

Telehealth audiology services need to be dialed up, shows study

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Despite a surge during COVID-19, the use of telehealth-supported access to audiologists is not being used to its full potential according to new research from Flinders University.

"Like many other industries, the pandemic prompted the [audiology](#) industry to reevaluate the potential benefits and uptake of audiology appointments online or over the phone," says lead author, Boaz Mui, Ph.D. student, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

"While we found attitudes towards the use of teleaudiology were very positive, the actual usage remains very low with concerns about the widespread use of it and reporting a lack of trust in the system.

"Our study found that while 55% of patients were aware of teleaudiology appointments, only 7% had taken part in one. Moreover, 98% of patients had never been offered a teleaudiology appointment," he says.

The study interviewed 366 [stakeholders](#) (173 clients, 110 clinicians, 58 students, 19 academics, and six industry partners) to explore the perceptions of telehealth usage among Australian hearing health care stakeholders (audiologists, audiometrists, patients, students, academics and industry partners).

It is the first study of its kind to investigate both patient and industry perceptions and experiences in using telehealth technology.

The article, "Hearing Health Care Stakeholders' Perspectives on Telehealth Implementation: Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Pathways Forward," by Boaz Mui, Jameel Muzaffar, Jinsong Chen, Niranjana Bidargaddi and Giriraj Singh Shekhawat—has been published in the [American Journal of Audiology](#).

The research clearly shows that the technology works but there needs to be a shift in promoting the system. Not only to raise awareness but also to build trust says Mui.

"Increasing the awareness of telehealth audiology services and

developing collaborations between stakeholders will be crucial to improve the acceptance and usage of teleaudiology in the future," says Mui.

"All stakeholders share an equally important role in increasing awareness and uptake of teleaudiology services. Audiologists and clinics are the first point of contact for clients who seek audiology services, and thus, they are in the best position to inform clients of available teleaudiology options.

"Industry partners can increase their promotional work to boost the usage of their teleaudiology products, as reflected by the fact that more than half of the clients in this study did not access teleaudiology apps simply because they were unaware of any," he adds.

Mui says while [health services](#) are traditionally delivered face-to-face, they can create barriers for those who find it inconvenient to visit clinics in-person.

Professor Raj Shekhawat, dean of research for the College of Education, Psychology and senior author, says that it is of great significance to evaluate telehealth models within the audiology sector to ensure better accessibility and inclusion.

"In the future, [telehealth](#) in Australia is likely to have a stronger place in primary health care policy and practice and an increased acceptance among patients.

"We need to implement a framework for clinicians to safely and effectively provide teleaudiology services and one that patients have trust in using," says Professor Shekhawat.

More information: Boaz Mui et al, Hearing Health Care Stakeholders'

Perspectives on Teleaudiology Implementation: Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Pathways Forward, *American Journal of Audiology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1044/2023_AJA-23-00001](https://doi.org/10.1044/2023_AJA-23-00001)

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