

# IMPACT OF UPDATED COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING GUIDELINES IN UNITED STATES FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL DATA

Megan R.M. Aaronson, MD, MS<sup>1</sup> (maaronson@mednet.ucla.edu)  
Matthew Y. Zhao, MD<sup>2</sup> (matthew.zhao@mountsinai.org)  
Jayraan Badiie, MPH<sup>3</sup> (jbadiie@mednet.ucla.edu)  
Folasade P. May, M.D., Ph.D., M.Phil.<sup>3-5</sup> (fmay@mednet.ucla.edu)

- 1) Department of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 2) Department of Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, New York
- 3) Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Division of Digestive Diseases, Department of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 4) Greater Los Angeles Veterans Affairs Healthcare System, Los Angeles, CA, USA
- 5) UCLA Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Equity, Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA

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**INTRODUCTION:** Colorectal cancer (CRC) screening guidelines were updated May 2021 to include individuals age 45-49, owing to an observed increase in CRC incidence in young adults. The impact of this expanded eligibility on efforts to screen 80% of Americans, particularly in communities already facing notable barriers to screening, is poorly understood. Our study investigates the impact of including this new age group on CRC screening rates at all United States (US) Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).

**METHODS:** We used national 2023 Uniform Data System (UDS) data to perform a cross-sectional analysis of CRC screening rates in all US FQHCs. As 2023 was the first year that the UDS included CRC screening data for patients age 45-49, we were able to calculate rates that include all age-eligible individuals (age 45-75) for the first time. We used multivariable linear regression to determine FQHC patient-mix characteristics significantly associated with 2023 CRC screening rates; these included the percentage of patients who: are age 45-49, are uninsured, prefer a non-English language, have income >200% the federal poverty level, and are experiencing homelessness. We also included majority patient race/ethnicity, state Medicaid expansion status, urban/rural location, and baseline CRC screening rate in 2022.

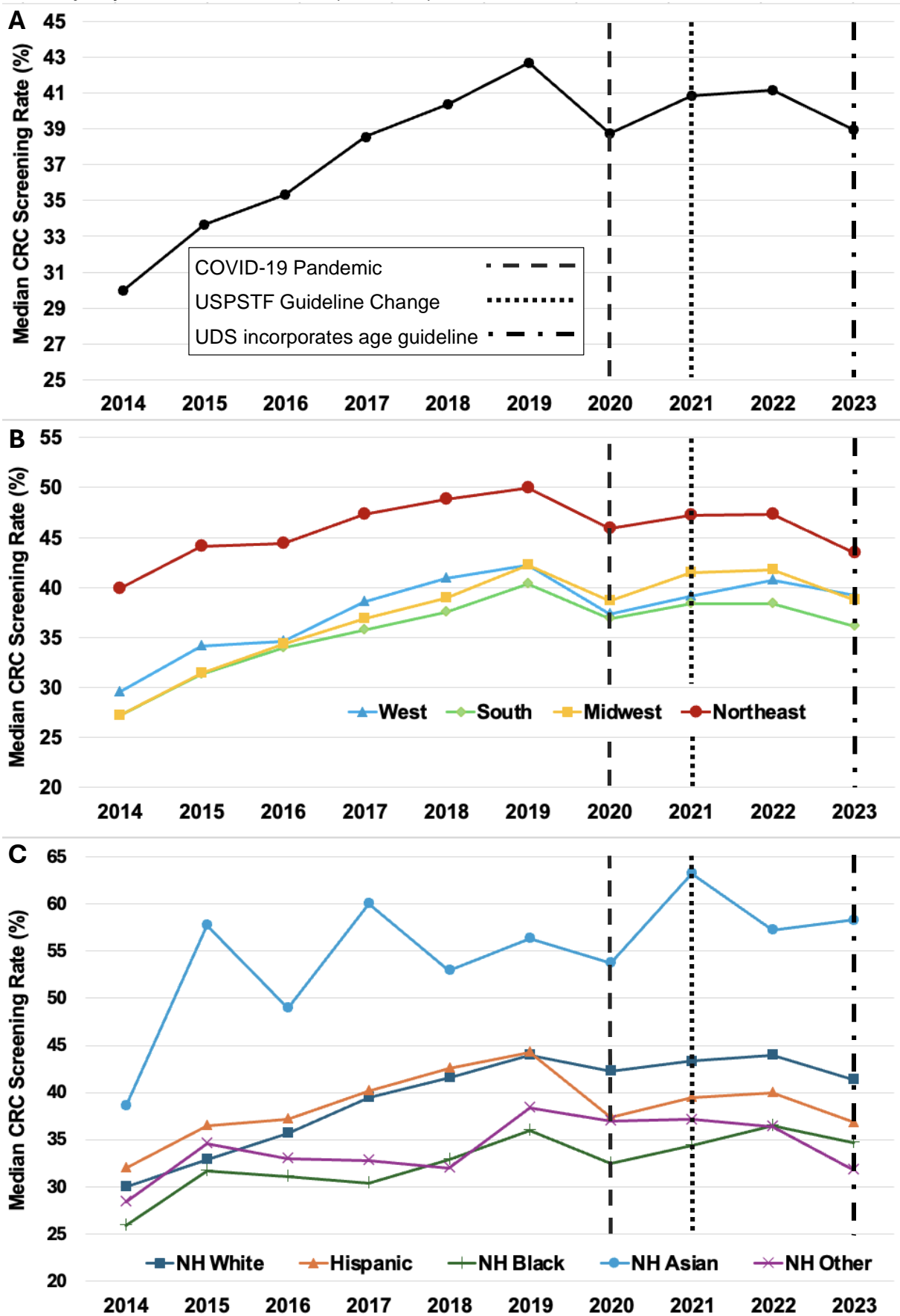
**RESULTS:** There were 7,136,160 patients eligible for CRC screening at 1,271 US FQHCs in 2023 (Table). Of these, 1,642,982 were age 45-49, comprising 6.0% of the total FQHC population and 23% of patients eligible for CRC screening (age 45-75). The US median FQHC CRC screening rate declined from 2022 (41.2%) to 2023 (38.9%) (Figure 1A). A decline in median CRC screening rate was observed in all US regions and regardless of majority race/ethnicity served except in FQHCs with majority non-Hispanic Asian patients, where CRC screening rates increased from 2022 to 2023 (Figure 1B & 1C). In adjusted multivariable analyses, FQHCs in urban settings (Coef. -1.57, 95% CI -2.65, -0.50), with a higher percentage of uninsured patients (Coef. -0.05; 95% CI -0.10, -0.01), and with a higher percentage of patients experiencing homelessness (Coef. -0.05; 95% CI -0.08, -0.02) had significantly lower 2023 CRC screening rates.

