

# How Hard is it for Alaska's Medicare Patients to Find Family Doctors?

Prepared for  
Alaska Health Care Commission Meeting

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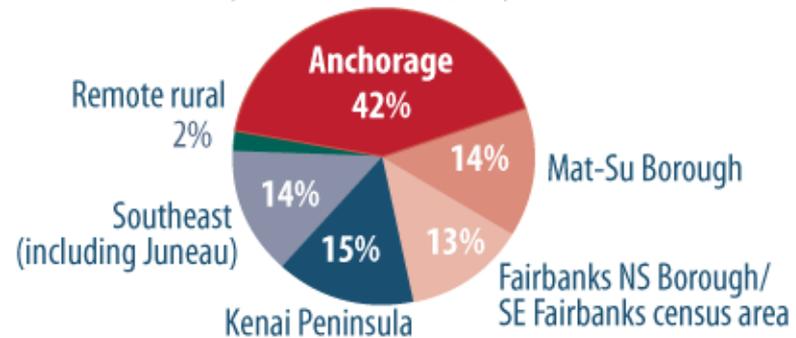
# Alaskans 65 and Older

## Non-Native Alaskans 65 and Older



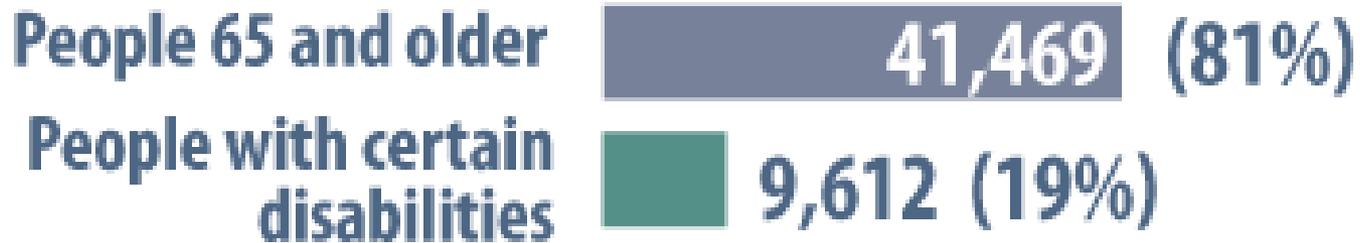
## Where Do Non-Native Alaskans Over 65 Live?

(2006 Estimate: 38,227)



# Medicare In Alaska

## Alaska Medicare Enrollment, 2005



# Who Did We Interview?

## How Many Primary-Care Doctors Are Available to See Medicare Patients ?

(Among Alaska Doctors Practicing General, Family, or Internal Medicine at Least 20 Hours per Week)

**709**  **Total licensed primary-care doctors in Alaska, 2006**

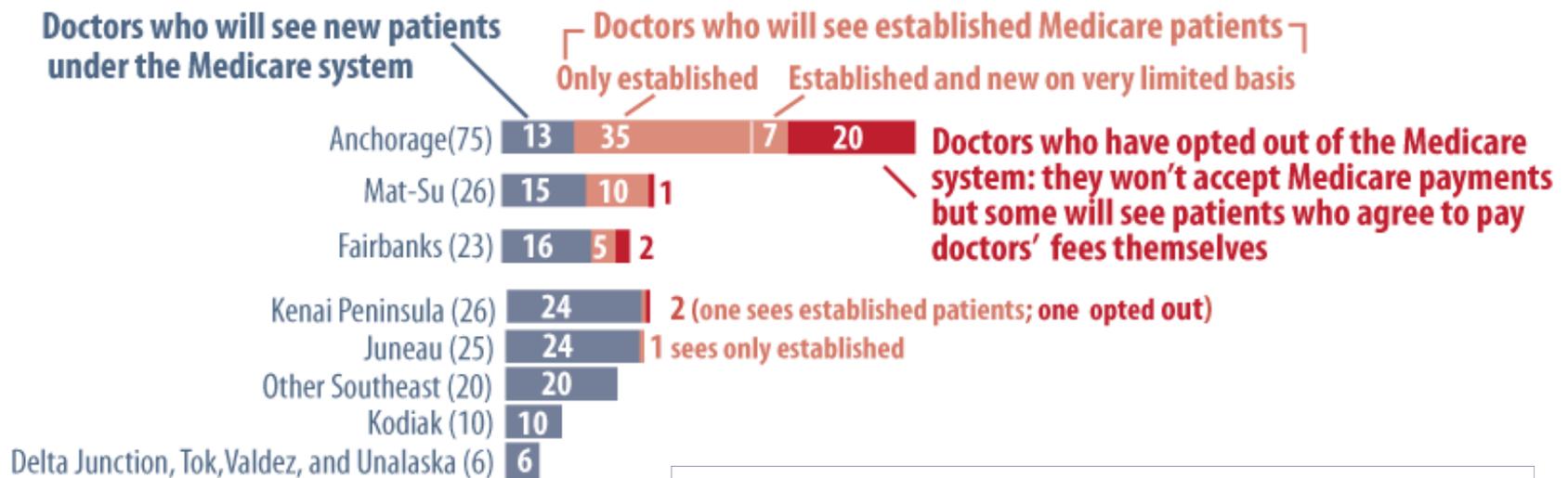
**264**  **Estimated number who could see Medicare patients.**

