

Walmart expands employee health benefits amid mass retail worker exodus

Article

The news: Walmart is partnering with **Health at Scale**, a platform that uses AI and machine learning to provide associates and their families with personalized physician

recommendations, per a Health at Scale press release.

Why it's worth watching: This follows a string of moves Walmart has made over the past year to beef up its employer-sponsored digital health benefits—which could be a play to compete with **Amazon's** employee coverage.

For example, last October, Walmart Health announced a new digital benefits program for associates enrolled in its health plan.

- The package includes a **virtual physical therapy program** that lets employees conduct video visits and app-based exercises online, in addition to a new **gastrointestinal pilot program** focused on improving employees' digestive health through one-on-one coaching.
- Walmart's digital health solutions also incorporated virtual access to primary care doctors to help monitor employees' chronic conditions.

This all could be part of an overall strategy to keep workers from jumping ship to huge competitors like Amazon—which has offered employees in-person and access to 24/7 virtual care since October 2021.

- **Most (65%) US workers are willing to give up perks like paid vacation and flexible hours for better health care benefits, [according to](#)** a recent One Medical survey of 1,600 employees.
- Boosting access to healthcare could be an especially important strategy for Walmart as retail workers leave in droves: **The retail industry lost 4.4% of its workforce in November 2021 alone, [per](#)** the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

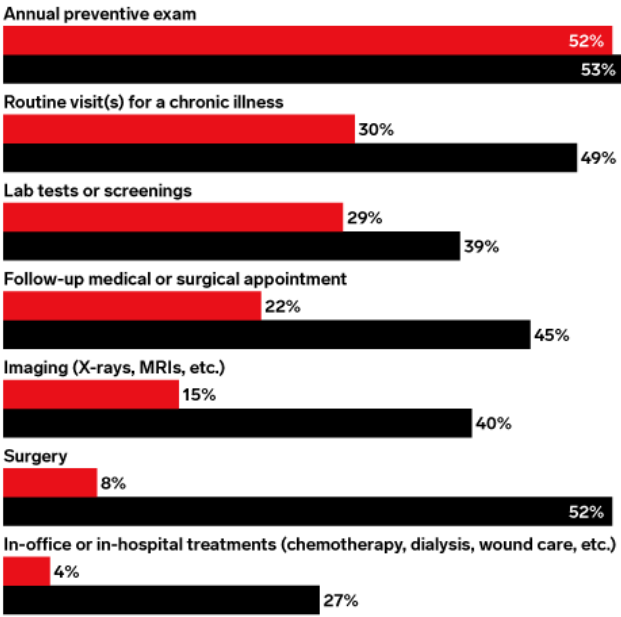
Why retail giants are doubling down on virtual care this year: Telehealth and personalized care recommendations from a trusted clinician could encourage workers to access care more regularly and in turn, prevent healthcare costs from racking up.

Nearly 1 in 5 US residents say they delayed care last year, and of those delaying medical visits, about 57% said they experienced negative health outcomes, [according to](#) data from the Cleveland Clinic.

- In Walmart's case, providing employees with a platform that pairs them up with a doctor that's the best fit could boost satisfaction and actually encourage workers to get regular medical care.

For example, if an AI platform could match employees up with physicians of similar race ethnicity, which could boost trust in medical providers among people of color: **Patients who shared similar ethnic or racial backgrounds as their physicians reported a higher satisfaction rating, per a 2020 Penn Medicine analysis of 100,000 patient surveys.**

Types of Care Deferred by US Adults with Employer-Based Insurance vs. US Clinician-Reported Levels, April 2021
 % of respondents



■ Adults with employer-based insurance ■ Clinician-reported levels

Note: based on responses from 168 individuals with employer-based insurance who said they had delayed some care since March 1, 2020 and still had not received it as of Sep 2020 and from 752 office-based providers and office-based nurses who indicated where patient volumes for certain services were as of March-April 2021 compared with before March 1, 2020 (pre-pandemic); office-based providers include providers (physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners) working outside a hospital setting and in a specialty other than acute care nursing
 Source: PwC Health Research Institute, "Medical Cost Trend: Behind the Numbers 2022," June 9, 2021

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