



# Proof: Availability of Urgent Care Lowers ED Traffic—and Could Save Up to \$1 Billion

It has always seemed self-evident that urgent care centers, offering a lower-cost and usually faster experience that is also on par clinically for nonemergent complaints, should help draw patients away from overcrowded emergency rooms. Just as obviously, that would mean more efficient use of the ED for patients who truly need to be there, and less of a financial burden on the healthcare system.

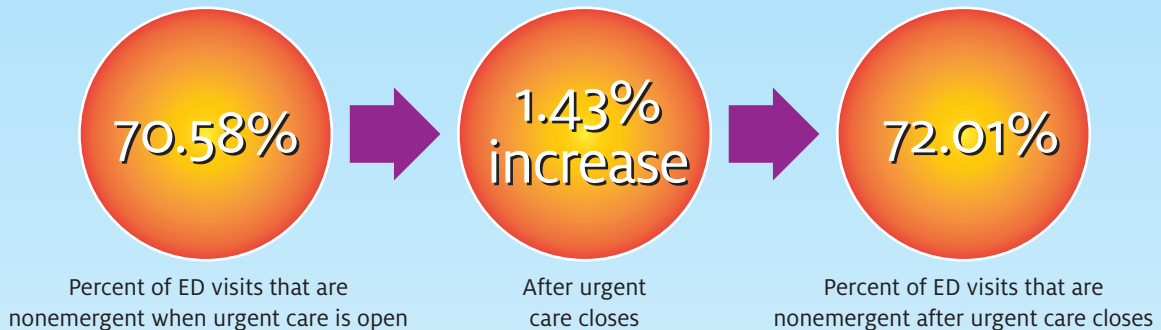
One problem has been a lack of conclusive data to back up those contentions. Until now.

A new study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, reflecting roughly 2.4 million visits, shows that nonemergent use of the ED goes up when local urgent care centers are closed. In other words, more patients choose urgent care for nonemergent complaints when that's an option.

With a trip to the ED costing \$414 more than a trip to the urgent care center for the same complaint, on average, the difference in the cost of care is dramatic. See the graphic below for a glimpse of the full effect. ■

### URGENT CARE REDUCES NONEMERGENT ED VISITS—AND SPENDING

When urgent care centers close, nonemergent trips to the ED go up...



...and so does the cost

2.4 million ED visits x \$414 higher cost/visit vs urgent care = \$993.6 million in higher cost when urgent care is closed

Source: Allen L, Cummings JR, Hockenberry J. Urgent care centers and the demand for non-emergent emergency department visits. National Bureau of Economic Research. January 2019.