

Some Idahoans can't find doctors

Less than half the primary physicians in urban areas of the state will accept all new Medicare patients, a study finds.

STATESMAN STAFF

If you have private health insurance, you probably take for granted that most doctors will take you on as a new patient. Increasingly, Medicare and Medicaid patients have no such certainty.

Just 47 percent of primary care doctors in urban areas, including the Treasure Valley, take every Medicare patient who wants an appointment, according to a new study by the AARP.

Access for Medicaid patients is worse. Just 39 percent of urban primary care doctors take all Medicaid patients who seek treatment.

The figures are part of a new study by AARP called "The Doctor is Out: An In-Depth Look at Why Some Physicians' Doors are Closed to New Patients in Idaho."

AARP said 413 doctors responded to the survey, which was sent to 804 doctors in September and October.

Medicare is the federal health insurance plan for seniors. Medicaid is the federal-state insurance plan mainly for children and for pregnant women and disabled adults.

The main reason doctors say they limit the numbers of Medicaid and Medicare patients they see is money.

They say they don't get paid enough to cover the cost of providing care, according to the study.

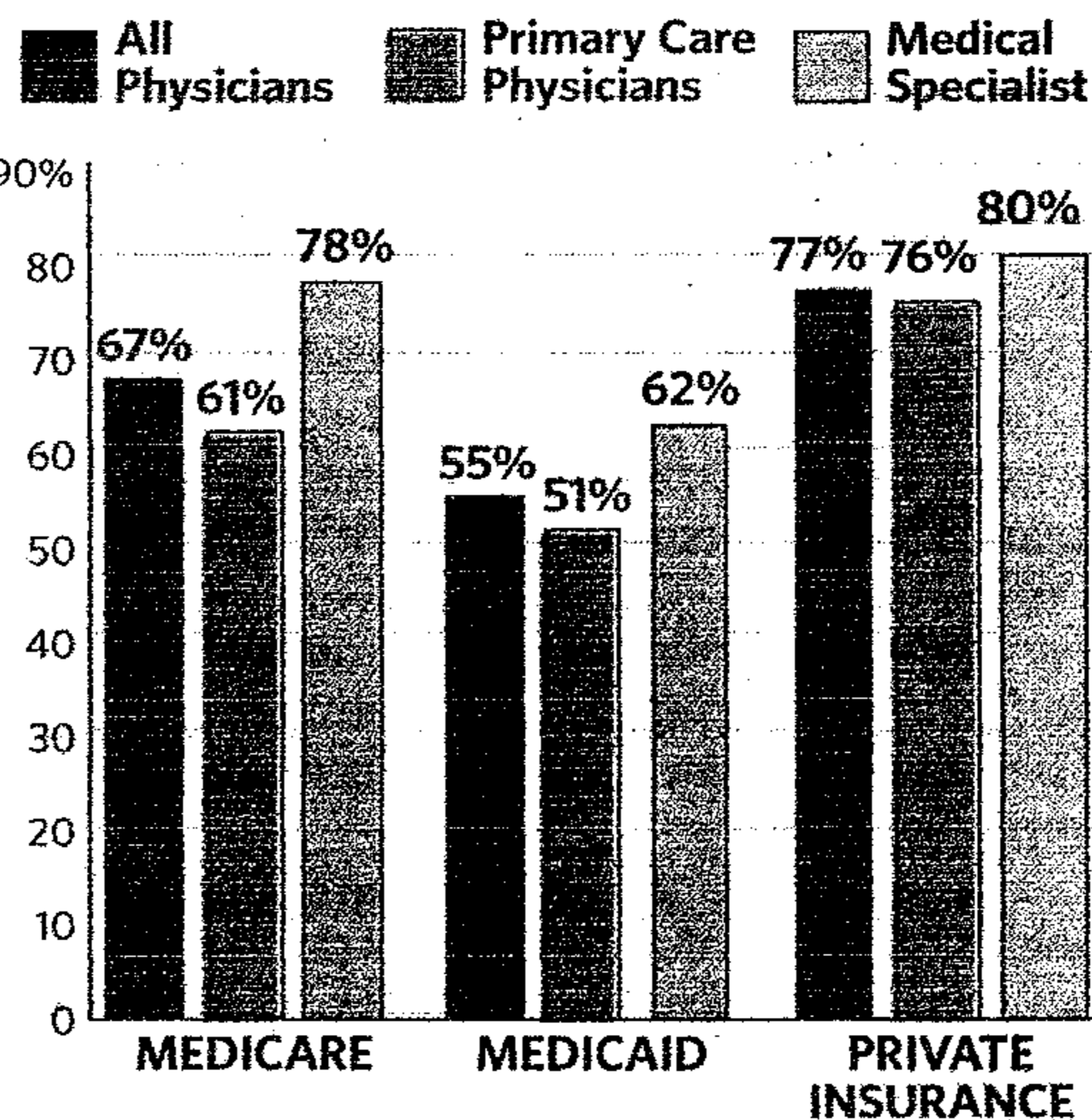
When patients can't get in to see a doctor when they need to, there are consequences, according to the study. Those include:

- Longer wait times and increased emergency room visits.

- Higher out-of-pocket costs for patients. Some doctors will take Medicare patients who are willing to pay the portion of bills that

IS THE DOCTOR IN?

Many new Medicare and Medicaid patients are unable to find a doctor. This graph shows the percentage of doctors in Idaho who will accept new patients:



Source: AARP

Medicare doesn't cover.

- Few choices for Idaho's poorest and most at-risk. Medicaid patients have the hardest time finding doctors who will see them.

- Poorer health outcomes and higher costs of health care.

When people can't see a doctor when they need to, small problems become larger and more expensive.

The AARP supports the health-care reform legislation promoted by President Obama and congressional Democrats.

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 **AARP IN IDAHO**
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