



2025 Report

# The Next Evolution of Patient Choice:

The Rise of AI in Healthcare Search





# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>1. Online Reviews Are Still Foundational, But AI Has Entered the Conversation</b>	<b>04</b>
Today's Patient Journey	05
<b>2. The Shift Away from Traditional Referrals and Rising Trust in AI</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>3. Social Media and Voice Search Play Supporting Roles</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>4. The Participation Gap: Patients Read Reviews, But Rarely Leave Them</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>5. Online Reviews Drive Trust — and Growth</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>13</b>
Key Takeaways	14
Survey Methodology	15
Appendix	18



# Introduction

## From Patient Reviews to AI-Powered Decisions

For much of the past decade, online reviews have been the foundation of how patients choose their providers. In December 2024, 84% of patients told us they checked online reviews before booking care.<sup>1</sup> Less than a year later, our June 2025 survey revealed a shift.

Patients are expanding beyond Google searches and word-of-mouth referrals, turning to artificial intelligence (AI), voice assistants, and social media to guide their care decisions.

This growing complexity means healthcare providers must rethink how they approach visibility and patient engagement. Practices that fail to meet patients across multiple channels risk becoming invisible in this next phase of healthcare search.

This report from rater8 maps out the next evolution of patient behavior and offers clear actions that healthcare organizations can take to stay visible, build trust, and capture new patient volume as search habits continue to change.

# 1. Online Reviews Are Still Foundational, But AI Has Entered the Conversation

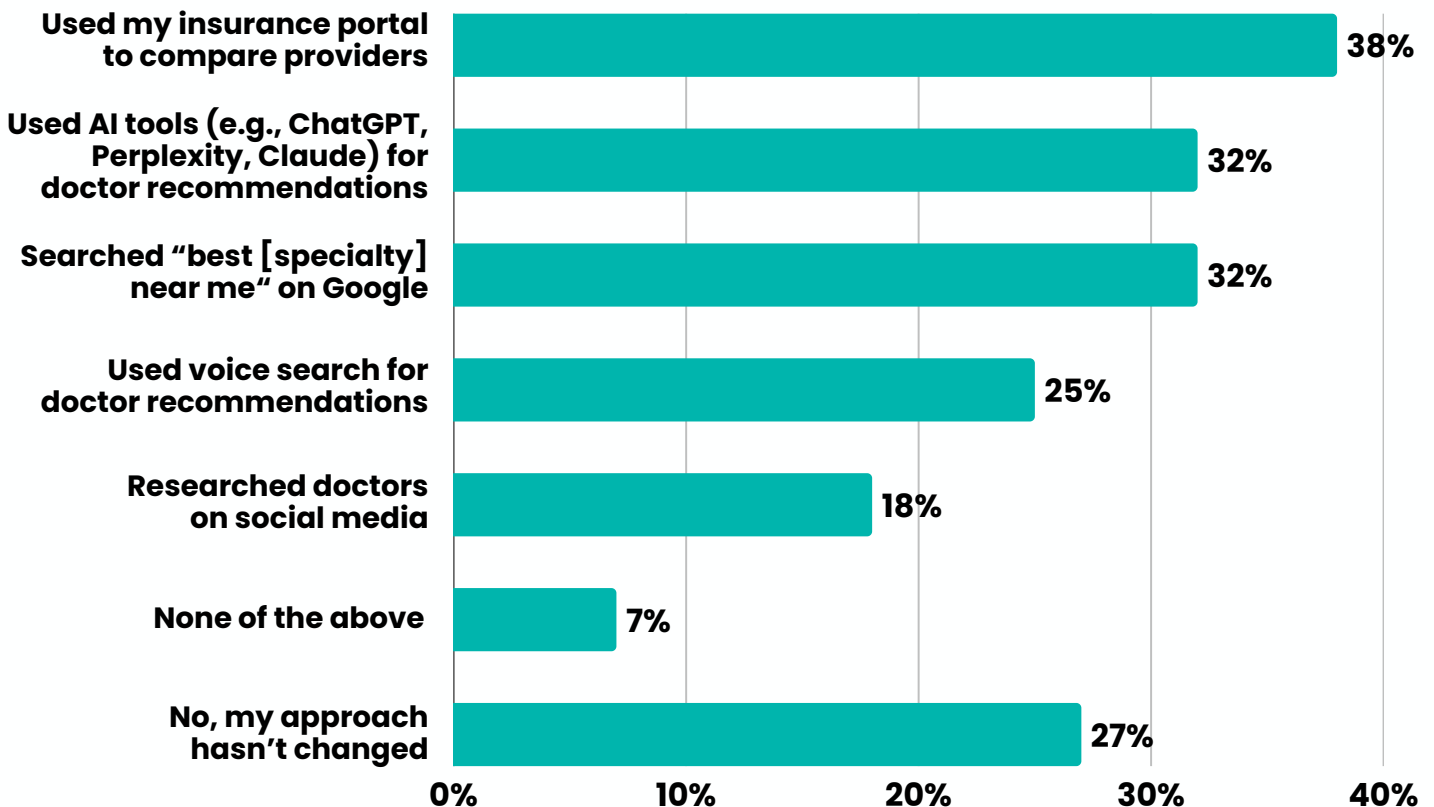
While online reviews remain the bedrock of patient decision-making, the June 2025 data revealed a striking new trend: **the adoption of AI-powered tools.** Online reviews continue to drive patient choices, with **more than half of patients** reading at least six reviews before booking an appointment.<sup>1</sup>

However, a growing number of patients are layering in new methods of discovery and evaluation. In the past year alone, **73% of patients** reported adopting new behaviors or tools to research providers, including AI chatbots like ChatGPT, voice search assistants like Siri and Alexa, and social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

This signals a clear shift: the patient journey is no longer linear. It's expanding into an AI-powered ecosystem where multiple touchpoints shape decisions.



**In the past 12 months, have you adopted any new behaviors or tools when searching for a doctor?**



# Today's Patient Journey



## AWARENESS

**Patients begin their journey online**, where reviews and ratings hold as much, if not more, weight than personal recommendations.

## RESEARCH

**84% of patients check online reviews** before choosing a new provider. Patients dive deep, with over half (**51%**) reading a minimum of 6 reviews before making a decision.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, **31% of patients use generative AI** like ChatGPT and Google AI Overviews to research or compare providers.<sup>2</sup>

## DECISION

Reviews can make or break a decision. **For 40% of patients, negative reviews have caused them to cancel or avoid booking an appointment entirely**,<sup>3</sup> even when friends and family recommend otherwise, with **61%** saying that personal recommendations wouldn't sway their decision if they saw negative reviews online.<sup>4</sup>

## EXPERIENCE

Creating an exceptional in-office experience, from short wait times to friendly staff, increases the likelihood of positive reviews.

## ENGAGEMENT

Nearly half of patients (**45%**) value providers who actively respond to reviews, whether positive or negative.<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates accountability and fosters trust among patients.

## 2. The Shift Away from Traditional Referrals and **Rising Trust in AI**

Historically, primary care referrals were the top driver of provider selection. But, as AI becomes embedded in search behaviors, this traditional hierarchy is starting to erode.

By mid-2025, **26% of patients** reported that AI tools, including AI-generated review summaries and conversational assistants like ChatGPT, had directly influenced their choice of healthcare provider. This places AI on par with primary care referrals (28%) and healthcare review sites (29%) in terms of influence.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, **61% of patients said they trusted online reviews more than personal recommendations** from friends or family.<sup>4</sup> This shift reflects a broader trend in consumer behavior.

