

Get the Facts About Telehealth

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that telehealth is a viable option for providing convenient, accessible and seamless care for patients.

Myth #1:

Telehealth is less feasible for senior citizens.

FACT: Data shows older patients are very comfortable with telehealth.

In a survey conducted by Sutter Health, 52% of people aged 65 and older reported having used telehealth during the pandemic and 93% of these patients reported having a positive experience.

In addition, Sutter's Tera Practice, a virtual-first medical practice that offers a whole ecosystem of healthcare support, has purposefully enrolled seniors who have at least one chronic

disease. More than 20% of Tera patients are aged 65 and above, allowing us to quickly learn that telemedicine is welcome across any age range, disease state and socioeconomic group. The key factor for acceptance came down to individuals experiencing firsthand Tera's convenience and responsiveness, and the rapport they were able to build with their personal care team virtually.



OF SENIORS WHO USED TELEHEALTH
REPORTED A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Myth #2:

Telehealth will amplify health inequities.

FACT: While more work needs to be done, telehealth is already improving critical access to care in rural and underserved communities.

Additional investments in technology, broadband and access are necessary to prevent the deepening of inequities and ensuring widespread availability. Providers and policymakers must continue to work together to ensure the benefits of virtual care extend to our most vulnerable patients and that no community is left behind.

Sutter serves millions of Medi-Cal patients in Northern California so this is a priority for our system. We are working hand-in-hand with our FQHC partners to make virtual care available and give patients in low-income and rural communities access to specialty providers and mental health services that they wouldn't otherwise have.

As virtual care access has increased, we have seen a significant decrease in no-show rates among patients who have traditionally been the most difficult to reach.



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Myth #3:

Telehealth encourages over-utilization, thereby driving up healthcare spending.

FACT: Telehealth patients are accessing care differently, not more frequently.

The pandemic significantly disrupted access to medical care. Fortunately, the healthcare industry as a whole embraced telehealth as a way to maintain access to much needed services. At Sutter, video visit volume increased by a whopping 15,370% in 2020. However, overall visit utilization dropped by 13% compared to 2019, and only 12.3% of all visits were conducted via video in 2020. Far from driving up healthcare spending, telehealth in 2020 proved to be an alternative and complementary service embraced by patients and providers alike.

Sutter strongly believes that virtual care can lower barriers to care while increasing access to critical services like preventative care that can improve overall health and reduce costs in the long run.

Video visit volume increased by **15,370%** in 2020

Overall visit utilization dropped by **13%** vs. 2019



“Virtual care remains a viable option to lower barriers to care and increase access to critical services.”

Myth #4:

The lack of broadband or connectivity resources will exclude many vulnerable patients.

FACT: Allowing all modes of virtual care will reduce barriers and increase access for underserved patients.

Currently, 96% of Americans have a cell phone and 81% have a smartphone.¹ To increase access for all patients, we must allow telehealth platforms to support cell phones and ensure that phone-only visits are reimbursable for all patients. Opening up all modes of virtual care (text, voice, video, etc.) can increase access and is not limited by the need for a smartphone or internet connectivity—reducing barriers to care, especially for underserved populations.

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¹Pew Research, 2020 <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

Myth #5:

Virtual care doesn't equate to quality care.

FACT: Satisfaction rates for telehealth are on par with in-person visits.

A survey Sutter conducted revealed that of the 70% of respondents who reported using telehealth services during the pandemic, 96% reported a 'positive' experience and 80% reported that they felt telehealth provided them with the same level of care as in-person visits.

Satisfaction rates for telehealth are on par with in-person visits, even as more patients than ever use the service—many for the first time. Telehealth is expanding access to care for those who need it most, enhancing how we treat our patients rather than replacing in-person care. Clinicians have also

found that telehealth has helped maintain more care continuity by making it easier for patients with chronic conditions to get the care they need, when and where they need it. By offering a rare glimpse into a person's life that goes beyond their diagnosis, virtual care gives clinicians a unique opportunity to view a patient's living environment, their family and support systems and the daily choices that impact their health and overall well-being—additional insights that clinicians can use to create a more personalized, whole-care plan for their patients.

“Telehealth is expanding access to care for those who need it most, enhancing how we treat our patients rather than replacing in-person care.”

**Myth #6:**

Physicians are struggling to adopt telehealth technology.



**MORE THAN
5,000
CLINICIANS
TRAINED**



**ONE
MILLION
VIDEO VISITS
COMPLETED**

FACT: Physicians are embracing telehealth and the flexibility it provides them and their patients.

Before the pandemic, regulatory hurdles prevented telehealth from widespread use. The crisis lifted those restrictions, making the use of telehealth much more accessible for both physicians and patients.

In response to the pandemic, Sutter launched a significant effort to expand telehealth services in just six weeks. Since March 2020, more than 5,000 Sutter clinicians have been trained and deployed to conduct video visits, compared to only about 50 clinicians pre-COVID. In December 2020, Sutter reached more than one million video visits completed by its clinicians since March 2020 with no reduction in satisfaction rates. As we continue efforts to optimize the virtual care experience for clinicians and patients, Sutter participates in an ongoing collaboration with 19 other digital health system executives to exchange successes, risks and innovations.²

² New England Journal of Medicine, 2020 <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.20.0532>

Myth #7:

Healthcare requires a human touch.

FACT: Virtual care should complement, not replace, in-person care to enhance an established doctor-patient relationship.

The COVID-19 crisis has fueled the rapid adoption of innovative, human-centered approaches to providing and receiving virtual care. While telehealth is not a substitute for in-person care, it has become an essential part of the overall care experience.

Human touch is essential to holistic healthcare, which is why, as an integrated system, Sutter is emphasizing the importance of ongoing relationships between providers and patients where

in-person care and virtual care are complementary—as opposed to virtual-only providers where the patient can never develop personal, real-life bonds with their caregiver. As we look ahead to new personalized care models, we remain focused on building our virtual care capabilities in a way that adds value to the patient and care team experience. Technology will continue to enhance human connection.



“Technology will continue to enhance human connection.”

Myth #8:

Security issues are a significant barrier to telehealth.

FACT: Healthcare systems have securely managed health data and information for years, and are best equipped to do so into the future.

Keeping health data and information secure in today's challenging environment requires significant investment and expertise. This is best managed by healthcare systems that are already well-versed in continually advancing rigorous safety standards to meet the ever-changing needs of our technology-driven world.

Sutter has invested in increased security systems and staffing to protect patient data and ensure confidence in the safety of telehealth. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, these investments were based on a foundational belief in protecting the privacy and data of our more than three million patients. Today, we offer several virtual care platforms with a variety of tools to communicate with patients and deliver care—including secure portal messaging.

