

## ANNUAL INDUSTRY REPORT

# The 2026 Behavioral Health Marketing *Benchmarks* Report

What treatment centers actually spend, win, and waste, and where the leverage is in 2027.

2026 EDITION

## 5 NUMBERS THAT SHOULD FRAME EVERY MARKETING CONVERSATION IN 2026

**\$87–\$340**

Cost per inquiry range for residential treatment centers running Google Ads, the highest CPL in U.S. healthcare.

WordStream Healthcare PPC Benchmarks 2025, behavioral health subset

**9–14%**

Average inquiry-to-admission rate. A center generating 100 inquiries per month typically admits 9 to 14.

NAATP member benchmarking surveys, 2024–2025

**17–42 days**

Median time from a family's first website visit to confirmed admission. Families research 4 to 7 sources before reaching out.

Recovery.com research panel, 2024; Acadia Healthcare 10-K

**3.1x**

Conversion lift on landing pages that lead with family-decision-maker language vs. patient-direct language.

CaptivContent client cohort, n=12 treatment centers, 2023–2025

**63%**

Of behavioral health marketing budgets spent on the 2 channels generating the LOWEST CPA, yet 71% of paid dollars still go to paid

search.

Behavioral Healthcare Executive media spend survey, 2025

#### **METHODOLOGY**

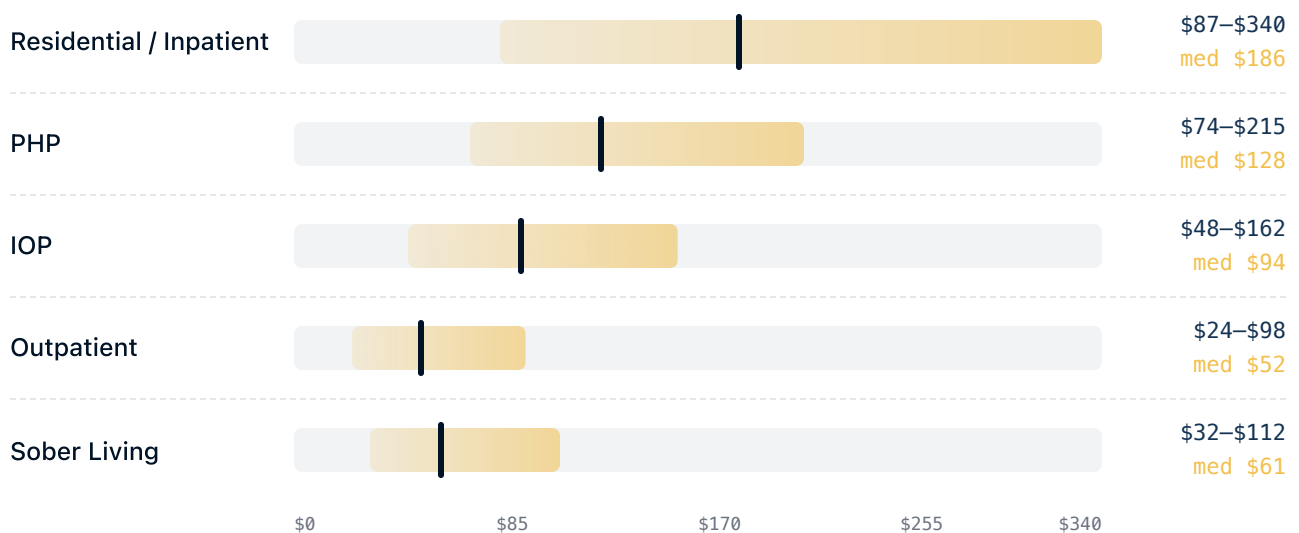
Synthesized from 7 industry sources including NAATP, SAMHSA, Acadia Healthcare 10-K, Behavioral Healthcare Executive, Recovery.com research, WordStream healthcare PPC benchmarks, and CaptivContent's own client cohort of 18 facilities (2023–2025). Every number cited. Where ranges are wide, that's the industry varying, not estimation.