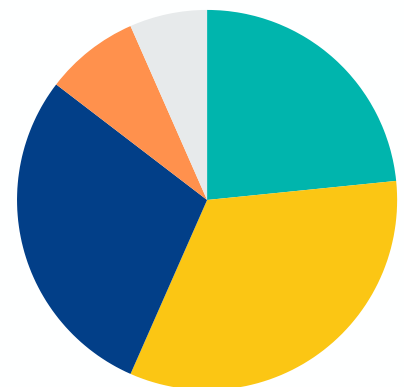
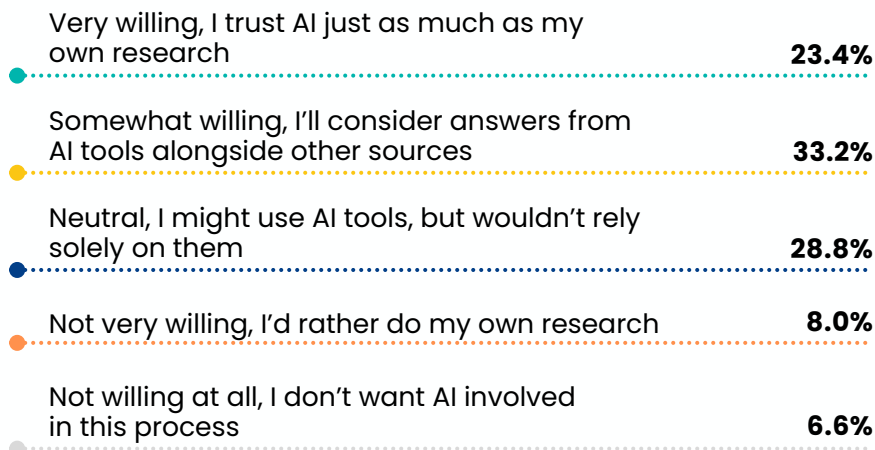
Today's patients want to see public feedback from real people. They value transparency, and without strong social proof of quality care, healthcare organizations run the risk of losing patients to competitors that have a more polished online image.

### Social Proof

Social proof is the public validation your practice receives through testimonials, reviews, and online interactions, such as likes, shares, mentions, and more.

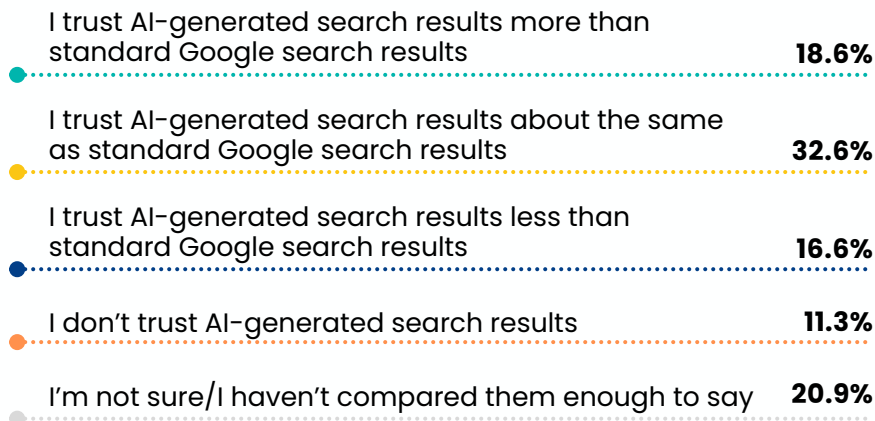
When patients consider which doctor to choose, they look beyond insurance coverage and referrals, seeking reassurance through the feedback and experiences of their peers.

### Q: How willing are you to rely on AI tools that summarize and rank doctors based on online information?



Our latest data also point to a significant uptick in trust toward AI-generated information. One-third of patients said they trust AI-generated search results as much as traditional search engines like Google, with nearly **one in five stating they trust AI even more**. Only **11%** expressed outright skepticism toward AI-powered recommendations. Yet, despite the growing trust in these emerging tools, patients remain grounded in the authenticity of peer reviews.

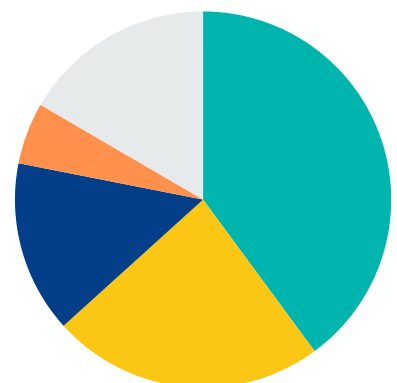
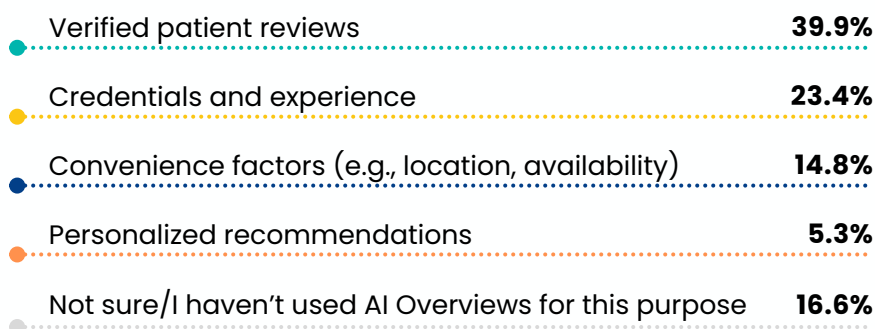
## Q: How much do you trust AI-generated search results vs. standard Google search results when choosing a doctor?



Over half of AI users said AI-generated summaries helped them to better research providers, and when asked what they valued most in these summaries, verified patient reviews consistently topped the list, far outweighing other factors like provider credentials or convenience.

This signals a clear truth: AI can guide patients toward options, but **authentic patient experiences ultimately drive final decisions**.

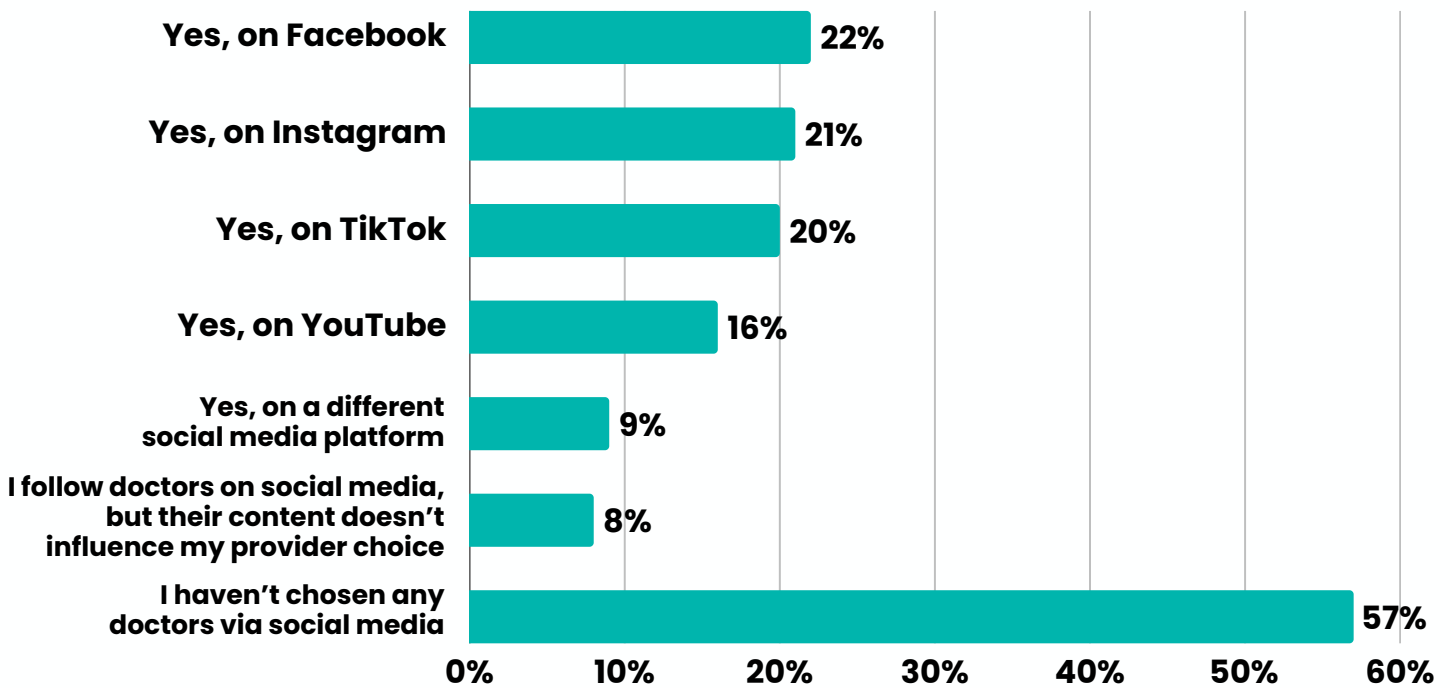
## Q: When using AI-generated Google search results (also known as "AI Overviews") to research and evaluate healthcare providers, what kind of information do you value the most?



