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EBRI Finds Telemedicine Usage Remains Higher Than Before the COVID-19 Pandemic
Telemedicine Patients More Likely to be Women, Older and Named Policyholders

WASHINGTON – August 5, 2021 – The [Employee Benefit Research Institute](https://www.ebri.org) (EBRI) has released a paper that finds the number of telemedicine visits remain higher than their pre-pandemic levels. Telemedicine-as-a-service, typified when services are delivered via a third-party platform, and there is no pre-existing relationship between the patient and health care providers, increased 87 percent compared with prior to the pandemic. Telemedicine-as-a-medium visits, exemplified by a patient using videoconferencing or remote monitoring technologies to engage with a doctor with whom the patient has an existing relationship, were 50 times higher than pre-pandemic.

[“Who, What, When, Where, and Why: Trends in Telemedicine Usage From 2016-2020”](#) finds patients who sought care via telemedicine were disproportionately women and were more likely to be older. Telemedicine is well-suited to help patients address acute, low-intensity, and self-limited health issues, and EBRI’s analysis finds that telemedicine was used more frequently for respiratory symptoms and mental health issues, while face-to face visits was used more frequently for musculoskeletal and connective tissue problems.

Named policyholders were also more likely to seek care via telemedicine than their spouses or dependents. This could indicate that named policyholders were more comfortable seeking care for themselves via telemedicine, were more familiar with their employer’s telemedicine offerings, or were better-informed at work about the benefits and availability of telemedicine services.

“Telemedicine has long been touted as a convenient and cost-effective means for health care providers to deliver services to patients. However, the COVID-19 pandemic thrust telemedicine into the spotlight when many providers ceased most elective in-person services,” said Jake Spiegel, EBRI Research Associate and author of the report. “Many patients and providers who had previously not used telemedicine before the pandemic experienced it for the first time. EBRI’s analysis finds that even after stay-at-home orders were lifted and health care providers resumed conducting in-person visits, telemedicine engagements remained above their pre-pandemic trend. This could be evidence of a transformational effect of the COVID pandemic regarding how Americans seek out and receive care.”

This paper relied on an analysis of EBRI’s Telemedicine Database of claims data, containing nearly 150,000 employees, including their spouses and dependents, of a collection of large employers. The database contains nearly 16 million health care encounters spanning five years, accounting for over \$600 million in annual claims, cumulatively. Additionally, EBRI’s database contains data on nearly 6.5 million prescription drug fills.

[“Who, What, When, Where, and Why: Trends in Telemedicine Usage From 2016-2020”](#) can be downloaded from www.ebri.org/telemedicine-trends.

About EBRI

[The Employee Benefit Research Institute](#) (EBRI) is a nonpartisan membership organization committed to contributing to, encouraging, and enhancing the development of sound employee benefit programs and public policy through objective research and education. Founded in 1978, EBRI is the only private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, Washington, DC-based organization committed exclusively to public policy research and education on economic security and employee benefit issues.