

Telehealth boosted patients satisfaction with their insurance plan

Article

Telehealth use boosted consumers' satisfaction with their health insurers during the pandemic, [according to](#) a new J.D. Power survey based on responses from over 32,000 commercial plan members through January and March 2021.

- **36%** of respondents said they accessed telehealth services during the pandemic—a 9% increase from 2020—and, higher telehealth usage contributed to a 10-point increase (on a

1,000-point scale) in insurer member satisfaction, per J.D. power.

Insurance giants have realized the correlation between telehealth and consumer satisfaction—and they’re doubling down on in-house telehealth services.

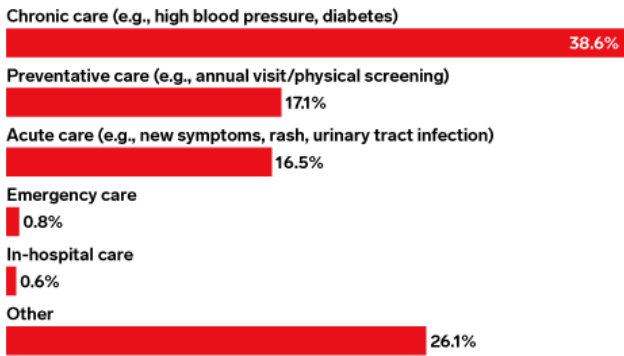
- Earlier this year, **UnitedHealthcare’s Optum** [announced](#) its expanding its telehealth services to all 50 states, posing a threat to virtual care giants like **Amwell** and **Teladoc**.
- And in February, **Cigna** [revealed](#) its plans to scoop up telehealth vendor **MDLive** to bring its virtual primary and mental health services under Cigna’s roof.
- In fact, Cigna [received](#) one of the highest satisfaction scores in the J.D. Power survey (742 on a 1,000 point scale), likely thanks to its heightened focus on virtual care amid the pandemic.

But as consumers return to a post-vaccine “new normal,” telehealth’s long-term fate hangs in the balance:

- **Telehealth usage has dropped off compared with early pandemic levels, which could signal US patients are less interested in using the tech amid reopening plans.** The percent of telehealth medical claims dipped nearly **16%** from January to February 2021 alone, [per](#) a tracker by nonprofit org Fair Health.
- **It’s likely adoption could continue to decline if insurance no longer covers telehealth visits after the pandemic.** Relaxed regulations amid the pandemic meant that many commercial insurers [covered](#) telehealth visits at a low or zero cost. However, removing insurance coverage means more patients would have to pay for virtual care services out of pocket: More than 11% of consumers say high cost is a barrier preventing them from accessing telehealth long-term, according to Rock Health.
- **However, new House and Senate bills could still give patients access to affordable telehealth services even after the pandemic subsides.** A pair of recently introduced bills in the House and Senate [propose](#) that telehealth flexibilities placed during the pandemic become long-term regulations, like reimbursing audio-only telehealth visits. The fact that telehealth extension bills were introduced in both the House and Senate means it’s more likely that the bill will be passed by Congress, thanks to bipartisan support.

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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