

IMPROVING PHONE ACCESS ACROSS CAMBRIDGE HEALTH ALLIANCE

BACKGROUND

Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) is a vibrant, innovative health system dedicated to providing essential services to all members of the community. With over 140,000 patients in Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston's Metro North region, CHA is a local provider of choice for primary care, specialty care, emergency services, hospital care, maternity care and behavioral health.

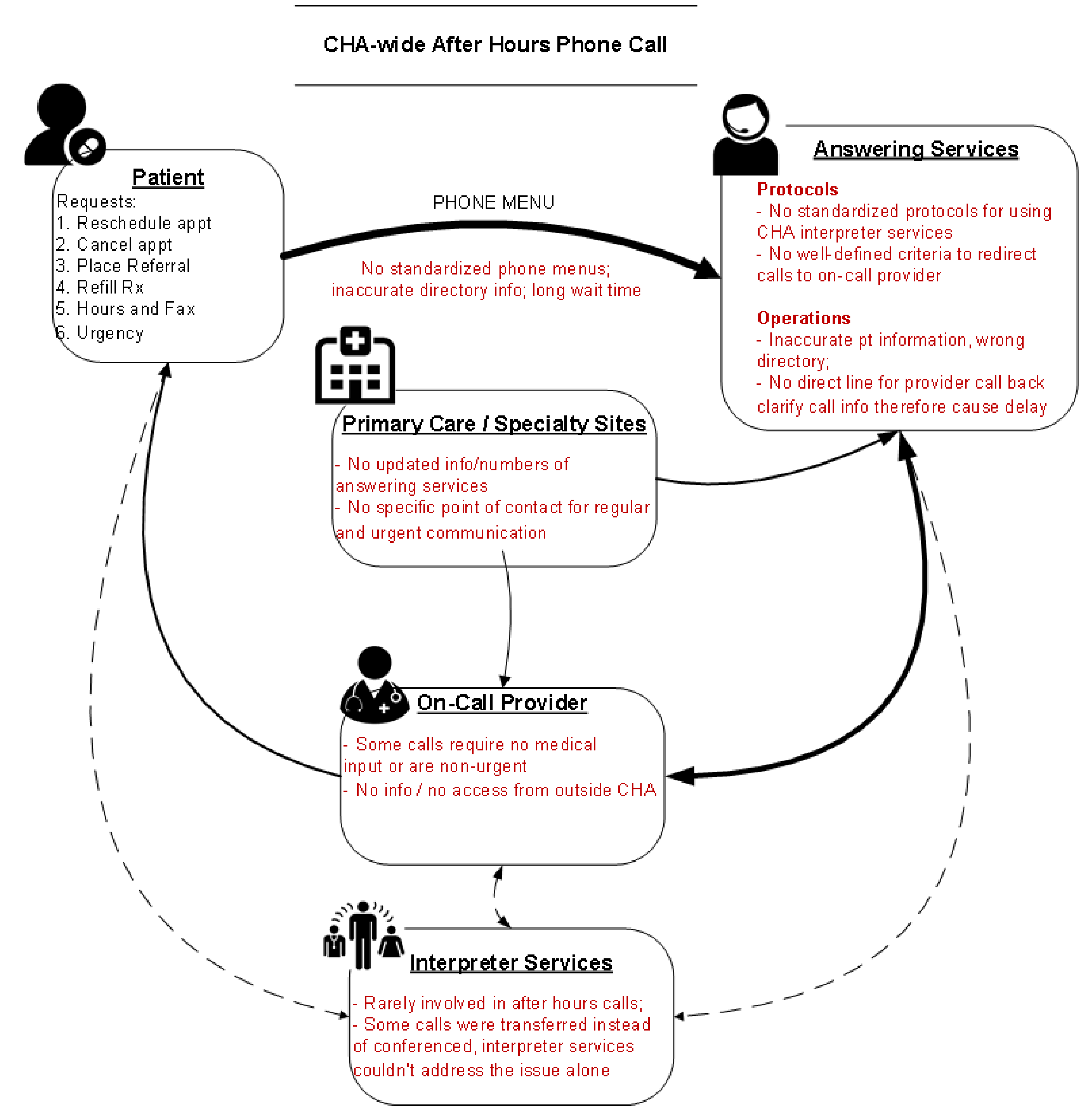
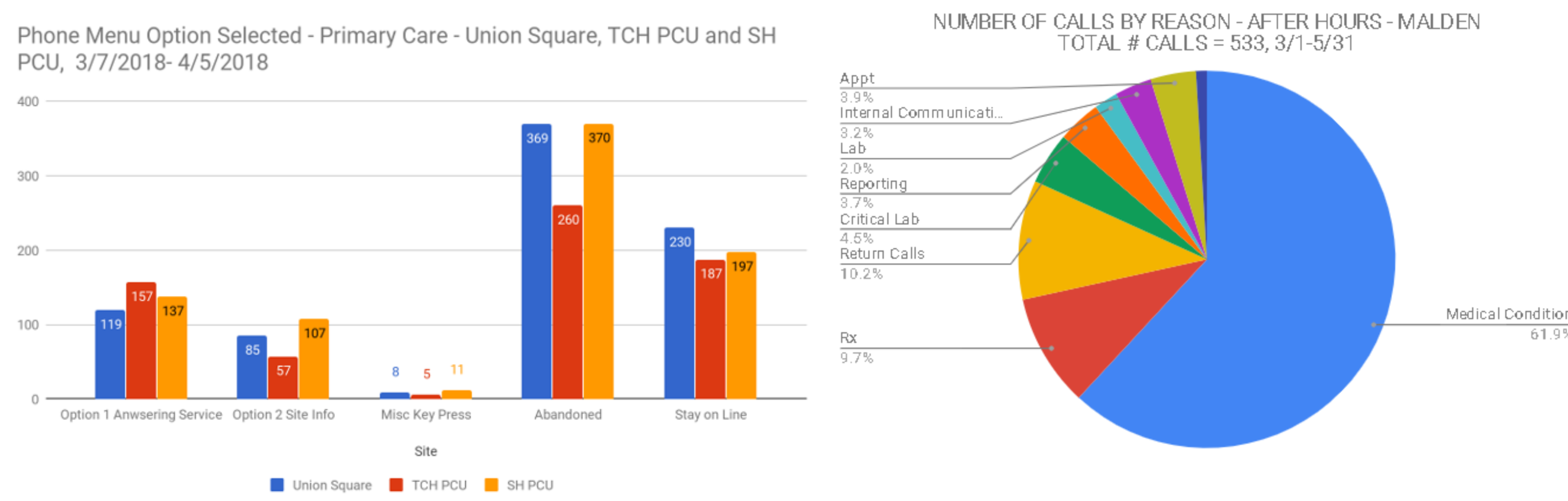
Patients of CHA experience barriers accessing health services through the phone system such as long wait times (avg=41 sec), complex phone trees, and call disconnections.

