

Telehealth Fact Sheet

More consumers of all ages are using new technologies like smartphones and expect the convenience these technologies offer. Health insurance providers are responding by offering telehealth services for their members.

Telehealth has emerged as a new platform that improves access by removing traditional barriers to health care such as distance, mobility, and time constraints. For certain conditions, telehealth is as effective as in-person visits with potential for cost savings, and real benefits to provider efficiency, consumer convenience, and better management of chronic conditions.

Increasing Access

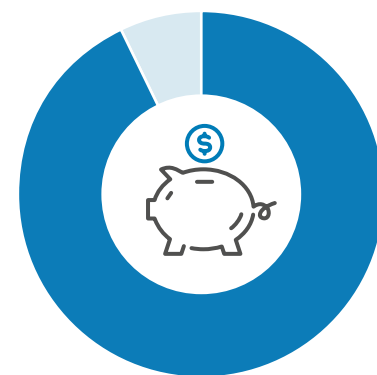
- Health insurance providers cover patient visits with clinicians via telehealth, through a computer, tablet, or smartphone, and often from the comfort of their own homes.
- The most frequent use of telehealth is for common conditions such as sinusitis, conjunctivitis, urinary tract infections, and upper respiratory infections.¹
- 96 percent of large employers make telehealth services available; 56 percent offer behavioral health services via telehealth.²
- A report from the Rural Broadband Association determined that telehealth in rural areas can increase access to specialists, improve timeliness and comfort, reduce transportation time, provide benefits to providers, and improve patient outcomes.³



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Cost Savings for Members/Consumers

- 93 percent of consumers who have used telehealth say that it has lowered their health care costs.⁴
- Studies have shown that a virtual visit can save up to \$100 compared to a visit to in other care settings (e.g., urgent care, primary care, emergency room) when accounting for cost of services, cost of travel to a physical care setting, and lost earnings associated with travel and wait times.⁵



93% of consumers say that telehealth lowered their health care costs

¹ ATA 2018 presentation

² <https://www.businessgrouphealth.org/news/nbgh-news/press-releases/press-release-details/?ID=334>

³ https://www.ntca.org/sites/default/files/documents/2017-12/SRC_whitepaper_anticipatingeconomicreturns.pdf

⁴ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/39-of-tech-savvy-consumers-have-not-heard-of-telemedicine-healthmine-survey-300241737.html>

⁵ <http://news.regence.com/releases/regence-data-measures-real-world-savings-for-telehealth-users>

- Telehealth consultations reduce rates of lab, imaging, and antibiotic use, overutilization that drives costs in health care, which can save up to \$137 per episode of care.⁶
- Telehealth triage programs have proven effective in classifying and prioritizing “red flag” cases and reducing unnecessary emergency department visits.⁷ A single avoided mental health-related emergency department visit can save \$2,264.⁸

Policy Barriers

- Restrictions on Medicare coverage of telehealth limits the abilities of seniors to reach a doctor via virtual visit.
- Physicians’ abilities to work across state lines are determined by the state where licensure was granted, restricting the ability of clinicians to deliver virtual care to patients outside the states where they are licensed.
- Inconsistent state and federal regulations, restrictions, or mandates relating to types of technologies, services or specialties, originating sites, or payment requirements, may limit health insurance providers, especially those operating in multiple states, to design benefits that best meet consumers’ needs.

Recommendations

- Expand telehealth to Medicare populations. All groups can benefit from increased convenience and access to health care services through telehealth. Remote patient monitoring can benefit Medicare beneficiaries with chronic conditions.
- Health insurance providers should retain flexibility in telehealth practices and be allowed to design benefits consistent with evidence-based care and in compliance with patient privacy rules.
- Expand the use of telehealth services to provide better access to care for people living in underserved areas. Telehealth can extend the reach of care teams, allow for round-the-clock monitoring, increase data collection to guide an individual’s treatment, and may provide more timely response to crises during treatment.
- Leverage telehealth to target services for underserved communities and ensure convenient access to high quality, affordable care. A recent report from Teladoc indicated that half of behavioral health telehealth interactions were with men ages 20 to 35, a notoriously hard-to-reach demographic. As demonstrated by this example, some population groups may be more comfortable using telehealth as a means of receiving services.
- Fund Project ECHO (Extension for Community Health Outcomes) initiatives to further expand patient access to high-quality, affordable care by connecting community-based primary care providers to specialists at academic medical centers to collaborate on a patient care, without the geographic boundaries of traditional health care services.

⁶ <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/the-value-of-virtual-why-telehealth-is-a-game-changer-for-intermountain.html>

⁷ ATA 2018 presentation

⁸ <https://www.intouchhealth.com/telehealth-solutions/clinical-use-cases/mental-health.html>