

CARE DEFICIT ASSESSMENT SERIES

With the assistance of the Joint Physician Advocacy Committee, the AMA is releasing a series of issue papers relating to different aspects of the COVID-19 care deficit. These talking points are for you in case of conversations with patients or others.

ISSUE 2 WOMEN'S HEALTH – PHYSICIAN TALKING POINTS

Women's health has been significantly impacted by pandemic-related delays in care, in both community and hospital settings. If you are asked about this topic or if you wish to discuss it with others, here are some talking points. There is more detail available if you need it in the [Issue 2 Executive Summary](#) or [Issue 2 full-length paper](#).

In the community:

- COVID-19 public health protections reduced how many patients could be seen in-office, resulting in longer wait times for both initial referrals and follow-up. Pressures on primary care mean some patients arrive without being assessed, examined or given medications prior to OBG visit.
- Non-pregnancy gynecology issues and reproductive health care have often been delayed, allowing issues to become more serious.
- The lack of previously available obstetrical services in smaller communities means patients are now driving to larger centres for labor and delivery.
- Because of COVID health protections, postpartum visits were often virtual, which made it harder to diagnose postpartum depression and left new mothers isolated and unsupported.

In hospital settings:

- There have been significant delays in scheduled surgeries for non-obstetrical issues due to OR capacity issues.
- Some of these surgeries are investigative and delays mean that reproductive cancers are not being diagnosed and treated as quickly.
- Obstetricians and other health care workers are experiencing emotional and physical burnout, which often means there is little energy left for compassionate care.

Other issues

- Many transgender patients, already underserved, have been further isolated and have struggled to access the gender-affirming care they need
- The numerous roles that women play have made them more susceptible to disadvantage impacting their physical, mental and emotional health.
- Despite some limitations and challenges, some OBGYNs note that their practices would not have survived and the care deficit would have been significantly worse without the availability of virtual care.

Solutions

- Patient access remains one of the biggest challenges impacting women's health. Although access may improve as COVID wanes, it will require time and additional resources to catch up on delayed care.
- Physicians need support to reduce backlogs and improve processes.
 - Improved centralized decision-making about best use of local hospital resources.
 - Improved communication with physicians, especially around the decision to cancel surgeries.
 - Strategies to recruit and retain OBGYNs, other specialties such as anesthesiologists and family physicians
- Physicians want to provide insight and expertise to improve efficiencies and better utilize existing resources.
- It will take all of us, working together to recover from the care deficit.