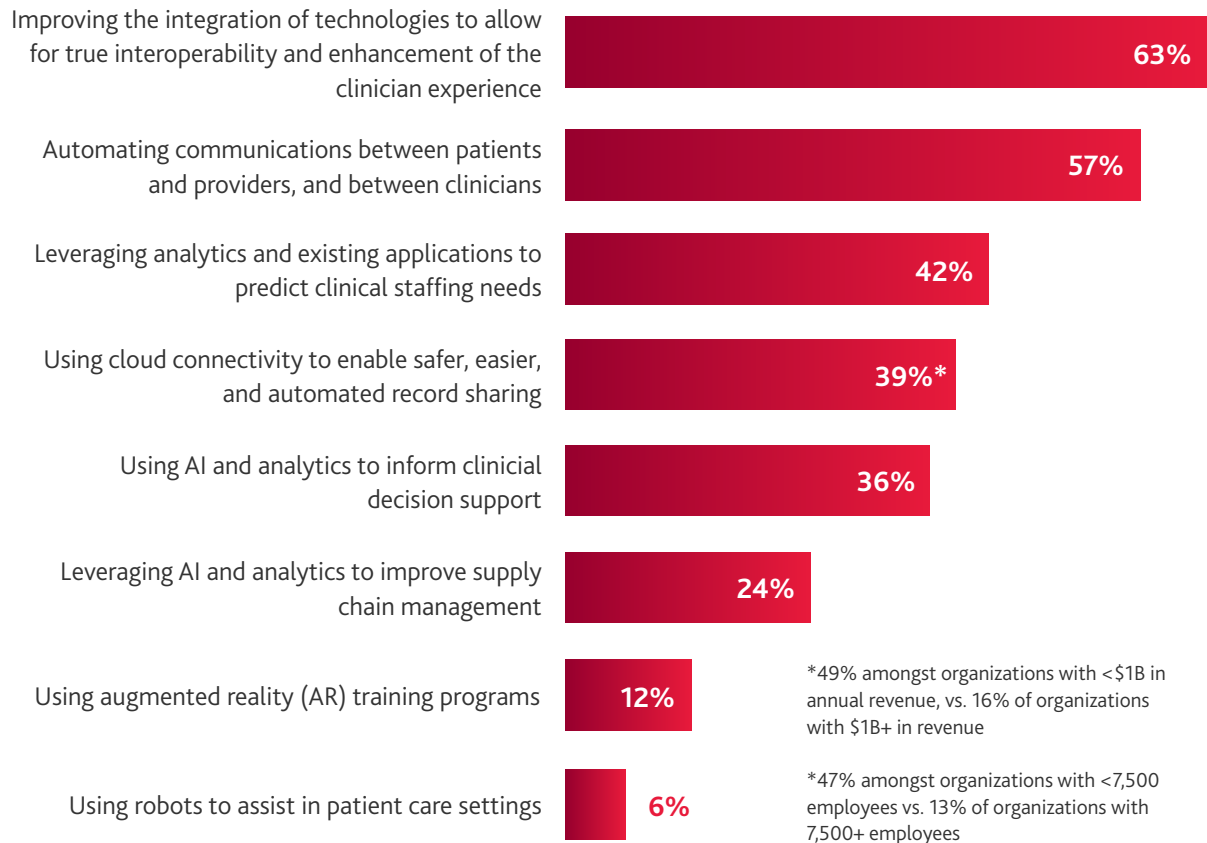
Understand and Manage Risks



While AI can bring benefits in the form of greater efficiency for clinicians, it also carries serious risks.

For example, generative AI can fall victim to hallucinations, meaning it generates an answer that is not correct or supported by its training data. AI platforms can also generate biased results, which can have serious consequences for patient care if left unaddressed.

Which three new technologies do you expect to be the most valuable to you in the next 2 years?



Improving Patient Engagement

Since the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many patients to defer care, providers must treat a patient population that shows an increase in morbidities and acuity. Treating these patients requires more time and resources, which increases the workload on clinician staff.

