# Provider Types and Challenges

## Health Care Providers: Types, Roles, and Challenges

Our potential to provide longer, higher quality lives is enormous. Who is expected to deliver and realize this potential? In this audio presentation, we examine the types, roles, and challenges of providers within the American health care system.

## Evolution of Public Health

Health services in the past largely meant curative and treatment services. Today, a new paradigm for health promotion and disease prevention has emerged that is based upon a public-private partnership to protect and preserve the health of the American public. Neither sector can do what the other sector does for Americans to reach their maximum health status, but it will be necessary to forge an even stronger public-private partnership that allows both sectors to use their unique roles and advantages to advance public health.

## Ambulatory Care

During the years of 1990 and 1996, ambulatory care became the fastest growing area of national health expenditures. What accounts for the rise in ambulatory care services and delivery systems? The role of ambulatory care services in organizing and rationalizing the American health care system has been greatly enhanced by the rapid growth of managed care, by the changing nature and role of hospitals and hospital systems, and by enhancement of the gatekeeper and coordinating function of frontline providers of care. The escalating shift of many services traditionally performed on an inpatient basis to an outpatient basis has also heightened interest in ambulatory care. Finally, the increasing consolidation and vertical integration of the health care system is increasing the linkages between ambulatory care and other health services.
### Hospitals and Health Systems

The early years of this new century have seen the resurgence of hospital success and financial viability, especially for for-profit sector and publicly held hospital management companies. This does not mean that hospitals, as providers of health care within the U.S. are not facing serious challenges.

Constantly changing Medicare rules and reimbursement levels; the aging of the American population; changing technology; access to capital; an increasingly complicated legal system; and pressure from managed care insurers, government, and other contracting organizations continue to pose significant challenges for the hospital industry. Within this environment, however, Americans continue to gain access to some of the best hospital care in the world.

### Long-Term Care

Long-term care refers to the health, mental health, social, and residential services provided to a temporarily or chronically disabled person over an extended period of time with a goal of enabling the person to function as independently as possible. Consequently, the primary consumers of long-term care are people who have chronic or complex health issues accompanied by functional disabilities. To meet this demand, the long-term care industry evolved into a series of differential services that now lack coordination and often make financing complicated and inadequate. The system that currently exists must evolve into a well-organized, efficient, client-oriented, cost-effective continuum of care for the limited available resources to meet an ever-increasing demand.

### Mental Health Care

Currently, the mental health service system is divided into public and private sectors. Public sector services are directly operated by government agencies or are financed with governmental resources such as Medicare and Medicaid. Private sector services include those directly operated by private agencies and services financed through private sources, such as employer-provided insurance coverage.
Many people who need mental health services, but lack the funds or resources to obtain them, often find limited services available to them despite the bifurcated delivery system. Despite problems that remain in the system, mental health professionals, citizen advocates, and consumers continue to labor towards greater access to financial resources, more and improved services, and less stigma for mental illness.