### 3. Social Media and Voice Search Play Supporting Roles

AI isn't the only disruptor in patient search behaviors. Social media and voice assistants are playing increasingly complementary roles. Our survey found that **35% of patients** have chosen a provider based on social media presence, and **25% of patients** began using voice assistants to research providers in 2025 (page 4).

#### Q: Have you ever chosen a doctor based on their social media presence?



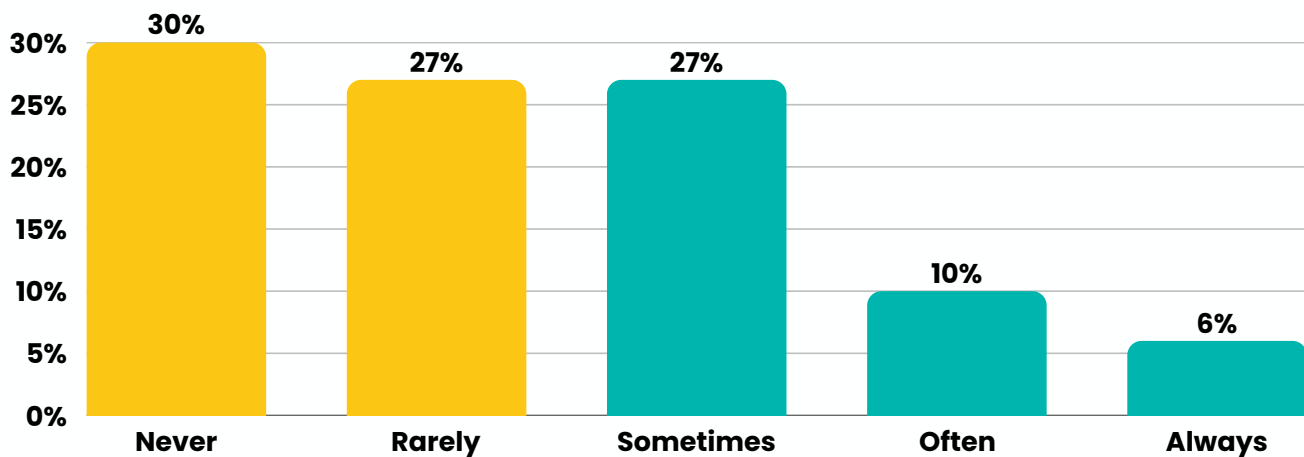
While voice search tends to be used for practical questions like directions and office hours, social media has become a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and generating trust. Patients expect to see healthcare providers engaging online, and those with a strong social and digital presence are more likely to capture attention early in the search journey.

Providers who build and maintain a professional social media presence and optimize for voice search will be better positioned to meet patients earlier in their decision-making process.

## 4. The Participation Gap: Patients Read Reviews, But Rarely Leave Them

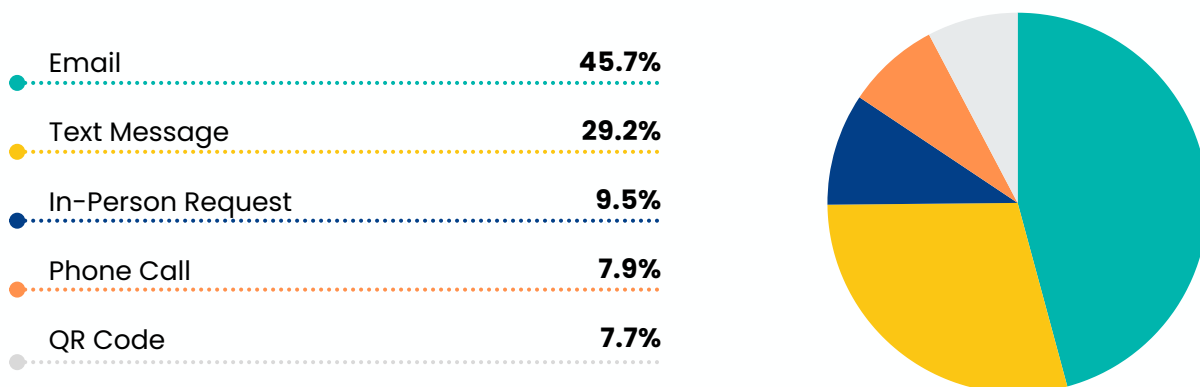
Both surveys revealed a consistent gap between how much patients depend on reviews, but how infrequently they leave them. While online reviews have immense influence on patient choices, **57% of patients** admit they rarely or never leave reviews themselves.

**Q:** How often do you leave online reviews for healthcare providers?



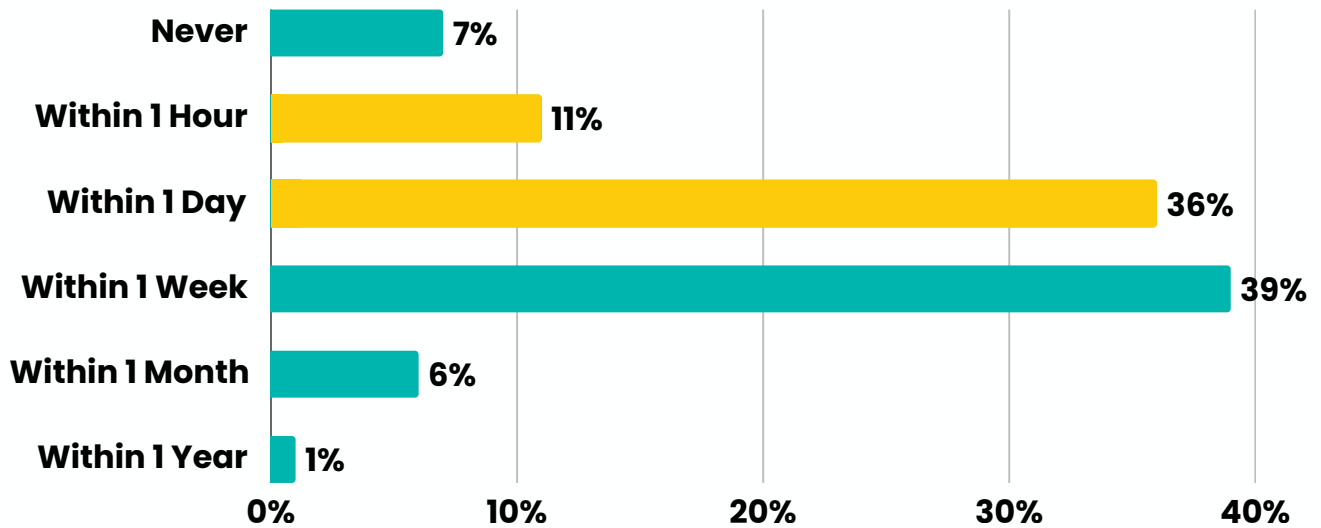
The good news is, patients are willing to leave reviews when asked, with 74% saying they are at least somewhat likely to do so when prompted.<sup>7</sup> Preferences have also shifted toward digital outreach, with 46% favoring email and 29% opting for text messages.

**Q:** When asked to leave a review, which method do you prefer?



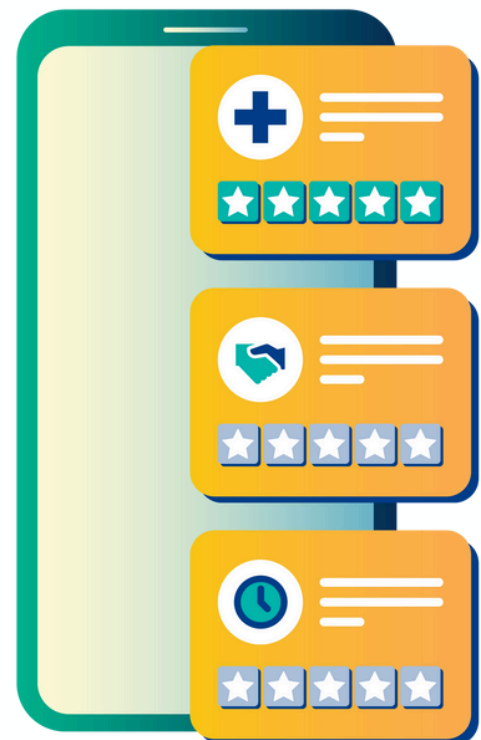
Timing is key, with **47% of patients most likely to leave a review within 24 hours of their appointment.** Practices that implement timely, well-targeted outreach stand to see a significant increase in their volume of positive patient feedback, thereby improving their overall online visibility.

