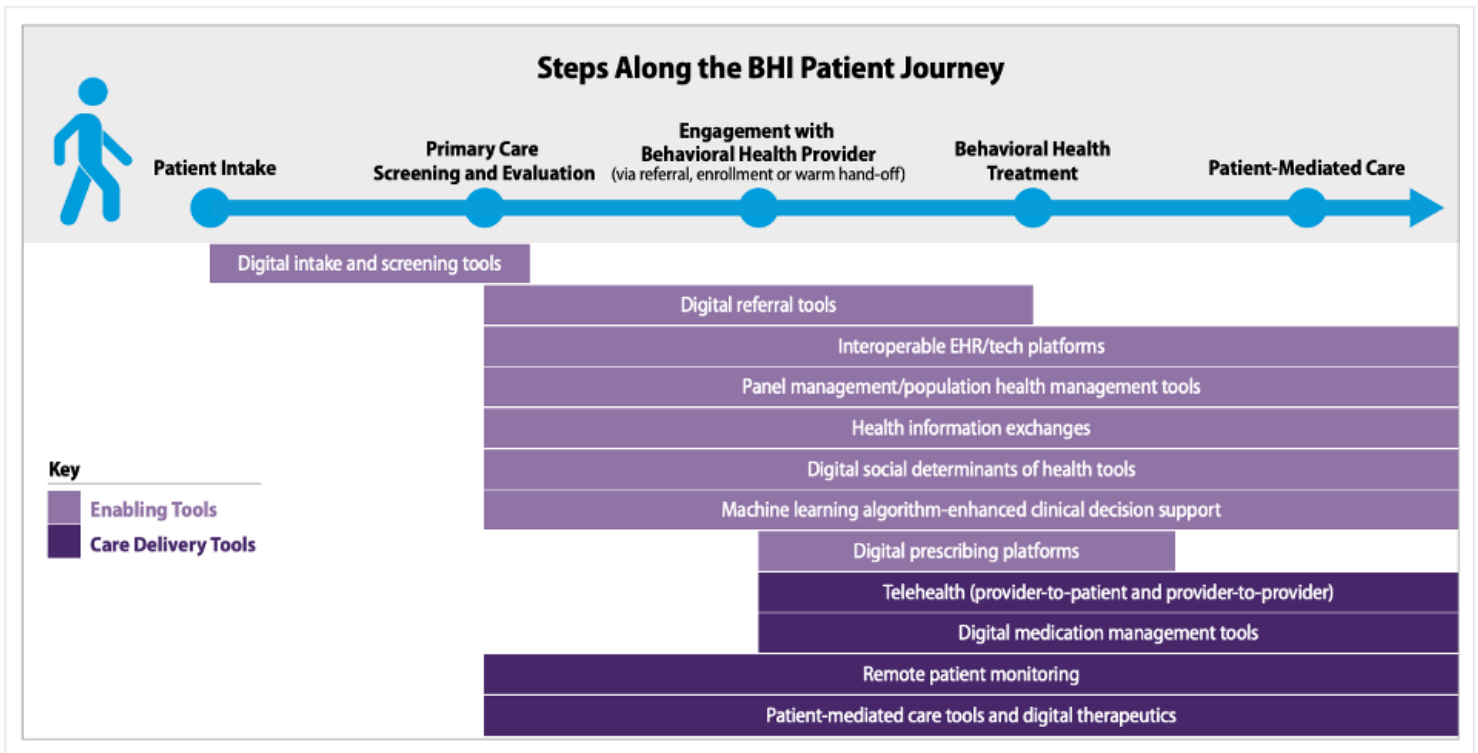


2 key areas where digital health can unlock wider access to mental health services

Article

The news: The American Medical Association (AMA) released a new [report](#) detailing how providers can boost adoption of telehealth and digital health tools and better integrate them

into behavioral healthcare.



The roles different stakeholders can play: The report specifically details how different healthcare stakeholders can implement digitally enabled behavioral health solutions.

- **Employers** can reevaluate their cost-sharing policies to lower out-of-pocket costs for employees seeking behavioral healthcare. In addition, they can expand the primary care networks they contract with and adopt tech that enables smoother coordination among providers.
- **Providers** (physician practices, health systems, hospitals) can implement digital health solutions to boost communication between primary care specialists and behavioral health clinicians to improve behavioral health diagnoses and treatment rates.
- **Insurers** can implement payment parity for virtual behavioral health visits to lower the barrier to access for patients. They can also broaden their provider networks and reduce cumbersome administrative processes like prior authorizations to ensure less patients in need of care fall through the cracks.

2 key ways digital health can unlock value in behavioral healthcare: While the AMA lists several strategies that use digital tools to make the patient journey less fragmented—there two we think will be the most impactful to help unlock wider access to mental healthcare in the US:

1. Virtual healthcare delivery

Video/audio visits and on-demand text-based communication with mental health providers can make behavioral healthcare more accessible by cutting out barriers like transportation and making it easier for patients to fit a visit into their schedules. This translates into better managed mental health conditions, lower downstream costs for insurers, and stable revenues for providers.

- Lack of access to reliable transportation impedes patients' access to care and costs the US healthcare system an estimated **\$150 billion** annually.
- US physicians experienced an average drop of **32%** in revenues due to the pandemic and loss of patient visit volume. Telehealth helped cushion their financial woes and provided a steady stream of revenue.

2. Care coordination tools

Between going to a primary care doctor, getting referred to the right behavioral health provider, finding the right medications/treatments, and navigating the back-and-forth with insurers—patients can easily fall through the cracks and miss out on the care they need. Digital health tools iron out the wrinkles in this process by streamlining communication among providers and easily integrating care functions like prescriptions and referrals.

The bigger picture: The mental health crisis in the US is still snowballing and being compounded by the growing shortage of mental health providers.

- **4 in 10 US adults reported symptoms** of anxiety or depression during the pandemic, compared with **1 in 10** who said the same in 2019.
- **And while there's high demand for mental health services, there's also a dwindling workforce of specialists.** The current mental healthcare workforce **only meets 28.1% of the need** for mental healthcare in the US, per The Health Resources and Services Administration's 2021 data.

- **Digital health tools can close these gaps, and consumers are willing to engage with them.** Consumers with mental health conditions are twice as likely to use telehealth than all consumers, per PwC's Health Research Institute.