

Use of telehealth services rose during the pandemic and remains high

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When the COVID-19 pandemic forced restrictions and shutdowns, health care providers turned to telehealth. The result was a surge in the use of telehealth by Californians to access care, according to a new study

by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

The study found that in 2022, 46.7% of adults had used telehealth in the past year—slightly less than the 49% in 2021 but still nearly quadruple the approximately 12% who used such services in 2018, before the pandemic.

Telehealth services range from talking to [health care providers](#) over the phone or by video and using remote health-monitoring devices tracked by providers to sending and receiving health-related messages over secure digital networks.

"Health care delivery services have evolved dramatically as a result of the pandemic," said Sean Tan, a senior public administration analyst at the center. "Telehealth is transforming the health care delivery landscape and creating opportunities for hybrid models of health care."

Despite the continued popularity of telehealth, researchers discovered wide disparities in its use across subpopulations in California. For instance, Latino and Asian adults were less likely than white adults to use telehealth (41.5% and 45.2%, respectively, vs. 51.3%).

Among the study's other findings:

- The proportion of adults who had health insurance and used telehealth was twice that of adults without [health insurance](#) (48.4% vs. 21.0%).
- Older adults were more likely than [young adults](#) to use telehealth: More than half of those 65 and older (54.5%) used telehealth, compared with 35.8% of those between the ages of 18 and 26.
- The main reasons adults used telehealth were for follow-ups or to access test or procedure results (42.7%); flu, cold, allergies or infections (20.4%); [chronic conditions](#) such as arthritis, joint or

muscle pain (18.0%); mental or emotional health problems (17.5%); and general disease management (15.9%).

- Adults in [rural areas](#) were less likely to use telehealth than those living in urban areas (41.2% vs. 47.3%).
- More than half of adults (51.2%) who spoke only English at home used telehealth, compared with [adults](#) who spoke Spanish (38.3%), Chinese (38.5%), Vietnamese (33.0%), English and Spanish (39.9%), or English and Chinese (42.9%) in the home.

"Access to telehealth could be an effective way to lessen the inequities we have frequently seen in health care systems, especially prior to the pandemic," said Ninez A. Ponce, director of the center and principal investigator for the California Health Interview Survey. "However, gaps in access to care still exist among certain sociodemographic populations, and California policymakers should focus on providing equitable access to these services."

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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