## Q: How soon after your appointment would you be most likely to provide a review?



Ultimately, the disconnect between patients relying on reviews and their hesitancy to leave them highlights a bigger challenge at play: bridging the gap between expectations and action.

Healthcare organizations can proactively address this gap through timely, personalized, and patient-focused review requests that will not only boost their online reputation, but also strengthen the trust and loyalty of their prospective and current patients.

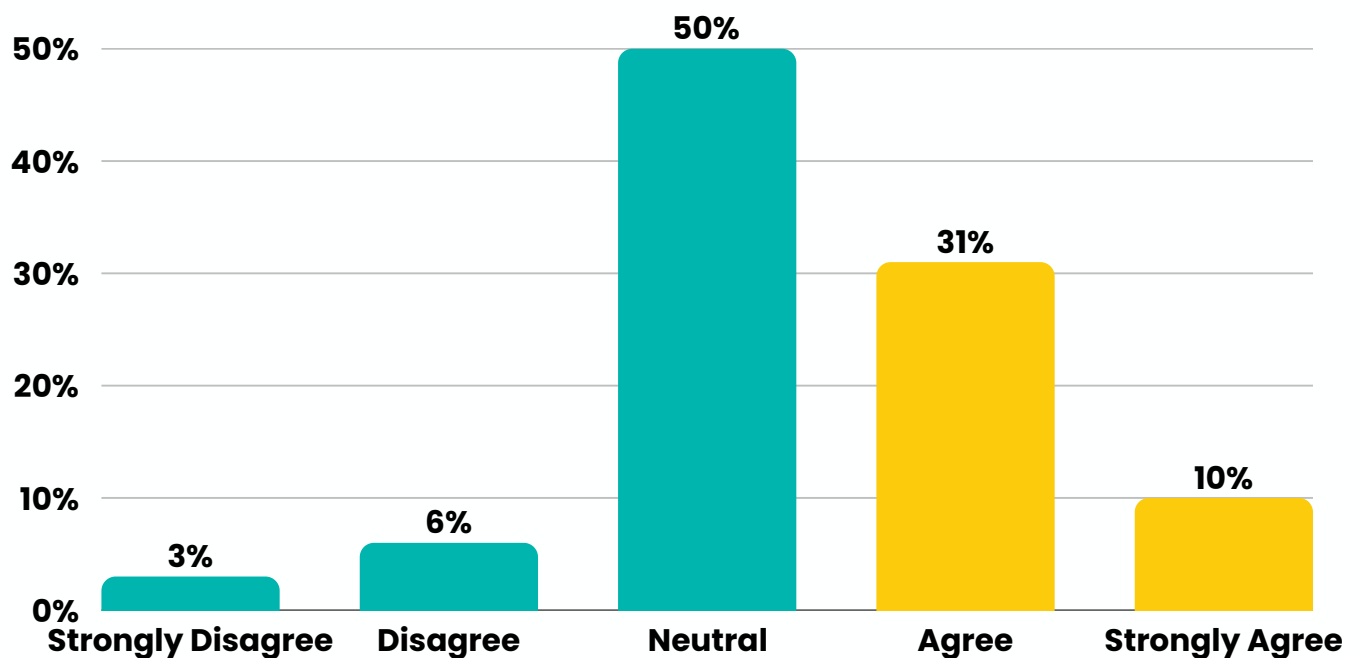


## 5. Online Reviews Drive Trust — and Growth

The patient journey doesn't end after reading a few reviews or selecting a provider through AI search. Ongoing engagement plays a crucial role in building and maintaining trust too. Given that **41% of patients say their trust in a provider increases when they see responses to online reviews**, taking the time to engage with feedback isn't just good practice, it's critical in enforcing the cycle of trust.

Review quantity and quality also correlate with better visibility in search engines and AI-driven summaries. Providers who frequently collect reviews and engage with patients online experience improved search visibility, which leads to more calls, more clicks, and, ultimately, more appointments.

**Q:** Does seeing a healthcare provider's response to online reviews influence your trust in them?



# Conclusion

## The Road Ahead: Opportunities for Healthcare Providers

Patient search behaviors are changing faster than healthcare organizations can be expected to keep up. AI search tools are evolving from helpful research aids to full-service booking platforms, offering patients the ability to schedule directly from AI interfaces. Social platforms are expanding their discovery features, and AI summaries are becoming more sophisticated, drawing from directories, websites, reviews, and social media content. Maintaining a strong online presence is no longer optional; it's fundamental to how patients evaluate their care options.

We've summed up the key points that will guide your organization to success in 2025 and beyond.



## Key Takeaways:

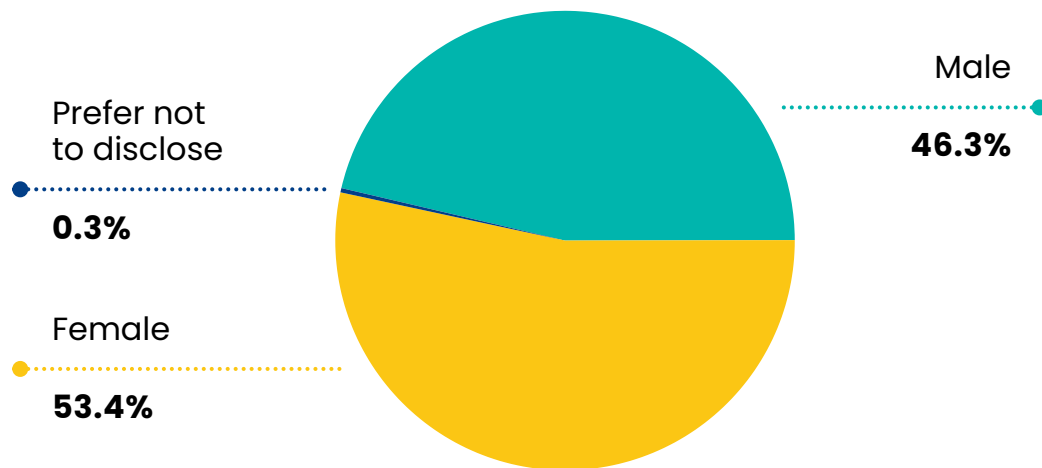
- 1. AI is Rivaling PCP Referrals — is Your Practice Prepared?** 26% of patients are choosing providers based on AI tools — nearly matching PCP referrals (28%). The traditional referral pipeline is weakening, and practices with poor AI visibility risk significant patient leakage.
- 2. Online Reviews Drive Both Patient Trust and Revenue:** 84% of patients check online reviews before choosing a provider, and 61% trust reviews more than personal referrals. Incomplete or outdated online profiles directly impact your bottom line through lack of visibility and canceled appointments.
- 3. AI Doesn't Replace Reviews, It Amplifies Them:** Verified patient reviews are the most valued AI search result, with AI bots pulling from Google, Healthgrades, directories, and social media. Bad reviews don't just live on Google — they surface everywhere AI scrapes.
- 4. Social Media and Voice Search Are Growth Channels, Not Afterthoughts:** 35% of patients have chosen a doctor based on social media presence, and 25% rely on voice assistants. Practices with no social media strategy risk invisibility on key digital touchpoints.
- 5. A Review Strategy is a Growth Strategy:** Practices actively requesting patient feedback (via text/email) and responding to reviews not only foster better patient experiences, but also improve search rankings, leading to more calls, more clicks, and, ultimately, more appointments.

The next frontier in patient acquisition will belong to those who adapt early. Healthcare organizations that establish a robust online presence, optimize for AI visibility, and actively engage patients across channels will be best positioned to capture market share. Those who delay risk becoming invisible, overlooked by patients who increasingly expect a seamless, tech-enabled discovery and booking experience.

