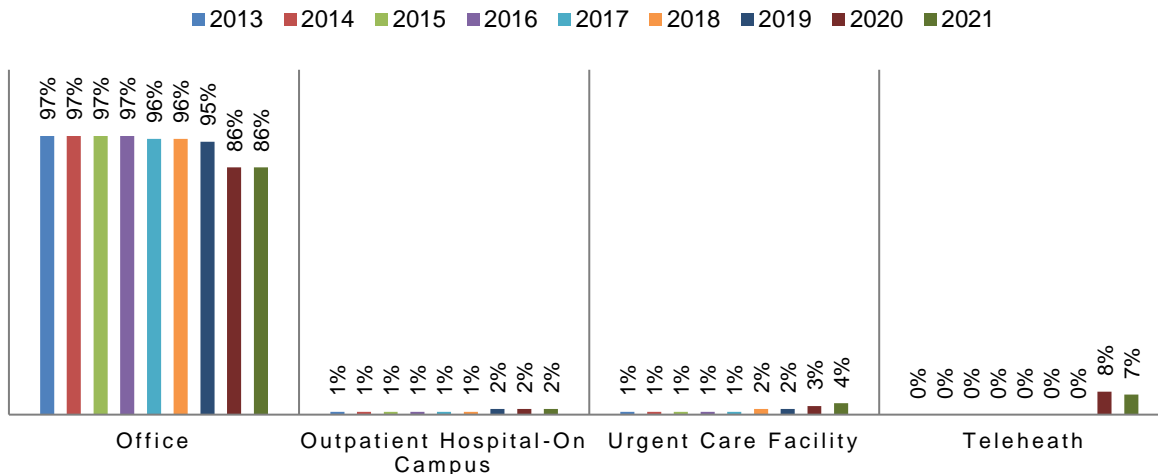


The Changing Nature of Primary Care Visits

Through the provision of workplace health benefits, employers not only attract high-quality employees, but also play a role in facilitating primary care use. Coverage of primary care through employment-based health plans helps employees stay healthy and can reduce the risk of serious health problems that can lead to high health care costs and lost productivity. A recent Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) [report](#) found that the nature of primary care office visits has been changing in recent years.

Among users of primary care, 95–97 percent utilized it in an office setting prior to 2020, but only 86 percent did so from 2020–2021 as employees began using telemedicine (7–8 percent) and urgent care clinics (3–4 percent) with greater frequency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

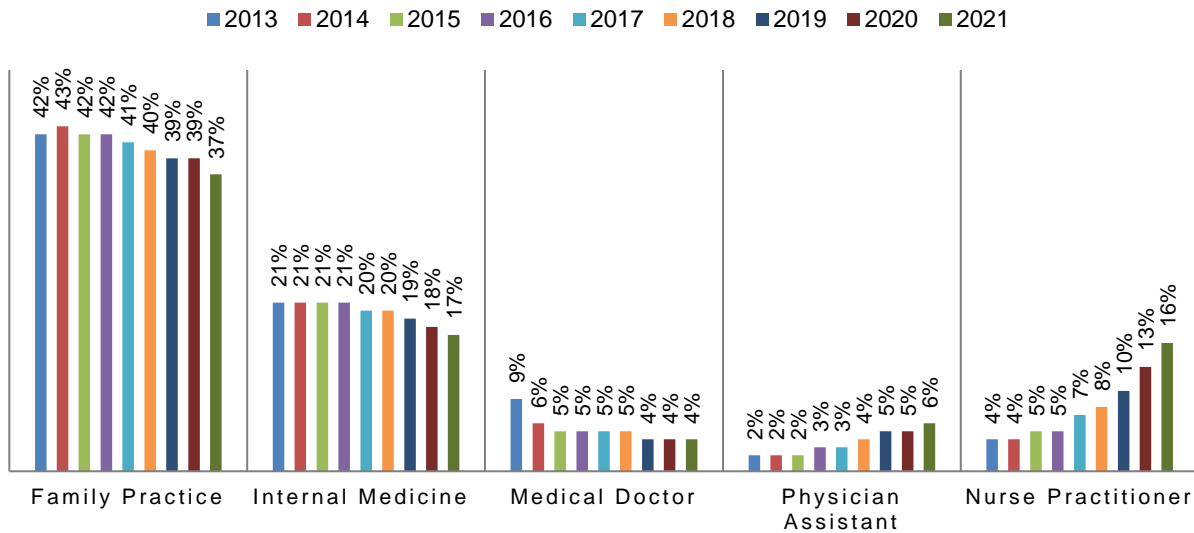
Figure 1
Most Common Place of Service for a Primary Care Visit, 2013–2021



Source: Employee Benefit Research Institute estimates based on administrative enrollment and claims data.

There has been a consistent downward trend in the share of employees whose primary care office visits are at a general/family practice, falling from 42 percent in 2013 to 37 percent in 2021. In addition, primary care office visits at internal medicine providers have fallen from 21 percent in 2013 to 17 percent in 2021. Finally, provision of primary care by a medical doctor has fallen from 9 percent in 2013 to 4 percent in 2021. In contrast, primary care provision by nurse practitioners and physician assistants has risen over time. The share of employees whose primary care office visits have been with a physician assistant rose from 2 percent in 2013 to 6 percent in 2021. The corresponding change for nurse practitioners has been from 4 percent in 2013 to 16 percent in 2021.

Figure 2
Provider Types for a Primary Care Office Visit, 2013–2021



Source: Employee Benefit Research Institute estimates based on administrative enrollment and claims data.

About EBRI: The Employee Benefit Research Institute is a private, nonpartisan, and nonprofit research institute based in Washington, D.C., that focuses on health, savings, retirement, and economic security issues. EBRI does not lobby and does not take policy positions. The work of EBRI is made possible by funding from its members and sponsors, which include a broad range of public and private organizations. For more information, visit www.ebri.org.

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