

# Telehealth After the Pandemic

## Considerations for Sustainable Telehealth Workflows

### Overview

2020 was a transformative year for telehealth. After the January declaration of a public health emergency (PHE) due to COVID-19, telehealth grew from less than 1 percent of total visits to just under 20 percent of total visits nationally.<sup>1</sup> This rapid growth was enabled by telehealth policy changes<sup>2</sup> and has positioned virtual care to play a more prominent role in health care.

Many practices now have a blueprint for telehealth and are exploring the right balance of in-person and virtual care post-PHE. As practices adjust to this “new normal,” it helps to reflect on processes implemented early in the PHE to delineate staff roles and responsibilities and fine-tune daily workflows that alternate between virtual and in-person visits.<sup>3</sup> Consider tasks, such as logging into the electronic health record (EHR) and making a triage decision, to identify potential modifications.<sup>4</sup>

### Evaluating Process – Key Considerations

**Explore ways to optimize time, space, and equipment.** This can include allocating blocks of time for in-person and virtual care,<sup>5</sup> reconfiguring office space to reserve a dedicated and private room for virtual visits,<sup>6</sup> and making sure the space is equipped with secure and reliable high-speed internet and equipment to support telehealth encounters.<sup>7</sup> Keep in mind visual aids used during in-person visits can be leveraged for virtual care, such as pain scales, portion size guides, and other care instructions.<sup>8</sup>

**Identify opportunities to enhance patient communications.** Make sure patients understand when telehealth might be a good option for them and that they are prepared to use the technology to join and



### Provider & Consumer Trends

**70% of providers** plan to use telehealth after the PHE, with 68% citing better access to care, 83% more timely care, and 60% improved patient health\*

**83% of consumers** want to continue using telehealth\*\*

\*COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition, *Telehealth Impact: Physician Survey Analysis*, November 2020. Available at: [c19hcc.org/telehealth/physician-survey-analysis/](https://c19hcc.org/telehealth/physician-survey-analysis/)

\*\*Medical Economics, *Four New Statistics that Prove that Telemedicine Isn't just a Pandemic Fad*, July 2020. Available at: [www.medicaleconomics.com/view/four-new-statistics-that-prove-that-telemedicine-isn-t-just](https://www.medicaleconomics.com/view/four-new-statistics-that-prove-that-telemedicine-isn-t-just)

<sup>1</sup> Advisory Board, *4 Takeaways to Help You Prepare for Digital Health's Next 'New Normal'*. Available at: [www.advisory.com/sponsored/4-takeaways-digital-health-new-normal](https://www.advisory.com/sponsored/4-takeaways-digital-health-new-normal).

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Health Care Commission, *Telehealth Policy Workgroup Report*, February 2021. Available at:

[mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit\\_telemedicine/documents/Telehealth\\_Policy\\_Workgroup\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit_telemedicine/documents/Telehealth_Policy_Workgroup_Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> California Telehealth Resource Center, *Webinar: Mapping and Designing Telehealth Clinic Workflows*, August 2018. Available at:

[www.caltrc.org/get-started/video-mapping-and-designing-telehealth-clinic-workflows/](https://www.caltrc.org/get-started/video-mapping-and-designing-telehealth-clinic-workflows/).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Harvard Business Review, *Balancing Virtual and In-Person Health Care*, November 2020. Available at: [hbr.org/2020/11/balancing-virtual-and-in-person-health-care](https://hbr.org/2020/11/balancing-virtual-and-in-person-health-care).

