

Free Clinics: Results from a Nationwide Survey

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The University of Chicago

What are Free Clinics?

- Free clinics are:
 - private, nonprofit organizations providing health care services to uninsured individuals,
 - staffed principally by volunteer physicians and other volunteer health professionals,
 - deliver medical, dental, and/or mental health services,
 - located in permanent stand-alone facilities, mobile units, or housed in borrowed spaces, and
 - charge no fees or nominal fees for services.

Why Should We Care?

- Free clinics have been part of the health care landscape for 40+ years
- Free clinics serve some of the most vulnerable populations, who are at greatest risk for poor health outcomes
- We know very little about the organizations that deliver health care to the uninsured

Source: Taylor 2004

Why Should We Care? (continued)

- Alternate sources of ambulatory care for the uninsured are declining
 - Physician charity care
 - Public health agencies delivering primary care
- Increasing recognition of free clinics
 - Eligible to receive malpractice coverage through the Federal Tort Claims Act
 - Receive state appropriations
- Universal coverage is unlikely

Sources: Cunningham & Kemper 1998; IOM 2000

What Do We Know about Free Clinics?

- Numerous personal accounts
- One study describes free clinics in 7 states
- One national study of <300 free clinics
 - Used single source to identify clinics
 - Various kinds of clinics studied
- One study of physician volunteerism
 - Combined 2 different models: free clinics and provider networks
- No national study of **all** free clinics since late 1960s

Sources: Geller et al. 2004; Isaacs and Jellinek 2007; Nadkarni & Philbrick 2005; Schwartz 1971

What Do We Know about Free Clinics?

- Generally ignored by health services researchers studying the healthcare safety net
- Few studies examining safety net that DO include free clinics are flawed or limited:
 - Rely on incomplete data
 - Apply an inadequate definition
 - Use a qualitative design, limiting the generalizability of the findings

Sources: Epstein 2001; Hadley & Cunningham 2004; Long et al. 2003; Felt-Lisk et al. 2002; Jacobson et al. 2003

Study Design

Research Questions

- How many free clinics exist?
- Where are they located?
- What do they do?

- Why does the number of free clinics vary from community to community?

Study Population

- **ALL** private, nonprofit free clinics:
 - *Direct* providers of medical, dental, mental health and/or pharmacy services
 - Staffed by paid staff and/or volunteers
 - Charge no fee or nominal fee
 - Housed in permanent building, temporary accommodations or mobile unit
 - *Seek* to serve mostly (or only) uninsured persons
 - May or may not bill insurers

Study Population (*continued*)

- Excluded:
 - Clinics that EXPECT payment:
 - At the time of service – Deny care / Reschedule appointment
 - Subsequent to the visit - Bill patient
 - Clinics that are *directly* supported by federal programs:
 - Federally qualified health centers and “look-alikes” (FQHCs/FQHC-LAs)
 - Rural health clinics (RHCs)
 - Title X family planning providers

Survey Instrument

- 12-page mail survey developed with substantial input from > 50 free clinic experts and practitioners
- Pre-tested survey with 23 clinics representing all clinic types in 9 states
- Explored:
 - Clinic operations
 - Patients
 - Services
 - Staff & Volunteers
 - Future plans

Free Clinics: A Nationwide Survey

This study is the first national effort in 35 years to describe all free clinics, the patients you treat, the services you provide, and the staff and volunteers who make it all possible.



This survey is sponsored by:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
with supplemental support from:
The California Endowment
Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

Return this questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope to:
School of Social Service Administration
The University of Chicago
969 E. 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
Attention: Julie Darnell

Questions?
Contact Julie Darnell at 773-263-0533 or j-darnell@uchicago.edu

Sources Used to Develop Sampling Frame

- Member lists:
 - National Association of Free Clinics
 - Volunteers in Health Care
 - All state/regional free clinic associations
- Directories:
 - Free Clinic Foundation of America
 - Medical/Dental Ministry: A Directory of North American sites
 - Compiled by M. Hiller for congressional study
 - Medical Student-Run Clinics of America

Sources Used to Develop Sampling Frame

- Guidestar, a database of all IRS-recognized nonprofit org.
- Internet
- Survey
- State primary care associations
- Area Health Education Centers (AHECs)
- Medical schools
- State medical societies

Methods

- Contacts:
 - 1. FedEx letter
 - 2. Reminder postcard
 - 3. Email/fax (if available)
 - 4. Replacement survey
 - 5. Letter with incentive (pen with inscription: “*If you’ve seen one free clinic, you’ve seen one free clinic*”)
 - 6. Phone call

Response Rate

- Survey Administration
 - October 2005 – December 2006
- 1,188 surveys mailed
 - 944 surveys returned
 - 1,007 clinics determined eligible
 - 181 clinics (17%) determined ineligible
 - **764** surveys returned from eligible clinics
- Overall response rate: **76%**

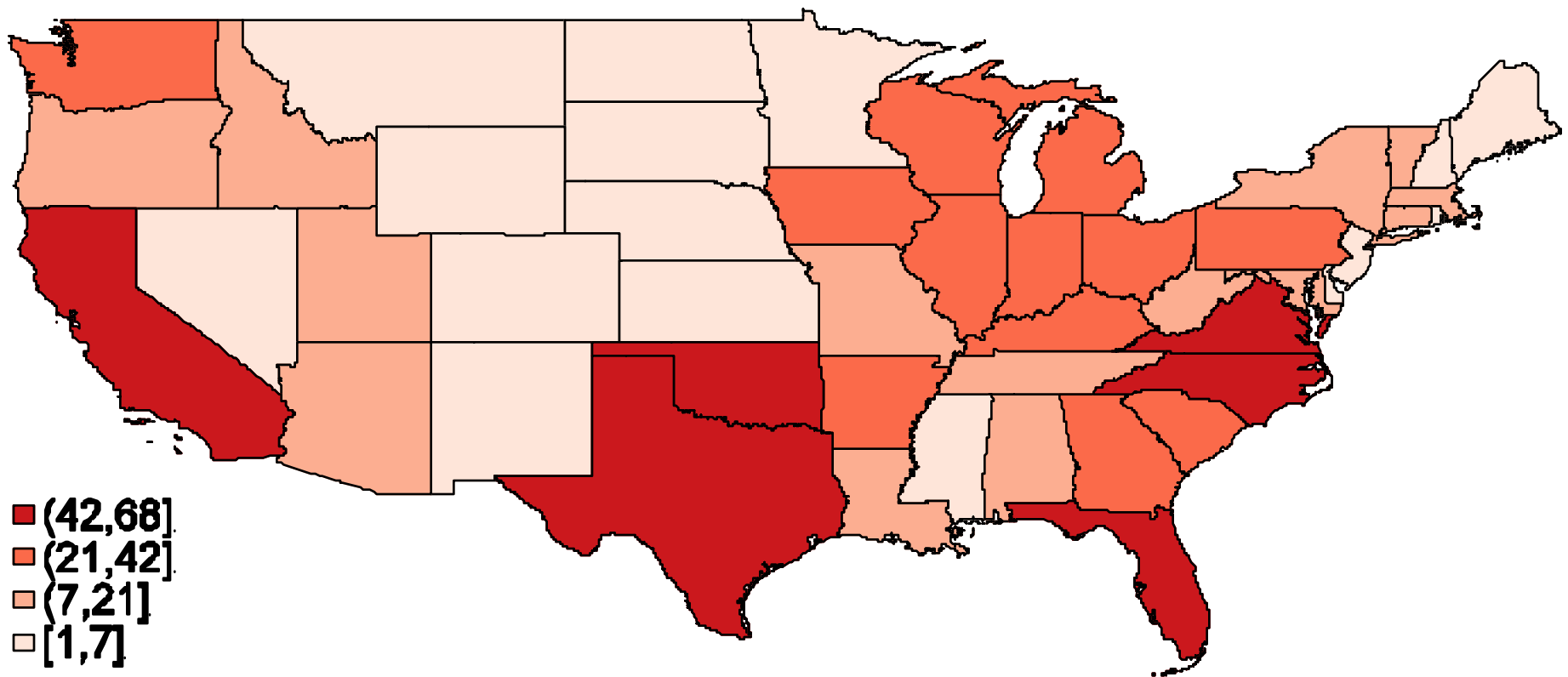
Nonrespondent Analysis

Logistic Regression of Nonresponse (n=909)

Variable	Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval
Region 1: West	1.5	.91, 2.48
Region 3: Northeast	.92	.50, 1.69
Region 4: South	1.41	.94, 2.10
Urban population size >165,740 to <=750,963	.87	.54, 1.40
Urban population size 750,963 to <= 2,552,994	1.13	.72, 1.78
Urban population size >2,552,994	1.38	.88, 2.16
Founding year of clinic	.99	.98, 1.01

Notes: Reference group for region is Midwest and reference group for urban population size is first quartile, with 165,750 or fewer residents.

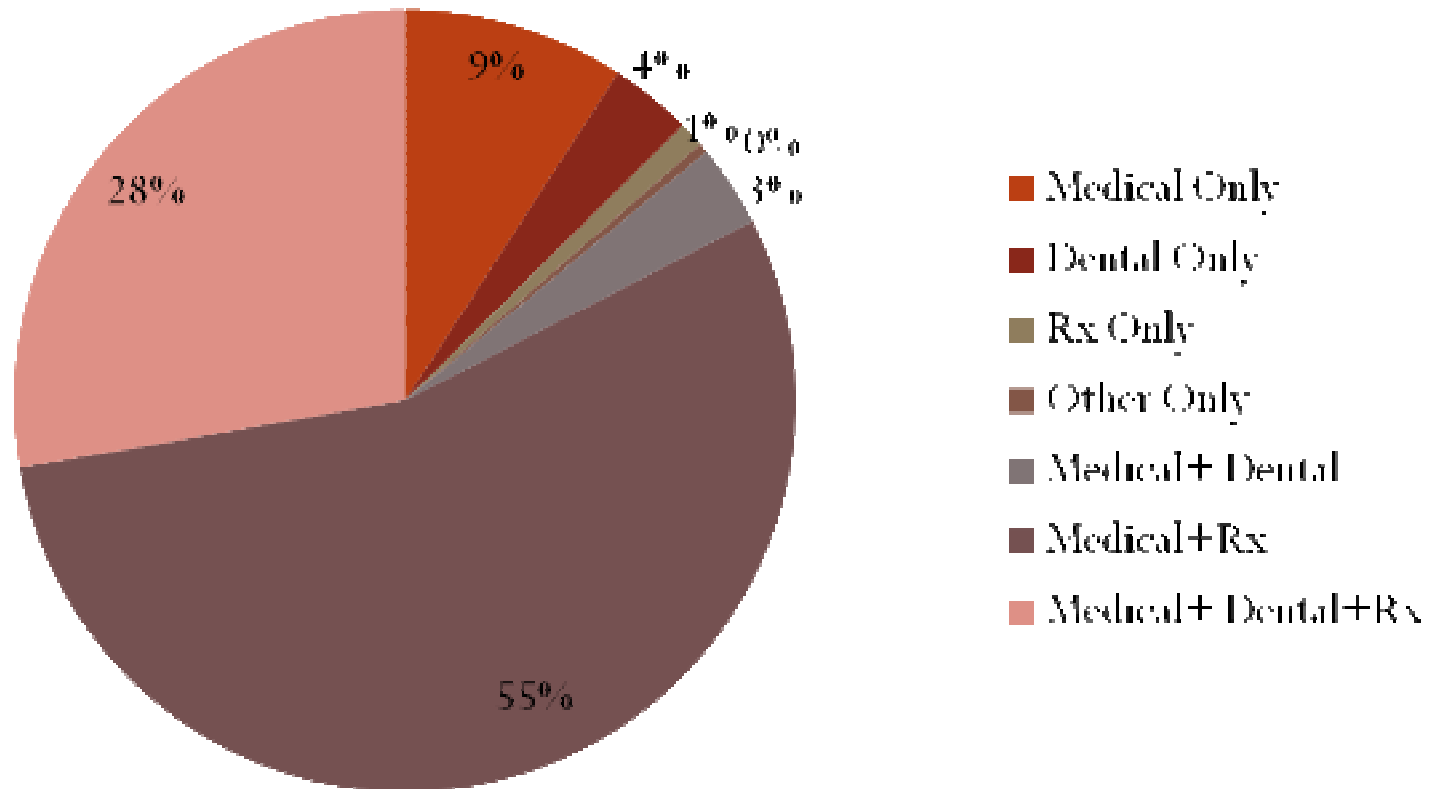
Number of Free Clinics by State



Note: Number of free clinics reflects clinics verified in 2004 - 2006.

