

Anthem data shows telehealth addressed some mental healthcare disparities, but gaps remain

Article

The data: Anthem [released](#) a new analysis from its 2021 State of the Nation's Mental Health report that broke down telemental health usage by race:

- It found that **40%** of Hispanic/Latino members, **34%** of white members, **33%** of Asian members, and **28%** of Black members had a telemental health visit in 2020.
- The analysis was done on claims data from 27 million Anthem members who had a behavioral health diagnosis in 2019 and 2020. across 14 states.

Telehealth's impact on health disparities: During the pandemic, telehealth helped connect people to mental healthcare at rates we'd never seen before.

- For example, [60%](#) of Medicare-related virtual behavioral health visits were for mental health, and **Teladoc** saw its telemental health visits double at the height of the pandemic.

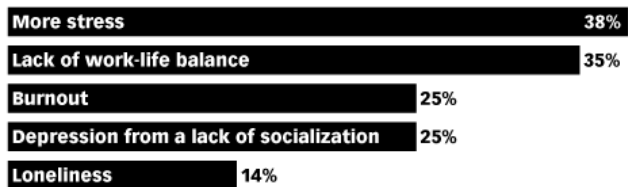
The pandemic-induced spike isn't totally unsurprising since virtual care became a necessity for many—what's notable is that many of these patients used mental health services for the very first time. From March to May 2020, **97% of people** who accessed mental health services never had a mental health claim before, [according to](#) Cigna's analysis of its claims data from that period.

But there's a lot more work to be done: Now that state governments and some health insurers are [rolling back](#) pandemic-era policies that made telehealth more accessible, patients, providers, and payers are back to square one.

- For example, clinician licensing restrictions were relaxed during the pandemic, giving patients unfettered access to a larger pool of providers outside of their state—which is especially significant for those that live in areas where mental healthcare may not be easily accessible.
- [More than half](#) of US counties have no practicing psychiatrists, and around **37%** of counties have no practicing psychologists—and that demand for mental healthcare is expected to far outpace available providers in coming years, [per](#) Mental Health America's 2021 The State of Mental Health in America report.
- The opportunity telehealth opens up for closing the gaps in mental health disparities will be lost if insurers continue to retract telehealth waivers and states resurrect barriers to widespread access. And as the mental health crisis worsens in the US, this will only exacerbate existing healthcare disparities among different populations.

How the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Negatively Affected the Mental Health of Adults Worldwide, Aug 2020

% of respondents



Source: Oracle and Workplace Intelligence, "AI@Work Study 2020" conducted by Savanta, Oct 7, 2020

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