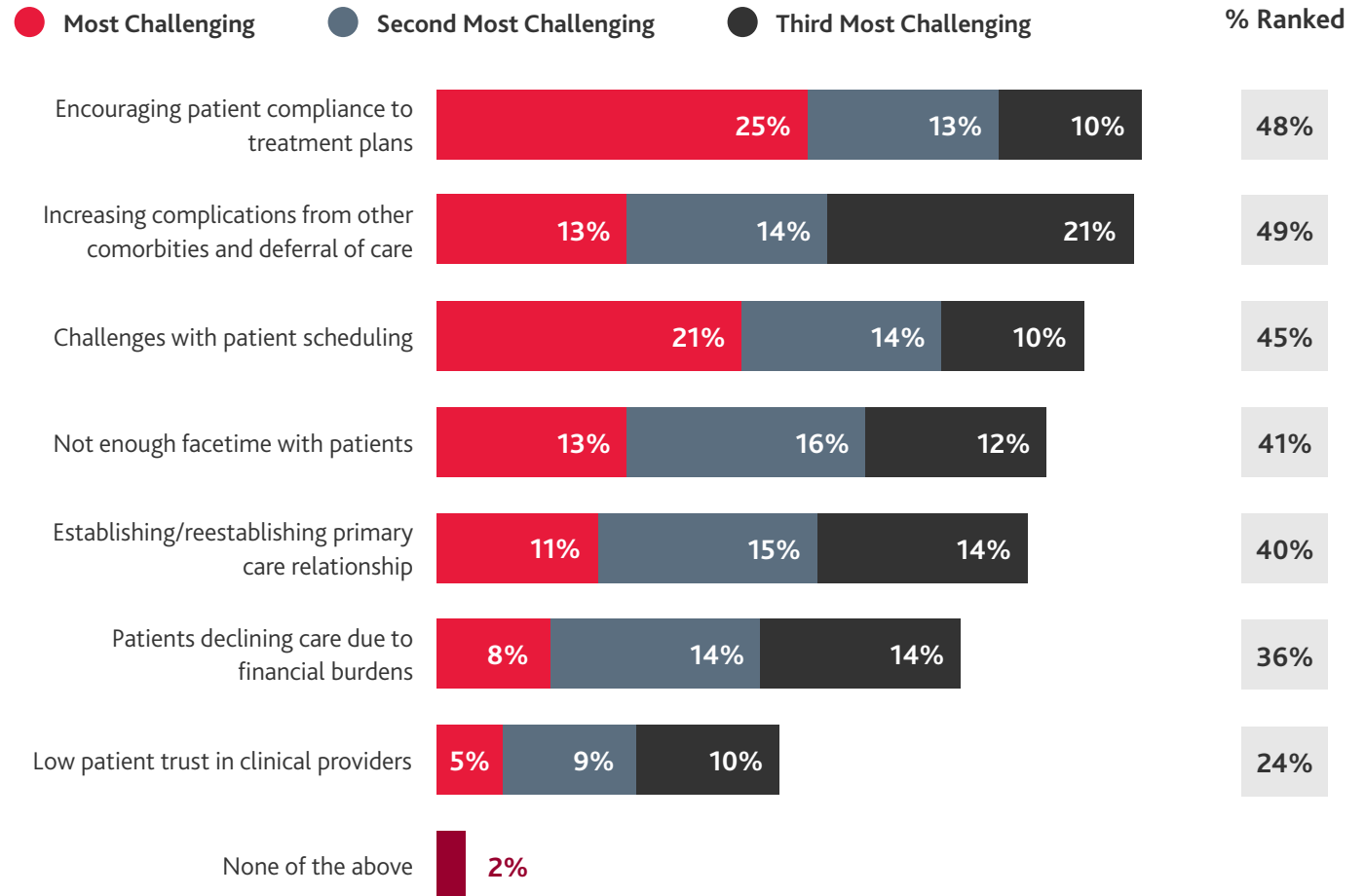
At the same time, patients seem more disengaged from their care than ever before.



69%
of patients
have a primary
care physician

According to [BDO's 2022 Patient Experience Survey](#), just 69% of patients have a primary care physician, and over half of patients admitted to delaying routine medical care. This type of patient disengagement can worsen acuity and comorbidities, which increases the burden on clinicians.

Of the following, which have been your three greatest patient engagement challenges in the past 12 months?



One way that providers are looking to re-engage patients is by [putting more control over their care into the patient's hands](#). In practice, that can look like offering self-scheduling capabilities through the online patient portal or increasing the availability of telehealth appointments.

Another benefit of these tools is that they can expand access to care. For example, telehealth visits can offer immunocompromised patients a way to receive care without exposing themselves to the potential pathogens that exist in a healthcare facility. However, technology solutions aren't the only answer to healthcare access issues, as technology requires infrastructure that some populations may not have — for example, rural populations without access to broadband internet.