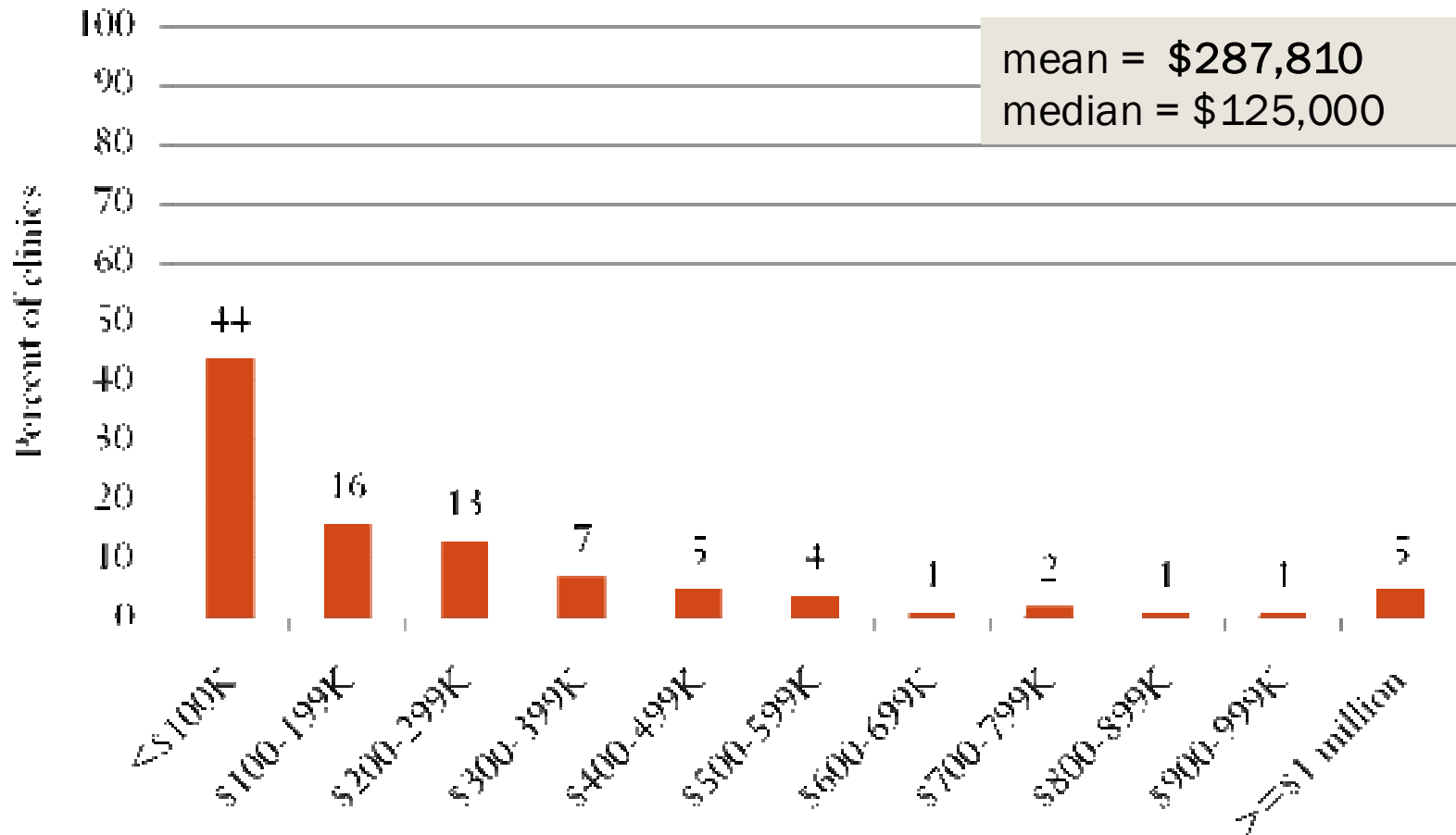
Results: Clinic Characteristics

Types of Clinics



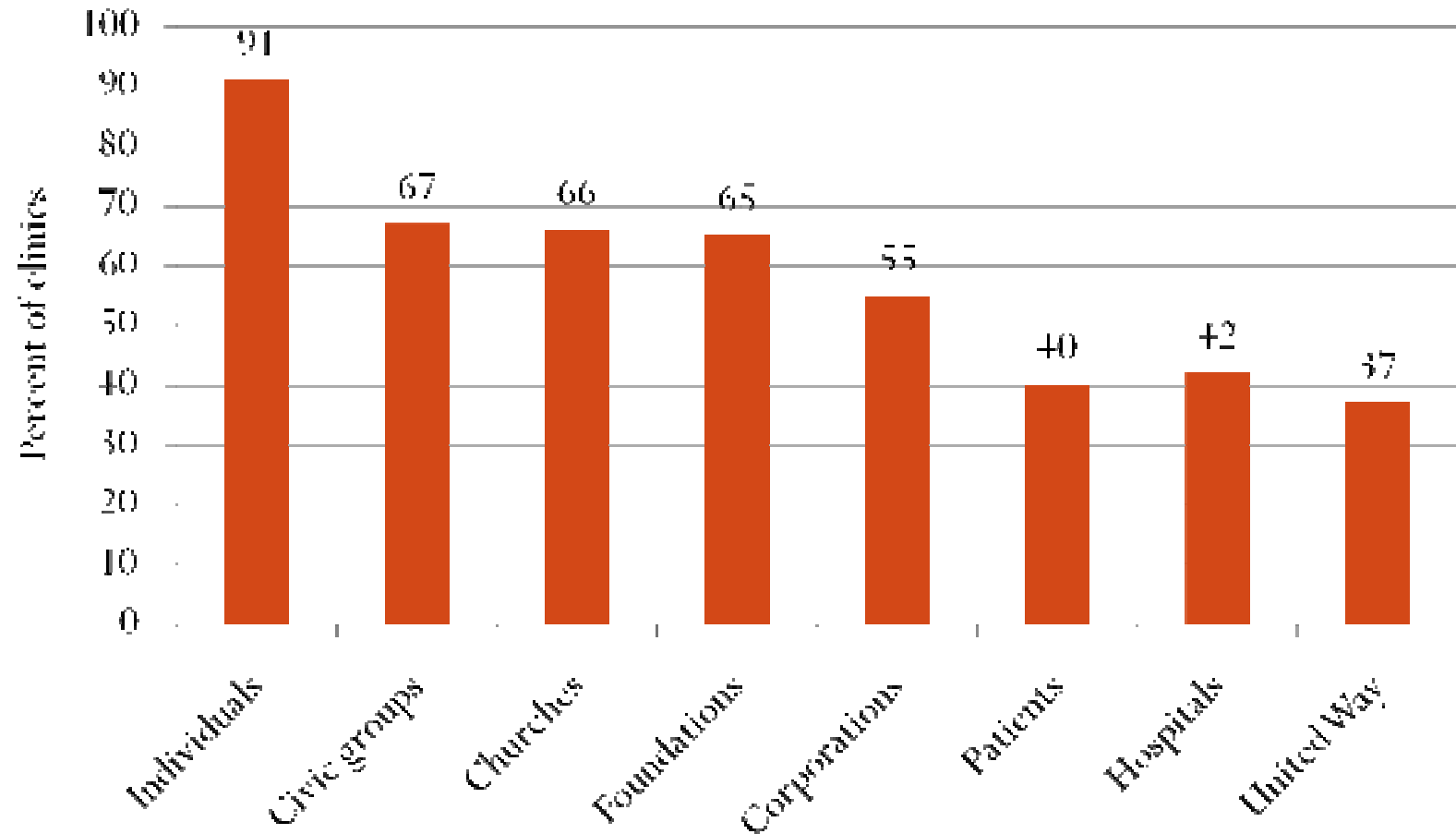
Note: Data is based on 764 clinics.

Operating Budget



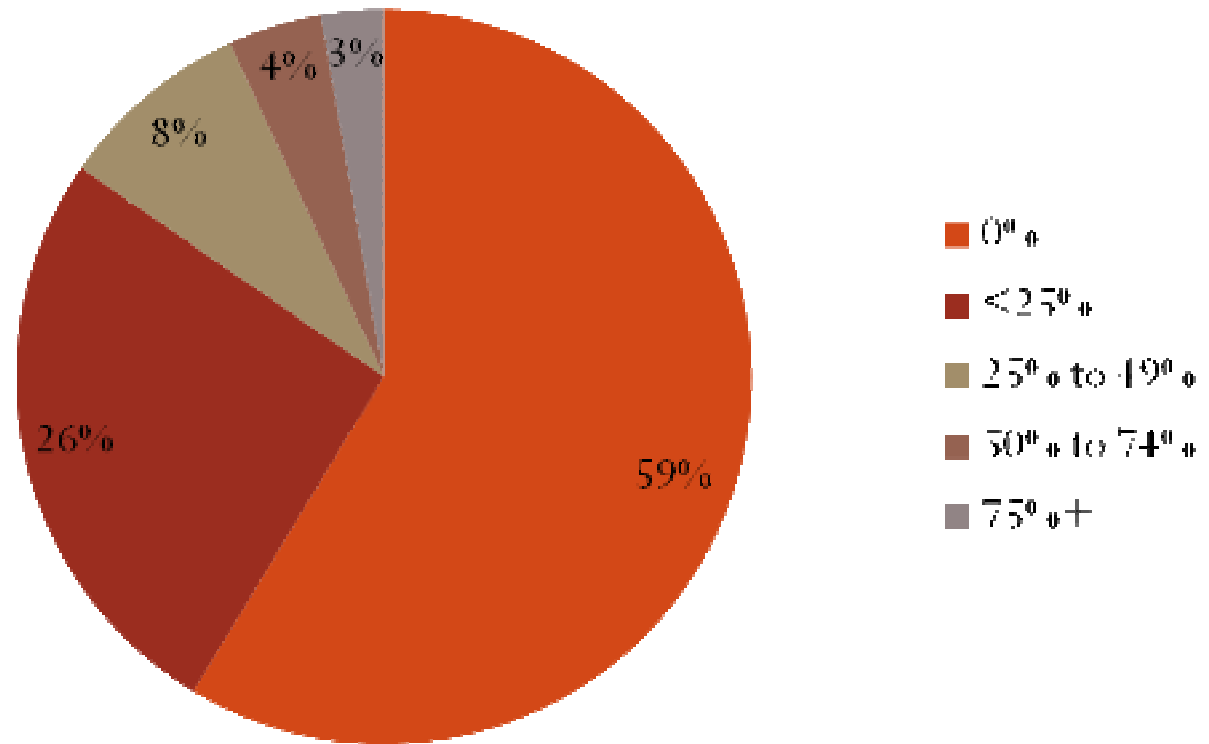
Note: Data is based on 587 clinics .