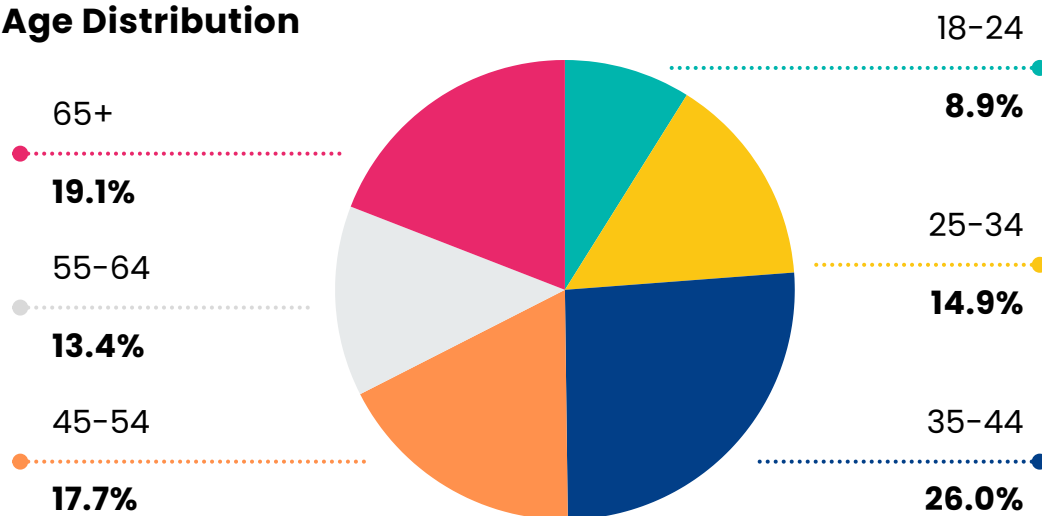
# Survey Methodology

This report combines data from two patient preference surveys conducted by rater8 via SurveyMonkey. The first survey was completed in December 2024 by 1,008 U.S. adults aged 18–65 and older, representing a mix of gender, region, and income levels. The second survey was completed in June 2025 by 1,024 U.S. adults using the same demographic balance to ensure comparability. Both surveys focused on understanding how patients search for providers and the growing role of online reviews, AI tools, social media, and voice search in healthcare decision-making.

