

# Survey shows video telehealth's broad reach 6 months into pandemic

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New research from the AMA sheds light on how often and in what ways different physician specialties were using telehealth six months into the pandemic.

The AMA Physician Practice Benchmark Survey—which focuses on practice arrangements and payment methodologies of post-residency physicians who provide at least 20 hours of weekly patient care and don't work for the federal government—found that 70.3% of physicians worked in practices that used videoconferencing to provide patient visits in September 2020. The pandemic was a catalyst in driving that number up from just 14.3% in September 2018.

“Research conducted over the past year illustrated telehealth's role in allowing patients to retain access to care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, the use of telehealth and the expanded rules around coverage and payment for it allowed physician practices to keep their revenue streams positive rather than at or near zero and to remain open to serve their patients,” according to the Policy Research Perspectives report, “Telehealth in 2020: Survey Data Show Widespread Use Across Most Physician Specialties and for a Variety of Functions.”(PDF)

Nearly 86% of psychiatrists said their practice provided visits to patients through videoconference. And other specialties saw use skyrocket as well, with many physician specialties near or above 80%.

According to the research, the percentage of those surveyed whose practices used videoconferencing for patient visits was:

- Dermatologists—87.3%.
- Urologists—87.2%.
- Pediatricians—82.9%.
- Cardiologists—82%.
- Family and general practice physicians—80.9%.
- Internists—76.6%.

## Telehealth met many patients' needs

Results from the AMA survey conducted in September 2020 suggest that practices used telehealth to treat a diverse set of patients for a variety of needs.

Among the physicians surveyed:

- 58% said their practices used telehealth to diagnose or treat patients.
- 59.2% used telehealth to manage patients with chronic disease.
- 50.4% used telehealth to provide care to patients with acute disease.
- 34.3% used telehealth for preventative care visits.

Psychiatrists had among the highest rates of using telehealth to diagnose or treat patients at nearly 83%. Family or general practice physicians and pediatricians also had relatively high rates at around 72%.

## Individual physicians' telehealth use

While 70.3% of physicians were in a practice that used videoconferencing with patients, 59.1% had personally conducted a videoconferencing visit in the prior week. Meanwhile, 66.6% of physicians worked in a practice that used telephone visits and 56.4% had a telephone visit in the prior week.

On average across all specialties, 10.6% of weekly visits were conducted via videoconferencing and 8.1% were conducted via phone. That equated to an average of 9.9 video visits weekly and 7.6 telephone visits.

“There was a great deal of variation within specialty, with large shares of physicians who didn’t provide any remote visits the prior week as well as some who relied much more heavily on remote care,” the report says.

Psychiatrists “clearly had the highest weekly use of remote visits with patients,” with 36.9% of visits conducted via videoconferencing and 29% of visits conducted via phone.

The AMA has conducted Physician Practice Benchmark Surveys since 2012. Policy Research Perspective reports, based on the surveys, provide detailed analysis of the data.

## Great telehealth resources from the AMA

The AMA, in collaboration with Manatt Health, has developed a "Return on Health" framework to articulate the value of digitally enabled care that accounts for ways in which a wide range of telehealth programs can increase the overall health and generate positive impact for patients, clinicians, payers and society.

Meanwhile, the AMA Telehealth Immersion Program offers a comprehensive curriculum and enhanced experience navigating the world of telehealth alongside peers nationwide through a series of curated webinars, interactive peer-to-peer learning sessions, virtual discussions, boot camps and resources on demand.

Also check out the AMA Telehealth Implementation Playbook (PDF).

The benefits of expanded telemedicine are clear. Join physicians who are advocating to permanently expand virtual care coverage.