

1 in 7 patients avoided emergency departments by using telehealth

Article

The data: The Bipartisan Policy Center and Social Science Research Solutions' new [survey](#) results show that **14% of telehealth users** would have gone to the emergency department (ED) or an urgent care facility if telehealth wasn't an option. The survey was conducted on a sample of 1,776 US adults between June 28 and July 18, 2021.

Why it matters: Telehealth is a valuable tool for triaging low-acuity care and avoiding unnecessary emergency department visits—which are a huge financial strain for hospitals:

- The US spends nearly **\$76.3 billion** annually on ED visits alone.

Other key findings: Telehealth gave millions of US adults access to care services in 2020.

- **One-third** of US adults surveyed had a telehealth visit for themselves or a dependent in 2020.
- Medicare beneficiaries were telehealth superusers: About 44% of Medicare beneficiaries used telehealth, while only 31% of adults on employer-sponsored plans opted for virtual care.
- **63% of adults** used telehealth as a preventative service, prescription refill, or routine visit for a chronic illness.
- And **8 in 10** respondents said they would likely use telehealth in the future.

But not everyone had easy access to telehealth: 35% of rural residents and 45% of older adults said access to high-speed broadband was an obstacle, compared with 24% of non-rural residents and 21% of younger adults.

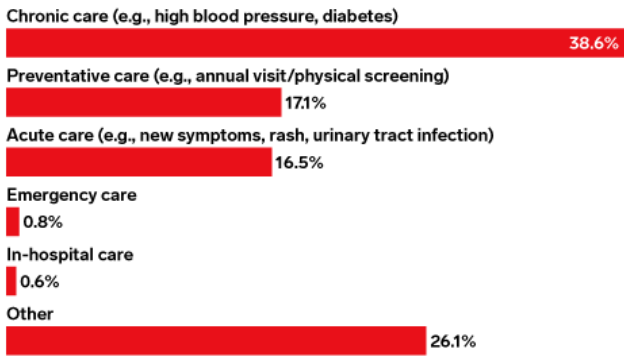
What's next? With the Delta variant pushing COVID-19 cases back up, clearing up capacities in emergency departments is more valuable than ever.

We saw the dire consequences that soaring COVID-19-related hospitalization rates and limited clinical staff had on breaching hospital capacities across the US, to a point where cities had to scramble to find space to erect beds. Plus, this has had an outside financial burden on hospitals and health systems.

It's likely hospitals will double down on their telehealth infrastructure now, considering providers are already pushing Congress to make telehealth reimbursement flexibilities permanent to bolster telehealth as a reliable, viable care option.

Telehealth Services Received Most Recently Among US Telehealth Users, Feb 2021

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+; among those who had at least one telehealth encounter during March 1, 2020-Jan 30, 2021
Source: The COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition, "Telehealth Impact: Patient Survey Analysis," April 11, 2021

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