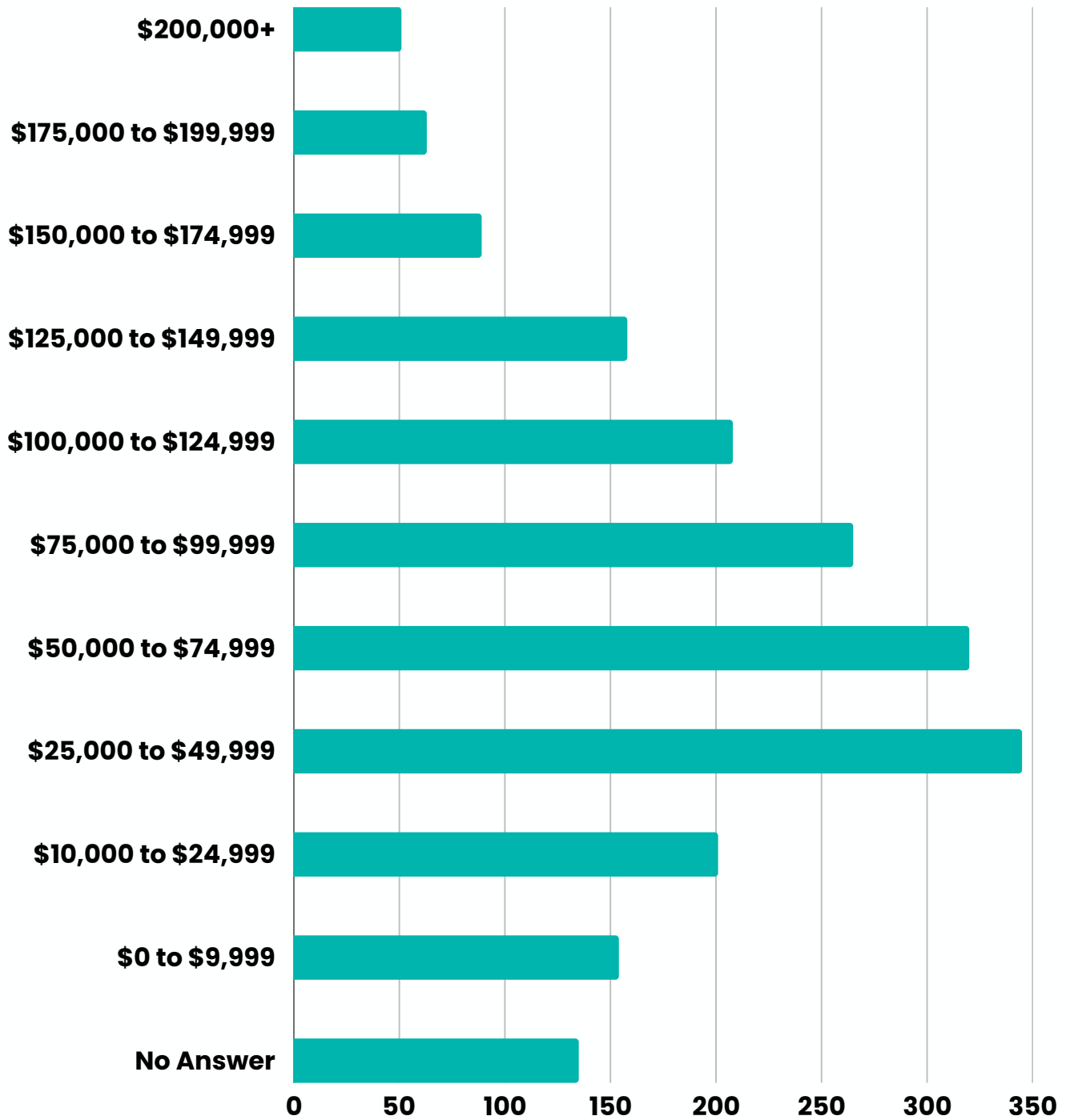
## Gender Distribution



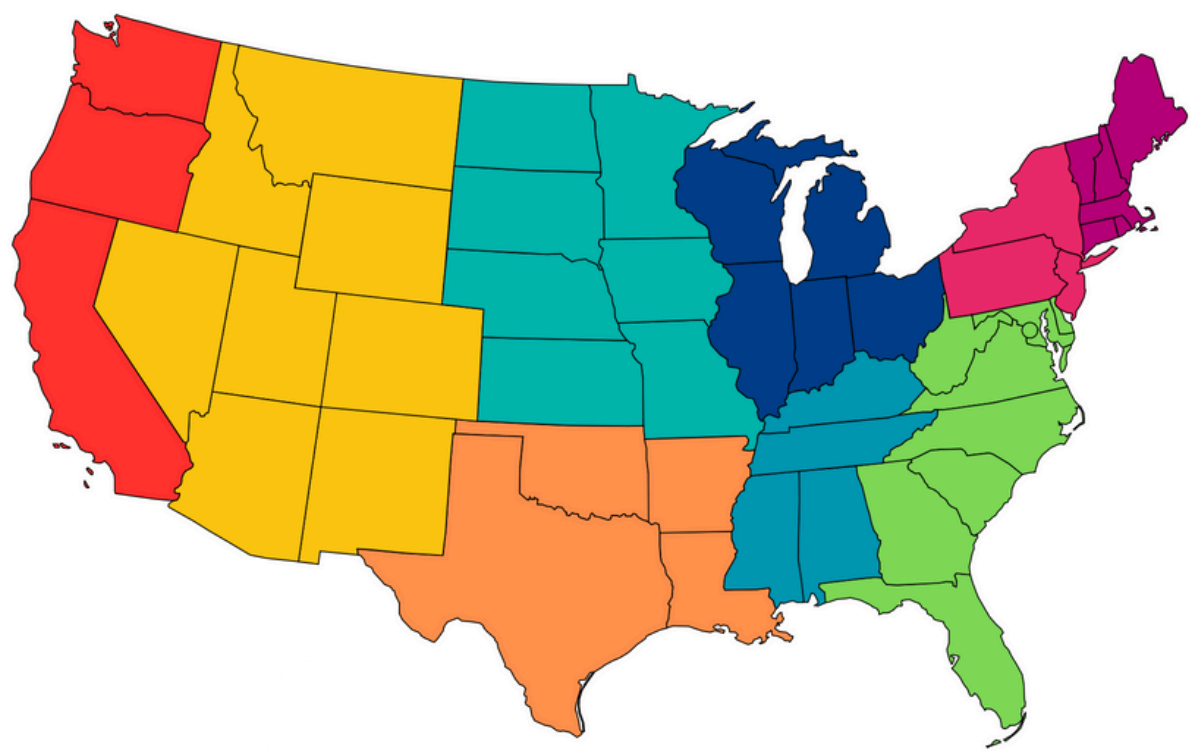
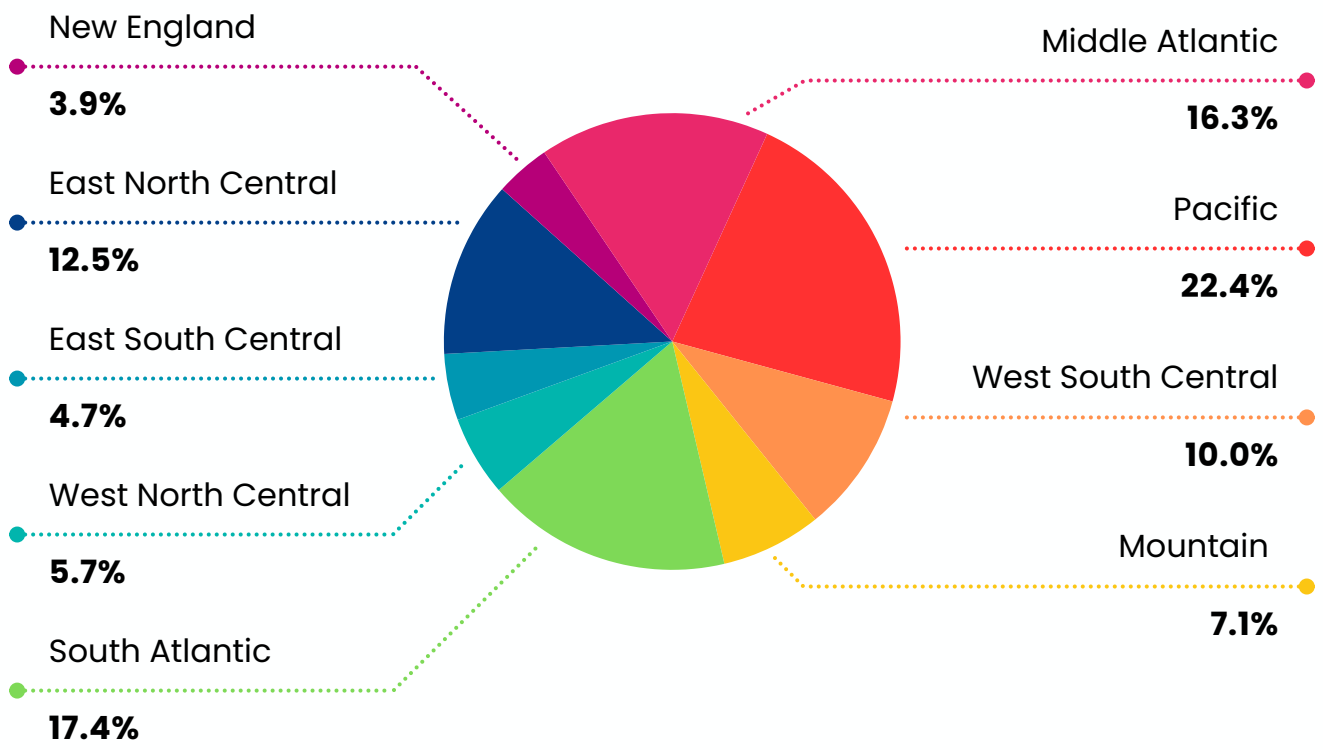
## Age Distribution



