

Telehealth continues to evolve from pandemic necessity to essential tool

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The unprecedented expansion of telehealth services that began in March 2020 -- when the COVID-19 pandemic triggered stay-at-home orders and otherwise brought our daily routines to an abrupt halt -- continues to yield a wealth of benefits for patients and physicians alike. It is essential that we continue this momentum.

The advantages we have gained from large-scale adoption of telehealth technology justify the provisional removal of restrictions on its use by Medicare recipients, who were allowed to access this care in their homes during the pandemic, as opposed to having to travel to an authorized health care center to gain access. We continue to call upon Congress to make the temporary waiver of geographic restrictions a permanent feature of Medicare telehealth policy, for obvious reasons.

Our AMA has been a leading proponent of telehealth since this technology was introduced, and during the pandemic we stepped up our efforts to support its use in an even broader range of settings and applications. The AMA [Telehealth Quick Guide](#) and the [Telehealth Implementation Playbook](#) offer detailed guidance on clinical integration of telehealth and related digital health technologies, while the [AMA Physician Innovation Network](#) offers additional information and resources on emerging health care solutions.

As important as improved continuity of care is for better health outcomes, the benefits of telehealth expansion extend far beyond. For example, telehealth use has helped relieve clinical staffing shortages in remote areas of the nation, as well as in critically underserved communities and populations. We are just beginning to explore the tremendous promise this technology holds for improving health outcomes in historically marginalized populations. This exploration must continue.

Telehealth continues to boost both the frequency and quality of communication between patients and their physicians, which reinforces the bond between them and supports improved compliance with treatment plans and better medication adherence. Its widespread use checks the tendency of patients to put off care for conditions that, left undiagnosed, can result in hospitalization or even more severe complications later on.

And we cannot overlook the value of telehealth services to seniors, people with vision impairments or limited mobility, those with compromised immune systems, and everyone who lacks the transportation or child care needed to receive in-person care.

When combined with remote-patient monitoring and other facets of digital health adoption and implementation, telehealth is a terrific asset in extending care beyond the walls of exam rooms and clinics.

The ability to peer into the daily lives of patients between scheduled appointments allows for rapid and effective intervention when health conditions suddenly worsen, which is particularly valuable when treating chronic disease. Gaining a more complete understanding of the social determinants of health shaping our patients' lives allows us to more accurately assess their impact, and paves the way for improved treatment plans and better health outcomes.

It is important to remember that physicians have a powerful ally at their side in navigating the complexities of telehealth and related digital health technologies, at both the [state](#) and [federal](#) levels.

The AMA [Advocacy Resource Center](#) brings a wealth of resources to bear in securing coverage and payment for digital health solutions while also tackling challenges linked to physician licensure and private insurance payment policies. Another AMA initiative, the [Digital Medicine Payment Advisory Group](#), has assembled a multispecialty panel of experts to hammer out effective solutions to issues such as coverage, coding and reimbursement.

It is clear that the rapid growth and widespread implementation of physician-based telehealth services since the pandemic began ranks as a vitally important step forward in health care delivery. It is up to us to not only sustain this momentum going forward, but to make this technology and all the other aspects of digital health serve more patients more effectively.

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