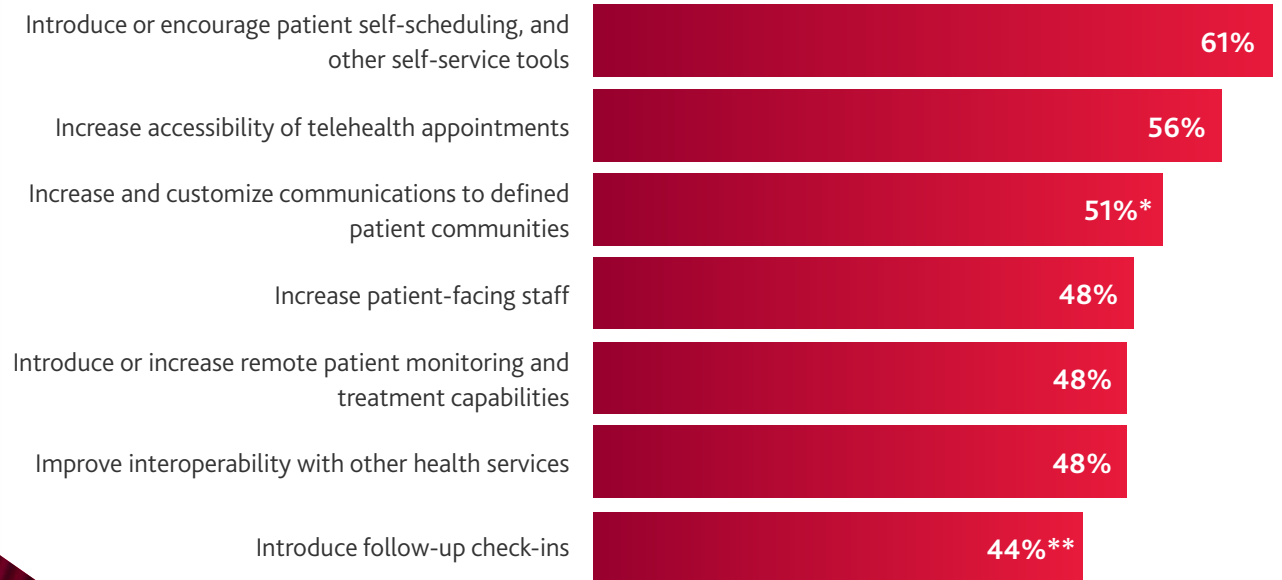
How did an AMC achieve a **260%** increase in new patient appointments across specialty practices?

Read our [case study](#) to learn how BDO helped an academic medical center use patient self-scheduling to grow patient volume and improve the online patient experience.



How does your organization plan to increase patient engagement in the next 12 months?

Respondents selected an average of **four** areas to increase patient engagement



*57% among those in Clinical Director or Executive Leadership job functions, vs. 35% of those in Clinician functions

** 56% among organizations with private ownership vs. 33% of organizations with non-profit or public ownership

BDO'S WAY FORWARD

Patient engagement is key to improving patient outcomes, which reduces the burden on clinicians in the long term. Here are some strategies clinician leaders can implement to improve patient engagement:

- ▶ **Reestablish primary care relationships.** Primary care physicians are key to ensuring patients receive regular and preventive care, which improves long-term health outcomes. Patient portals can help patients connect more quickly and conveniently with their primary care physician, which can strengthen or rebuild that relationship.
- ▶ **Rethink scheduling.** Online self-scheduling can reduce the friction patients face when making appointments. Additionally, standardized scheduling templates can help clinicians see patients and manage appointments more efficiently. Healthcare providers should establish sustainable governance models to maintain scheduling best practices across the organization.
- ▶ **Assess your telehealth approach.** Healthcare leaders should help clinicians handle increased patient responsiveness via telehealth and patient portals through dedicated virtual health service lines. Additionally, providers must remain aware of evolving regulations around telehealth visit reimbursements.

SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR THE CLINICIAN EXPERIENCE

Improving the clinician experience is a critical step toward improving patient care and supporting the financial stability of the healthcare organization. Understanding and addressing the challenges that diminish clinicians' satisfaction with their jobs — such as morale issues, understaffing, complex technology infrastructure, and obstacles to engaging effectively with patients — are critical to delivering high-quality patient care and keeping healthcare facilities open. Healthcare leaders should strive to address these challenges while empowering clinicians to work at the top of their licenses in a workplace where technology makes them more efficient caregivers.



