

Telehealth resource center: Research findings

Telehealth use survey

Telehealth use, which surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, has provided a way for physicians to provide care while keeping patients safe in their homes. These services also protected health care staff and safeguarded resources such as personal protective equipment (PPE).

In 2020, the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition conducted a survey highlighting the wide expansion of telehealth services in many specialty areas, high levels of satisfaction with the services, and a look at barriers that could affect the continued use and improvement of these services.

The AMA recently fielded a follow-up survey (PDF) of physician experiences with telehealth, and gathered insights on current and expected future use to inform ongoing telehealth research and advocacy, resource development and continued support for physicians, practices and health systems. Of the 2,232 physician respondents, 85% indicated they currently use telehealth. In addition:

- Of the 15% that indicated they do not use telehealth to care for patients, over half did not use telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Of those using telehealth, 93% are conducting live, interactive video visits with patients and 69% are conducting audio-only visits.
- 8% of respondents said they were using remote patient monitoring technologies with patients in their homes; the commonly used tools include smartphones (camera), blood pressure cuffs, pulse oximeters and body weight scales. Additionally, 76% report data is usually shared manually (e.g. verbally over the phone or via email).

Key findings

The survey responses show that telehealth is positively influencing four important telehealth goals:

Quality of care

- 60% of respondents agree or strongly agree telehealth enabled them to provide high quality care.
- 56% of respondents are motivated (agree and strongly agree) to increase telehealth use in their practices.

Patient experience

- More than 80% of respondents indicate patients have better access to care since using telehealth.
- 62% of respondents feel patients have higher satisfaction since offering telehealth.
- 63% of respondents report 75% or more of virtual visits are conducted with patients they have an existing relationship with.

Cost

- 44% of respondents indicated that telehealth decreased the costs of care.

Professional satisfaction

- A majority of respondents indicated that telehealth has improved the satisfaction of their work by 54.2%.

The future of telehealth

A majority of respondents were interested in sustaining telehealth in their practice, indicating that physicians want to see telehealth remain an available modality for care delivery. Key areas of opportunity to address as physicians, practices and health systems optimize telehealth include:

- Ensuring equitable access for under-resourced patient populations and communities, including but not limited to supporting increased funding and planning for telehealth infrastructure such as broadband and internet-connected devices.
- Developing telehealth workflow best practices to create efficiencies.
- Integration of telehealth and supporting technologies with the EHR.

Physicians also indicated several areas where additional research is needed including the impact on quality and cost, clinical appropriateness for telehealth, and how to scale digitally enabled care models into clinical practice.

AMA digital health care 2016 & 2019 study findings

Digital health encompasses a broad scope of tools that can improve health care, enable lifestyle change and create operational efficiencies. This includes digital solutions involving telemedicine and telehealth, mHealth, wearables, remote monitoring, apps and others. Read more about the 2016 and 2019 digital health care study findings of physicians' motivations and requirements for the adoption of digital clinical tools.