

The State of Retina Care

executive report

As the demand for specialized retinal care increases, Retina Consultants of America's (RCA) State of Retina Care report offers insight into the trends shaping community-based retina care, the pressures facing retina specialists, and the impact of the RCA partnership on patient access, physician experience, and clinical innovation.

Background

The [prevalence of retinal conditions](#), including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic macular edema and diabetic retinopathy, represents a considerable and growing health care burden in the United States.

Accelerated by an aging population and the increasing prevalence of retinal disease, demand for specialized care continues to rise. At the same time, retina specialists in community-based practices — who deliver care to millions of patients each year — face mounting operational and financial pressures that may threaten the long-term sustainability of that care.

As specialty care becomes more complex, shaped by the emergence of novel therapies and an evolving regulatory and policy landscape, this report examines the challenges retina specialists face and the impact of the Retina Consultants of America (RCA) partnership on physician experience, patient access and clinical innovation. Findings are based on responses from more than 115 retina specialists at RCA-affiliated practices who participated in an independent, anonymous survey.

Key findings at a glance

- **82%** of retina specialists said their ability to participate in clinical research or offer innovative therapies has improved since affiliating with RCA.
- **Nearly 80%** of retina specialists reported that RCA's support has positively affected their practice, their work as a physician, and their ability to care for patients.
- **53%** of retina specialists reported of patients' access to clinical trials has improved significantly since affiliating with RCA.
- **According to retina specialists**, RCA's greatest areas of support include research infrastructure, data analytics, purchasing and supply chain support.
- **Nearly half** of retina specialists reported that patient access to care has improved since affiliating with RCA.

Physician perspective

"As demand for retina care grows, RCA's support helps our practices deliver care close to home and bring new treatments to our patients, while creating opportunities for physicians to learn from one another and grow professionally."

—Dr. Vivek Chaturvedi, MD, FASRS
(Illinois Retina Associates)

Patient access to retinal care

Access to retinal care remains uneven across the country. According to a [study](#) published in *Retina*, more than 10 percent of U.S. residents live 30 to 60 minutes from a retina specialist, and 5 percent live more than an hour away.

Access also varies widely by state and region, with disparities most pronounced in rural communities. As an example, diagnostic and therapeutic care for diabetic retinopathy – a condition affecting nearly 10 million Americans – is [predominantly concentrated](#) in urban practices, even after adjusting for population differences and disease burden.

Given the time-sensitive nature of emergencies and the treatment burden associated with chronic retinal conditions, the significant geographic access gaps, [researchers say](#), have the potential to impact treatment adherence and compromise visual outcomes. Closing these gaps and bringing high-quality care closer to patients' homes is essential to improving outcomes, particularly as the prevalence of conditions such as AMD and diabetic retinopathy continues to rise.

Nearly half of the retina specialists surveyed reported that patient access to care has improved since their practice affiliated with RCA, including 15 percent who said access has significantly improved. Physicians most commonly attributed these gains to increased access to clinical trials, the opening of new facilities or satellite clinics, the ability to offer novel therapies and treatment options, and expanded appointment availability or capacity.

Since January 2025, when RCA joined Cencora, RCA has committed nearly \$40 million toward the planned opening of 18 de novo clinics across 13 states. Three clinics are already open, with affiliated practices recording increases in monthly patient capacity ranging from 7% to 16%, directly expanding access to care.



Since January 2025, RCA has committed nearly \$40 million toward the planned opening of 18 de novo clinics nationwide, helping practices expand access to care.

Advancing innovation in retinal care

Clinical trials are foundational to innovation in retina care, and the robust pipeline of products in development – including gene therapy, biologics and cutting-edge delivery systems – holds significant promise for the millions of Americans living with retinal disease.

Patient access to clinical research has long been shaped by a range of factors, including the [geographic concentration](#) of trial sites.

Expanding clinical trials into community settings – closer to where patients live – can reduce barriers and improve access to clinical research and next-generation therapies. However, building and sustaining research programs requires substantial resources and infrastructure, which can pose challenges for community-based practices already facing operational pressures.

More than 80 percent of surveyed retina specialists reported an improved ability to participate in clinical research and offer innovative therapies since affiliating with RCA, underscoring the value of RCA's [infrastructure and centralized services](#) in supporting practices and site-level investigators as they build and expand research programs. In addition, 85 percent reported improved patient access to clinical trials, supporting research participation closer to home and contributing to the advancement of therapies and management strategies for vitreoretinal diseases.

Physician perspective

"The capital and resources RCA has provided have allowed us to expand our existing offices and open new locations – equipped with the latest technology and diagnostic and therapeutic equipment – enabling us to meet the growing demand across Northern Central Valley and deliver care closer to home. The centralization of certain administrative and operational processes through RCA has created meaningful efficiencies, allowing us to spend more time with patients – while medical decision-making remains entirely with each physician."

–Dr. Margaret Chang, MD, MS
(Retinal Consultants Medical Group)

Strengthening practice operations, enhancing physician experience

Community-based physician practices are the backbone of accessible, affordable specialty care, but they are operating under mounting pressure. When adjusted for practice cost inflation, Medicare physician payments have declined **33 percent since 2001** – exacerbating the financial strain physicians face today and **impacting patient access to care**.

As specialty care grows more complex, physicians increasingly seek partners that can help them navigate access, reimbursement and administrative demands, while preserving physicians' clinical autonomy and their ability to deliver high-quality care in community-based settings.

Nearly 80 percent of respondents reported that RCA's administrative, operational and research support has had a positive impact on their practice, their work as a physician and their ability to care for patients. RCA's support is felt most strongly in research infrastructure, data analytics, purchasing and supply chain support, and revenue cycle and billing support – support designed to reduce operational complexity and enable physicians to spend more time on patient care.

Physician perspective

"On patient care, we are now able to care for more patients due, in part, to our expanded capacity. Our patients are happy and appreciative, and they tell us so every day."

–Dr. Sabin Dang, MD
(The Retina Institute)

Conclusion

As demand for retinal care continues to grow, supporting the long-term strength of community-based practices will be critical to ensuring patients can access high-quality care close to home.

The findings in this report suggest that retina specialists are operating in an increasingly complex environment shaped by rising disease burden and mounting administrative and financial pressures. However, the results also indicate that the RCA partnership can strengthen practice operations, enhance the physician experience and satisfaction, and improve patient access to high-quality care, including novel therapies.

As innovation accelerates and the retina landscape evolves, it's increasingly important to provide practices and physicians with the support needed to navigate pressures – including a projected **28 percent** shortage of ophthalmologists by 2038 – and empower them to focus on delivering high-quality retinal care.

Survey Methodology

RCA surveyed partner and associate physicians May 4–18, 2026, to better understand how affiliation has affected their practices, physician experience and ability to care for patients. The anonymous, 19-question email survey received responses from more than 115 physicians, representing approximately one-third of RCA's physician network.

Respondent profile

- 70% have been practicing as a retina specialist for more than 10 years
- 61% have been affiliated with RCA for at least four years
- 15% have been affiliated with an RCA practice for less than one year