

Massachusetts Acute Care Hospital Outpatient Observation Data— Quarterly Update

October 2019 through September 2025 (Preliminary)

Introduction

The Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) provides analyses of health system utilization to inform payers, providers, policymakers, and the public using information from its Acute Hospital Case Mix Databases, including the Outpatient Observation Database (OOD). Observation visits are classified as outpatient care and serve a variety of functions, including the reassessment of clinical status and/or continued testing beyond the care provided in an emergency department.

In January 2022, CHIA first published [Massachusetts Acute Care Hospital Outpatient Observation Data \(FFY 2016-2019\)](#). This report provided information and analyses of hospital outpatient observation utilization patterns in the period leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic and presented measures of observation utilization overall and by hospital, patient, and visit characteristics.

Building upon that report, CHIA has developed a quarterly update series to complement existing inpatient and emergency department (ED) treat-and-release visit reporting focused on outpatient observation visits, which includes an [interactive dashboard](#) and an accompanying [databook](#).

These updates use interim data to present analyses on a quarterly basis at a statewide and hospital level. Data from FFY 2016-2019 (October 2015-September 2019) is not displayed in the dashboard but can be found in the [legacy databook](#). More information is available in the [technical appendix](#).

Key Findings From the February 2026 Update

- July to September 2025 (Q4 of FFY 2025) reported the highest number of observation visits since the first quarter of FFY 2020, at 59,792 visits.
- Among all observation visits in FFY 2025, the 3 most common primary diagnoses were nonspecific chest pain, syncope, and alcohol-related disorders.
- Overall behavioral health-related observation visits have increased every quarter since Q4 FFY 2024, with mood disorders being the most frequent mental health condition and alcohol use disorders the most frequent substance use condition.

The data in the quarterly updates is preliminary. The primary purpose of this series is to provide timely patterns and trends on key outpatient observation utilization measures. The OOD dashboard and databook are updated at each release with more complete information as it becomes available and as CHIA continues to work with providers and payers to process and confirm data submissions through the annual data collection process.

About This Update

This quarterly update includes data from October 2019 to September 2025. This update is organized in the following 6 sections:

- Total Acute Care Volume
- Statewide Utilization
- Utilization by Hospital
- Visit Characteristics
- Diagnoses
- Behavioral Health

Total Acute Care Volume

This section shows the total volume of acute care hospital visits and discharges in Massachusetts by Case Mix categorization. Discharges/visits are categorized by inpatient stay, outpatient observation, and emergency department treat and release.

Statewide Utilization

The utilization section includes the total number of outpatient observation visits and average length of stay in hours. Measures are shown for all hospital outpatient observation visits across Massachusetts as well as by hospital cohort, hospital system, high public payer status, age group, sex, race/ethnicity, and primary payer type.

Utilization by Hospital

This section presents hospital-level outpatient observation utilization measures on a quarterly basis for all acute care hospitals in Massachusetts. The measures included are total visits and average length of stay. The databook includes tabs for hospital utilization by age group, sex, primary payer type, discharge setting, and behavioral health-related visits.

Visit Characteristics

This section shows statewide outpatient observation utilization patterns by age group, sex, race/ethnicity, and primary payer type.

Diagnoses

This section presents common primary diagnoses associated with outpatient observation visits by age group at a statewide level. Additionally, the average length of stay for each of these primary diagnosis categories is provided.

Behavioral Health

This section shows total visits and average length of stay for outpatient observation hospital visits associated with any behavioral health condition and by specific behavioral health diagnosis categories. These estimates are presented for all outpatient observation visits statewide and by age group.