Top Sources of Funding



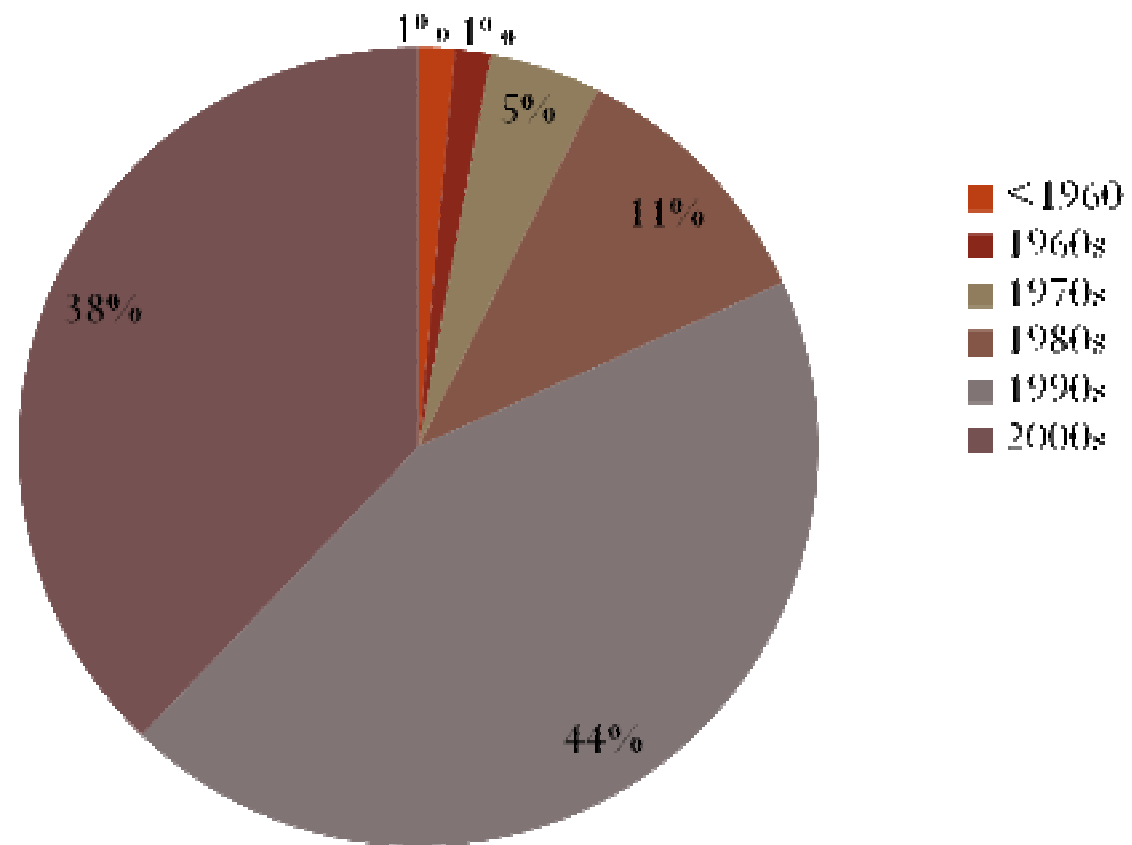
Note: Data is based on 748 clinics .

Percentage of Revenues from Government Sources



Note: Data is based on 728 clinics.

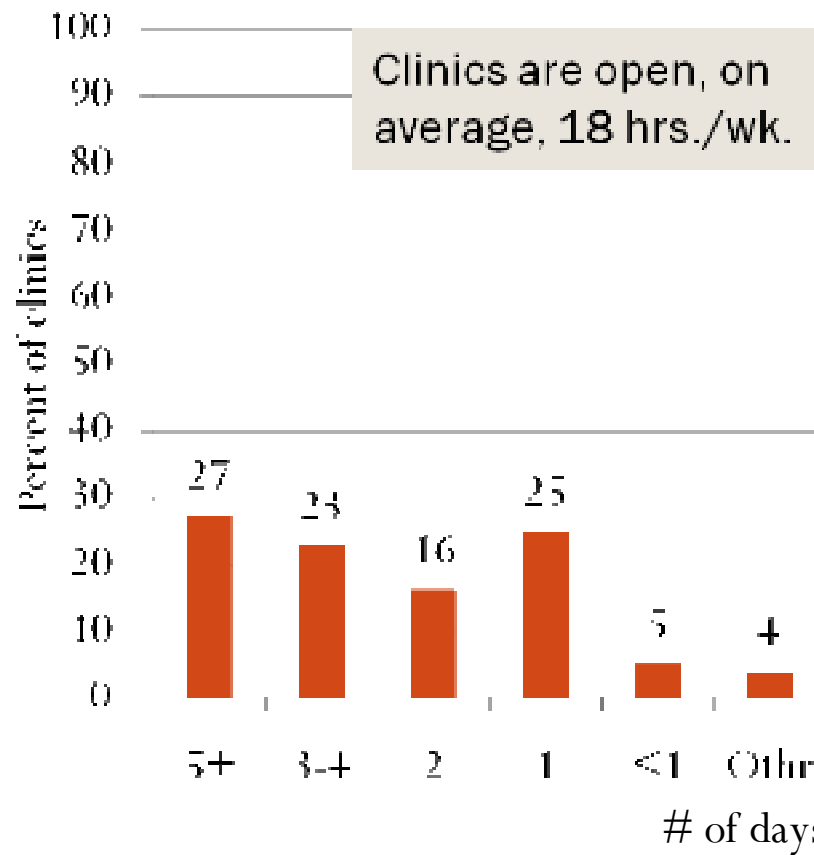
Year of Founding



Note: Data is based on 756 clinics.

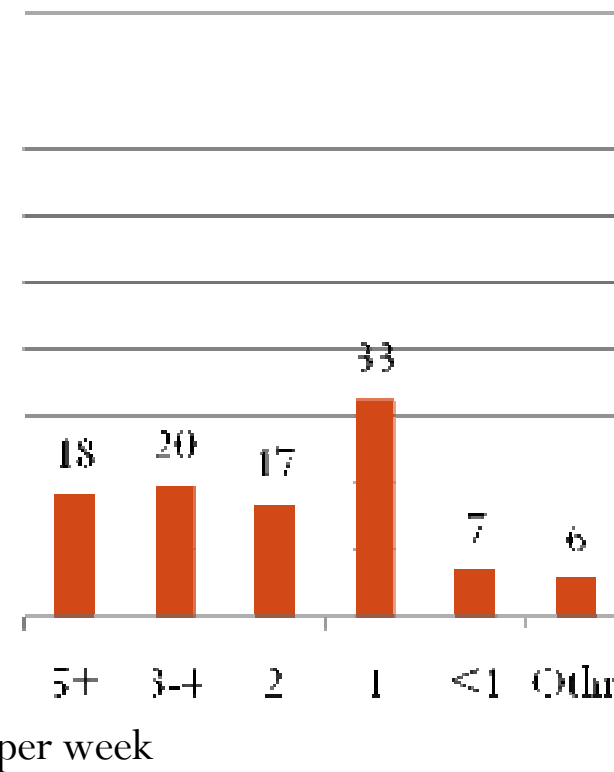
Number of Days Open per Week

Clinics founded in ALL years



Note: Data is based on 751 clinics.

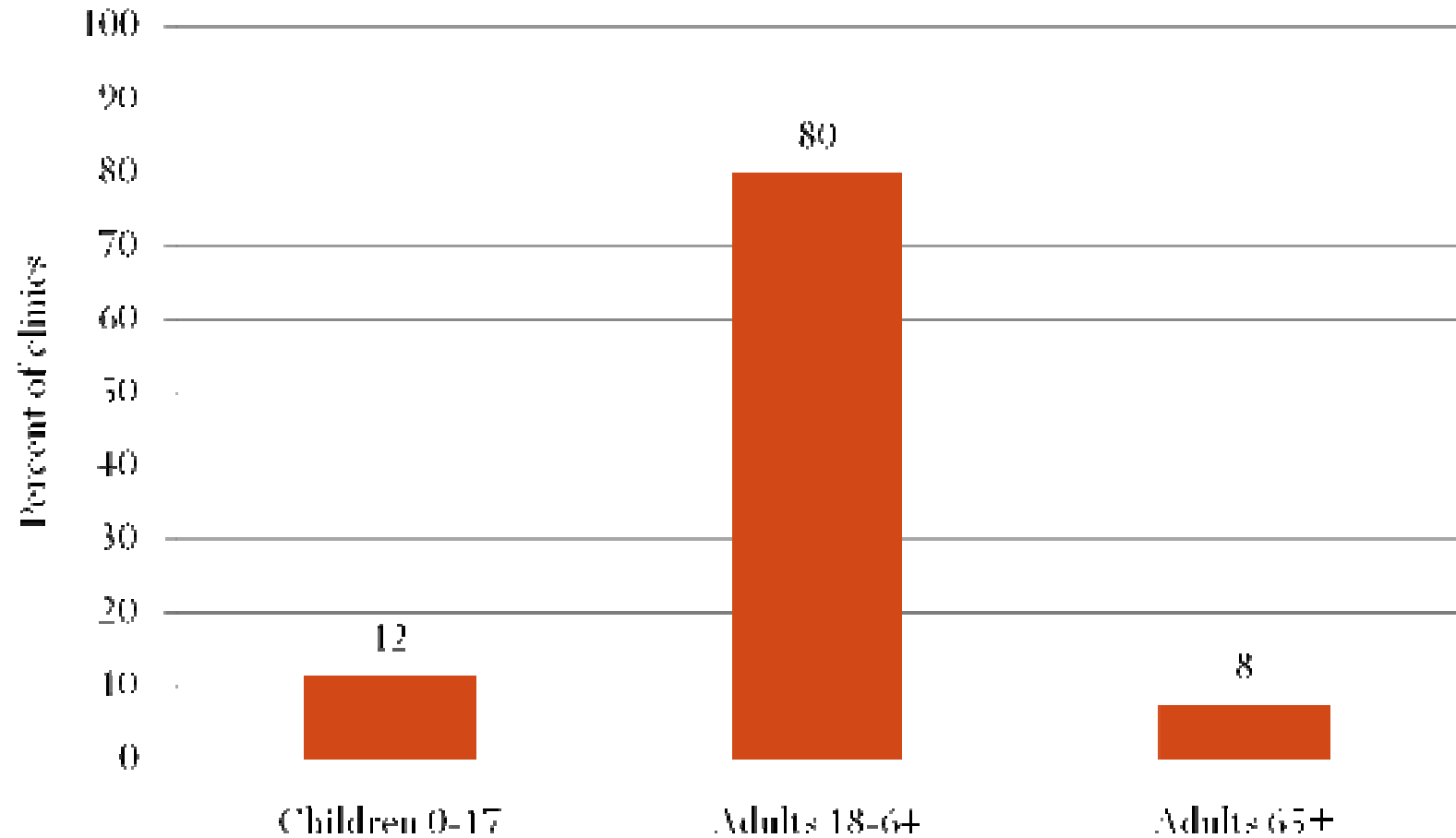
Clinics founded since 2000



Note: Data is based on 280 clinics.

