

Consumers still prefer in-person therapy over virtual visits—here's what telehealth vendors should do about it

Article

The news: Most healthcare consumers were satisfied with telemedicine this year, but overall satisfaction levels dropped relative to 2020:

- In 2020, about **53% of respondents** indicated greater satisfaction with video visits compared with in-person care—but in 2021, their satisfaction levels **dropped to 43%**, [according to](#) Rock Health's 2021 Consumer Adoption Report.

How we got here: Rock Health claims one reason for the drop in consumer satisfaction is that people began to view telemedicine as an alternative to in-person care in 2021, rather than a necessary replacement for emergencies.

For example, less consumers used telehealth for urgent care visits this year compared with last, likely since they felt safer to visit their doctor's office post-vaccine:

- In 2020, **33% of respondents** used telehealth for emergency visits, while **only 20% of consumers** used the tech for emergency visits in 2021.
- **Our take:** consumers may be less satisfied with the tech for more standard care use cases, especially given the limitations of a telehealth visit.

Digging deeper into the data: Surprisingly, most consumers preferred to visit their therapist's office rather than meeting virtually despite telemental health adoption skyrocketing this year.

For context, telehealth claim lines for primary care and urgent care fluctuated this year:

- **Telehealth utilization fell nationally 10%** from May to June alone, [per](#) Fair Health.
- However, **in 2021, telemental health adoption remained strong.** Mental health conditions were the top-ranking telehealth diagnoses from May to September, according to Fair Health's latest data.

Despite the uptick in telemental health use, adoption didn't hold a candle to in-person therapy visits:

- In 2021, **about 62% of health consumers opted** to visit their **clinician's office** for a mental health visit, while **only 25% of consumers preferred** seeing their therapist **via a video visit.**

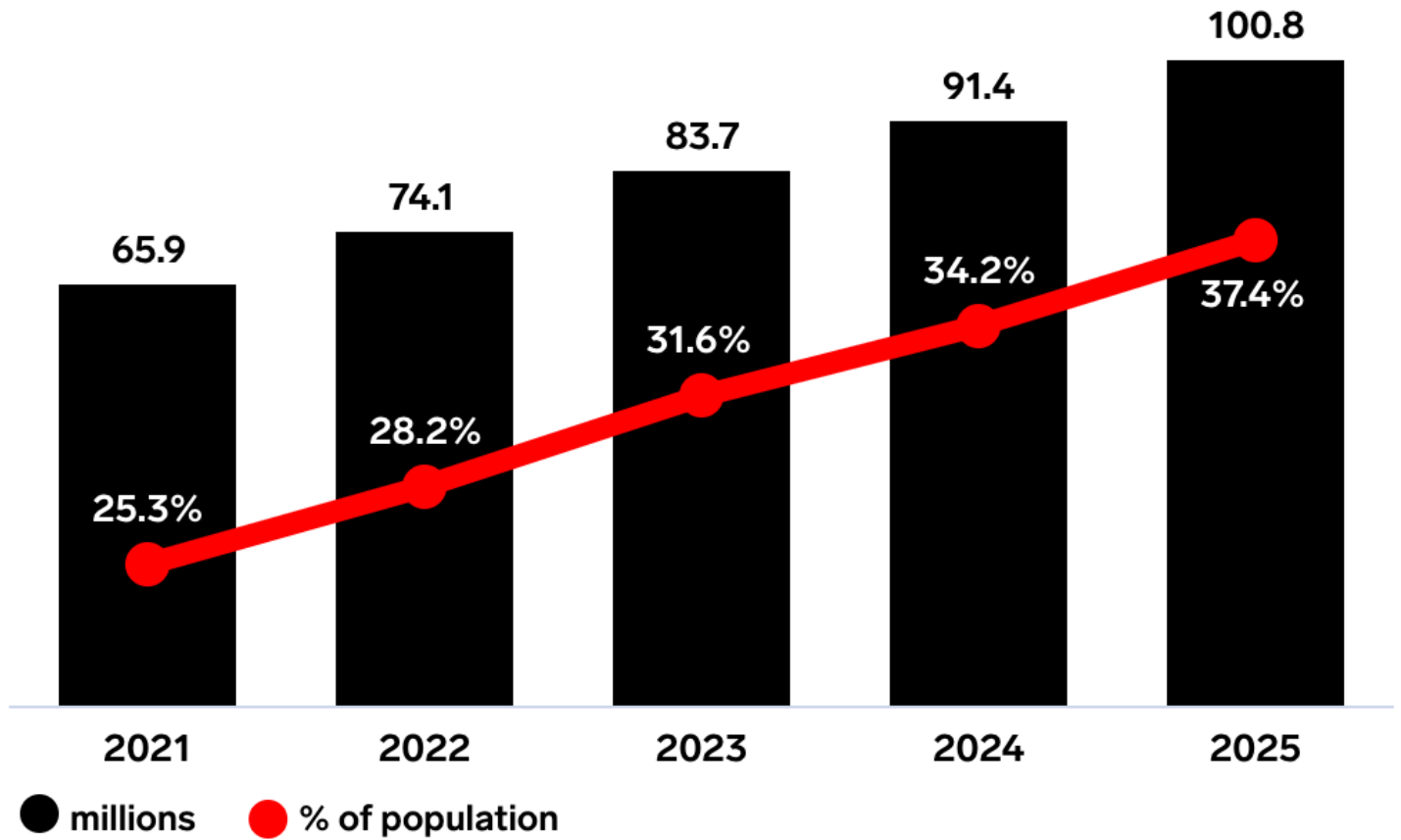
What does this data mean for telehealth vendors? Now more than ever telehealth entrants should be looking to incorporate in-person mental health visits with virtual care to boost consumer engagement.

Large telehealth players like **Walmart** and **CVS** are already appealing to clients' wish for both virtual and in-person mental healthcare. Telehealth-only vendors like Teladoc will likely hop onto the hybrid care trend soon to keep up with the consumer demand for in-person care.

- For example, earlier this year, Walmart announced it's snapping up telehealth provider **MeMD** (which offers telemental health services) to complement in-person care options at Walmart Health Centers.
- Similarly, this year, CVS launched a nationwide **Aetna-backed** virtual care service offering primary care and mental health counseling—shortly before it announced its plan to open up in-person primary care offices.

Telemental Health Users

US, 2021-2025



Source: eMarketer, August 2021

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