## Household Income Distribution

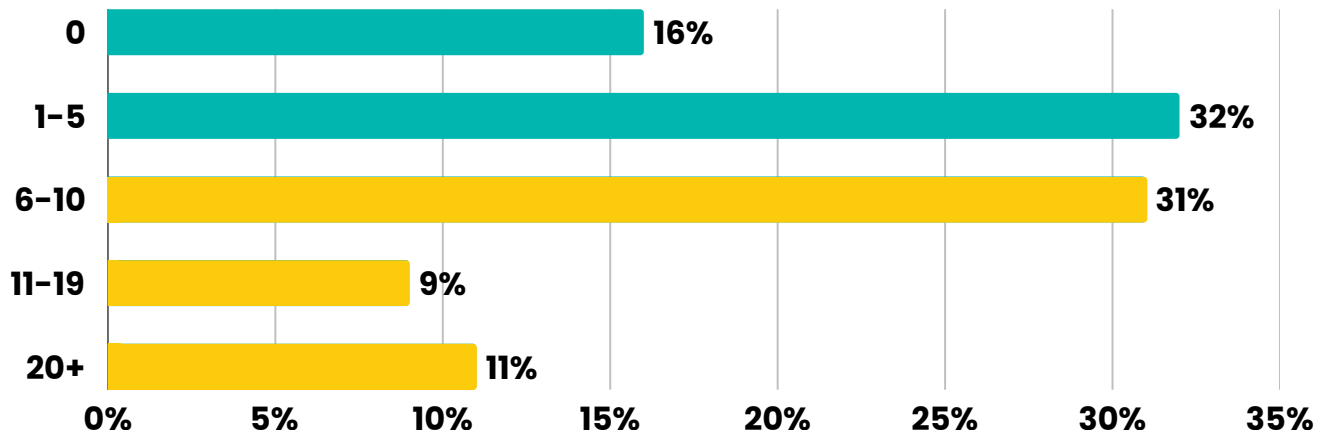


# Geographic Distribution

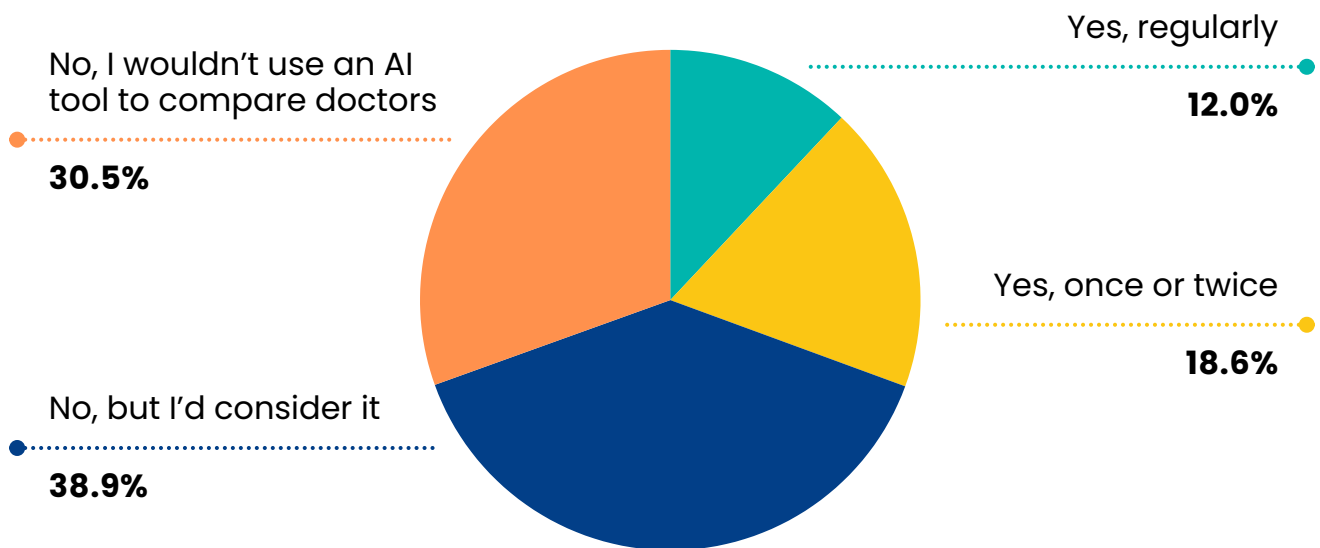


# Appendix

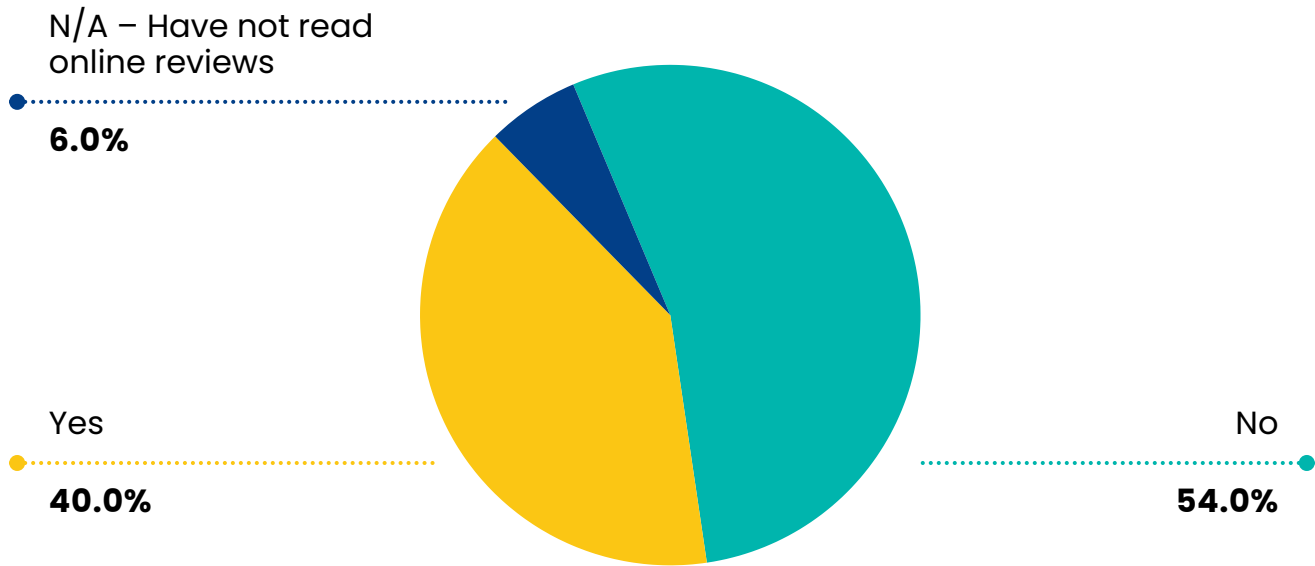
**1 Q:** How many reviews do you typically read before choosing a provider?



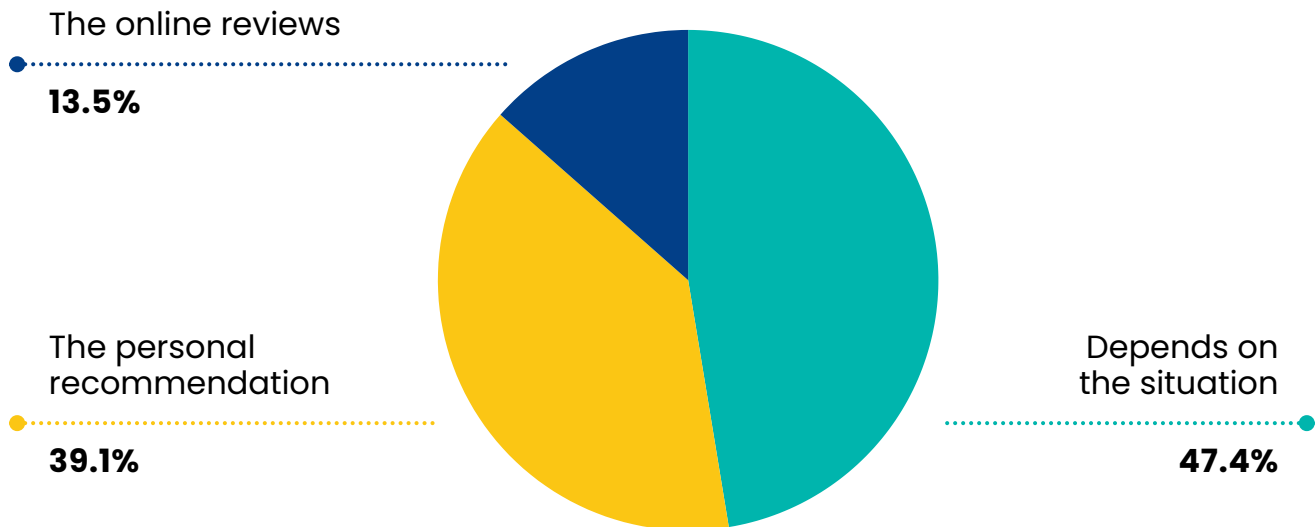
**2 Q:** Have you ever used a generative AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews) to research or compare healthcare providers?



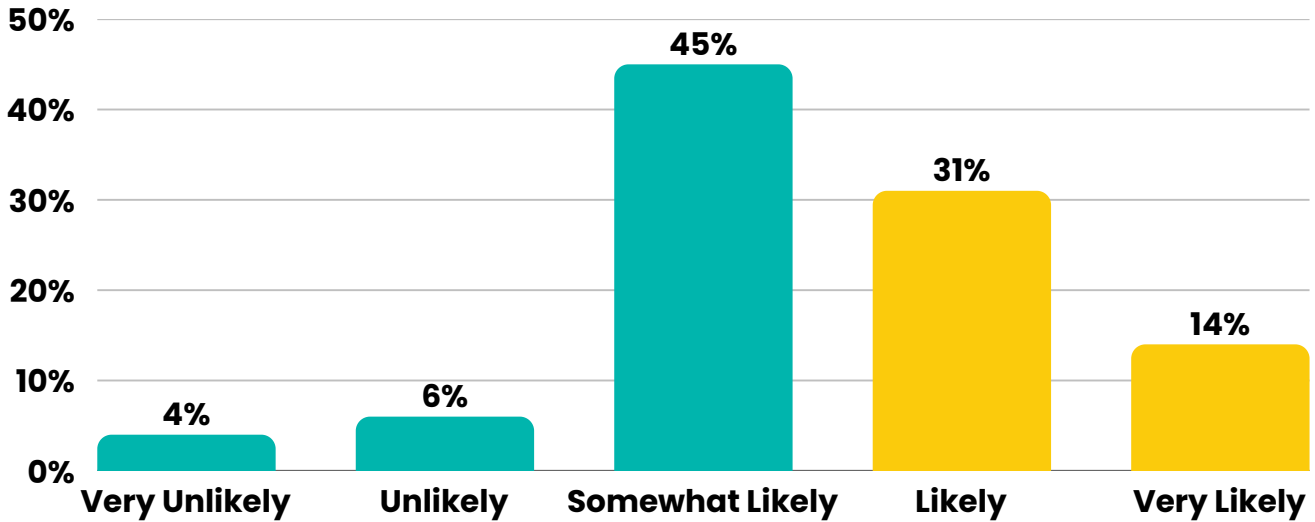
**3 Q:** Have you ever decided to cancel an appointment or to not book an appointment with a potential physician after reading online reviews?



