McGohan Brabender
A Higginbotham Partner



Emergency Room Utilization

A key indicator of access, population health, and healthcare cost

Emergency room utilization can reveal gaps in primary care access, condition management, and member understanding of lower-cost care options.

The Cost Difference

Emergency rooms are among the most expensive sites of care.

From our book of business:

$1900

average ER visit

$112

average urgent care visit

$83

average telemedicine visit

What High ER Use May Signal

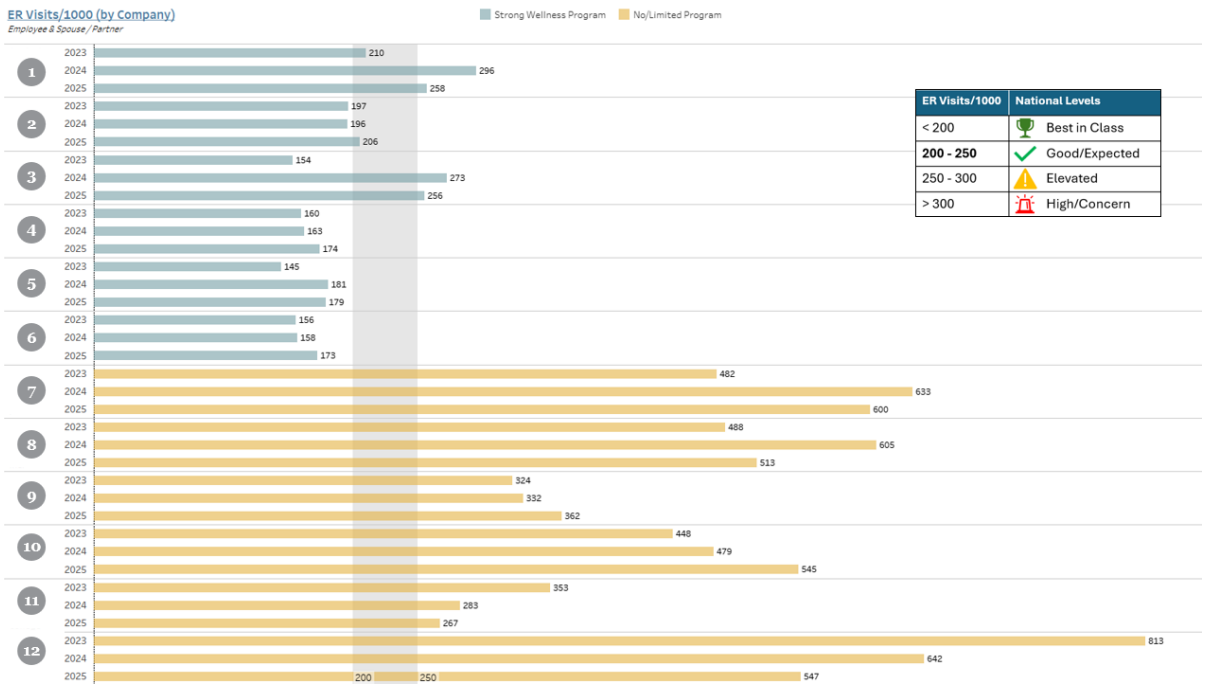
- Limited relationships with primary care providers
- Delayed preventive care or routine screenings
- Poorly managed chronic conditions
- Reliance on a high-cost site of care for nonemergency needs

