

January 22, 2021

Survey Results: Mental Health Therapists on the Increase in Demand for Outpatient Psychiatric Services at Kaiser Permanente Facilities in California

Survey Summary:

In November and December of 2020, the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) administered an electronic survey to NUHW members throughout California who are employed by Kaiser Permanente as therapists (Psychologists, LCSWs, LMFTs, LPCCs, among others). The survey focused on measuring the change in demand for mental health and social services during the pandemic as well as understanding the impact the pandemic is having on the delivery of behavioral health and social services, including workload issues for NUHW members. This summary encapsulates over 2,000 therapist responses from the nation's largest nonprofit HMO.

Survey Highlights:

- 92% of the respondents state that, during 2020, the acuity levels of their patients increased, with 61% reporting that acuity levels significantly increased during 2020.
- 87% of therapists report that weekly individual psychotherapy appointments are unavailable for patients who need it.
- 79% of the respondents indicate that patients' wait times for individual return appointments in their clinic have grown worse during the past 12 months with nearly 50% reporting they have increased significantly.
- 65% of respondents report that on a daily basis, they must schedule their patients' return appointments further into the future than is clinically appropriate.
- 70% of therapists state that their clinic or worksite has eliminated or curtailed therapy groups that have been helpful to patients. In addition, of the group therapy and classes that still exist, 72% report that patients are being placed on waitlists due to the inadequate availability of these services.
- 87% of the respondents state that, during 2020, their workload increased and of this total, 63% report that their workload increased significantly.
- 55% of the respondents indicate that during the past six months they've considered leaving Kaiser. In several locations, responses indicate that as many as 75% report

that they have considered leaving Kaiser in the past six months.

- 80% report that their clinic departments are understaffed with not enough staff available to provide appropriate and timely care to patients.
- 34% report an increase in the frequency of negative patient outcomes, in particular suicides or overdoses, since the start of the pandemic.

These findings indicate that Kaiser's capacity to deliver clinically appropriate care to its enrollees, already severely compromised before the pandemic, has deteriorated substantially even as enrollees' demand for mental health services has increased. Furthermore, the problems are systemic and enduring in that they are not limited to particular subregions of the state and the under-staffing of Kaiser's mental health clinics has persisted over years. Finally, the survey indicates widespread dissatisfaction among its clinician staff, with 55% reporting they have considered leaving Kaiser during the past six months.

Survey Notes:

Instrument & Methodology: The survey was distributed electronically via Qualtrics to each Kaiser therapist for whom NUHW has a valid personal email. Each therapist who received the survey obtained a unique link for completion which allowed for follow-up tracking on completions. Individual responses are confidential and responses are only reported in aggregate form.

The majority of the questions were presented in multiple choice form. Because of the regional nature in which Kaiser's services are delivered, a small portion of survey questions differed depending on a therapist's work region (Northern vs. Southern California). In addition, a subset of questions were tailored specifically to therapists who provide psychotherapy to children, adults and families in a Kaiser Psychiatry Department.

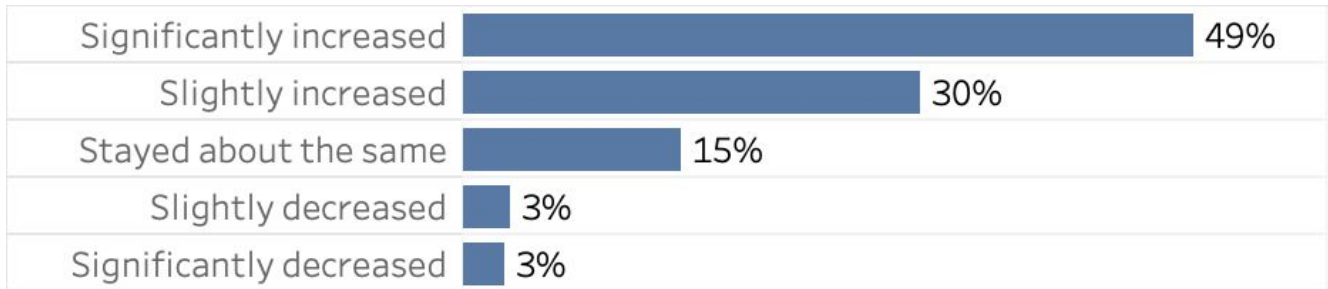
Survey Data: The survey was sent to 3,496 Kaiser clinicians. Responses were received from 2,097 mental health providers practicing across Kaiser Permanente's various facilities in Northern and Southern California.

For Southern California, a total of 901 survey responses were received out of 1,642 surveys distributed representing a 54.8% response rate.

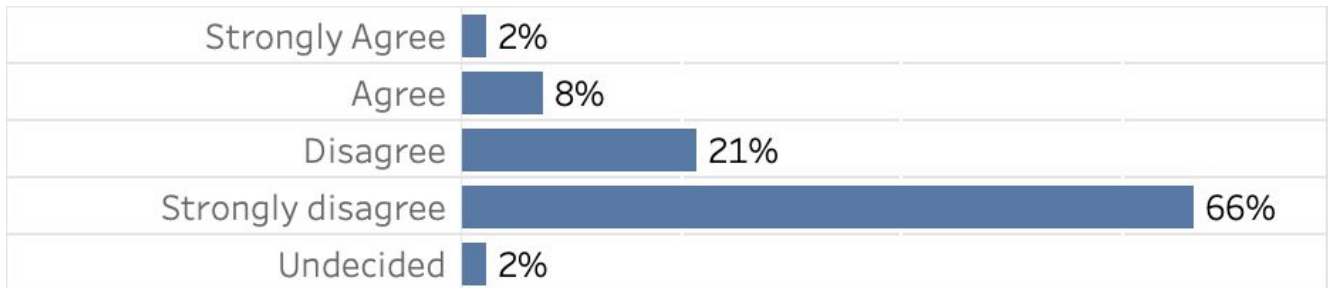
For Northern California, a total of 1,196 survey responses were received out of 1,854 surveys distributed representing a 64.5% response rate.

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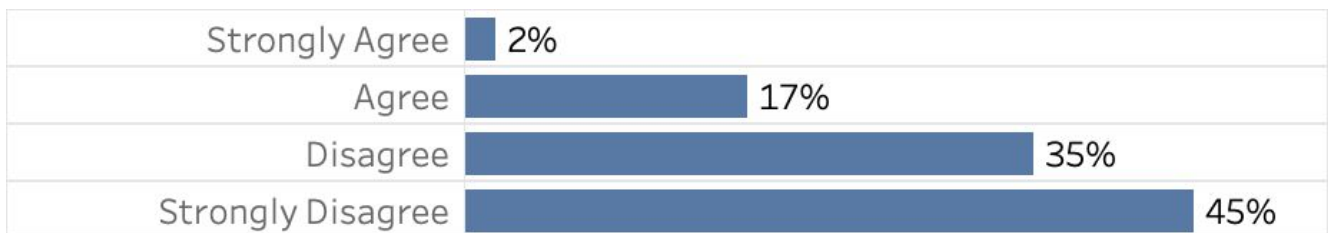
On average, to what extent have wait times for individual return appointments for your patients increased or decreased over the last 12 months?



Weekly individual psychotherapy appointments at your clinic or worksite are available to those who need it:



There are usually enough staff in my department to provide appropriate and timely care to patients.



Note: Data for above charts reflect combined response numbers from both Northern and Southern California.