

Care for the Common Good

Sharing our Telehealth Story

Trinity Health is one of the largest not-for-profit, Catholic health care systems in the nation, serving diverse communities across 25 states. We advocate for public policies that promote care for the common good including expanding health care coverage and care, investing in public health, paying for high-value care, and improving the health of communities.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Accelerated Use of Telehealth

The COVID-19 pandemic—and the accompanying flexibilities provided by policymakers—led to a dramatic increase in the use of telehealth. Emerging data related to telehealth use and Trinity Health's experience underscore its importance, the imperative to ensure that all patients benefit equally from telehealth, and the necessity of extending flexibilities beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE).

Telehealth Allows for More Flexible and Timely Care

Increased use of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic helped illuminate its benefits. These include expanded access to services, including specialty care, improved patient safety through fewer care delays and missed appointments, and enhanced patient experience given the elimination of travel time and transportation barriers.

Further, during the COVID-19 pandemic, use of telehealth reduced the possibility of COVID-19 infection among patients and caregivers and reduced burden on the health system to preserve personal protective equipment and implement infection control measures, among other efforts. According to a report by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, "systematic reviews confirm that telehealth improves health outcomes, utilization, and cost of care for a host of chronic diseases including heart failure, diabetes, depression, obesity, asthma and mental health conditions."¹ Consumer surveys further indicate high levels of satisfaction with telehealth.²

Telehealth may also be able to help address disparities in access to health care services and health outcomes. Realizing this promise will require special efforts to ensure access to affordable broadband, technology resources, and telehealth services for communities of color and other underserved populations.

National Experience with Telehealth During Pandemic

Use of telehealth grew dramatically during the public health emergency. Telehealth visits among Medicaid fee for service (FFS) beneficiaries increased more than 60-fold between 2019 (840,000) and 2020 (52.7 million).³ Telehealth visits to behavioral health specialists saw the largest increase, rising from 1% of Medicare FFS behavioral health visits in 2019 to 38.1% in 2020.⁴ Telehealth also supported

Using Telehealth to Reach Patients: By the Numbers

- Across Trinity Health, the number of telehealth visits increased from approximately 6,000 in March 2020 to more than 30,000 in the winter of 2021. While utilization of telehealth has dropped as pandemic restrictions have been lifted, telehealth visits continue to exceed 10,000 visit/month.
- Internal analysis of overall volumes indicates that across Trinity Health, telehealth visits are replacing some in-person visits and not adding additional services.
- The use of telehealth services spans payers and programs. In the spring of 2020, more than 25% of patient visits counted toward Trinity Health's national accountable care organization (ACO) were provided via telehealth. While that share has since declined to approximately 4%, telehealth continues to be an important access point for our national ACO.
- Both patients and providers appreciate the benefits of telehealth:

"I feel fortunate that I was able to schedule a telehealth appointment with my primary care physician (PCP). [The telehealth visit] was a simple and seamless way to get high-quality care. My PCP had immediate access to all my electronic medical records. I didn't feel rushed, and I felt like I got the care I needed in short order. The resulting prescription ended up being precisely what I needed."

~ Patient (who wishes to remain anonymous),
Springfield, Mass.

"With telehealth, consumers are quickly learning that high-caliber, well-coordinated care can be delivered at the time and location of their choosing. Telehealth services can offer both convenience and quality for a wide variety of concerns."

~ Dan Weiswasser, MD, Provider,
Trinity Health of New England

¹ [Telediagnosis for Acute Care: Implications for the Quality and Safety of Diagnosis \(ahrq.gov\)](#). August 2020.

² [Consumer adoption of telemedicine in 2021 | Rock Health](#)

³ [medicare-telehealth-report.pdf \(hhs.gov\)](#)

⁴ [Ibid](#)

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access to primary care services during the pandemic as 1 in 10 Medicare FFS encounters for internal medicine, family practice and nurse practitioner specialties occurred using telehealth in 2020.⁵

Analysis also found that Medicare beneficiaries with the greatest health care needs were more likely to use telehealth in the early months of the PHE. Of Medicare beneficiaries with 5 or more emergency department (ED) visits in the year before the PHE, 41% used telehealth in March or April 2020, compared to 17% of those who had not had an ED visit in the previous year.⁶ Telehealth use was also higher among dual-eligible beneficiaries and the disabled in 2020.⁷ An analysis of the Census Department's Household Pulse Survey conducted between April and October 2021, found that almost 1 in 4 adults (23.1%) had used telehealth services in the 4 weeks preceding the survey.⁸ In addition, Patients with certain diagnosis are at high risk for hospital re-admission multiple times throughout the course of a year and home health agencies are using remote patient monitoring (RPM) for these patients. RPM for an entire year is less than a third of the cost of a single hospitalization and savings to Medicare and other programs multiply every time a hospitalization is averted.

Trinity Health's Commitment and Leadership on Telehealth

During the PHE, Trinity Health dramatically increased telehealth capacity so patients received the care they need. Even in the spring of 2022, as pandemic restrictions are lifted, the use of telehealth greatly exceeds pre-pandemic levels.

This experience demonstrates that telehealth must become a routine part of patient care to maintain access and meet consumer expectations for convenient, technology-supported care through Trinity Health. To this end, Trinity Health is committed to ensuring that all patients have the ability to use telehealth services when needed and desired. We also advocate for policy changes that support the continuation of telehealth flexibilities provided during the pandemic.

Trinity Health: Rising to the Telehealth Challenge

Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic

In March 2022, Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic (THMA) partnered with Broad Street Ministry (BSM) to launch the Community Hygiene Truck. THMA and BSM are working to implement the telehealth component that provides primary medical care for individuals struggling with homelessness and chronic conditions. Not only does this roaming resource provide free personal care items such as soap, deodorant, toothpaste and more, the goal is to provide a private setting for individuals to connect with a clinical professional, utilize remote equipment to capture vital signs, and remove barriers to care.

Trinity Health Of New England

Since the beginning of the pandemic Trinity Health Of New England (THONE) worked with stakeholders and policymakers to develop guiding principles and policy recommendations to support patient access to wide variety of services and increase access to primary care, behavioral health and other specialists through telehealth. Flexibilities provided have allowed THONE to offer telehealth behavioral health consult services through Iris telehealth. This service utilizes providers from across the country, licensed in Connecticut, to serve both adults and pediatric populations with 24x7x365 coverage across our hospitals. This is extremely important for prompt management of vulnerable populations, particularly in the emergency department (ED). It has streamlined the workflow in the ED with an almost 30% reduction in time prior to discharge from the emergency room since implementation. In addition, THONE has seen improved patient outcomes and ED management.

⁵ [Telehealth Tuesday - Partnership to Advance Virtual Care](#), Week 3

⁶ [Telehealth Tuesday - Partnership to Advance Virtual Care](#), Week 6

⁷ [Telehealth Tuesday - Partnership to Advance Virtual Care](#), Week 5 and Week 2

⁸ [telehealth-hps-ib.pdf \(hhs.gov\)](#)

Mission

We, Trinity Health, serve together in the spirit of the Gospel as a compassionate and transforming healing presence within our communities.

Core Values

Reverence • Commitment to Those Who Are Poor •
Safety • Justice • Stewardship • Integrity