

# How to gauge your physician practice's telehealth success

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When implementing telehealth, it's important to identify what you hope to accomplish by offering patients a digital way to access or enhance their care and it's critical that you evaluate whether you are meeting your goals.

Generally speaking, goals should be identified early in the process and can be aligned with the Quadruple Aim of Health Care—reducing costs, improving population health, patient experience and team well-being.

As you decide which data points you will evaluate to determine your success, it's important to look at metrics beyond the number of patient visits, according to the AMA Telehealth Implementation Playbook. The resource walks physicians through a 12-step process to implement real-time audio and visual visits between a clinician and a patient. Evaluating success is step 11 of the process.

Supporting telehealth is a critical component of the AMA Recovery Plan for America's Physicians. You took care of the nation. It's time for the nation to take care of you. It's time to rebuild. And the AMA is ready.

Telehealth is critical to the future of health care, which is why the AMA continues to lead the charge to aggressively expand telehealth policy, research and resources to ensure physician practice sustainability and fair payment.

Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) is an example of a program that clearly defined its success metrics when implementing its telehealth program. Kelly Crown, CHLA's program director of virtual care in 2019 and 2020, said that defining success criteria and metrics early allowed the hospital

telehealth team to measure the overall impact more clearly and easily.

Their goals included achieving lower:

- Wait times for visits.
- Absenteeism from school and work
- Clinic no-show rates
- Risks and barriers associated with transporting medically complex patients to CHLA for visits.

Another goal was to improve satisfaction for physicians and other health professionals coincident with offering alternative care delivery models and new approaches to medical practice.

The metrics they chose to evaluate whether they were meeting their goals included, but were not limited to, these 10:

- Virtual visit volume.
- Number of physicians and other health professionals trained and using virtual care services.
- Number of additional appointments available as a result of virtual visits.
- Patient satisfaction with virtual visits.
- Physician and health-professional satisfaction with virtual visits.
- Reduced no-show rates for clinic visits.
- Reduced absenteeism from school and work for patients and parents.
- Improved use of clinic space and resources.
- As applicable, achievement of established standard-of-care recommendations. For example, Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines for visit frequency for patients with diabetes.
- As applicable, development of new and innovative virtual care models for specific patient populations.

The AMA Return on Health Framework can help your physician practice or health care organization set specific short- and long-term goals with measurable metrics and a process for tracking your progress to guide your team along the way.

## How to use data you collect

Having a centralized platform to collect feedback can be helpful, such as sending the patient to a survey at the end of a telehealth visit, the Telehealth Implementation Playbook suggests.

After you have gathered data that you need to track your key success metrics, the playbook advises that the next steps are to:

- Collect feedback from the implementation team.
- Determine your practice's success by comparing this data to the pre-implementation baseline.
- revisit your process to identify hurdles to success and then rework and iterate as needed if you are not meeting goals.
- Gather compelling success metrics into an expansion proposal if you are meeting goals.
- Consult your core and leadership teams to determine the program's future.
- Align on goals for the program's next iteration or phase.

## Be patient

Clinical success can be slow to measure, the Telehealth Implementation Playbook cautions.

"It may take six months or longer to prove the clinical results of your program," the playbook says. "In the meantime, lean on more immediate measures of success, such as staff and patient satisfaction, utilization rates and reimbursements received so far to confirm if the program is having an impact."

Share with the AMA Physicians Grassroots Network how telehealth generates value at your practice to help ensure virtual care coverage and payment remains in place.