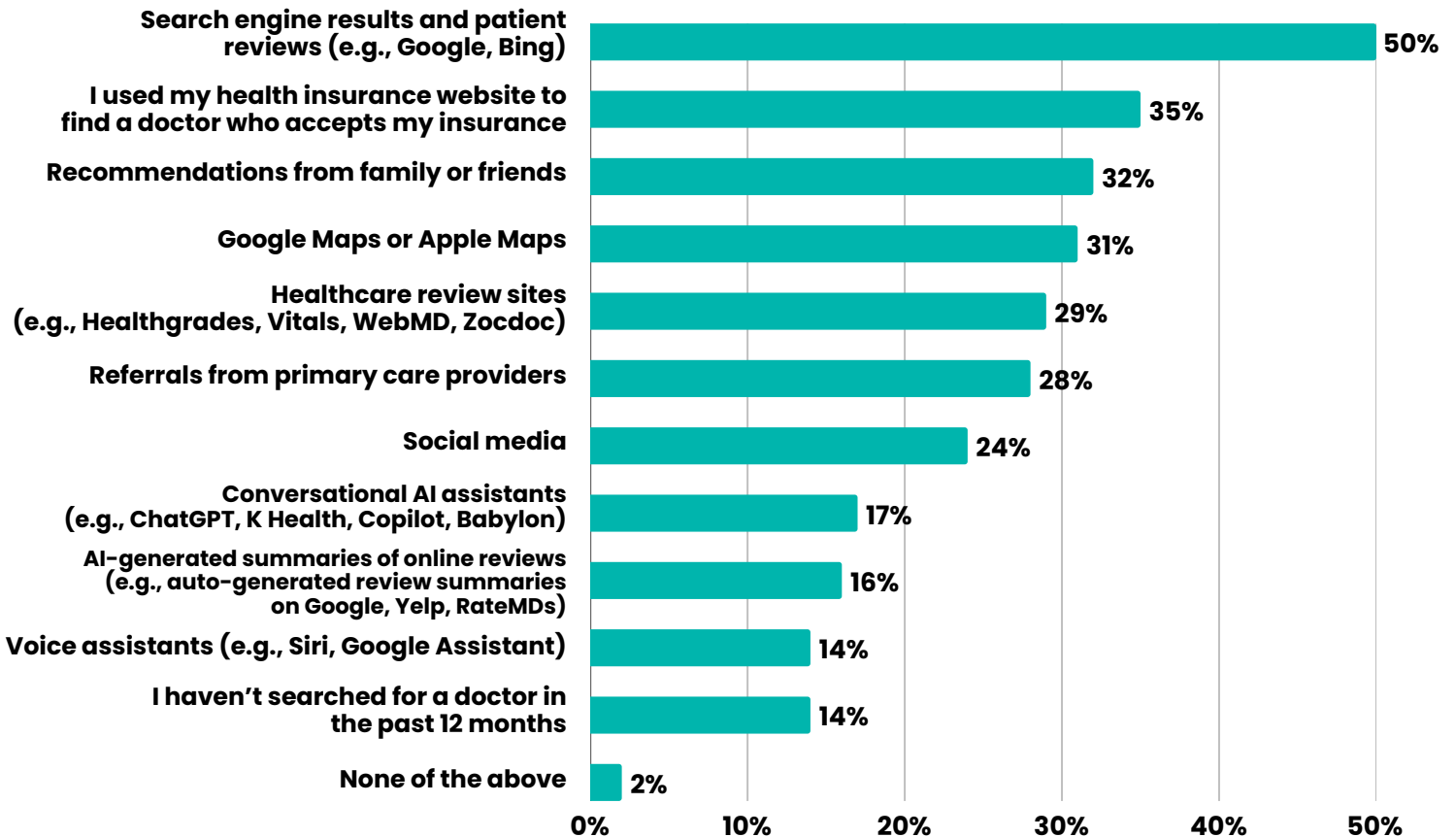
**4 Q:** If a physician had good online reviews, but someone you knew mentioned that they did not have a good experience with them, which would carry more weight in your decision about whether to make an appointment with them?



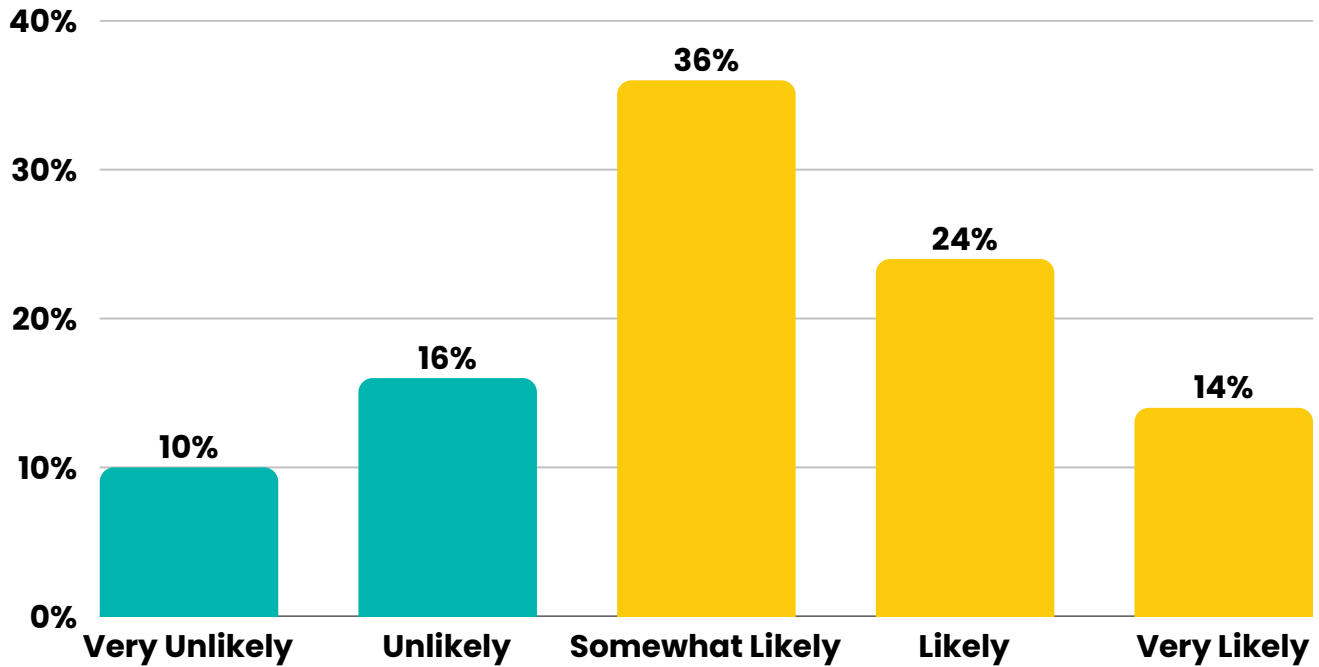
**5 Q:** How likely are you to choose a provider who actively responds to patient reviews compared to one who does not?



**6 Q:** In the last 12 months, which sources have most influenced your decision when choosing a new doctor?

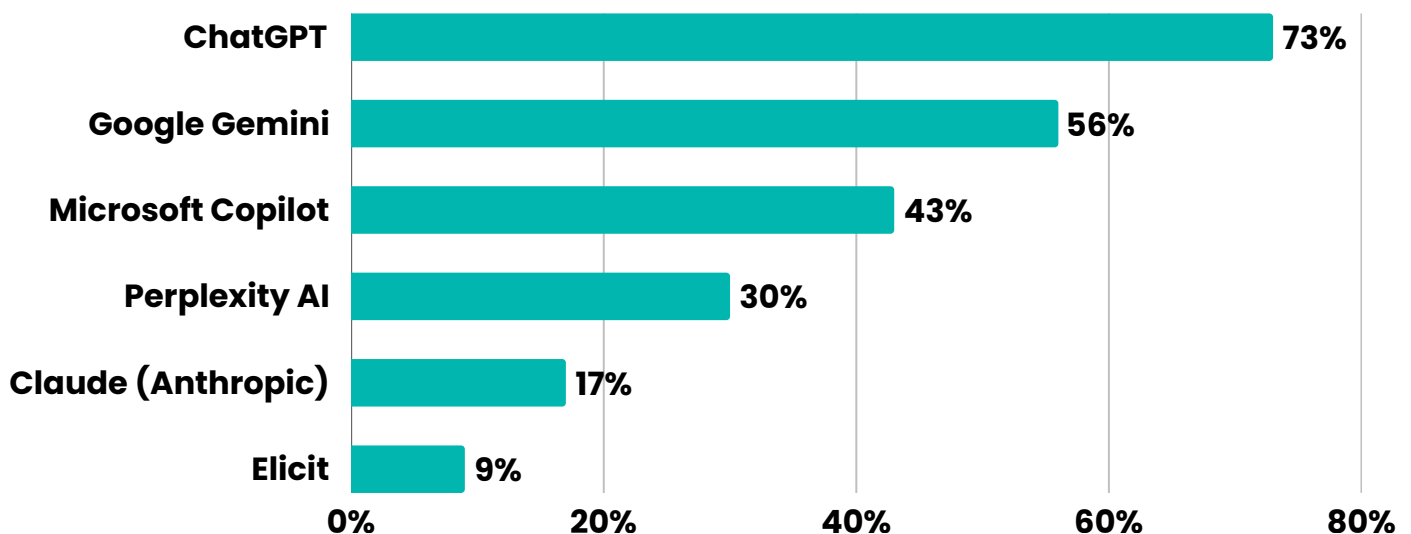


**7 Q:** How likely are you to leave an online review about your healthcare experience if asked?



**Ranking of AI Tools for Provider Research**

**Q:** If you've used generative AI tools to research healthcare providers, which of the following have been the most helpful or accurate?



# About rater8

rater8, the healthcare industry's leader in online reputation management, provides SaaS solutions that help medical practices attract more patients by effortlessly cultivating five-star reviews on leading sites and gathering real-time patient feedback. Based in the U.S., rater8 is a rapidly growing healthtech innovator serving hundreds of practices and hospitals of all sizes and specialties.

Learn more at [rater8.com](https://rater8.com).



**You make patients happy.  
We make sure everyone knows about it.**

rater8



🌐 [rater8.com](https://rater8.com) | ✉ [info@rater8.com](mailto:info@rater8.com)