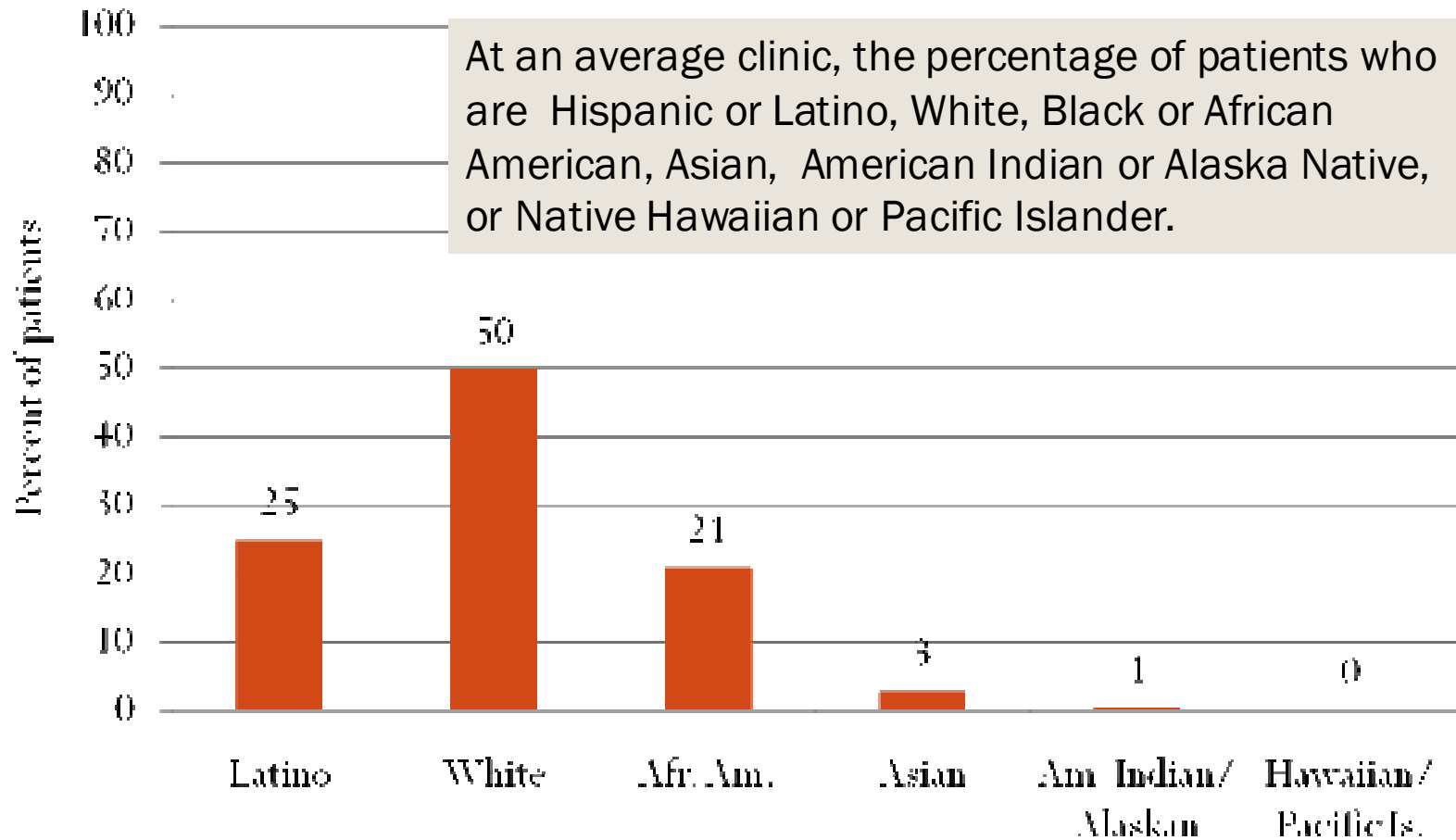
Results: Patients

Patients by Age Group



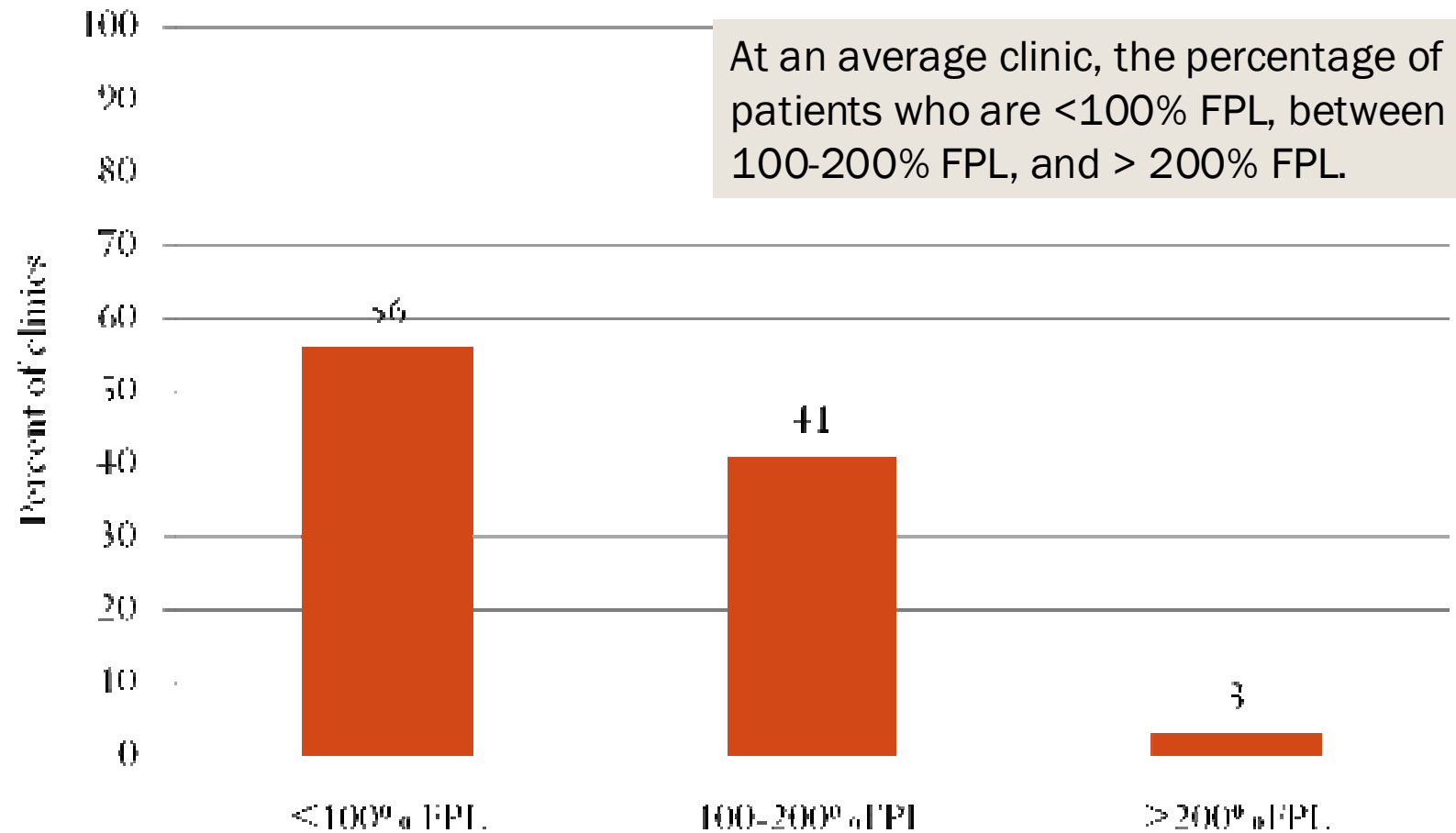
Note: Data is based on 688 clinics. One-third of clinics report treating adults only.

Patients by Race/Ethnicity



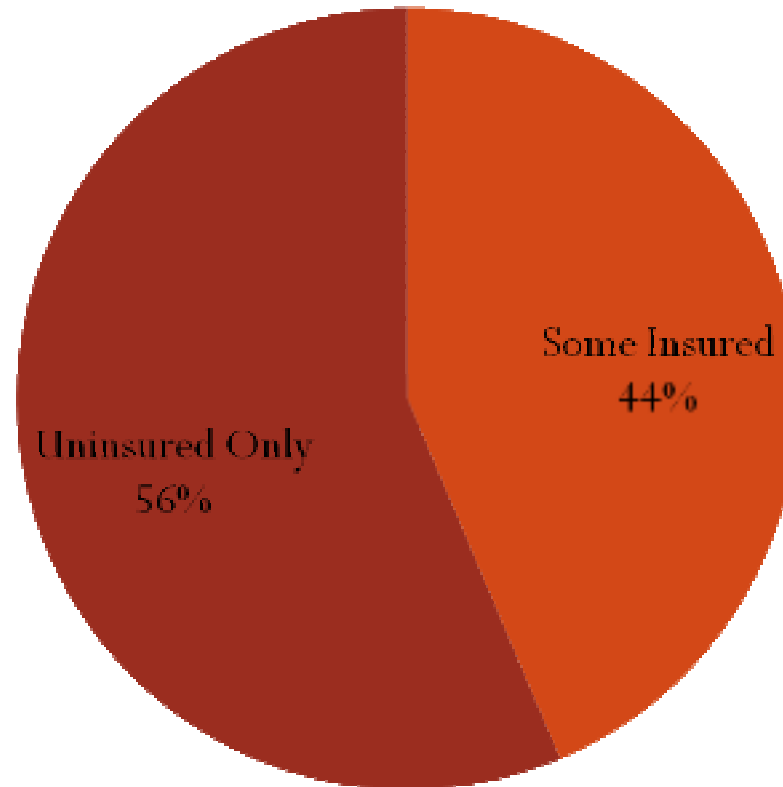
Note: Data is based on 696 clinics.

Patients by Income



Note: Data is based on 575 clinics.

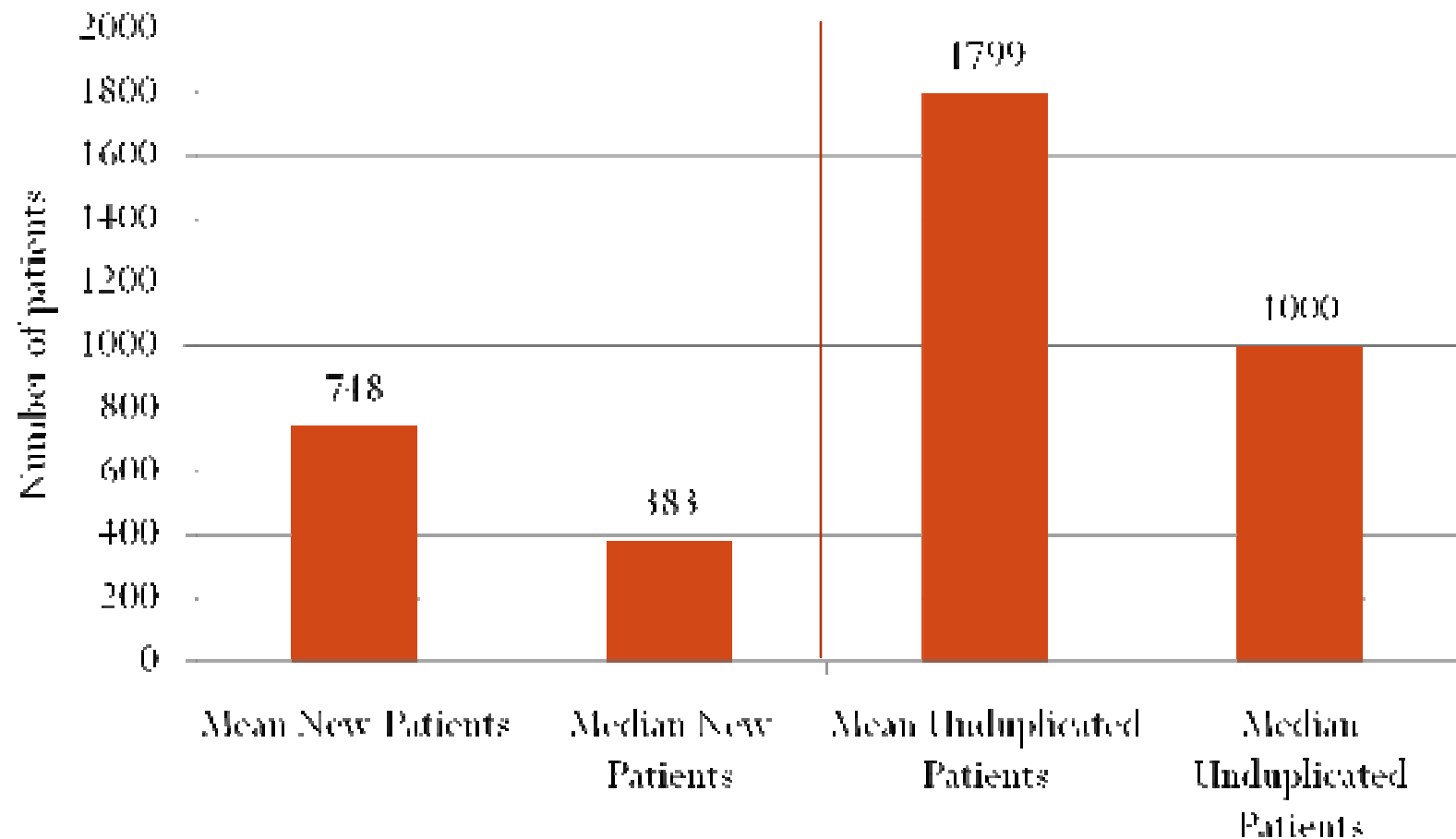
Patients by Insurance Status



6% clinic report billing insurers

Note: Data is based on 752 clinics.