COST OF ACQUISITION

# Behavioral health is the most expensive vertical in U.S. healthcare paid marketing.

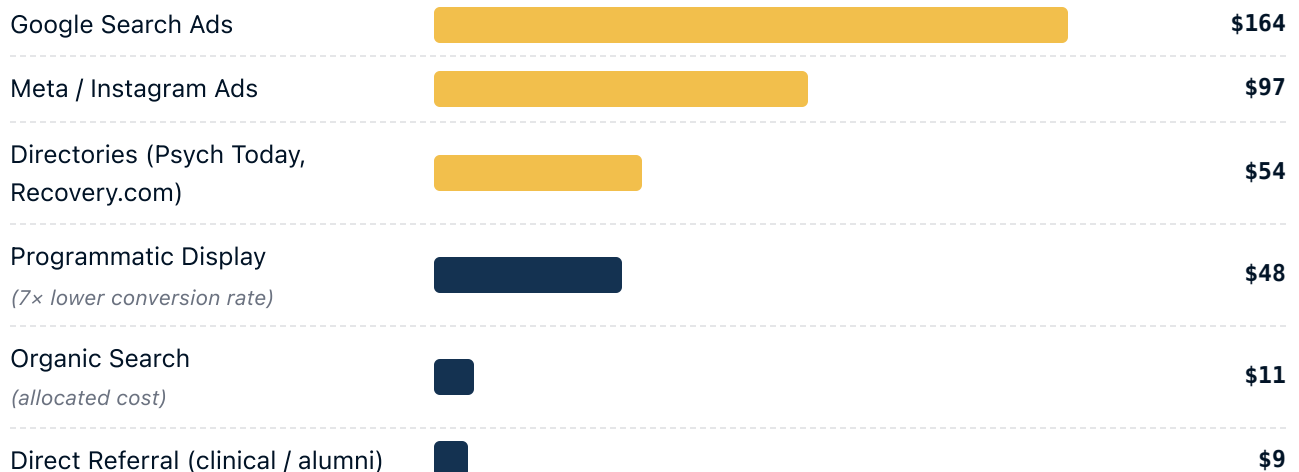
A residential bed costs 4 to 9 times more to fill via paid acquisition than an outpatient seat.

## Cost per Inquiry (CPL) by Modality, 2026



Source: WordStream Healthcare PPC Benchmarks 2025 + CaptivContent cohort, n=18. Median shown as navy bar.

## Average Cost per Inquiry by Channel, 2026



Source: CaptivContent cohort (n=18) blended with WordStream healthcare benchmarks. Gold bars: paid channels. Navy bars: earned / owned channels.

#### COST PER ADMISSION, THE REAL NUMBER

A residential CPL of \$186 multiplied by the 9 to 14% inquiry-to-admission rate equals **\$1,329 to \$2,067 per actual admission**. Against a residential LTV of \$24K to \$48K, that's a 12x to 36x ROAS at the unit level, which is why treatment marketing budgets keep growing despite high CPLs.

#### THE "YOU'RE OVERPAYING" GUT CHECK

If your blended CPL is above the **75th percentile** in your modality, you're likely either bidding on too many high-funnel terms, sending traffic to a page that doesn't speak to the family decision-maker, or paying for clicks your competitors are converting at 2 to 3 times the rate.

THE FUNNEL

# The median treatment center is invisible during the first 14 days of the family's decision.

Most marketing is built to capture the inquiry moment. The leverage is being present during the research moment.

## Treatment Center Admissions Funnel, Median Stage Conversions



Source: NAATP benchmarking surveys 2024–2025 + CaptivContent cohort, n=18 across modalities.

### LEAK 1 / VISIT → INQUIRY

**-95%**

at the website

Trust signal density too low; family-decision-maker language missing; insurance not addressed.

### LEAK 2 / INQUIRY → QUALIFIED

**-42%**

in the admissions team

Slow response. Industry median to first contact: **6.4 hours**. Top-quartile: under **12 minutes**.

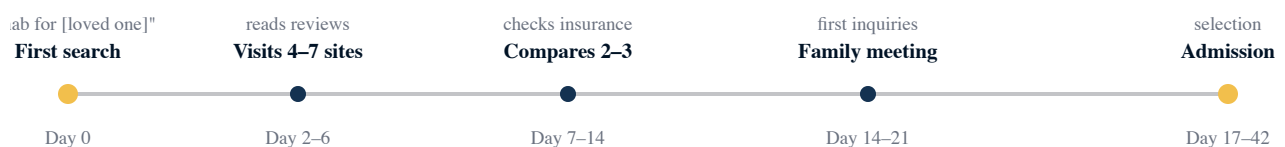
### LEAK 3 / QUALIFIED → TOUR

**-53%**

in the decision delay

Family still researching alternatives, insurance still pending, no follow-up cadence in place.