AIM

This project aimed to improve phone access through standardizing and simplifying operating hours and after hours phone menu across CHA.

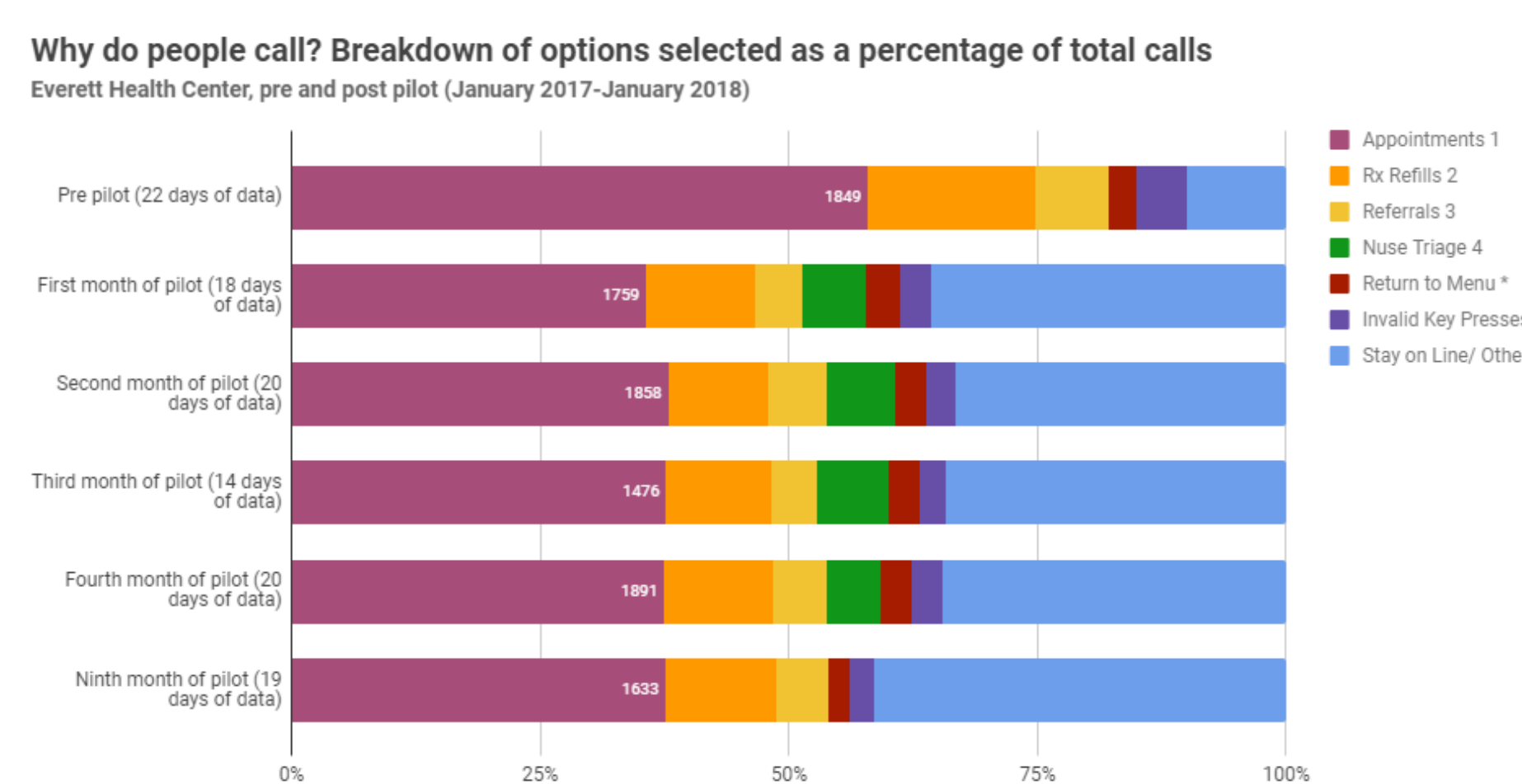
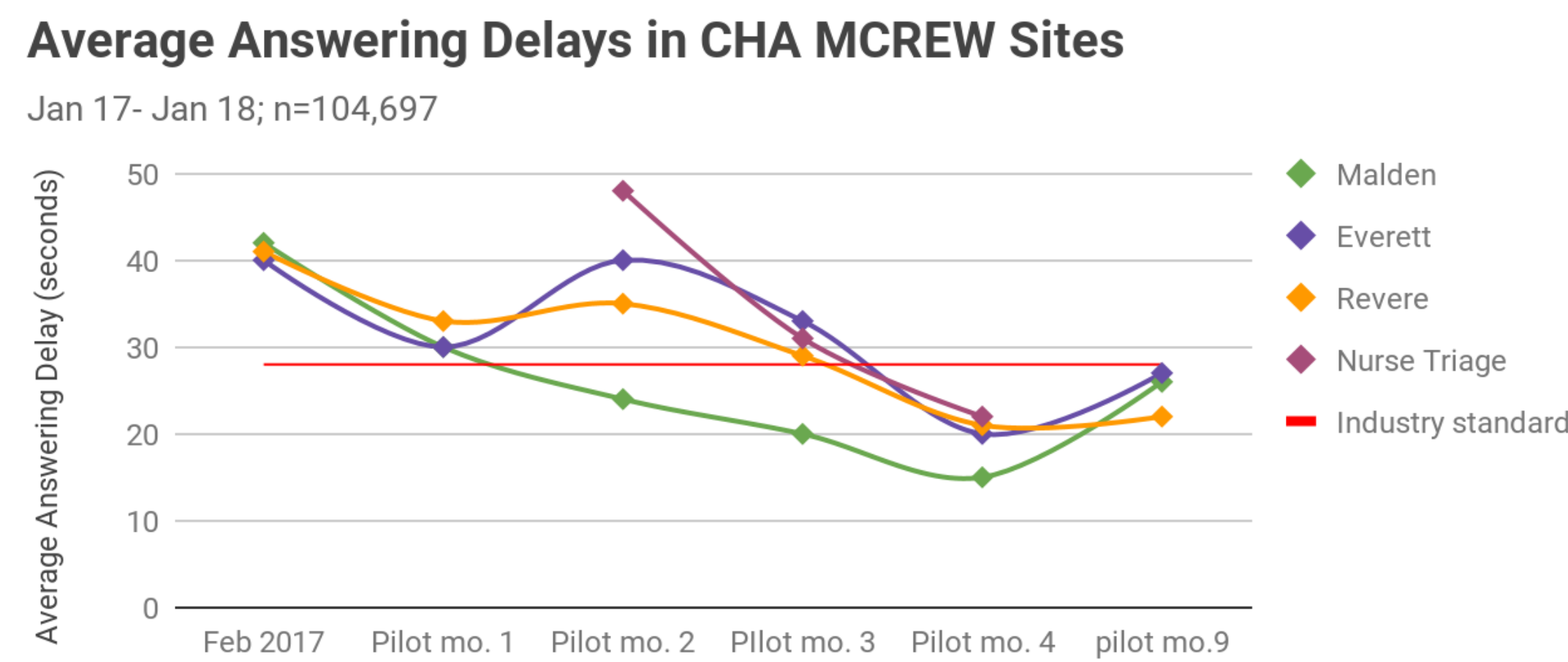
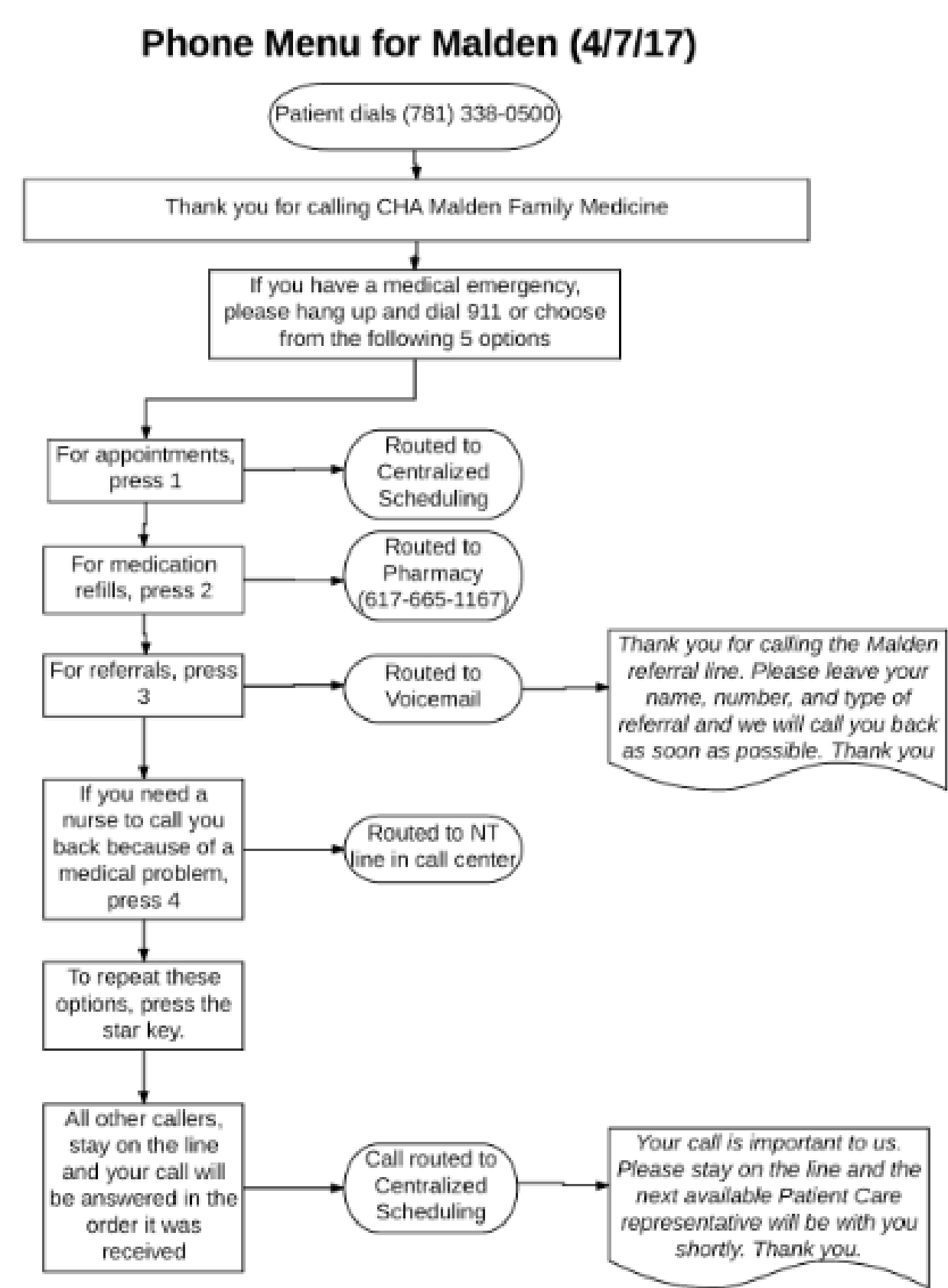
UNDERSTANDING CURRENT STATE

- Call Abandonment Rate
- Call Volume
- Average Wait Time
- # of Calls Routed to Vendor
- Press Ganey Score
- Feedback from provider and patient



IDENTIFYING AND IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS

Simpler, standardized, and patient-friendly scripts were piloted and cascaded for operating hours and after hours phone menus. Changes included reduced options (including languages), discontinuation of underused voice mailboxes, addition of a "return to main menu" option and consolidation of answering services for after hours calls.



The phone menu redesign resulted in lowered abandonment rates (from 7.3% to 4.3% over 9 months) and shortened wait times (from 41 sec to 25sec over 9 months), and reduced calls inappropriately triaged to clinics and providers, all of which promotes better patient communication and access evident by patient feedback.

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In addition to the standardization of the phone menus across CHA, this project also established an effective framework that engages multidisciplinary stakeholders (Patient, Interpreter Services, Call Center, Answering Services, Operations team, Performance Improvement team) to identify, apply, and disseminate best practices to improve patient access and reduce system inefficiencies.

- Develop call triage protocols
- Continue monitoring the metrics
- Consolidate after hours answering service vendors
- Build capacity to triage and handle after hour calls