What the Analysis Found

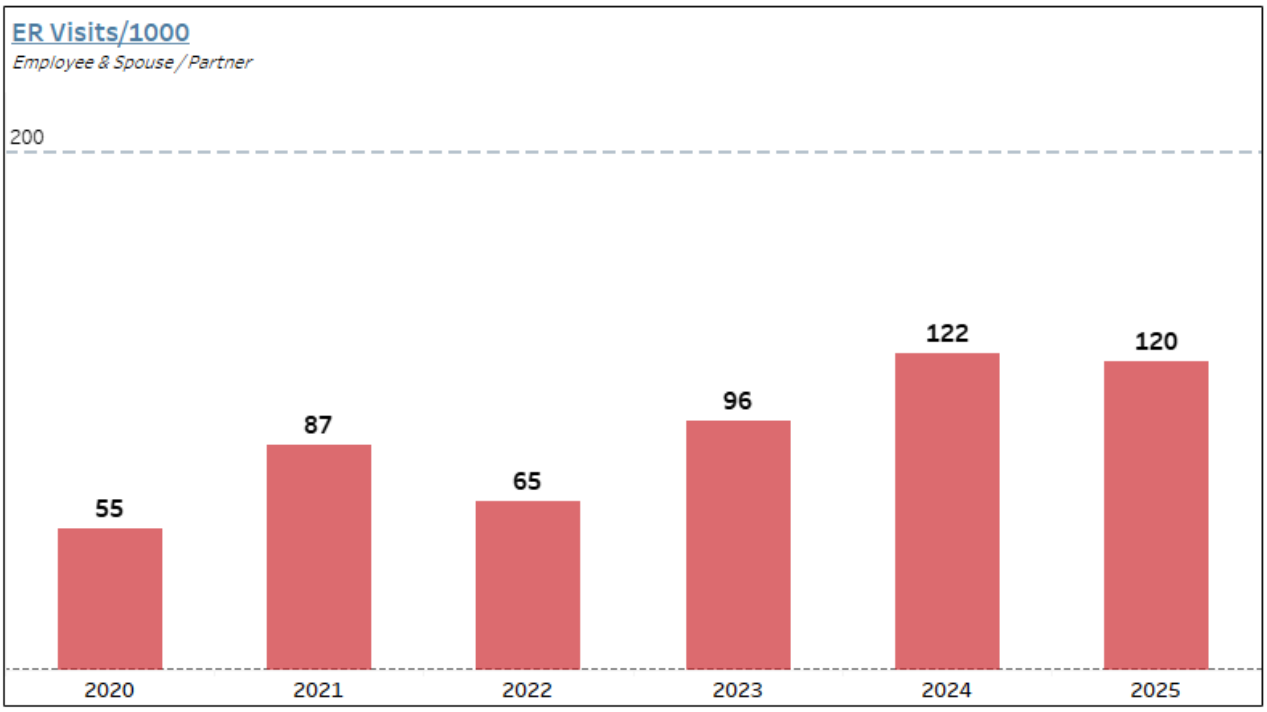
Using national benchmark ranges, we set a target zone representing **Good to Expected performance** for ER utilization of 200-250 ER Visits/1000.

Most organizations with **strong wellness program**s performed exceptionally well, maintaining ER utilization rates below **200 visits per 1,000 members**, placing them in the **Best-in-Class** category. While a small number of wellness-focused groups fell into a moderately elevated range, ER utilization remains an opportunity area that can be addressed through communication, wellness initiatives, preventive care campaigns, and increased PCP engagement.

In contrast, every organization with **limited or no wellness program** exceeded the benchmark target range. These groups consistently fell into the **Elevated** or **High Concern** categories, indicating greater reliance on emergency care and higher associated healthcare costs.



ER visits per 1,000 members by employer group



Client example: utilization remained below the best-in-class threshold

This client has multiple years maintaining ER utilization rates well below **200 visits per 1,000 members**, placing them in the **Best-in-Class** category year over year.

Actions Employers Can Take

- Encourage members to establish a primary care relationship.
- Communicate when to use primary care, urgent care, telemedicine, and the ER.
- Offer navigation support and after-hours care options.
- Target outreach to members with chronic conditions or repeated ER use.
- Track ER visits per 1,000, avoidable ER use, and follow-up after discharge.

BOTTOM LINE

Helping employees access the right care in the right setting can improve outcomes while reducing avoidable emergency care spending.

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