Average Number of Patients per Clinic per Year

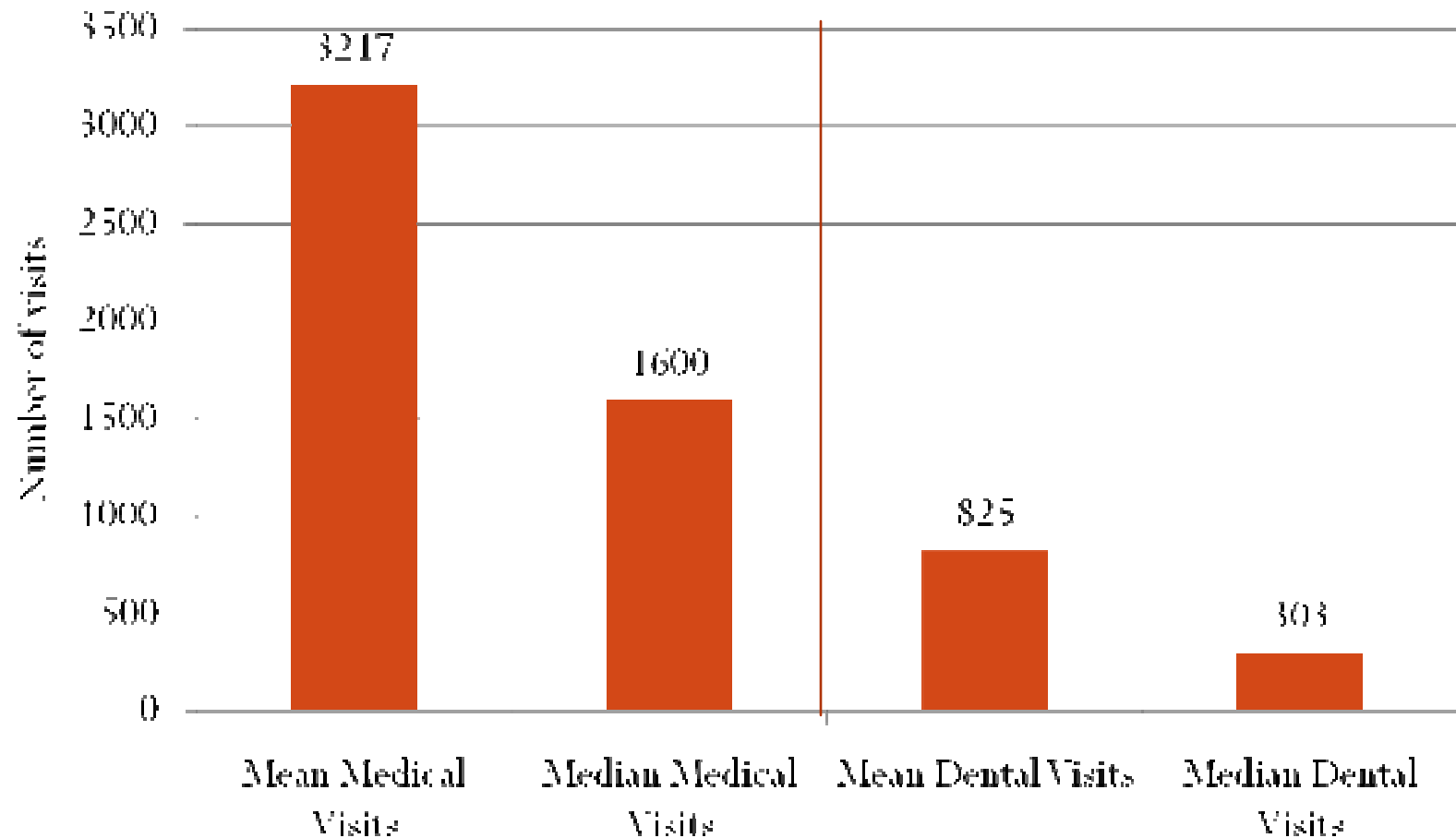


Notes: Data is based on 533 clinics.

402,150 (median) 785,400 (mean) total new patients served yearly (n=1,050).

1.0 million (median) 1.9 million (mean) total unduplicated patients served yearly (n=1,050).

Average Number of Patient Visits per Clinic per Year



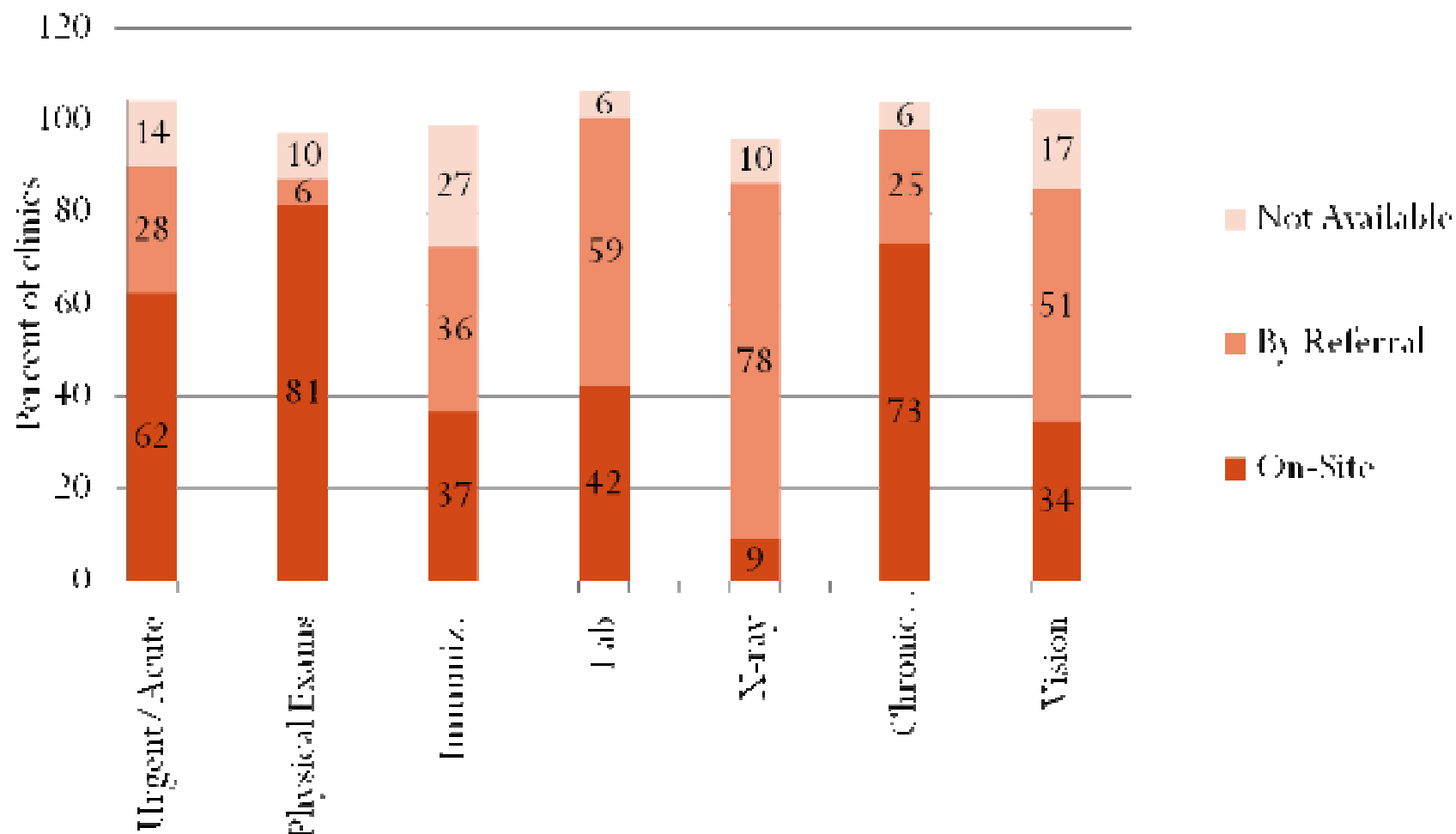
Notes: Data is based on 589 medical clinics and 200 dental clinics .

1.6 million (median) 3.2 million (mean) total medical visits at clinics in the U.S. (n=998).

105,141 (median) 286,275 (mean) total dental visits at clinics in the U.S. (n=347).