Appendix

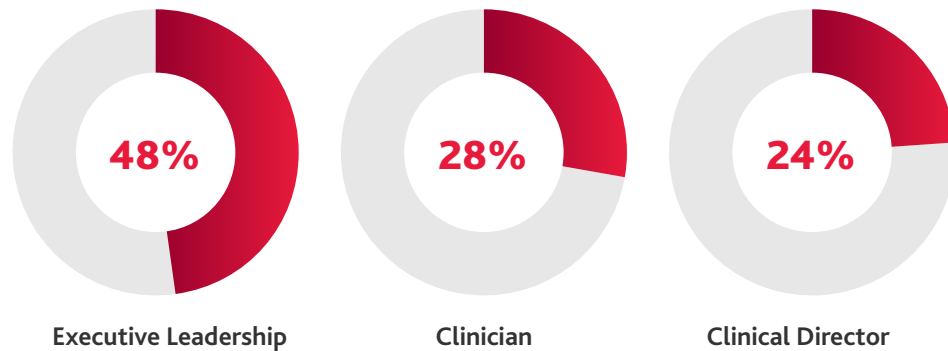
RESEARCH OVERVIEW

HIMSS Market Insights conducted this research in June and July 2023. The research was conducted online among healthcare leaders (directors and above) in the United States to understand their perspective on their organizations' challenges and planned future investments. A total of 153 qualified respondents participated in this research.

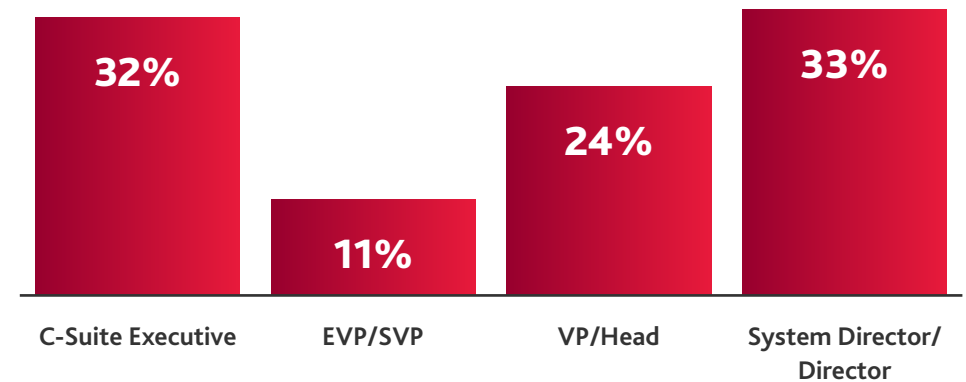
This was a blind data collection effort; BDO was not identified as a sponsor of the research.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

What is your job function?



What is your job role?

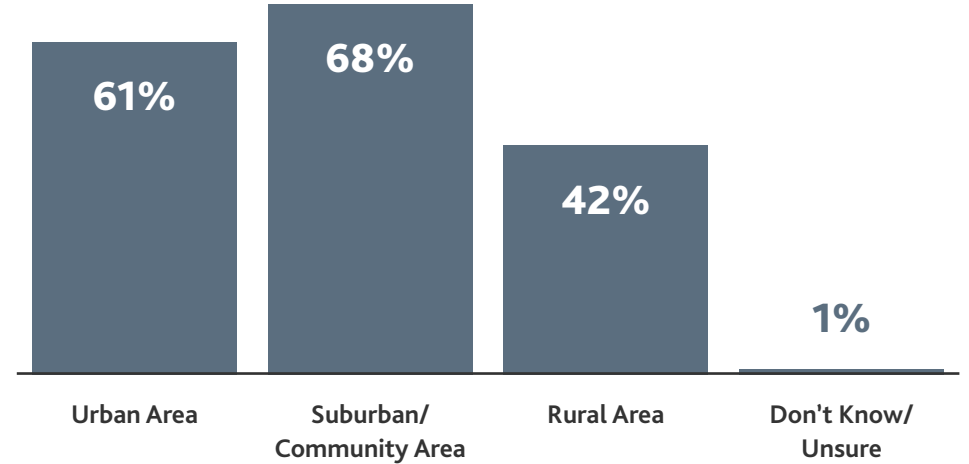


ORGANIZATION PROFILE

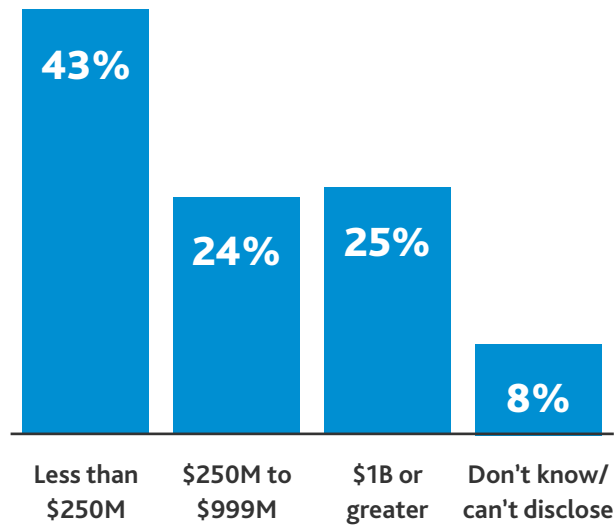
What type of organization do you work for?



