



### *PCMH 1A-4 – Availability of Appointments*

Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) identified third next available appointment tracking as "a more sensitive reflection of true appointment availability". IHI has set a goal of zero days for primary care.

<http://www.ihi.org/resources/Pages/Measures/ThirdNextAvailableAppointment.aspx>

## Third Next Available Appointment

### **Definition**

Average length of time in days between the day a patient makes a request for an appointment with a physician and the third available appointment for a new patient physical, routine exam, or return visit exam.

The "third next available" appointment is used rather than the "next available" appointment since it is a more sensitive reflection of true appointment availability. For example, an appointment may be open at the time of a request because of a cancellation or other unexpected event. Using the "third next available" appointment eliminates these chance occurrences from the measure of availability.

### **Goal**

Decrease number of days to third next available appointment to zero days (same day) for Primary Care.

Decrease number of days to third next available appointment to two days for Specialty Care.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Sample all physicians on team the same day of the week, once a week. Count the number of days between a request for an appointment (e.g., enter dummy patient) with a physician and the third next available appointment for a new patient physical, routine exam, or return visit exam. Report the average number of days for all physicians sampled. Note: Count calendar days (e.g. include weekends) and days off. Do not count any saved appointments for urgent visits (since they are "blocked off" on the schedule.) The data collection can be done manually or electronically. Manual collection means looking in the schedule book and counting from the "index" (day when the "dummy" appointment is requested) to the day of the third available appointment. Some electronic scheduling systems can be programmed to compute the number of days automatically.

### **Related Tools**

[Practice Supply Worksheet \(IHI Tool\)](#)  
[Backlog Reduction Worksheet](#)