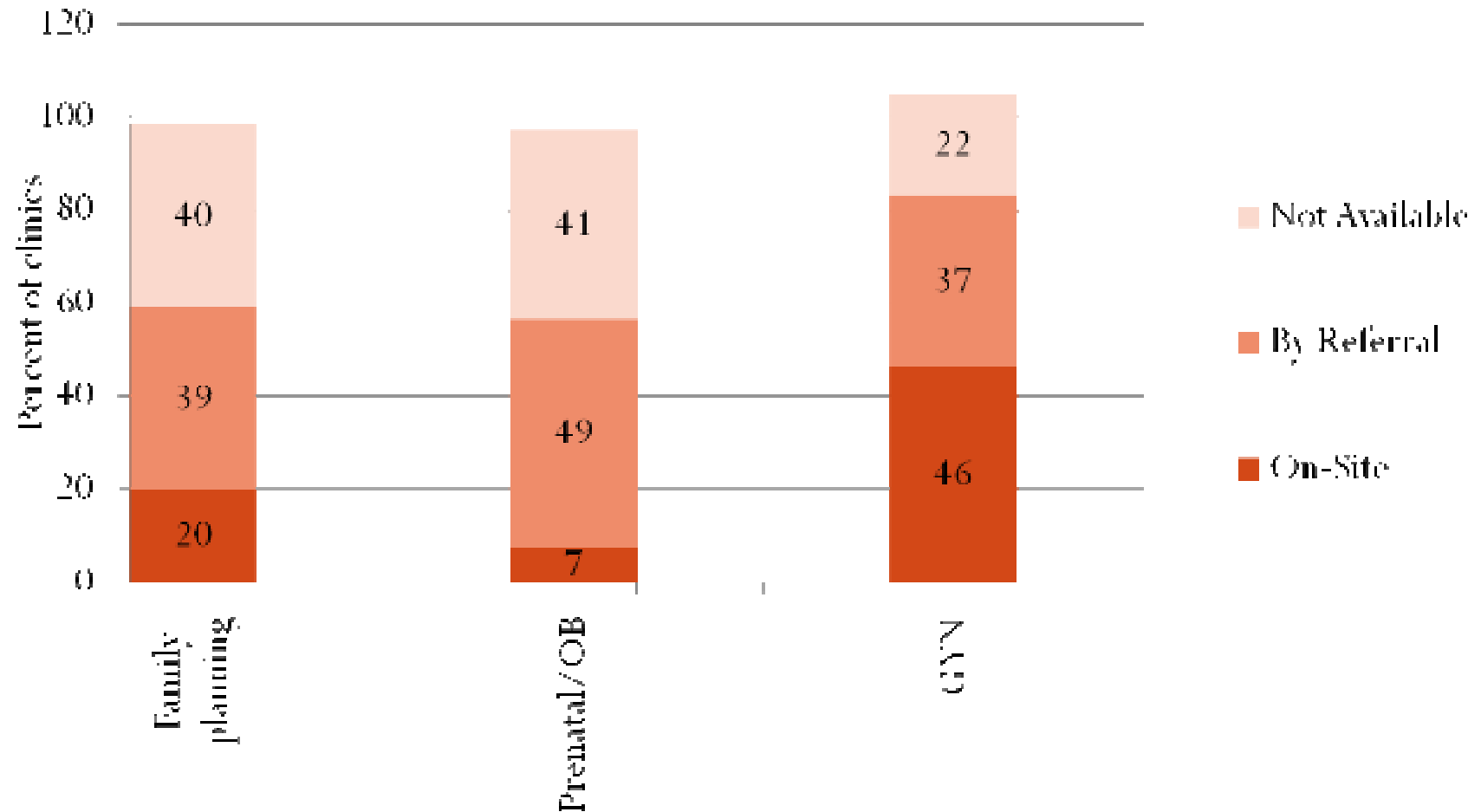
Results: Services

Availability of Primary Care Services



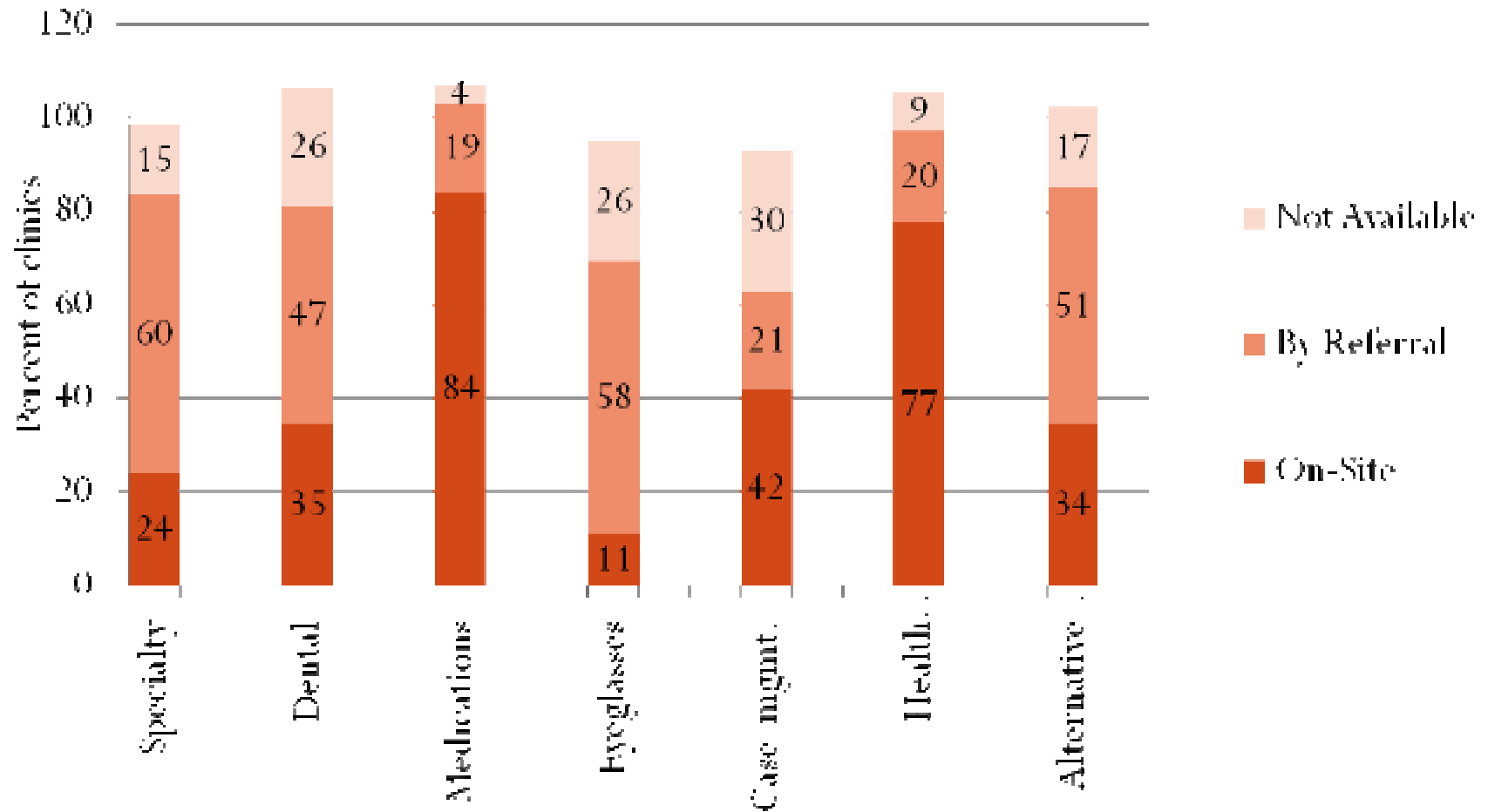
Notes: Data is based on 727 clinics. Percentages exceed 100% because clinics reported more than one option for the availability of service.

Availability of Reproductive Health Services



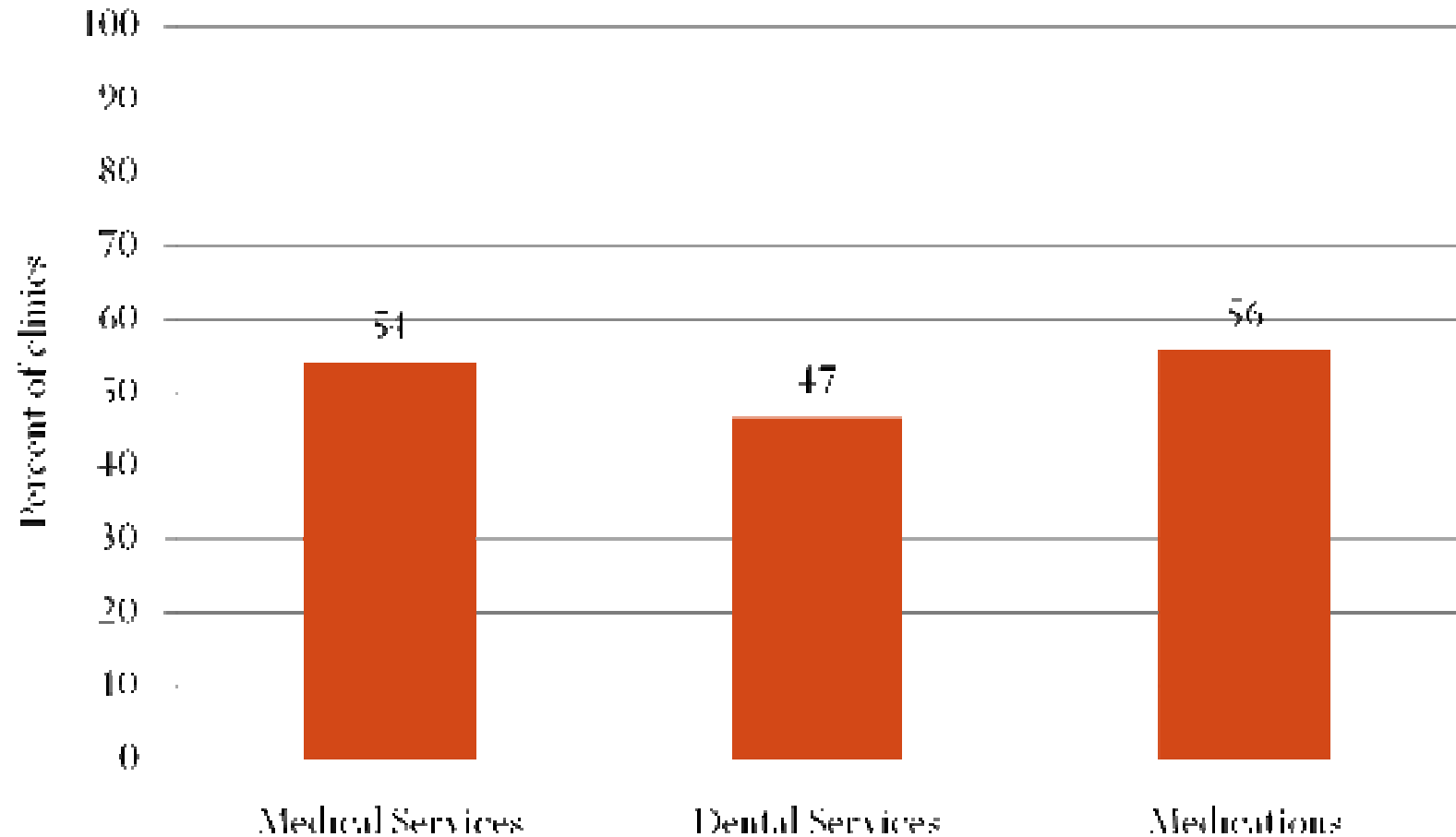
Notes: Data is based on 727 clinics. Percentages exceed 100% because clinics reported more than one option for the availability of service.

Availability of Other Services



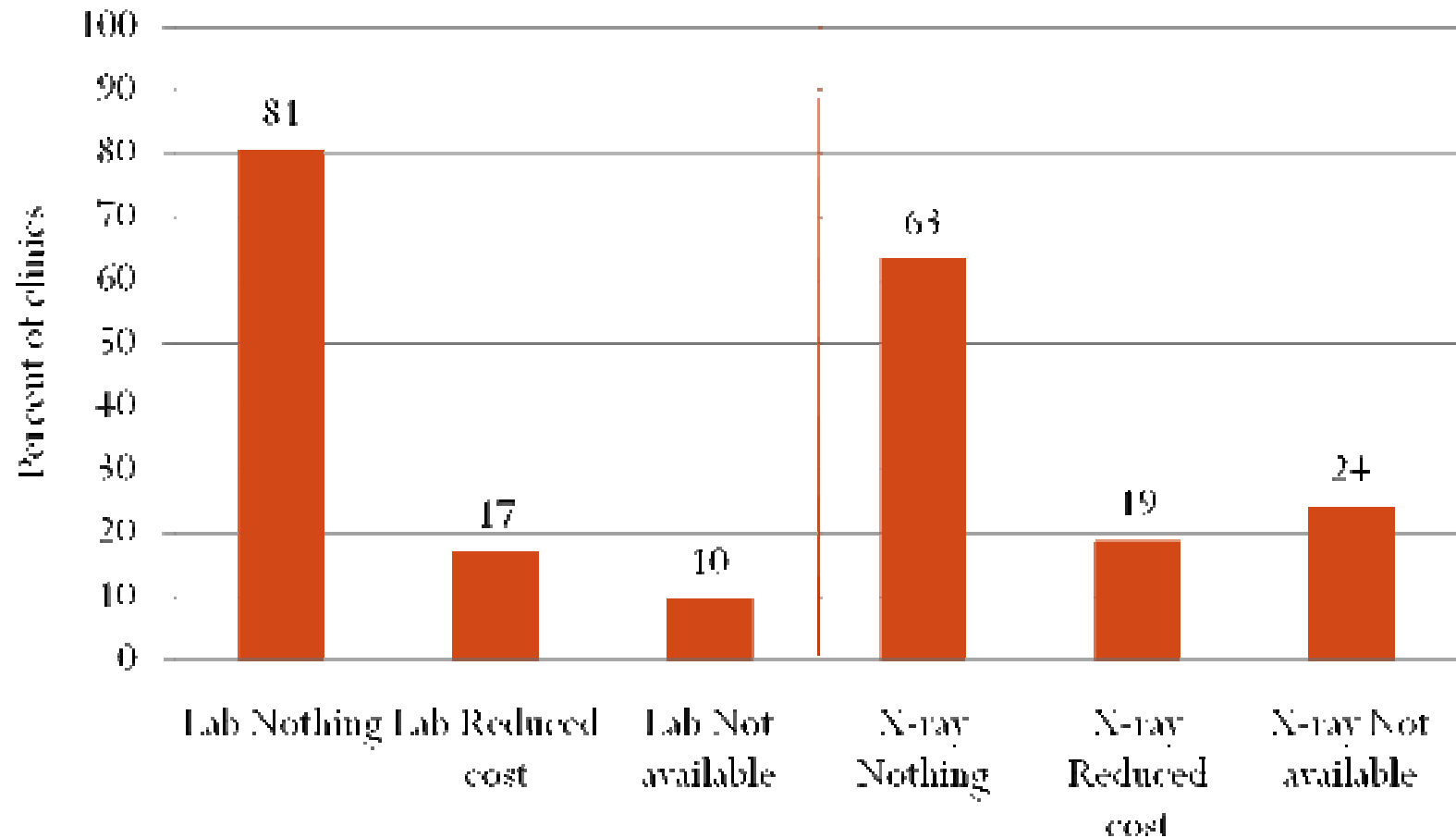
Notes: Data is based on 727 clinics. Percentages exceed 100% because clinics reported more than one option for the availability of service.