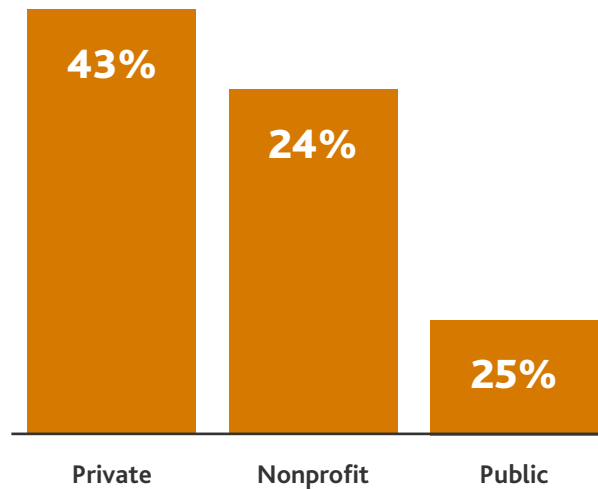
Patient Population Location



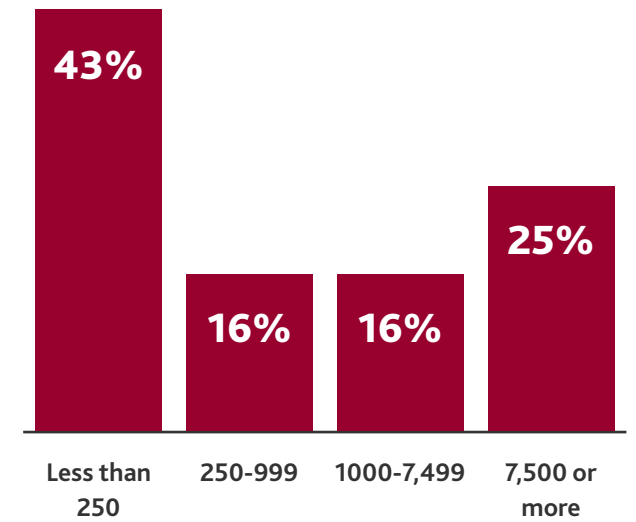
Annual Revenue



Ownership

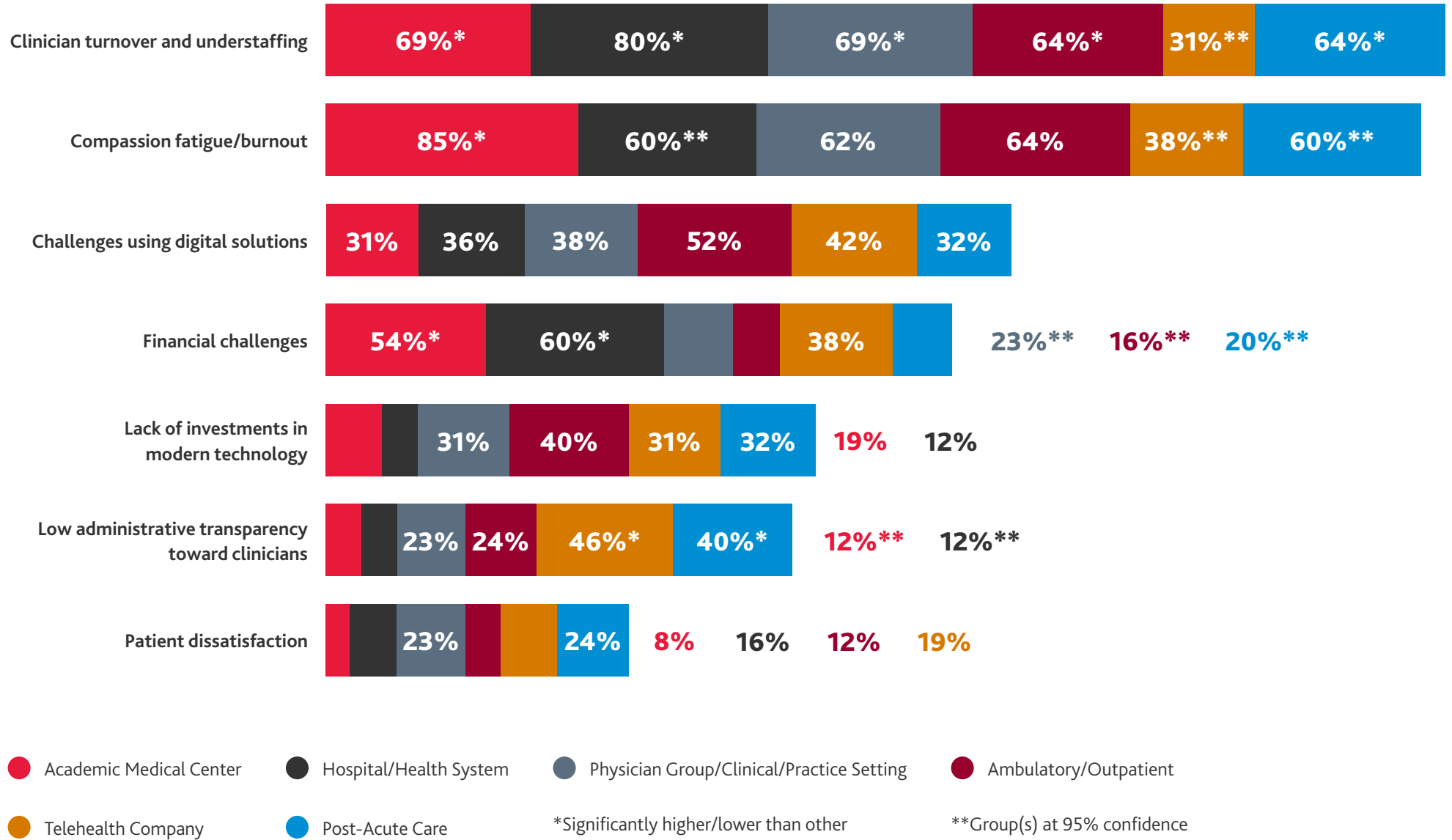


Number of Employees

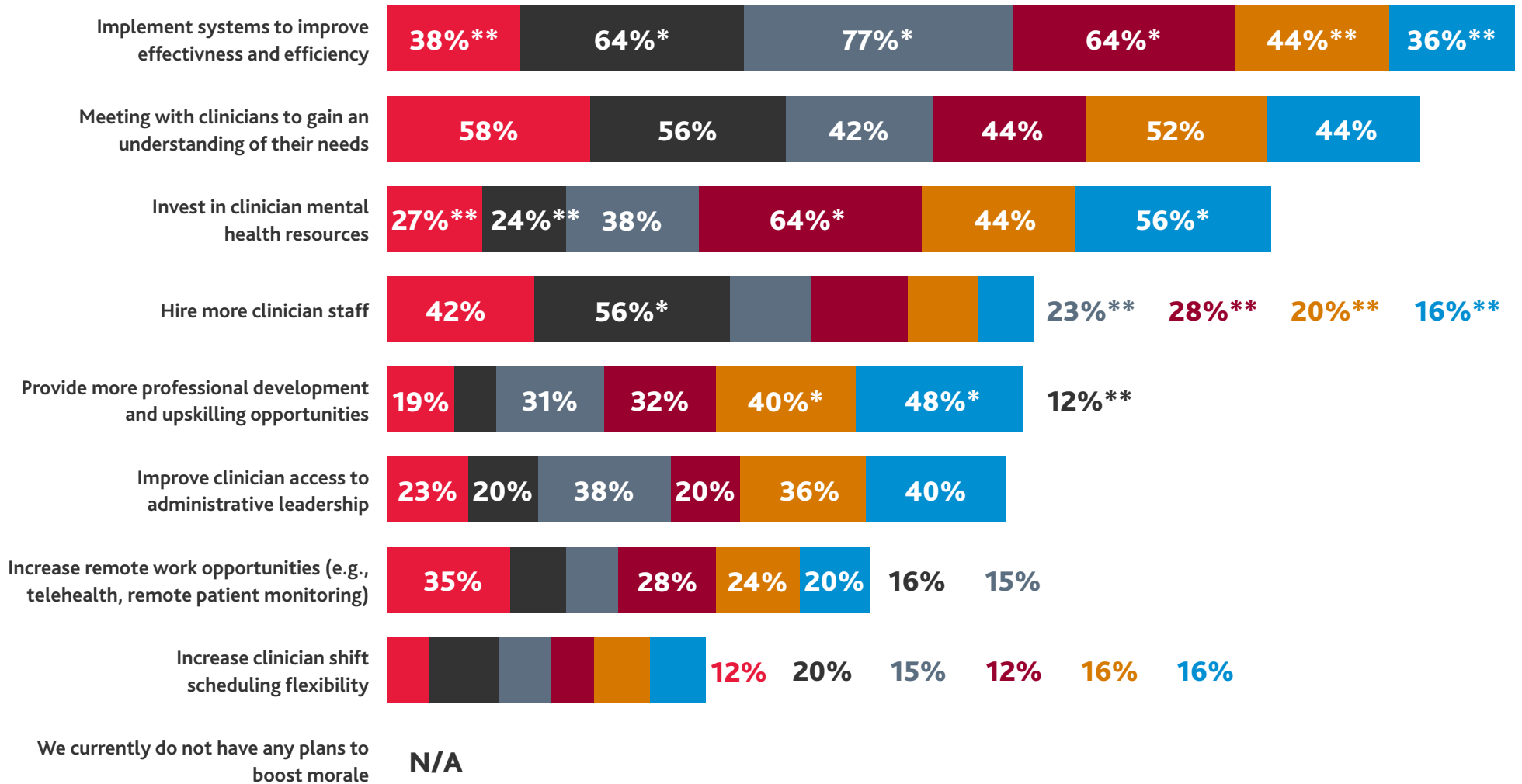


RESPONSE BREAKDOWN BY ORGANIZATION TYPE

