

# The COVID-19 emergency extension could be a silver lining for some telehealth physicians

Article

**The news:** The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has extended the public COVID-19 emergency through October 13 of this year.

**How we got here:** Earlier this year, many US adults said that COVID-19 is no longer a crisis — but climbing cases could change that perception.

Only **9% of US consumers agreed that COVID-19 was a “serious crisis,”** per an April Axios/Ipsos survey of over 1,000 US adults. But it’s possible more US adults could once again start perceiving COVID-19 as a major problem as the gov’t extends the public health emergency and a new COVID-19 variant spreads.

- The BA.5 variant is reinfecting people who have already had COVID-19, and it appears to be the most contagious strain.

**The HHS’s extension provides a silver lining for telehealth physicians:** It will continue some pandemic-era policies (like the ability to conduct virtual visits in different states).

For context, some states like **Illinois** and **Michigan** have already rescinded their temporary regulations that let out-of-state providers conduct telehealth visits in their state without a special license, per the Federation of State Medical Board’s tracking.

- But other states like **New York** and **North Carolina** declared interstate telehealth is allowed (with an emergency license) until the COVID-19 emergency period ends.
- That means out-of-state physicians will likely be able to conduct telehealth visits with patients in **North Carolina** until at least October 13, for instance.
- The ability to practice telehealth across state lines will not only boost patient access but will help telehealth physicians grow their patient rosters.

**Zooming out:** Investors are placing bets on startups easing the interstate physician licensing process—likely because there’s no guarantee the public health emergency will extend yet again.

For example, in late June, physician licensing platform **Medallion** scored **\$35 million** from investors like **UnitedHealth Group’s** VC arm, **Optum Ventures**.

- It works with virtual care companies, payers, and health systems to automate and expedite clinician licensing and credentialing workflows.
- That helps physicians expand into new markets with multistate licensures and ensures they’re in compliance with their state medical licenses.

## Barriers to Offering Telehealth Services According to US Physicians, Dec 2021

% of respondents

Roll back of COVID-19 waivers, coverage, and payment policies	77%
Lack of insurer coverage of telehealth services	76%
Low/no reimbursement	64%
Technology challenges for patient population	54%
Licensure in additional states	40%
Liability	29%
Integration with the electronic health record	22%
Lack of technical support	21%
Telehealth-specific workflows	18%
Integration of additional technologies	18%
Lack of guidelines for clinical appropriateness in telehealth	15%
Low patient engagement	13%
Clinician dissatisfaction/lack of buy-in	12%
Cost of implementing/maintaining telehealth platform	12%
Little/no buy-in from administrators or leadership	8%
Lack of marketing for telehealth services	7%
Do not anticipate any barriers/challenges	6%
Other	4%

Note: n=1,545

Source: American Medical Association (AMA), "2021 Telehealth Survey Report," March 23, 2022

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