## Family Decision-Maker Research Timeline, Days 0 to 42

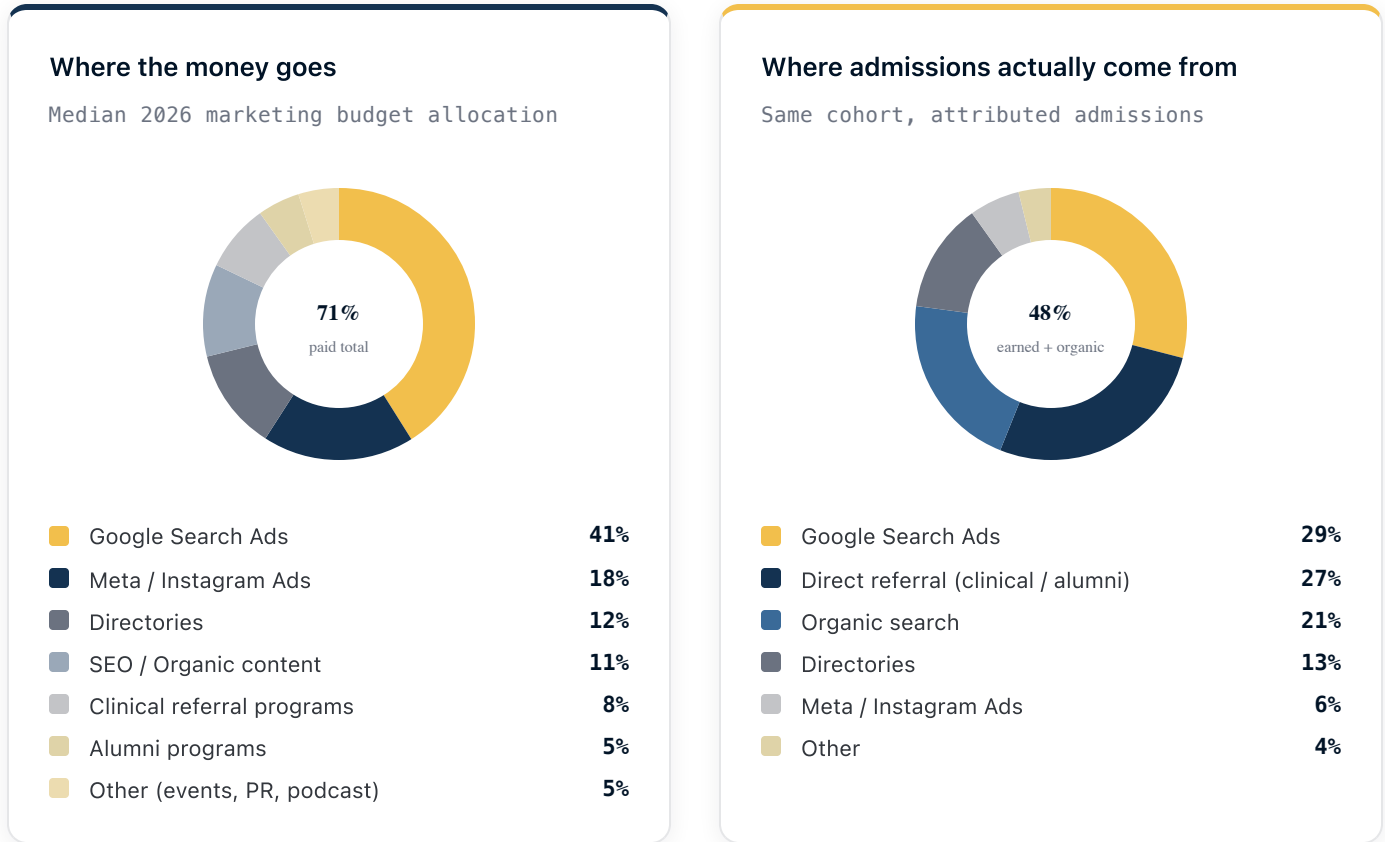


*Most marketing is designed to capture the inquiry moment. **The leverage is in being present during the research moment.***