What have been your organization's top three clinician morale challenges in the past 12 months?



What are your organization's top three priority plans to boost clinician morale in the next 12 months?



● Academic Medical Center

● Hospital/Health System

● Physician Group/Clinical/Practice Setting

● Ambulatory/Outpatient

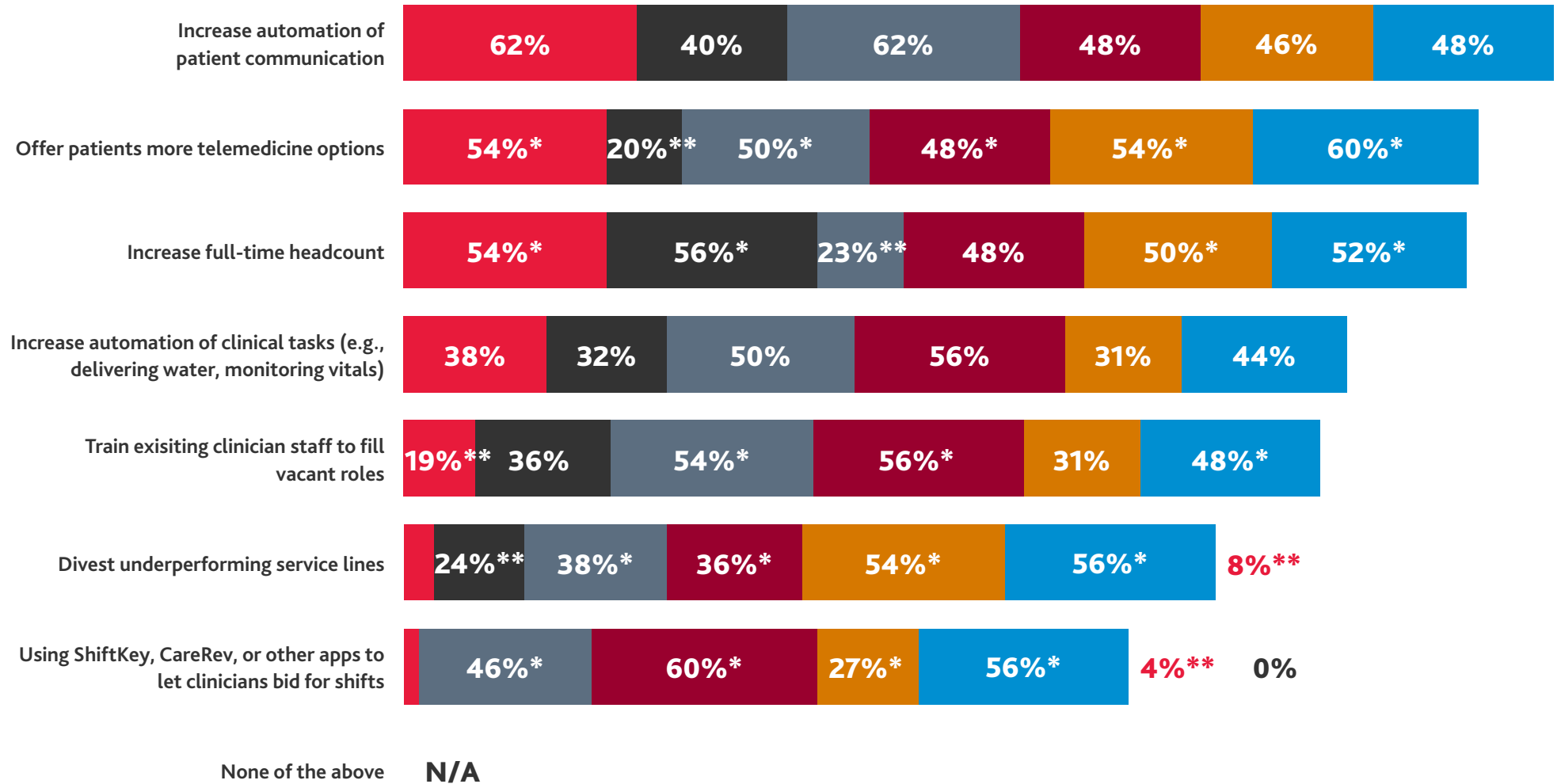
● Telehealth Company

● Post-Acute Care

*Significantly higher/lower than other

**Group(s) at 95% confidence

How does your organization plan to fill clinician staffing gaps in the next 12 months?



