

24 hours in Ontario's Healthcare System: The Ecology of Healthcare Services in Ontario

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Context/Approach

To guide improvements in healthcare services and the policies which support them, an understanding of where people receive care is needed.

All Ontario residents receive universal healthcare, which includes physician care, emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations.

Family physicians provide the vast majority of physician-based primary care in Canada.

Our objective was to examine the average number of health care services accessed in Ontario in a 24-hour period.

Study Design

This cohort study used linked health administrative data and standardized measures of health care utilization. The population studies included all Ontario residents.

Included services:

- family physician visits
- specialist visits
- ED visits
- hospitalizations
- X-rays
- CT/MRI Scans
- hip and knee replacements
- chronic health conditions

Average number (per 24-hour period) of select weekday/weekend healthcare visits for Ontario residents from March 1, 2019-February 29, 2020.

Family physician visits excluded ED visits and inpatient visits and included nursing home and home visits.

Key Message

Family physicians are by far the most frequently accessed service in Ontario's healthcare system, putting them at the centre of patient care and making them integral to population health outcomes and coordination with other services.

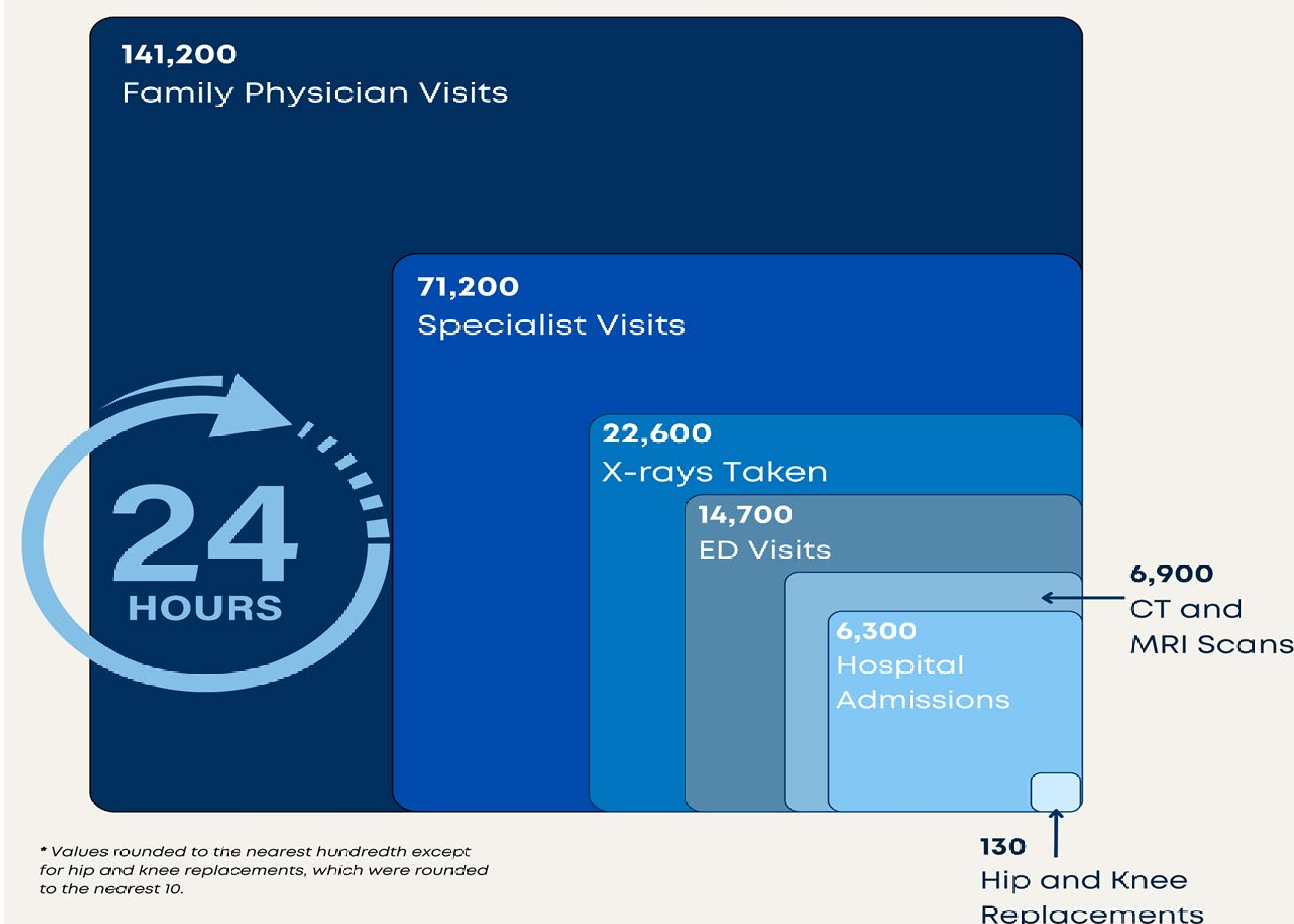
Given the population of Ontario has increased over 20 years, the relative decline in primary services per population warrants further exploration.

Average number of health care services accessed in 24 hours – by age and urban/rural residency

	All Patients N=14,708,903	Age ≤64 N=12,257,830	Age ≥65 N=2,451,073
Hospital admissions	6,300	3,800	2,500
Inpatient hospitalizations	2,600	1,700	1,000
Same day surgeries	3,600	2,100	1,500
ED-only visits	14,700	11,800	2,800
Physician visits			
Family physician visits	141,200	103,800	37,500
Specialist visits	71,200	48,400	22,800
Diagnostic and surgical procedures			
X-ray	22,600	14,300	8,300
CT and MRI scans	6,900	4,200	2,800
Total hip and knee replacements	130	50	80

	Urban N=10,736,248	Suburban N=2,771,802	Rural N=1,020,958
Hospital admissions	4,100	1,500	600
Inpatient hospitalizations	1,800	600	200
Same day surgeries	2,300	900	400
ED-only visits	8,900	3,500	1,900
Physician visits			
Family physician visits	108,700	23,800	7,400
Specialist visits	54,100	12,800	3,800
Diagnostic and surgical procedures			
X-ray	15,800	4,700	1,800
CT and MRI scans	4,800	1,500	600
Total hip and knee replacements	80	30	10

Average Number* of Health Care Services Accessed in a 24-hour Period in Ontario 2019-2020



Interpretation

- 66.5% of physician visits are with a family physician
- Compared to 2002/03, family physician visits increased 3.1% and specialist physician visits increased 31.9%
- In 2002/03 there were 1.13% family physician visits/population, compared with 0.97% family physician visits/population in 2019/20. This represents a 14.1% decline.
- 26.6% of family physician visits, 32.0% of specialist physician visits and 19.0% of ED visits are made by people aged 65 years and older
- There are 10x more family physician visits than ED visits
- 5.2% of people in rural areas had a family physician visit and 12.9% had an ED visit
- Compared to 2002/03, CT/MRI scans have tripled and hospital admissions have doubled

Conclusions

Family physicians provide by far the largest number of services to Ontario residents but growth in those services has been much smaller than in other sectors. Attention to lagging provision of family physician services is needed to sustain a high functioning health care system.