No Fees/Donations by Type of Service



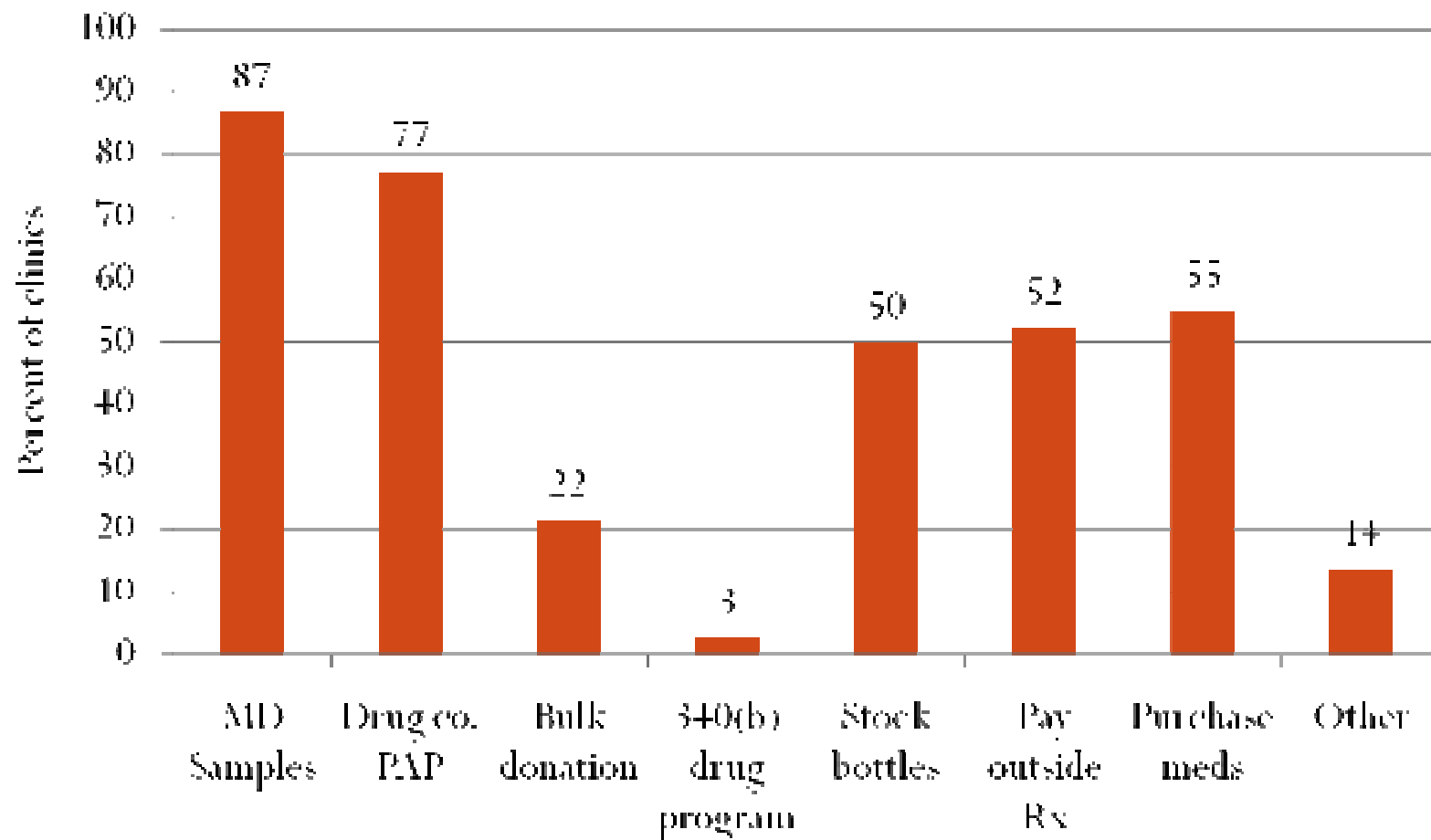
Note: Data is based on 727 clinics that provide medical services, 264 clinics that provide dental services and 669 clinics that provide medications.

Cost to Patient for Diagnostic Services



Note: Data is based on 703 clinics.

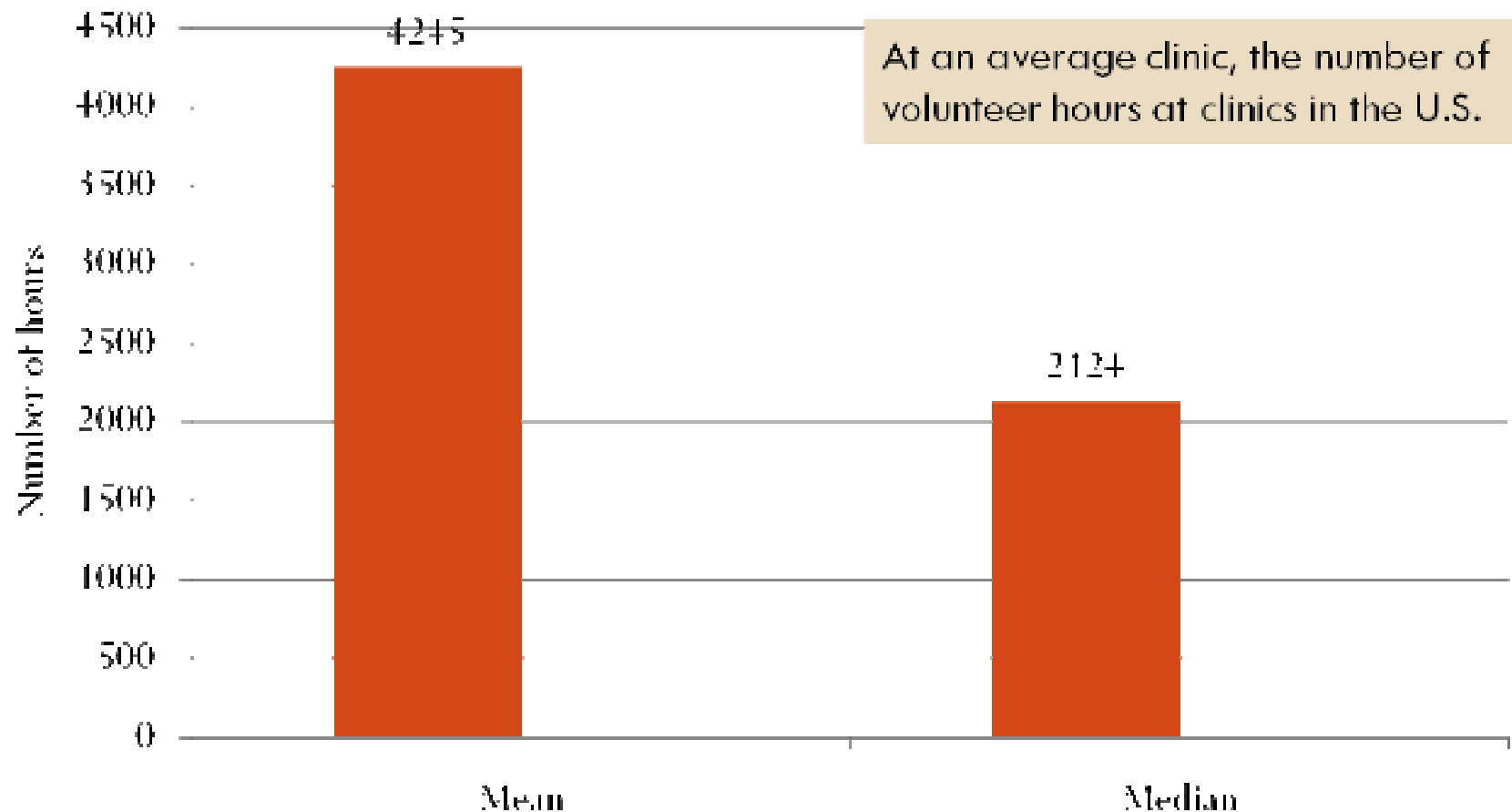
Arrangements to Provide Medications



Note: Data is based on 660 clinics.