● Academic Medical Center

● Hospital/Health System

● Physician Group/Clinical/Practice Setting

● Ambulatory/Outpatient

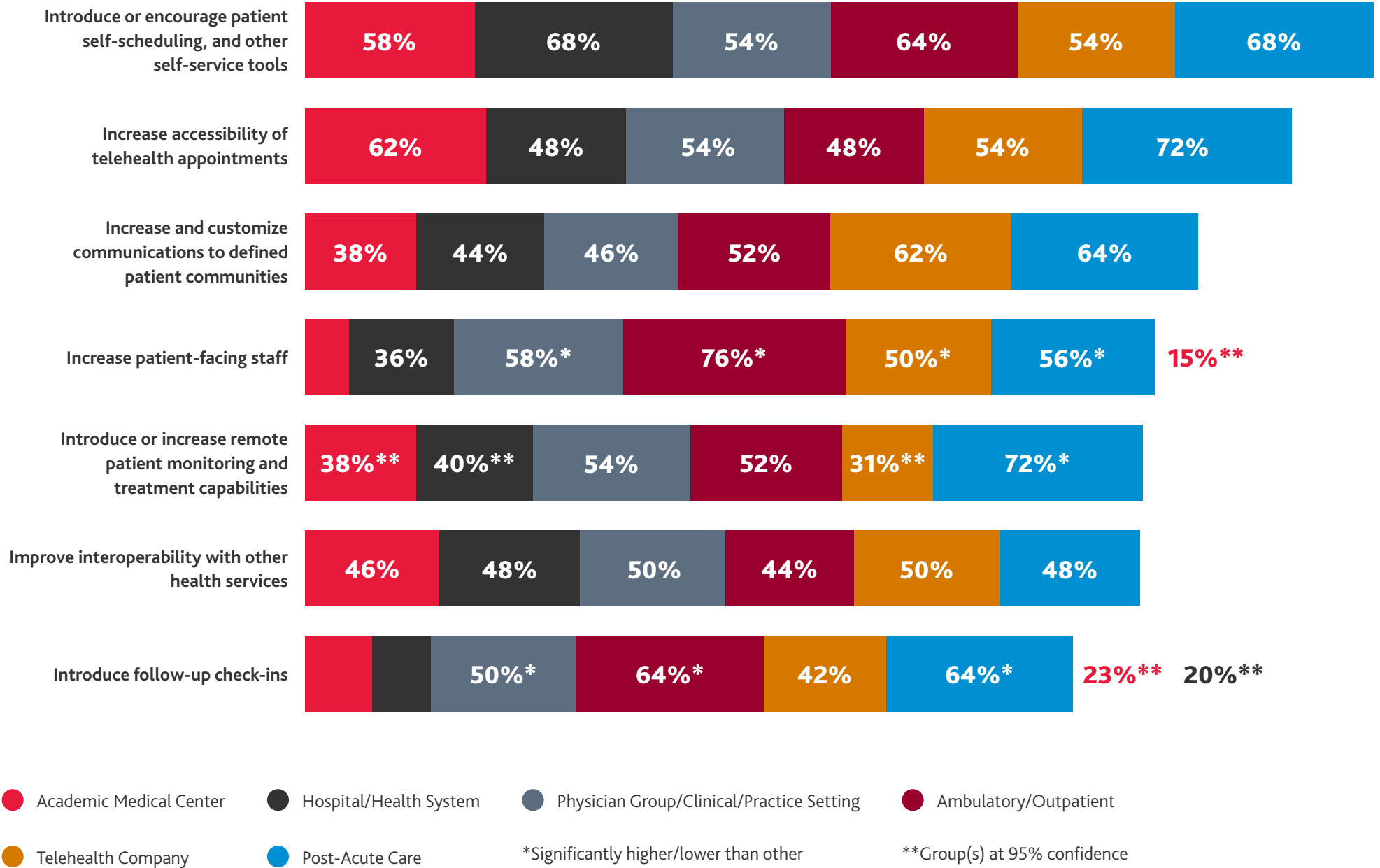
● Telehealth Company

● Post-Acute Care

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**Group(s) at 95% confidence

How does your organization plan to increase patient engagement in the next 12 months?



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