

The Next Chapter: From Alternative to Essential

■ Steve Sellars

As I continue to meet with operators, clinicians, policy-makers, employers, and healthcare leaders, I continue to hear many of the same challenges: reimbursement challenges, rising healthcare costs, workforce shortages, limited access to primary care, and growing pressure on emergency departments.

At the same time, I'm hearing something else: growing recognition of the important role Urgent Care plays in addressing these challenges. For years, Urgent Care was often viewed as an alternative, a convenient option when patients couldn't get in to see their physician or wanted to avoid a trip to the emergency department. Access, convenience, and efficiency fueled our growth and helped establish Urgent Care as a trusted care setting in communities across the country.

Essential Access Point

Today, however, our role is evolving. Healthcare is changing, and Urgent Care is becoming an increasingly important part of the solution. Every day, clinicians working in Urgent Care centers provide timely, high-quality care for more than half a million patients. We help improve access, reduce unnecessary emergency department utilization, support employers, and provide care when and where patients need it most. In many communities, Urgent Care has become an essential healthcare access point.

With that opportunity comes responsibility. Being viewed as an essential part of healthcare requires more than growth. It requires leadership. It requires a commitment to quality, advocacy, collaboration, and continuous improvement. It requires us to demonstrate the value we provide and ensure that policymakers, employers, payers, and patients understand the important role Urgent Care plays within the healthcare system.



Steve Sellars is Chief Executive Officer of the Urgent Care Association.

That work is happening today. This month, clinical and executive leaders from across the country will gather in Washington, D.C., for The Assembly. It's an invitation-only annual event that unites the Urgent Care Association (UCA) and the College of Urgent Care Medicine's key groups to discuss trends and advance new strategies. Bringing together influential leaders from across our industry, The Assembly reflects the growing recognition that Urgent Care must help shape the conversations that influence healthcare policy, reimbursement, access, and delivery.

At the same time, UCA continues to engage policy-makers, employer coalitions, and other healthcare stakeholders to advance awareness of the value Urgent Care delivers every day. Those conversations are important because decisions made outside our centers increasingly affect what happens inside them. The future of Urgent Care will not be shaped by any one organization or individual. It will be shaped by clinicians, operators, and leaders who choose to engage, share their expertise, contribute their perspectives, and help define what comes next.

I believe we are entering one of the most important periods in our field's history. For years, Urgent Care worked to establish itself as a trusted alternative within healthcare. Today, we have an opportunity to establish Urgent Care as an essential component of everyday healthcare.

Shaping the Future

The next chapter will be defined by how effectively we work together to strengthen our voice, demonstrate our value, and lead the conversations shaping the future of healthcare. The opportunity before us is significant. Healthcare needs innovative, accessible, and affordable solutions, and Urgent Care is uniquely positioned to help meet that need.

I am optimistic about where our field is headed, and I believe our greatest contributions are still ahead of us. ■