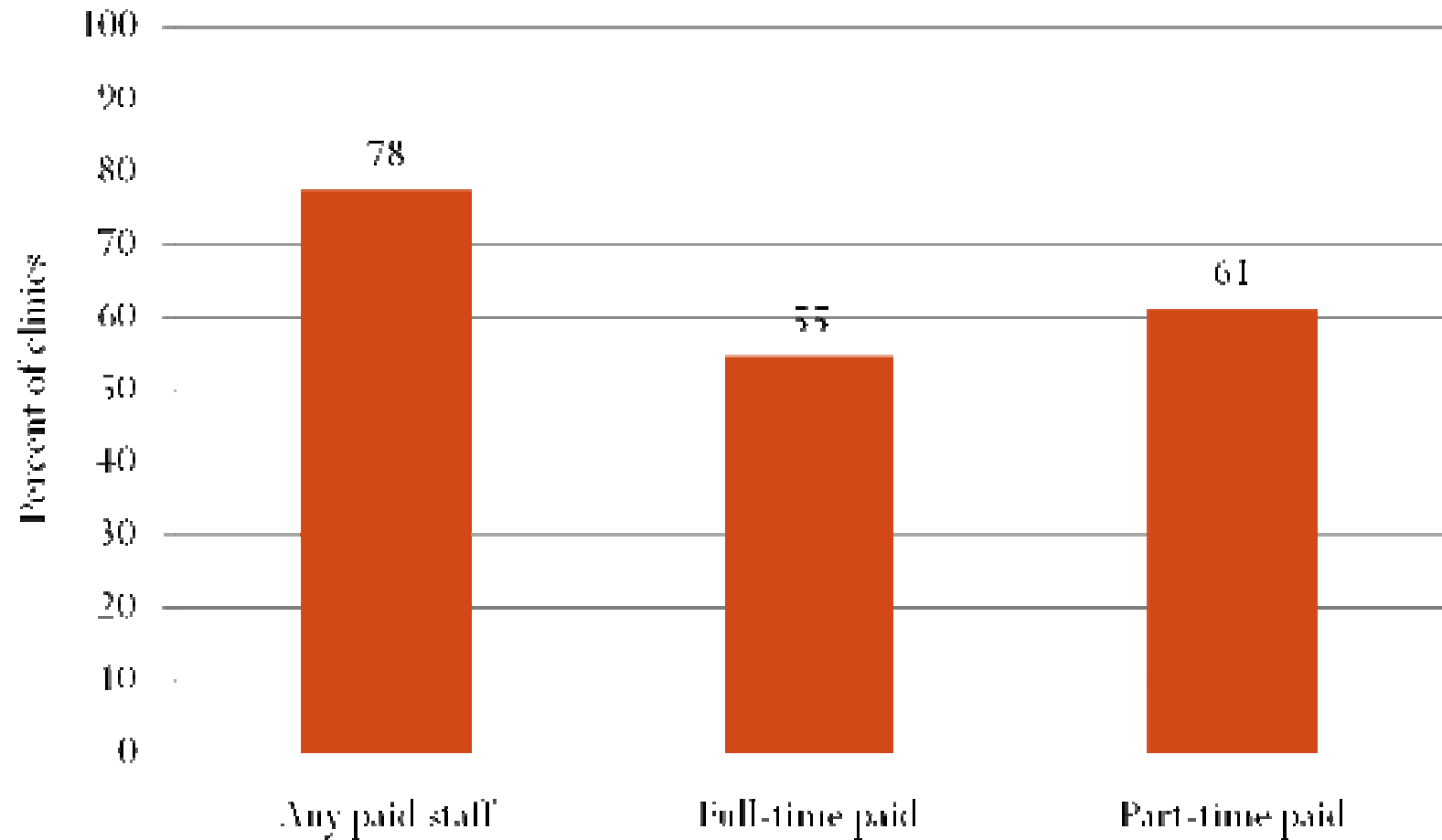
Results: Staff and Volunteers

Number of Volunteer Hours per Clinic per Year



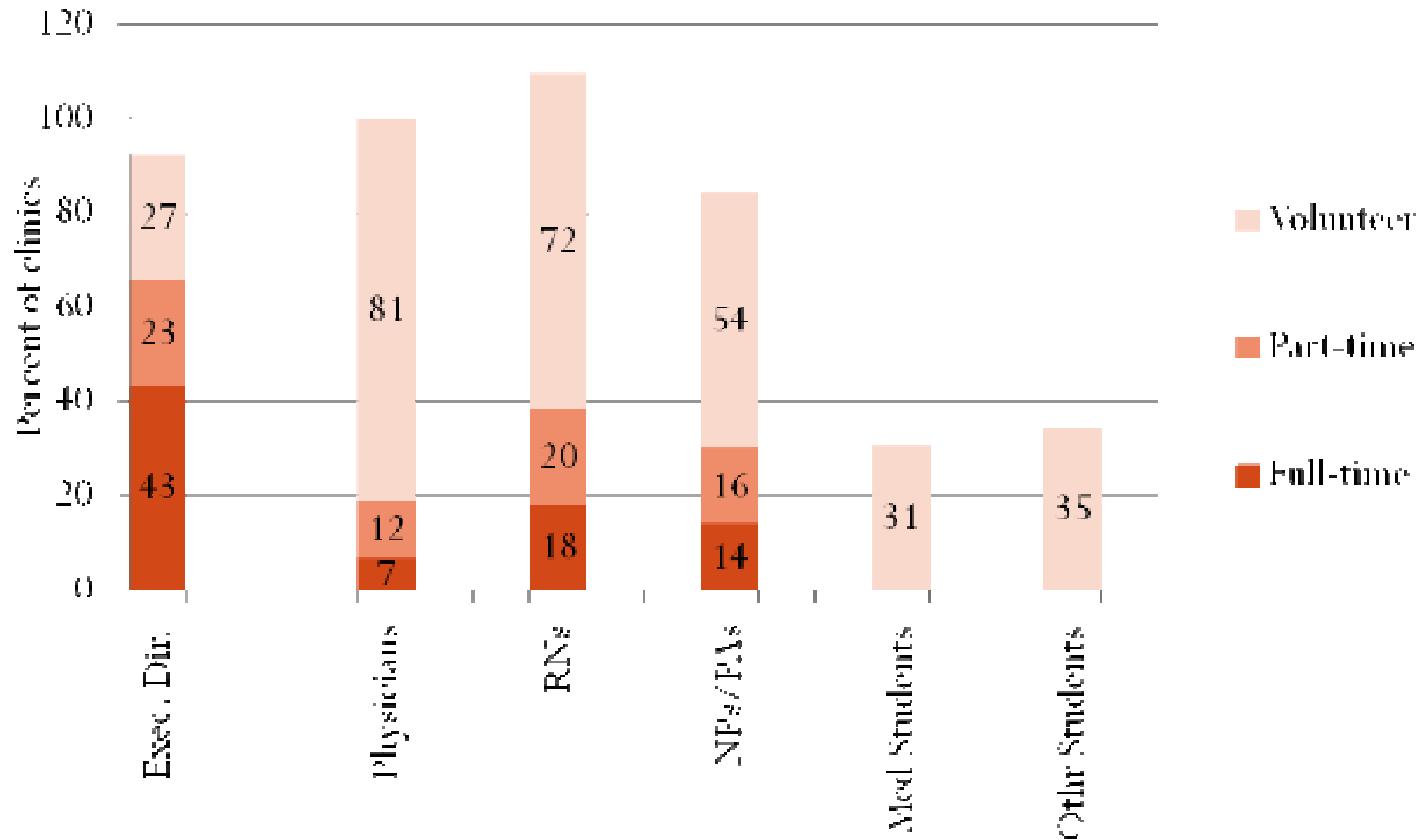
Notes: Data is based on 530 clinics in the nation. Estimated 4.5 million total volunteer hours provided at clinics in the U.S. (n=1,050) each year. Estimates are based on the mean.

Paid Staff



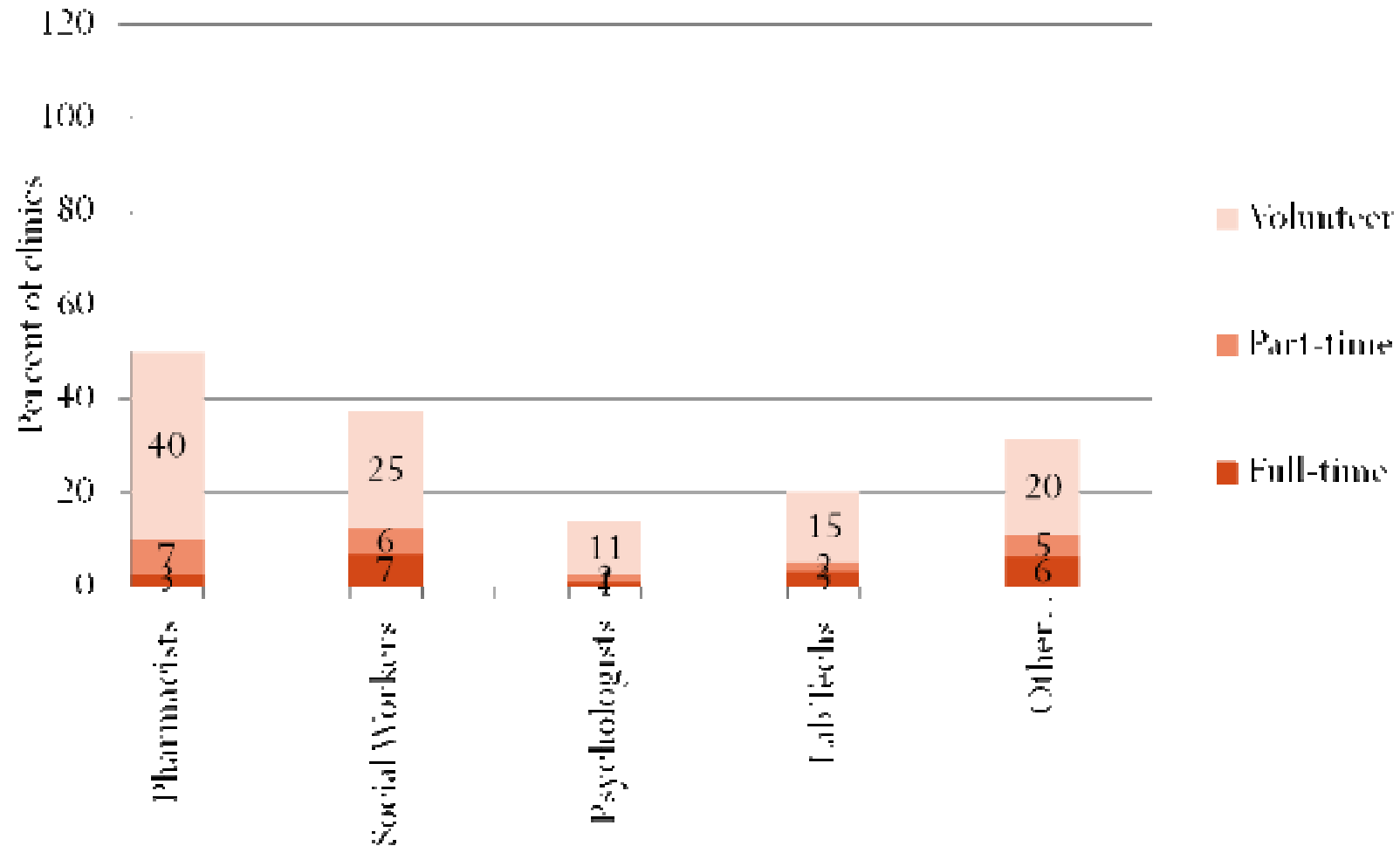
Notes: Data is based on 743 clinics. Assumes responses with missing values = 0.

Medical Staff and Volunteers



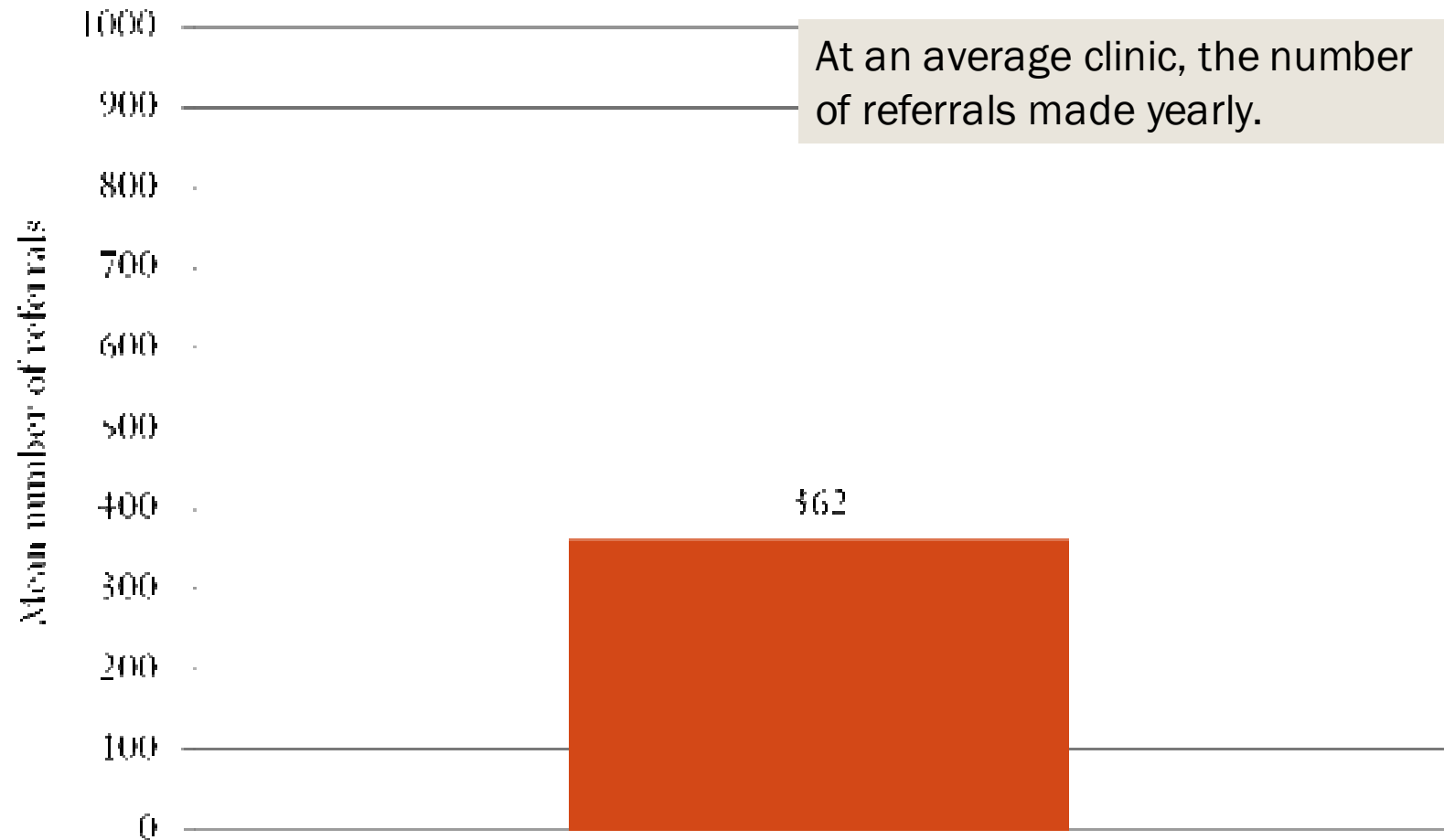
Notes: The number of clinics on which data is based varies by category. Percentages exceed 100% because clinics reported staff and volunteers in more than one category.

Other Professional Staff and Volunteers



Notes: The number of clinics on which data is based varies by category. Percentages exceed 100% because clinics reported more than one option for the availability of service.

Referrals to Providers



Notes: Data is based 415 clinics . Excludes clinics that do not utilize referral providers.
Assuming 1,050 free clinics nationwide, free clinics make an estimated 380,100 referrals per year.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion and Conclusions

- Findings challenge common assumptions about the nature and scope of care provided by free clinics
- Free clinics serve patients who may otherwise fall through the cracks
- The very existence of free clinics suggests that there are limits to an ambulatory healthcare safety net sustained by government support and insurance
- Failure to consider free clinics as part of the ambulatory health care safety net has important limitations

Thank You

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