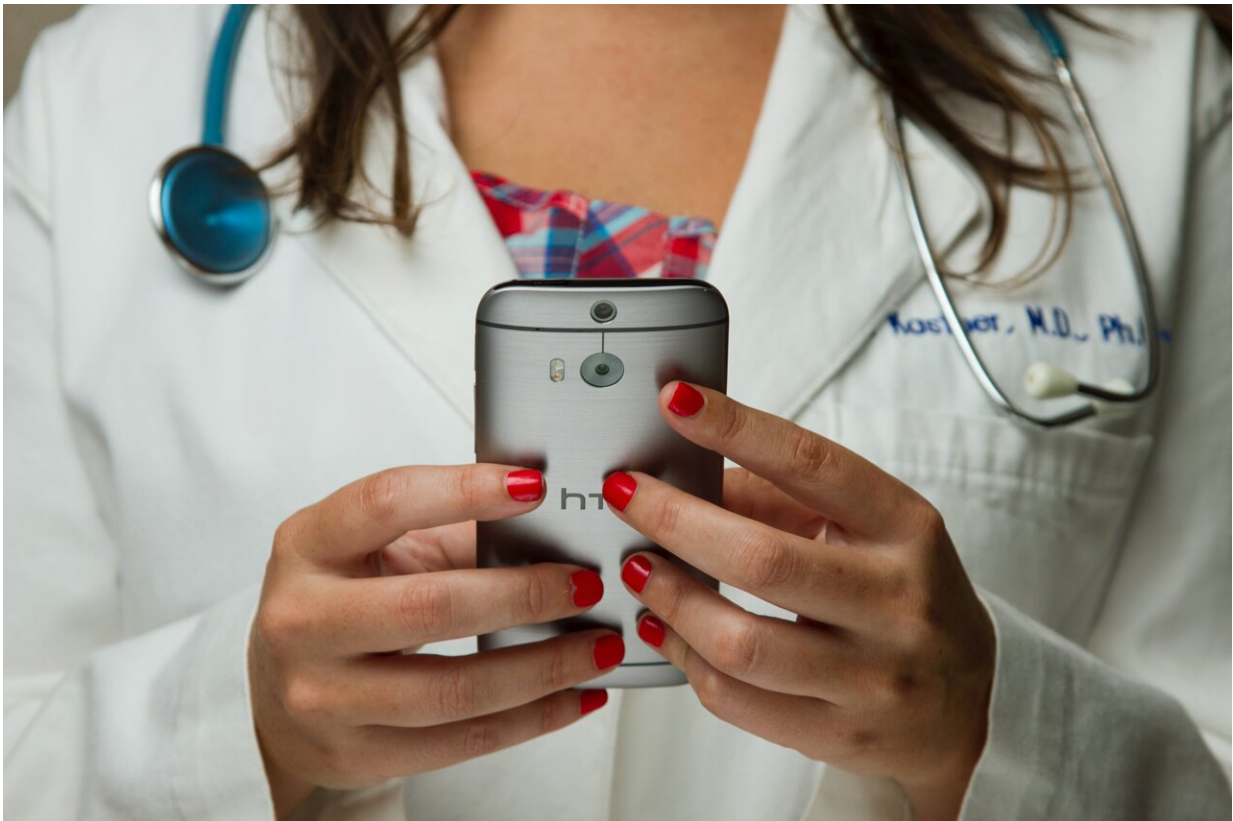


# Latest study on telehealth consultations highlights potential health inequalities

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Researchers at Staffordshire University warn that the rapid expansion of telehealth consultations may increase disparities in access for vulnerable people.

A new study, reported in the *International Journal for Equity in Health*, showed that the vast majority of Allied Health Services—89.4 percent—were planning to continue the use of telehealth services as a method of delivering healthcare post COVID-19 restrictions. Currently Allied Health Professionals are the third largest workforce in the NHS with over four million patient contacts a week.

However, service managers and clinicians taking part in the study reported that a lack of technological skills and limited technology among patients were the main barriers and biggest disadvantages of telehealth.

Clinicians felt that the main advantage for patients was a reduction in the cost of parking and transport to attend appointments as well as the ability for them to work more flexibly.

Dr. Aoife Healy says that "the latest report includes [survey data](#) from 658 participants consisting of 119 AHP service managers across 168 AHP services and 539 frontline clinicians. The majority of these people reported that their services were planning to continue using telehealth post-pandemic."

The study concludes that there is a potential that telehealth will be considered inappropriate by patients and thus, underused, negating some of the perceived advantages.

Associate Professor Dr. Nicky Eddison, explained that "telehealth consultations have the potential to transform the way AHP services are delivered, empowering service users, offering an increased choice of access and reducing the burden of treatment for service users with long-term [health](#) conditions."

"However, we must ensure service users are at the center of service design, ensuring all voices are heard, and all service users have equity of

access to treatment. To ensure this happens we need standardized, robust guidelines for the provision of AHP telehealth consultations."

To ensure allied [health professionals](#) (AHPs) embrace the digitization of healthcare in line with the digital framework for AHPs, the recently released AHP strategy for England and the NHS' Long-Term Plan, the research team at Staffordshire University are looking to make sure vulnerable patients do not miss out.

Led by Professor Nachiappan Chockalingam, they are working on new telehealth guidelines to ensure standardization of process and inclusion. This work follows on from the team's recently published work exploring UK AHP professional bodies' guidance on telehealth consultations. This program of work is supported by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and the British Association of Orthotists and Prosthetists.

Professor Chockalingam says that their "findings have an impact beyond the United Kingdom and we anticipate that the [telehealth](#) guidelines framework to be published later in the year will be of use globally."

**More information:** Nicola Eddison et al, The potential impact of allied health professional telehealth consultations on health inequities and the burden of treatment, *International Journal for Equity in Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12939-022-01689-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-022-01689-2)

Provided by Staffordshire University

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