

# CVS wants in on the digital health metaverse

## Article

**The news:** CVS filed to trademark its pharmacy, health clinics, and retail goods in the metaverse, per CNBC.

- Details in the filing include CVS' intent to provide wellness and nutrition coaching in a virtual setting.

**Trendspotting:** There's been a cluster of corporate metaverse filings since **Facebook's rebrand** to **Meta**, including companies like **Walmart** and **Nike**, according to CNBC.

Still confused about what the metaverse is? [Click here to read our primer.](#)

**We saw this coming:** CVS' filing aligns with our [prediction](#) that a retail player would be the first large healthcare player to dip its toes into the metaverse.

Last month, we said it would be difficult for a major health system like **Kaiser Permanente** to launch its own metaverse. Such an endeavor would require hospitals to overhaul their business models for reimbursement from commercial health insurers and government health plans.

- For example, physicians wouldn't readily conduct care in a health system metaverse if something like VR "procedures" aren't covered by Medicare plans, since they won't be getting reimbursed.

At the same time, we [said](#) it was more likely for a large retail player like CVS Health (with a market cap of \$140 billion) to build its own metaverse, combining services like its pharmacy and primary care services to be delivered through augmented reality or mixed reality. It appears CVS is planning to do just that.

**The bigger picture:** Besides reimbursement, there's a major barrier that could slow down the launch of metaverses in any industry: connectivity.

A few weeks ago, Meta [revealed](#) that building its metaverse won't be possible unless there are sweeping improvements to telecom networks, since glasses and VR headsets require more advanced connectivity than tech like a smartphone.

- 5G will be an essential element to boost connectivity over the next few years, but it'll take time before 5G speeds are established all across the US.
- In fact, **many (28%) US and UK-based adults don't intend to upgrade their networks to 5G over the next year**—simply because they're "not interested" in 5G technology, [per](#) a January 2022 survey by YouGov.

*To learn more about Meta's plan to take on the metaverse, check out our [Connectivity & Tech](#) briefing article from 2/22 [here](#).*

**What's next?** Some digital health startups were already deploying augmented reality to treat chronic pain or assist with surgery before the term "metaverse" even took off. These immersive experiences are what will likely continue to define the healthcare metaverse over the next year.

For example, **Osso VR** uses Oculus headsets to train surgeons on certain procedures before entering the operating room, which should go a long way toward improving performance.

- The VR startup reported a **230% improvement in surgeons' performance** after training with the tech, per a recent study.

And last year, **AppliedVR** announced a one-year partnership with clinical study platform Curebase to run five clinical trials assessing the effectiveness of VR-based therapy to manage and treat chronic pain.

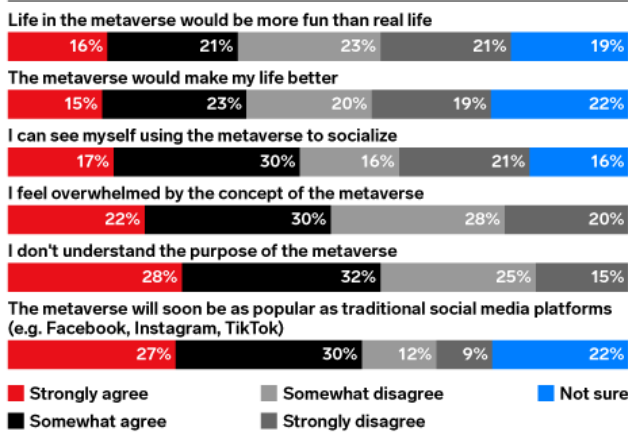
Still, VR headsets to treat conditions like chronic pain are relatively new in the healthcare space. Now that the metaverse is a buzzy topic in tech, we could see startups like AppliedVR get more traction from new investors over the next year to improve its platform and release more clinical research touting its effectiveness as an alternative to pain meds, for instance.

- In fact, **Insider Intelligence** forecasts that the number of **US-based VR users will balloon from 66.8 million in 2021 to 75.4 million by 2025**—which means more healthcare consumers will likely become familiarized with the tech.

**Keep reading:** To learn more about how healthcare will look like in the metaverse, check out our Analyst Take: "[Welcome to the metaverse: The doctor will see your avatar now.](#)"

### Attitudes Toward the Metaverse Among US Adults, Jan 2022

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding  
Source: The Harris Poll on behalf of Protocol, Jan 25, 2022

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