**229**  **Number we interviewed**  
Excludes 8 doctors unavailable during survey and 27 who declined interview.



# What the Doctors Told Us

## Medicare Policies of Primary-Care Doctors We Surveyed



### Where Are Anchorage Doctors Who Take New Medicare?



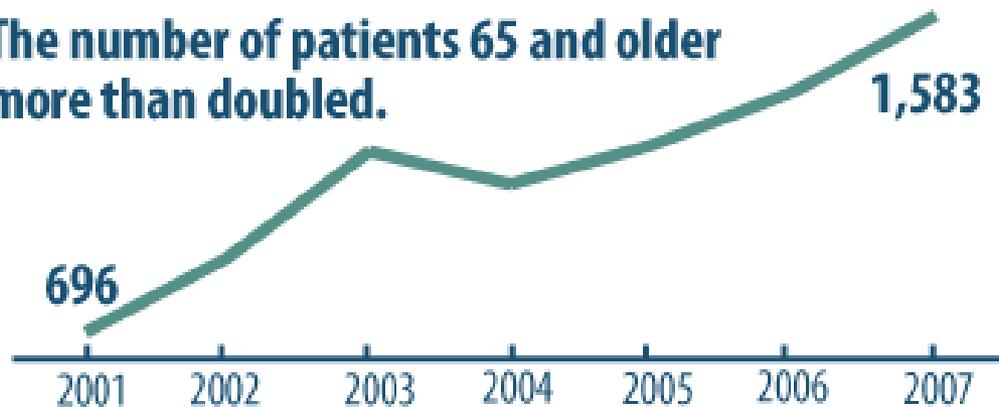
# Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center

## Growth in Number of Patients 65 and Older at Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center, 2001-2007

Patients over 65 jumped from 6% to nearly 14% of all patients who came to the clinic.

2001	6%
2007	13.5%

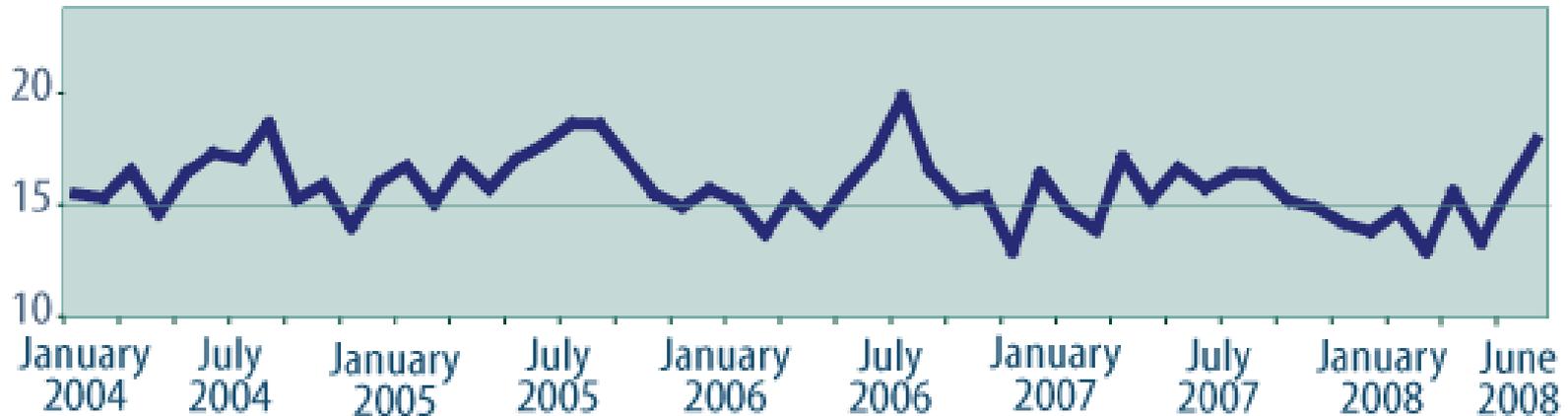
The number of patients 65 and older more than doubled.