<sup>6</sup> JD Supra, *Impact of Telemedicine on Medical Office*, October 2020. Available at: [jdsupra.com/legalnews/impact-of-telemedicine-on-medical-office-78290/](https://jdsupra.com/legalnews/impact-of-telemedicine-on-medical-office-78290/).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Barton Associates, *Telehealth Equipment: 7 Essentials for Your Exam Room*, November 2019. Available at:

[www.bartonassociates.com/blog/telemedicine-equipment-7-essentials-for-your-exam-room](https://www.bartonassociates.com/blog/telemedicine-equipment-7-essentials-for-your-exam-room).

participate in a telehealth visit.<sup>9, 10</sup> This includes ensuring patients receive adequate instructions and reminders before and after a telehealth visit (via voice, text, or email) as it relates to frequently asked questions, troubleshooting tips, and next steps for follow-up care, if necessary.<sup>11, 12</sup>

**Conduct a telehealth solution usability assessment.** Evaluate factors like interface design, reliability, and overall patient/provider experience to make sure the practice is getting the most out of their telehealth solution.<sup>13</sup> Some commonly used assessment tools include the Telehealth Usability Questionnaire, Telehealth Satisfaction Questionnaire, and Service User Technology Acceptability Questionnaire.<sup>14</sup> Keep in mind that a solution that integrates with the practice EHR can minimize the need for duplicate data entry or having to toggle back and forth between different systems.<sup>15</sup>

**Gather feedback to identify common technical issues.** It may be helpful to run mock visits where providers and staff can experience the telehealth solution from both sides, improving their ability to troubleshoot issues during a telehealth visit.<sup>16</sup> Practices should have a back-up plan in place for technology issues, such as using audio-only (telephone) as appropriate.<sup>17</sup>

## Additional Resources

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### **Developing & Refining Telehealth Workflows**

*The AMA Telehealth Implementation Playbook*

[www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf](http://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf)

### **Telehealth Solution Selection**

*MHCC Telehealth Vendor Portfolio (list of 70 telehealth vendors and existing EHR integrations)*

[mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit\\_telemedicine/documents/TLHT\\_Telehealth\\_Portfolio\\_Protected.xlsm](http://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/hit/hit_telemedicine/documents/TLHT_Telehealth_Portfolio_Protected.xlsm)

### **Telehealth Workflow Examples & Mapping Tips**

*California Telehealth Resource Center*

[www.caltrc.org/get-started/](http://www.caltrc.org/get-started/)

Questions? Contact Kelly Scott, Program Manager, at [kelly.scott@maryland.gov](mailto:kelly.scott@maryland.gov)

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<sup>9</sup> American Medical Association, *Telehealth Workflow Best Practice*, April 2020. Available at: [www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/telehealth-workflow-best-practice.pdf](http://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/telehealth-workflow-best-practice.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Medical Economics, *Telehealth Best Practices: Building a Long-Term Workflow*, July 2020. Available at: [www.medicaleconomics.com/view/telehealth-best-practices-building-a-long-term-workflow](http://www.medicaleconomics.com/view/telehealth-best-practices-building-a-long-term-workflow).

<sup>11</sup> American Medical Association, *Telehealth Implementation Playbook*, 2020. Available at: [www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf](http://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> CoverMyMeds, *Five Ways Providers Can Help Mitigate Telehealth Access Challenges*, August 2020. Available at:

[insights.covermymeds.com/patient-experience/telehealth/five-ways-providers-can-help-mitigate-telehealth-access-challenges](https://insights.covermymeds.com/patient-experience/telehealth/five-ways-providers-can-help-mitigate-telehealth-access-challenges).

<sup>13</sup> BMC Medical Informatics and Decision Making, *The Most Used Questionnaires for Evaluating Telehealth Services*, February 2021. Available at: [bmcmidinformatik.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12911-021-01407-y](http://bmcmidinformatik.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12911-021-01407-y)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See n. 10, *Supra*.

<sup>16</sup> American Medical Association, *11 Telehealth Tweaks that Help Team-Based Care Flourish*, March 2021. Available at: [www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/11-telehealth-tweaks-help-team-based-care-flourish](http://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/11-telehealth-tweaks-help-team-based-care-flourish).

<sup>17</sup> American Medical Association, *6 Best Practices to Sharpen Physicians' Use of Telehealth*, October 2020. Available at: [www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/6-best-practices-sharpen-physicians-use-telehealth](http://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital/6-best-practices-sharpen-physicians-use-telehealth).