**DISCUSSION:** We found that individuals age 45 to 49 represent one-fifth of FQHC patients eligible for CRC screening. Additionally, CRC screening rates at US FQHCs decreased in 2023 following the guideline-concordant inclusion of patients age 45-49. Further, 2023 screening rates were lowest in FQHCs in urban settings, with a high percentage of patients experiencing homelessness, and/or with a high percentage of uninsured patients. These findings suggest that the equitable implementation of new CRC screening guidelines will require expanded efforts to screen young adults in FQHCs.

**Table.** Characteristics of FQHC Study Population in 2023.

<b>Frequency or percent</b>	<b>All FQHCs (n=1,271)</b>
<b>Total patients</b>	27,480,346
<b>Total patients ages 45-49, n (%)</b>	1,642,982 (6.0)
<b>Total patients eligible for CRC screening (age 45-75)</b>	7,136,160
<b>CRC screening rate in 2022, median %</b>	41.2
<b>CRC screening rate in 2023, median %</b>	38.9
<b>Change in CRC screening rate from 2022 to 2023, median % (IQR)</b>	-1.8 (-5.2, -1.6)
<b>Sex Male, median %</b>	43.0
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity, median %</b>	
White non-Hispanic	33.5
Black non-Hispanic	8.9
Hispanic/Latino	19.1
Asian non-Hispanic	1.0
Other non-Hispanic	3.4
<b>Preference for non-English Language, median %</b>	14.6
<b>Experiencing homelessness, median %</b>	2.0
<b>Income Level &gt;200% of the Federal Poverty Level, median %</b>	5.7
<b>Uninsured, median %</b>	15.9
<b>Insured by Medicaid, median %</b>	44.4
<b>Urban, n (%)</b>	754 (59.3)
<b>Located in a Medicaid Expansion State, n (%)</b>	1,001 (78.8)
<b>Race/Ethnicity of the Majority of Patients Served, n (%)</b>	
White non-Hispanic	587 (46.2)
Black non-Hispanic	221 (17.4)
Hispanic/Latino	412 (32.5)
Asian non-Hispanic	19 (1.5)
Other non-Hispanic	32 (2.5)
<b>Region, n (%)</b>	
West	352 (27.7)
Midwest	267 (21.0)
South	437 (34.4)
Northeast	215 (17.9)

**Figure 1.** Trends in Median Colorectal Cancer Screening Rates from 2014-2023 for (A) All U.S. FQHCs, (B) FQHCs by U.S. Region, and (C) FQHCs by Race/Ethnicity of the Majority of Patients Served (n=1,271).



USPSTF: United States Preventive Services Task Force; UDS: Uniform Data System