# Providence Hospital

## Visits to Providence Hospital's Emergency Room in Anchorage, Patients 65 and Older, 2004 to 2008

Visits per 1,000 Residents 65 and Older



# Why Are Doctors Seeing Fewer Medicare Patients?

## Top Reason

- Inadequate Reimbursement

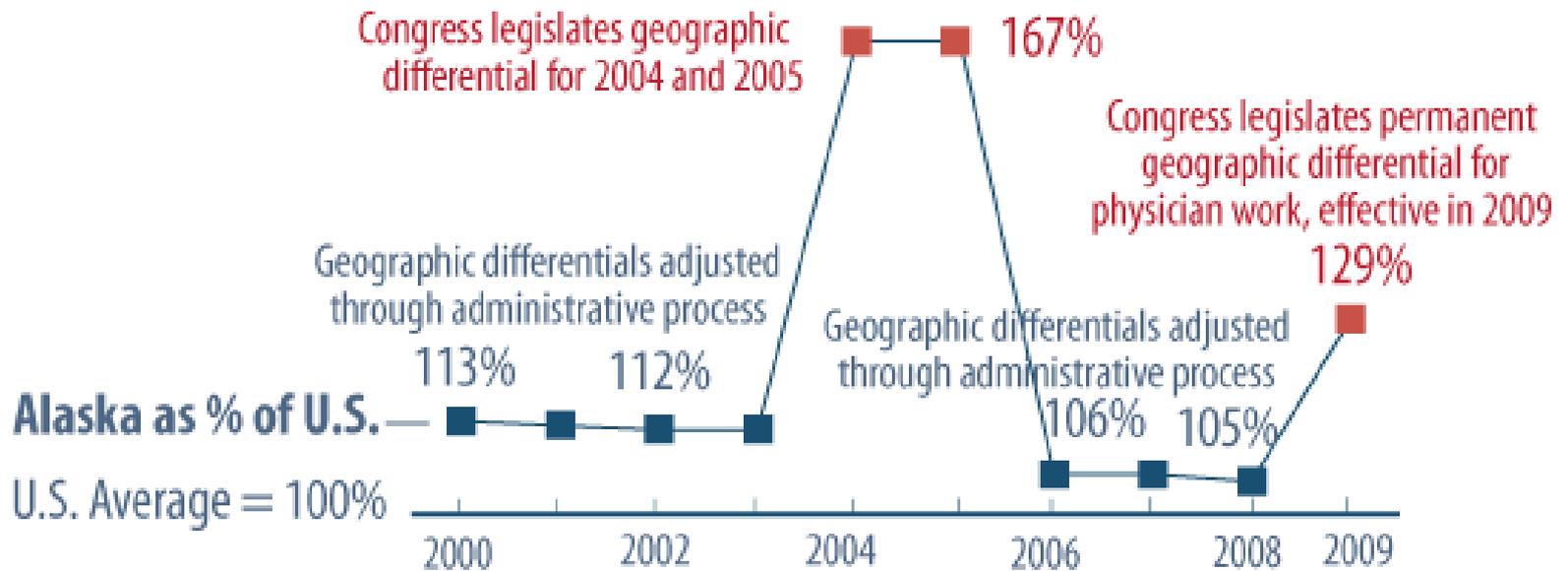
## Other Reasons

- Billing Requirements
- Practice Already Has Enough Patients
- Medicare Patients Have a High Clinical Burden
- Concern About Medicare Audit



# Medicare Cost Differential for Alaska

## Medicare Geographic Cost Differential for Alaska Doctors



# Comparison of Medicare and Private Insurance Payments

**Medicare and Private Insurance Payments To Primary-Care Doctors, Anchorage and U.S. Average, 2005 and 2009**  
(New Patient, 30-Minute Visit)



# Comparison of Payments to Private Doctors and the Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center

## Medicare and Patient Payments to Private Doctors and Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center, 2009

### New Patients



30-minute visit

Doctor **\$94.90** ■ \$23.72 ■ = \$118.62

ANHC **\$119.28** ■ \$39.60 ■ = \$158.88

1-hour visit

Doctor **\$189.56** ■ \$47.39 ■ = \$236.95

ANHC **\$119.28** ■ \$76.20 ■ = \$195.48

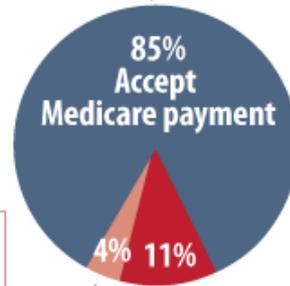


# How Doctors Get Paid

## How Do Alaska Primary-Care Doctors Who See Medicare Patients Deal with the System?

(Among 211 Surveyed Who See New or Established Patients)

Most doctors accept standard Medicare fees and bill Medicare. They are called “participating.”



A few doctors (called non-participating) can charge up to 9% more than the allowable Medicare charge. But Medicare pays less and patients pay more.

Some doctors don't accept Medicare payments for their fees. They are said to have “opted out.”

### Example: How Much Would Patients Pay for a Service with an Allowable Medicare Charge of \$100?

	Participating Doctors Charge \$100	Non-Participating Doctors Can Charge \$109.25	Doctors Who Have Opted Out Can Set Their Own Fees
Medicare pays	\$80	\$76	\$0
Patient pays	\$20	\$33.25	Entire doctor's fee



The authors thank the doctors and others in health care who took the time to help us.

This research summary and back-up materials for figures in this summary as well as a basic model that can be used to estimate how changing the balance between patients paying with Medicare and with private insurance could affect doctors' revenues are available from ISER.

Go to ISER's Web site:  
**[www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu](http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu)**  
907-786-7710

