

Pennsylvania poll shows that 1 in 4 lost physician due to liability insurance crises

68 percent favor caps on non-economic damages, but bills die in committee

*The following is a statement from Roger F. Mecum, executive vice president of the Pennsylvania Medical Society.*

A poll conducted in late August by Princeton Survey Research Associates International for IssuesPA/Pew found one in four Pennsylvanians say the state's liability insurance crisis forced their family to change doctors within the past year because their doctor moved, stopped practicing, or gave up certain procedures.

In the southeastern part of the state, the percentage climbs to one in three.

When compared to a 2003 poll by that Allentown Morning Call and Muhlenberg College, the new IssuesPA/Pew shows a significant jump in lost access to care. The earlier poll by the Allentown Morning Call/ Muhlenberg College indicated seven percent of Pennsylvanians reported they were unable to get medical care from a doctor who had stopped practicing in the state because of increased liability insurance rates.

The solution, says 68 percent of the IssuesPA/Pew poll's participants, is to cap non-economic awards through a constitutional amendment. Research on caps and results of caps in states like California and Texas prove they can make a difference.

Unfortunately, the voice of voters will not be heard soon. As bills to give Pennsylvanians a vote died in committee this past spring, thanks to powerful lobbying efforts of groups representing personal injury laws.

Based on other research, it should come as no surprise that Pennsylvanians are losing access to care at an all-time high. For example the percentage of young physicians is an all time low, and we're not retaining young physicians just out of residency at the same level as several years ago. In fact, in 2003, Pennsylvania kept only 285 residents out of training, compared to historically retaining over 1100 per year. Between 2002 and 2003, more doctors left, Pennsylvania than moved in. Pennsylvania is failing to meet physician growth expectations that will be needed as our aging population demands more.

Yet, personal injury lawyers are allowed to have a 70 percent error rate in pursuit of a lottery-style payday, collection between 33 and 40 percent of awards plus expenses. All of this is at the expense of patients and successful plaintiffs.

The next time caps are considered in our commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Medical Society urges our state legislature to listen to the voice of voters and remember the huge number of patients who have been burdened by the state's liability insurance crisis.

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The Pennsylvania Medical Society has been working to enhance the patient-doctor relationship since 1948. With member physicians throughout the commonwealth, as well as a statewide Patient Advisory Board, the medical society addressed concerns of both patients and doctors to improve the delivery of health care services. To learn more about the Pennsylvania Medical Society, visit its website at [www.pamedsoc.org](http://www.pamedsoc.org).