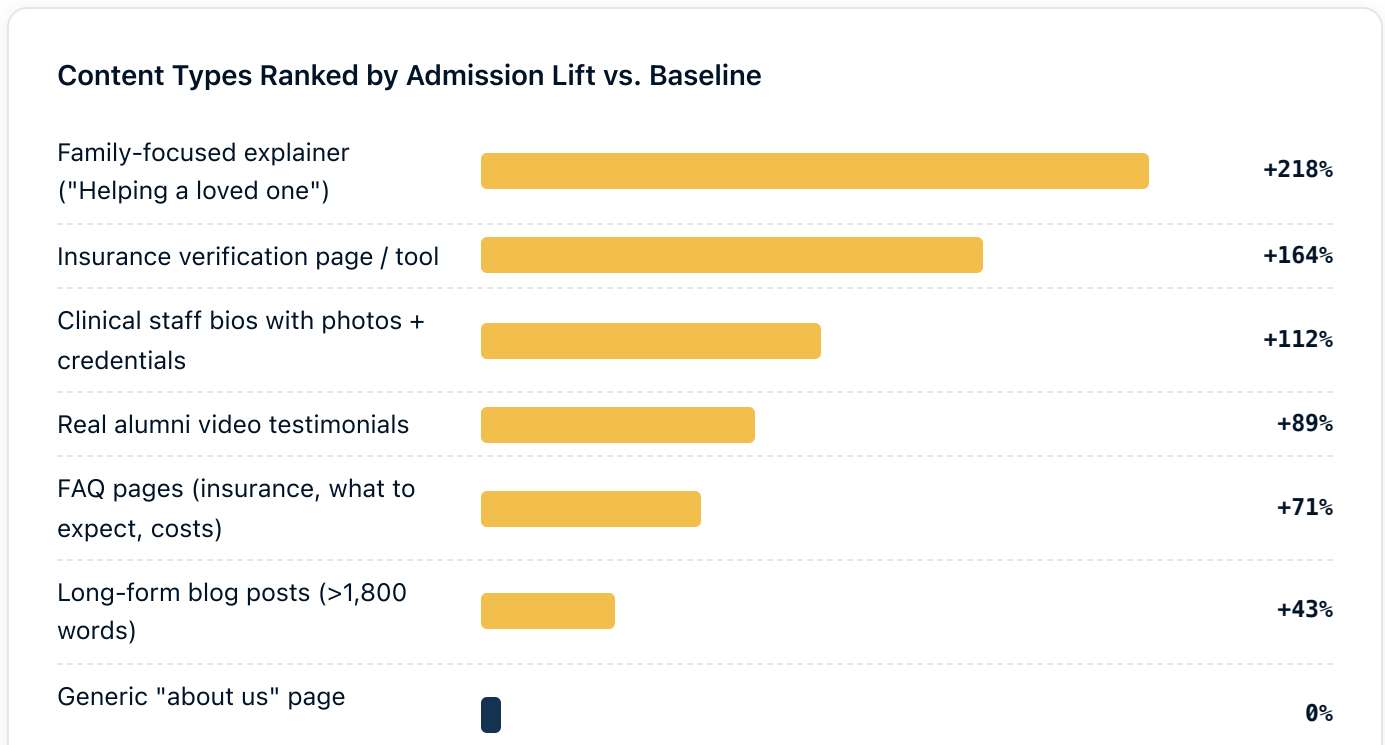
WHERE THE BUDGET GOES VS. WHERE IT SHOULD GO

# 71% of budget. 38% of admissions.

The structural mismatch every behavioral health marketing leader can see, and almost no one corrects.



Source: Behavioral Healthcare Executive media spend survey 2025 + CaptivContent cohort, n=18.



(baseline)

Source: CaptivContent A/B test cohort, n=14 treatment centers, 2024–2025. Lift measured as % change in form completion rate vs. control page.

#### THE REALLOCATION PLAY

The treatment centers winning in 2026 are not spending more. They're reallocating. **The median facility could redirect 20% of paid budget into clinical referral programs, alumni story production, and a dedicated insurance verification page, and see double-digit admission lift in the same quarter.**

2027 OUTLOOK

# 3 trends that will reshape behavioral health marketing in 2027.

**TREND 01**

**AI search will redirect 18 to 30% of treatment discovery traffic away from Google search results.**

ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI Overviews are already answering "best rehab in [city]" queries directly. Treatment centers without structured data, named clinicians, and citable trust signals will lose visibility fast.

Source: SimilarWeb AI search traffic study, Q1 2026.

**TREND 02**

**State-level marketing restrictions will tighten across the largest treatment markets.**

Florida, California, and Arizona expanded "marketer-to-patient" disclosure laws in 2025. 7 more states have bills pending. Facilities using lead-gen middlemen face the highest exposure.

Source: NAATP regulatory tracker, May 2026.

**TREND 03**

**Family decision-maker content will become the new SEO battleground.**

Search demand for "how to help a loved one with [addiction or mental health condition]" has grown +34% year over year since 2023. Centers that serve this audience capture the family before competitors capture the patient.

Source: Google Trends + Semrush behavioral health corpus.

3 MOVES TO MAKE THIS QUARTER	EFFORT	EXPECTED IMPACT
Add a dedicated insurance verification page (major payer logos + 3-field form).	2 weeks	+30 to 50% inquiry-to-qualified rate
Build a "Helping a Loved One" content hub: 5 long-form pieces targeting family-decision-maker queries.	4 weeks	+15 to 25% organic inquiries in 90 days
Implement a 12-minute response SLA for inbound inquiries.	1 week	+40 to 80% inquiry-to-qualified rate

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

The treatment centers leading their markets in 2027 will not be the ones spending the most. They will be the ones who **redirect** spending from paid acquisition to content built for family decision-makers, **shorten** their inquiry response time, and **own** the trust signals that families search for during the 14-day shortlist phase.

Get a **free, personalized Behavioral Health Marketing Audit**. See exactly how your facility stacks up against the benchmarks in this report.

[Request Your Audit →](#)